

EXPLORING THE STANDPOINTS OF MARGINALIZED: A CRITICAL STUDY OF KATHRYN STOCKETT'S NOVEL, THE HELP

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this qualitative investigation is to explore the standpoints of the characters portrayed in Kathryn Stockett's novel, *The Help* (2009), by positioning the analysis on Hegel's Master Slave Dialectics as a critical framework. Van Dijk's model of Critical Discourse analysis has been employed as a research method for analyzing the data, and determining the role of social positioning in creating the standpoints of two asymmetrically aligned racial groups, the blacks and whites, presented in the novel. The analysis of the novel demonstrates that the epistemic consciousness of the characters is socially determined, as the masters having an independent social positioning, behave as self-centered, while the economically dependent maids focus their attention on the masters for survival needs and self-recognition. The self-centered attitude alienates the masters from labor and leads them to dissatisfaction, contrarily, the slaves develop a more reliable epistemic consciousness through their labor force and achieve self-actualization.

Keywords: Marginalization; Standpoint; Consciousness

Background Of the Study

Marginalization is a social problem, infecting the world since its creation, by adversely affecting individuals and societies alike. It brings the threat of exclusion to those who experience it in its various social, economic or political forms (Burton & Kagan 293). Racial discrimination is a form of marginalization that usually comes up with all these versions of segregation. Though rooted deep

in the world's history, in America it is one of the lingering colonial legacies which has left many indelible marks on American social life and literature. It started in the slavery era, when millions of people from across the world, especially the Africans were brought to the New World in the name of slavery to work on the plantations. Even though slavery was abolished in the latter half of nineteenth century after the Civil war, and a century later equal rights were granted to blacks in the wake of Civil rights movement of 1960's, racial discrimination is still persisting in America and influencing the lives of people in almost every walk of life (Perry 2007). This long history of marginalization and discrimination has shaped the consciousness of both the dominant and subordinate groups in distinct ways due to the difference in their experiences. The subject finds expression in literature from both white and black authors, each capturing the nuances of the experiences in different ways.

Introduction of the Book and Author

The novel *The Help* by Kathryn Stockett (2009) is an example of the depiction of this marginalization in literature, penned down by a white American author. Kathryn Stockett is an author of American origin, born and raised in a white American family in Jackson Mississippi 1969. She aroused as a novel writer after the publication of her debut novel, *The Help*, which gained much critical acclaim, owing to its treatment of racial segregation of black maids by a white author. Though the novel was first rejected by many agents but finally published by Penguin publishers and became the national best seller. The novel was also casted into a movie later in 2011.

The novel, *The Help* largely drew out of Stockett's inspiration as a result of her childhood intimacy with a black female house keeper, and this relationship can be traced in the novel as an autobiographical element. Set in 1960's Jackson Mississippi, the novel is based on the experiences of black maids working in the houses of whites and depicts the kind of relationship they share mostly through the eyes of three characters, Sketeer Phelan, an affectionate white lady who motivates

the black women to narrate their stories to her, Abileen, and Minny, the two black maids working in white households. The novel intensively records the stratification of the black women on three grounds, race, gender and economic conditions which heightens their marginality. It voices the consciousness of both whites and blacks about the social reality of their town and demonstrates that how it influences their lives and shapes their self-consciousness. The asymmetrical relationship that both these groups share, and the resultant consciousness it confers them is an intriguing area to explore, hence the present research will focus on dinging out this domain.

Research Statement

The research is based on exploring the standpoints of two racial groups of American history, blacks and whites, as presented in the novel *The Help* by Kathryn Stockett, by particularly focusing on the role of their social positioning in creating their consciousness and the way this consciousness leads their lives to achieve self-actualization.

Research Objectives

The objectives of the present research are:

- To explore the role of social positioning in creating the parallels and differences in the standpoints of blacks and whites regarding their social reality in the novel *The Help* by Kathryn Stockett.
- To examine the way standpoints of both blacks and whites in the novel lead them to shape their lives.

Research Questions

- What role does the social positioning plays in creating the parallels and differences in the standpoints of blacks and whites regarding their social reality in the novel *The Help* by Kathryn Stockett?
- How does the standpoints of both blacks and whites in the novel *The Help* by Kathryn Stockett lead them to shape their lives?

