

THE BLACK MAID'S VOICE IN KATHRYN STOCKETT'S *THE HELP*

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to present the voices of coloured people in Kathryn Stockett's *The Help*. Kathryn Stockett, an American novelist, born and raised in Jackson, Mississippi is a graduate from the university of Alabama. The title *The Help* stands for the help rendered by Skeeter to the blacksmith in Jackson through which their stories come to light. Despite belonging to the dominant class of the society, Stockett writes on the African American maids with utmost clarity and depicts the characters like Aibileen and Minny. They raised out their voices of struggle they faced being a black maid in white people's house with the help of 'Skeeter'. She belong to the dominant group in the society. Stockett had faced many adverse situation on her journey as the writer of the novel. The genre is acknowledged as a classic of world literature as, novels, short stories written specially on colored people. This novel is also considered as an autobiographical novel. The help highlights the relationship dynamic between the white and their African, domestic help in the south. This novel gained its significance for its profound language for rich style used by the author. A white author writing in a black vernacular is a risky territory, but Stockett had the potential to work through the concept. This story mainly focuses on the real life experience of the author. The maids succeed in getting their voices heard, though they were aware of the upcoming risk that they would face after the publication of book *The Help*. The novel was recognized for its signifying concept and for true values of human life in the society.

African - American literature is based on the struggle, difficulty and violence experienced by the colored people. Such literature has attained its pinnacle around late 19th and early 20th century. African – American literature has been a discourse across colour lines and a medium through which one is able to exert considerable authority on both sides of the racial demarcation. African – American literature emerged as a distinct and independent genre in literature. It mainly deals with the themes of a particular interest on the black people. One of the famous African – American writer is Karthryn Stockett. She was born in, Jackson Mississippi. In Mississippi there were half white and half black, her childhood memories are only of blacks who worked as domestic help for white people, which she assumed as common. Every family in Stockett's town had a black women as a slave and they were expected to wear the white uniform which was granted to them. She also had an experience of having a black named Demetrie as a maid in her family. Demetrie was born in Lampkin Mississippi, in 1927. She is a cook and has to carry on work for Stockett's family from the age of twenty eight. There was discrimination between the white and the black people. The white people don't sit at the table while a colored person was eating and they had rules to maintain the division between blacks and white. She felt that she was living as an alien and blacks were not considered racially equal. The impact drove her to write down story on it.

She started to write on the struggles of the black maids among the white people. *The Help* is a novel that tells the story about African maids working as slaves in Jackson Mississippi. During the early 1960's, the novel became a phenomenon, since it published for the first time, about the distress of black maids, who were not treated equally by the white people because of the racial discrimination.

The book has published in 35 countries and in three languages. As on August 2011, it has sold five million copies and spent more than 100 weeks on *The New York Times*. The work of Kathryn Stockett drew's the people's because, her work raised the voices of the other black maids who were still suppressed and dominated by the white people Stockett, received high praise for her well – developed characters and portrayal

of complex social relationship. The novel faced more the 60 rejection, even though it has gone through many obstacles, it received great recognition and also has won “good reads” choice award for best fiction. Stockett has employed three main characters Aibileen, Minny and Skeeter of which Aibileen and Minny belong to the black community and Skeeter to the dominant community. Aibileen and Minny work as domestic maids. Though there is no servitude during the era, Aibileen and Minny are treated as slaves. They cannot taste the fruits of education unlike the white