Significance of the Study

The present research is significant as it is based on the comparative analysis of the standpoints of two different communities depicted in the novel *The Help* by Kathryn Stockett thus exploring the viewpoints of two conflicting races of American history. The research is a guide in to how a person's social standing determines his particular standpoint regarding the society around him and leads him to assert his positionality in different ways. It is especially significant as it voices the standpoints of the marginalized people and examines the way they have to suffer because of the standpoints of the dominant class. The findings of the research can be generalizable to other marginalized communities of the society as well. Moreover, the novel has not been explored before using Hegel's Master Slave dialectics, I therefore anticipate that the research will contribute innovatively.

Delimitation of the Study

Due to scale and time confinement, the present research will be delimited to the role of social positioning in creating the standpoints of black maids and white ladies about their own self and the society around them in the racially segregated American society as depicted in *The Help* by Kathryn Stockett. To abstain from wider analysis, four characters from the dominant group, Hilly Holbrook, Elizabeth Leefolt, Charlotte Phelan and Eugenia Sketeer Phelan and three characters from the subordinate group Minny Jackson, Abileen Clark and Constantine Jefferson will be focused within the boundaries of the above listed research questions.

Review of the Related Literature

The novel, *The Help* has been a subject of enormous debate since the time of its publication and researchers and critics tried to dig out different critical dimensions of the text. The researcher, Maya Danastri Suastifa has conducted research entitled as, *The Representation of Racial Discrimination in The Help by Kathryn Stockett* in 2011, to explore the elements of racial segregation among the two significant groups in the novel, the whites and the blacks. Using the critical

framework of Stuart Hall's theory of representation, the researcher sustains that the novel is a commentary on American racism by demonstrating how the blacks are oppressed by their white masters in every walk of life. Blacks are considered inferior in the pretext of their skin color and diseases. The research also highlights how the struggle of the two black women Abileen and Minny leads them to liberate themselves out of their own circles of oppression.

The novel has been explored by postcolonial lens by two researchers, Hawasi and Nabiya Rizki Meida in their article, *Postcoloniality in Kathryn Stockett's Novel, The Help* (2015) which examines the hybrid culture of the society depicted in the novel by utilizing Homi K Bhabha's hybridity theory. The research provides an insight into the multicultural American society of the novel by reinforcing the formation of a hybrid culture or what it terms, 'third space' resulted due to the intercultural interactions of blacks and whites. The blacks (colonized) being the product of colonial ambivalence, try to mimic the culture of whites (colonizers) and hence evolve with an ambiguous or hybrid identity. Yet in the process, both the groups do not lose control of their own separate identities. The research also reinforces that the novel is a counter narrative to the racial discrimination of the time period it is set in, by revealing the multicultural identities and consciousness of the characters.

A researcher, Frida Eriksson has questioned the representation of blacks and whites by Stockett in her research, *The Representation of Three Characters in The Help - A Patronizing Highlighting of Black People* (2015) by highlighting the patronizing approach of the writer. The researcher sustains her analysis with a post-colonial perspective to reach out the conclusion that the representation of three main characters of the novel, Abileen, Minny and Skeeter Phelan is reinforcing the biased attitude of the writer from the very start as blacks are portrayed as deviant while whites are considered as norm. Hence the findings of the research propose that the novel doesn't simply traces the relationship of both the races but itself aids

in exaggerating the narrative of difference between them. The similar critical stance comes out by another researcher Elisabet Nindia Paramita Ariesta Putri in her research *Representing Black People in Kathryn Stockett's The Help* (2018). Using black feminism as the main approach, the researcher argues that although the novel is an attempt to portray the racial segregation in the society, it is not liberated from white condescending attitude. The character of Skeeter Phelan, a white female, is assumed to be a savior of the blacks who leads them to voice their issues and experiences. The researcher argues that this is a biasness one the part of writer which reflects in the portrayal of the relationship among the characters in the novel.

Another significant research conducted on the novel is *The Black Maids' Voice: A case study in Kathryn Stockett's "The Help"* (2018) by Boukli Hacene Ghizlene which focuses on the experiences and struggle of the maids portrayed in the novel as lower-class black women. The researcher employs a Marxist feminism approach to unfold the economic challenges faced specifically by women in the racist American society. The black women were seen nothing more than just helps, working in the domestic domains of not only their own but their white masters as well. The findings of the research hold that black women have played a very significant role in the black civil rights movement by actively participating in the social and political struggles as can be observed in the characters of Aibileen, Minny and many other maids in the novel.

Review of the related literature demonstrated that the novel has been explored previously from postcolonial, racial and Marxist feminist approach but understating the standpoints of two different races and the role of their social positioning in creating their standpoints has not been explored previously. The present study will focus on fulfilling this gap in the existing domains of knowledge.

Research Methodology

The present literary research is a qualitative investigation into the standpoints of marginalized black people in Kathryn Stockett's novel *The Help*

(2009), using the standpoint theory of Hegel's Master Slave Dialectics and Van Dijk's model of critical discourse analysis as a research method.

Theoretical Framework

Standpoint theory is a theoretical, social and epistemological endeavor to counter the partiality of knowledge by considering the standpoints or voices of marginalized in any society (Wylie 26). Standpoint, according to Collins English Dictionary, is 'a physical or mental position from which things are viewed' (Forsyth 2014). Hence, standpoint theory proposes the notion that one's epistemic positioning is closely related to one's social positioning and often people living in the same geographical locations develop different epistemic perspectives respective of their social positioning. Among these differing perspectives, certain social positions possess more reliability than the others (Wylie 26). The distant standpoints, according to feminist standpoint critic Hartsock, are the result of one's cultural background, social class, and identity in a society (Forst 13).

Standpoint theory first emerged in the works of Georg W.F Hegel in his work, Phenomenology of Spirit in 1807, where he examined that how different power relations and social positioning result in different standpoints on social reality, self-consciousness and the consciousness about others. Hegel accomplished this philosophical viewpoint by proposing a master slave dialectics (Zaytseva 4).

The same concept was later further developed by the social theorists Karl Marx and Fredrick Engels, as they proposed that individuals 'developing their material production and their material intercourse, alter, along with this their real existence, their thinking and the products of their thinking' (Cockburn 1). Through this master slave dialectical debate, Hegel sustains that the oppressed or marginalized groups, possess more reliable consciousness of the reality as compared to the dominating one because of their experiences and social positioning. (Zaytseva 4).

Research Methodology

The present research has employed critical discourse analysis as the method of data analysis. Critical discourse analysis is a form of discourse analysis which examines the way language and discourse are involved in the constructs of power resulting into dominance and inequality in a society. It aims to analyze the way different social, historical and political setups give rise to certain discursive practices in a society and how these discursive practices are involved in shaping ideologies and power relations (Van Dijk, 1998). Fairclough (1993) defines Critical discourse analysis as follows,

discourse analysis which aims to systematically explore often opaque relationships of causality and determination between (a) discursive practices, events and texts, and (b) wider social and cultural structures, relations and processes; to investigate how such practices, events and texts arise out of and are ideologically shaped by relations of power and struggles over power; and to explore how the opacity of these relationships between discourse and society is itself a factor securing power and hegemony. (Sheyholislami 1)

A significant theorist of critical discourse analysis is Van Dijk, who proposed a framework for CDA while discussing the discourse of media texts. In his model, he discussed the relationship between three significant levels of text analysis which are structural level, production level and reception or comprehension level. Structural level analysis includes "structures at various levels of description" either linguistic (grammar, phonology, morphology etc.) or 'higher level properties' or overall schematic patterns, themes and rhetoric. In production level analysis the focus lies on the institutional role especially social and economic institutions in the generation of specific discourses. While the reception level explores the comprehension, memory and reproduction of discourses. In Van Dijk's model, the relationship between these analyses is identified at two structural levels: micro level structure and macro level structure. Micro level involves the linguistics categories

such as syntactic, semantic, lexical and rhetorical components such as quotations etc. and macro level pertains to overall schemata involving the thematic structure (Sheyholislami 3).

Van Dijk stresses that CDA involves the analysis of ideologies by exploring its social dimension (how society constructs them), discursive dimension (text based) and cognitive dimension (the mental representations of members in a social group). Hence he defines ideologies as, ‘the overall, abstract mental systems that organize socially shared attitudes’ (Sheyholislami 4). These ideologies are then involved in the power struggles of the society.

Van Dijk’s model proposes the following steps of critical discourse analysis.

1. Identify and examine the social, political, and historical context of the discourse and the participants involved.
2. Analyze the nature of conflict and power relations in the groups.
3. Locate the opinions of different groups either positive or negative.
4. Identify the implicit and hidden suppositions
5. Examine and analyze the formal and linguistic structures that support the polarization of opinions and voices in the group (Sheyholislami 4, 5)

ANALYSIS

The novel *The Help* (2009) by Kathryn Stockett is an intensive record of the experiences of black maids in the late twentieth century America. Racial discrimination is a part of American history since the colonial practices which resulted in importing blacks as slaves, and persisting till today even the Civil rights movement of twentieth century abolished segregation of blacks and whites (c.f.1.1). This racial discrimination resulted into acute marginalization of a whole race in America, and caused the people to suffer in every walk of their life (Suastifa 1). *The Help* by Kathryn Stockett tells the similar tale of suffering of black people in their society who experience marginality in their society and workplace. As the novel is set in 1960’s America, which was the time of great social upheavals due to

the rising consciousness and protests by black activists in the name of Civil rights movement to counter the segregation laws (J. Perry 182-184), it largely depicts the social condition and sufferings of blacks in the then America. It records the kind of relationship the masters and slaves share, and its effects on their lives.

The novel portrays two acutely segregated racial and social groups, in the form of black maids and their white masters, possessing the same geographical location of Jackson Mississippi, though they differ vastly in their needs, priorities and consciousness of the surroundings. They share the dialectical relationship of Hegel's master slave dialectics (c.f. 3.1) in the way their social positioning influences their standpoints and the relationship they share with each other. The white masters are enjoying the independent status as they belong to the dominant racial group in American history. They consider them culturally, socially and racially superior to the black race, the manifestations of which are very evident in the novel. The blacks are considered an outcast race, they have their separate living areas, markets, book stores, magazines, churches even toilets etc. and they are never allowed to visit white's territories, except wearing white uniforms as a symbol of their identity as maids. 'But the colored part of town, we one big anthill, surrounded by state land that ain't for sale. As our number get bigger, we cannot spread out. Our part of town just gets thicker.' (Stockett 12). These are considered as diseased people due to which they cannot use their washrooms. They are marginalized at every step and are considered inferior, who are not allowed to stand for their rights. The relationship they share is more of the master and slave, than paid maids, because although they are paid for their work, their rights are exploited and they are not allowed to stand for their cause. Minny Jackson, the only black maid, who is out spoken, always suffers because of this habit. As Abileen Clark reflects, 'worse thing you'n do for your career as a maid is have a smart mouth' (Stockett 17). There are many other examples of black people, who are even killed because of their standing up for the cause of blacks, such as Abileen's son Tree Lore who

dies mysteriously soon after he plans to write a book on the experiences of black people in Jackson Mississippi and Medgar Evers, a black rights activist who was killed outside his home. Such incidents show the extreme racial discrimination of that society in which the whites are the masters and blacks are the slaves.

The master slave stratification is developed because of the social positioning (c.f.3.1) of the actors in situation. Being members of the more powerful race in America, they enjoy the dominant position. They are socially, politically and economically independent. They are the law makers and power holders as depicted in the form of Jim Crow laws of segregation in the novel formulated by the white people and the state actors Senator, Governor and specifically Hilly Holbrooke's family, who hold white supremacists' views. They have their own businesses, enjoy the boons of living in better places, better living and facilities in each and every term. Even the people who are not financially very strong, like the Leefolt's, enjoy supremacy over the blacks because of the power constructs of the society as highly racial and stratified. This dominancy reflects in their standpoints regarding the black race and the society around them. Because their consciousness of self and the other is created by their social positioning as dominant group, they are not dependent upon the consciousness of the subordinate group about them. The black maids, who are economically and racially marginalized, are considered as nothing by most of the white masters. Hence, they assert their dominant positionality by acting as masters on the blacks whom they treat as slaves.

Most of the white masters are examples of this dominant assertion, among whom the prime one is Hilly Holbrooke, whose concern throughout the novel remains to ensure and promote the segregation of the two races and assert her dominancy by exploiting the rights of blacks. She belongs to a powerful political family, that's why her actions are followed and accepted by all the others in the society. She introduces the 'Home Help Sanitation Initiative to ensure the segregation and is followed blindly by other white ladies, such as Elizabeth Leefolt,

whether they have the resources to do so or not. She always blames the black people of any wrong doing and then punishes them even beyond the boundaries of law. As she blames Minny for not taking care of his nutrition though her mother always appreciates her, ‘That Minny is not feeding you so that she can steal every last heirloom I have left’ (Stockett, pg.). Hilly acts as a kind of nightmare for the two narrator maids, Abileen and Minny, as they are always scared of Hilly, after starting work on narrating their stories. She is independent and dominant and hence her focus of attention always lies on her own self and to increase her fame and power on other people especially on blacks.

The other white ladies such as Eugenia Sketeer Phelan Elizabeth Leefolt, Celia Foote and Charlotte Phelan, also assert their dominance on the maids in one way or the other. Elizabeth Leefolt hires Abileen in a very average pay and never gets satisfied by her duties, as Abileen reflects about her, ‘she...just frowning all the time’ (Stockett) She installs a separate toilet for the maid in her house just to increase its worth, even though she could not afford it. Similarly, Charlotte Phelan also acts dominantly by asking Constantine, her maid, to leave her only daughter. The interests of these dominant characters or in Hegelian terms ‘masters’, lie on protecting their self-image, and work for their own benefit without caring for the interests of their maids. Even Cilia Foote, who is much different than the other white ladies show dominance in dealing with Minny. Though initially, she needs her for her help but later as her husband knows about the secret maid Minny, she never lets Minny to end up the so-called secret game and puts Minny in danger by secretly hiring her from his husband. She even fires her once, when Minny mistakes her medicines for alcohol. She is concerned with her own self-image in the eyes of her husband and other white ladies when she wears a gaudy dress at the party, even Minny opines her to wear something else. She does not consider her opinion as significant and hence she is not dependent about her self-recognition on Minny because of her identity as a marginalized community. So, in all these white people

their independence and dominance lead them to focus on their self-image and personal benefit, rather than showing concern for the black people. This lack of concern arises due to the asymmetrical relationship they share, in which they exploit the rights of blacks and do not consider their consciousness about them as significant.

While Eugenia Sketeer Phelan whose character holds some autobiographical stances (c.f. 1.2) as well, and is depicted as very compassionate and sympathetic with blacks, does not behave with Abileen and Minny on equal friendly terms and sustains her dominance in some way. Every time she meets them, their relationship demonstrates her superior attitude towards them. Although she writes the book to voice their experiences as maids, her motivation for the book is more of an interest in becoming a writer than to work for the empowerment of black people. Moreover, when she provokes Abileen and the other maids to narrate their stories, she is not much concerned about the consequences of such an activity for the maids. She is sympathetic for the black people and her sympathy arises out of her relationship with her childhood black maid Constantine, with whom she shares a very cordial relationship, but she never stands up for the rights of the blacks among her friends in the truest sense. Even the very idea of writing the experiences of black people comes in her mind from Abileen's late son Tree Lore's motivation to work on this project. It implies that she also shares the master slave relationship with them, but as contrary to the other white ladies, she mirrors her self-image in the consciousness of the black people because of her cordial relationship to her late maid Constantine. After she starts working on the book, she feels curious about Constantine's opinion on her writing such a book. Gradually she develops concern for other black ladies as well, 'but now even if I did get a job offer in a big city, I can't abandon Abileen in the middle of this mess. Not with things going so badly' This shows that her standpoint differs from the other white ladies as she shows concern for the consciousness of blacks as well due to her social conditioning.

On the contrary, the standpoints of the blacks are dependent upon the whites because of their social and economic positioning, which renders their self-image tied to their master's consciousness about them. Their basic needs are of survival and safety which are fulfilled if and only they live up to the consent of their white masters. Hence their focus of attention lies on their masters and their survival and safety needs act as a motivation of labor for them. This motivation manifests itself in almost all the black characters of the novel. Abileen, who even thinks that 'a bitter seed was planted inside me' and she does not 'feel so accepting anymore' after the death of her only son Tree Lore, submits herself to the will of her white lady Elizabeth Leefolt just to full fill her safety needs. There come certain times, when she feels intense anger boiling up inside on Elizabeth Leefolt whenever she punishes her daughter, but she never opens up due to her subdued position. As she reflects once, 'I am so mad at Miss Leefolt, I'm biting my tongue' (Stockett). Her focus of attention is to comfort her lady and her children, and in turn her self-image is dependent on their consciousness of herself, 'she, my boss. I guess everybody wonder what they boss think a them' (Stockett). She takes care of her lady's children, even more than her lady do. Same is the case with other maids too, Minny, who gets fired because of her out spoken nature, suffers a great deal in getting a job again because her self-image was dependent on her master's consciousness, which she ruins. In her next job, she remains in the fear of get caught and punished for a long time due to the secrecy her mistress keeps. She becomes insecure of her mistress, Celia Foote, because of her nature and suspects that she takes drugs and is ultimately, fired by her as well. But her survival needs brings her back to work which shows that she is dependent on her mistress. Similarly, Constantine and other black maids also have to endure the same, owing to their dependence on the white masters. Constantine has to put her only daughter in to an orphanage, just to be accepted in the society by the white masters, because her pale looking daughter who seems more of a white child than black is considered a sign of her illegal

relation with some black in the racially segregated American society. She herself is the product of this cross racial relationship which is deemed illegal in that society. Her father was from the white race, but she comes out colored like her mother, due to which she has to spend an alienated life from her father's love. The society never even allows colored people to be with white kids without their uniforms as maids, a symbol of their identity. This struggle for acceptance remains a part of her life with her daughter as well who seems to be a reflection of her maternal grandfather.

According to Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory, which presents a hierarchical order of motivational needs arising out of the psychological and social standings of people, the basic needs of human's motivation are psychological needs and safety needs which must be fulfilled for the survival. Then come the needs for belongingness, esteem needs and finally needs for self-actualization. The self-actualization stage comprises of a person's accomplishment of his ideal self by undergoing personal growth and realizing his potentials. But often, even all other needs of hierarchy are satisfied, individuals feel dissatisfied because they cannot achieve self-actualization. Maslow posits that this results because of the lack of personal growth which can be achieved by realizing one's personal abilities and the efforts to maximize it. (H. Tezcan UYSAL 215, 216). The characters in the novel *The Help*, demonstrate their motivational needs in different ways, which arise out of their social standings. The white people are economically and socially privileged, and hence their basic safety needs are satisfied. Their motivation for their particular behavior is their esteem needs, or the need for self-recognition, fame and status. While for the black people, who are subjugated and marginalized, the primary concern is their safety needs. They are dependent on the whites for their food, and live under the fear of non-existence in the racially segregated society.

Hence, due to the disparities in their social needs and positioning, their consciousness about each other is different. Because of this difference, their approach to fulfill their needs is also distinct from each other. The masters who are

not dependent on the slaves at first, spend their time in unproductive activities because the dependent slaves, in an attempt to fulfill their safety needs and self-image, are motivated for labor. It is manifested in the novel in the form of the unproductive activities of the whites' mistresses, as Abileen narrates, 'only three things them ladies talk about: they kids, they clothes, and they friends' (Stockett 6). Their concern and prime activity in the whole novel surround around the League parties and the so-called Benefit which they run for the help of poor people in Africa. The irony of the Benefit lies in the exploitation of their own home keeper's rights by themselves. While the black people find motivation to work for them, and they handle most of their house chores. Even the name of the novel 'The Help' drives from the role, the black people play for them. They not only cook, clean, wash and iron for them but do a crucial job as rearing their kids. As an illustration, the Leefolt's, though not financially established, hire Abileen for all their household chores. Elizabeth Leefolt, does not bother to care about the needs of her daughter and leaves her as Abileen's duty. Sketeer Phelan, who is presented as the savior of black people by his attempt to write a book on their experiences, uses Abileen's wit and knowledge in writing the columns at Miss Myrna magazine. Even for the book she writes on the experiences of the black maids, she depends on the maids who narrate the stories. Celia Foote, hires Minny to learn cooking and other household chores and herself keeps resting all the time and ultimately learns nothing. Constantine works for the Phelan family and also rears Eugena Stekeer Phelan and her brother.

This leads the growth of both the groups in quite different manners. The relationship they share is reversed, because the white people start depending on the blacks for their needs and the black maids such as Abileen and Minny achieve a true sense of living by undergoing personal growth and self-realization. Elizabeth Leefolt and Charlotte Phelan alienate their kids from them, and the kids become more attached and intimate with the maids. Sketeer Phelan never gets close to her

mother and always feels Constantine's absence whenever she feels sad and alone. Throughout the novel, her feelings for her mother reflect a gap in the relationship they share. Leefolt's daughter, Mae Mobley also goes through the same phase and at one point in the novel she says to Abileen, 'Aibee, you're my real mama' (Stockett 284). Both of these characters demonstrate an emotional detachment from their mothers. This shows that the others lose the essence of their motherhood by estranging them from their own children. Similarly, Celia Foote and her husband become dependent on Minny for their household chores and cooking and assure her a permanent job. While Hilly, who remains focused to ensure the segregation laws in any possible way to gain political advantage and fame, loses her self-dignity in her own eyes, after the publication of the book which includes her story of eating Minny's pie cake. In rage, she fires her own maid and Abileen, but remains dissatisfied at the end, ensnared in her self-afflictions. These characters do not achieve self-actualization because neither they focus on self-growth nor care for their image in the eyes of their maids, and remain entrapped in their so-called efforts to achieve status and fame. Skeeter Phelan is the only among the white ladies who achieves some kind of personal growth and satisfaction at the end of the novel, despite the master slave relationship she shares with Abileen, Minny and other black maids. This self-consciousness results because of her concern about her own image in the eyes of blacks that is shaped out of the cordial relationship she shares with Constantine. This leads her to self-satisfaction and personal growth in the form of an independent writer, a dream which she cherishes from so long. Eventually, she evolves as a strong person who learns to liberate herself from the fetters of society.

On the contrary, the black maids, in an effort to improve them through their labor, live to the true sense of living. Abileen, though fired from Leefolt's house, gets another job as a writer in reward of her labor for Sketeer Phelan. This job liberates her from the sufferings she goes through at Leefolt's to fulfill her safety

needs, and grants her with satisfaction and a respectable job as a writer. As she reflects at the end of novel, 'feeling, in a way, that I'm free, like Minny. Freer than Miss Leefolt, who so locked up in her own head she doesn't even recognize herself when she read it. And freer than Miss Hilly. That woman gone spend the rest her life trying to convince people she didn't eat that pie. I think about Yule May setting in jail. Cause Miss Hilly, she in her own jail, but with a lifelong term' (Stockett).

Similarly, Minny who suffers marginalization not only at work place as a black woman but is also abused by her husband, evolves as a strong woman at the end by liberating herself from the abusive marital relation and also gets recognition from her mistress due to her labor. In this way, she achieves a better sense of living and consciousness about her own self and the world around her. Her self-actualization lies in her personal growth and realization of her own potential.

This demonstrates that the social positioning of the characters largely influences their standpoints. Those who strive for personal growth by mirroring their self-image in the eyes of others and accomplish it through the power of labor, get satisfaction and self-actualization, while those who remain self-centered, and do not bother to care for other's consciousness about them, enmesh themselves in self-afflictions.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The aim of the present research paper was to explore the standpoints of two asymmetrically aligned groups presented in the novel, *The Help* by Kathryn Stockett, utilizing the theoretical lens of Hegel's Master Slave dialectics, to delve in to their epistemic consciousness created through their standpoints about each other. The study revealed the role of social positioning in determining the standpoints of individuals, as people belonging to distinct social groups evolve distinctly in their consciousness of the social reality and their own self.

The analysis of the study demonstrated that the two racially segregated groups, whites and blacks in the novel share a master slave relationship between

them. Living in the same geographical location, both strive for their own needs at different levels in the Maslow's Hierarchy of needs, the whites for esteem needs and blacks for safety needs. The whites being politically, socially and economically dominant, are independent in their consciousness and they do not consider the standpoints of blacks about them. Contrarily, the blacks are dependent on their safety needs on white masters, and they behold the white's consciousness as a mirror to their own self. This leads both of these groups to different behaviors, the whites become self-centered, they exploit the rights of blacks and depend on them for labor. While, the blacks make their standpoints more reliable through their labor force and emerge out as more conscious about their own selves and the world around them. It is hence concluded that self-actualization and satisfaction is not just economically determined, but by focusing on the standpoints of other to mirror your own self-image.

The present research has explored the social determination of standpoints of individuals by focusing on limited number of characters. The future researchers can explore the novel through structuralist point of view, to examine its complex narrative structure. A psychoanalytical study of the characters, can also reveal interesting facts about the novel. Researchers can also investigate the theatrical adaptation of the novel, released in 2011 with the same title, *The Help*.

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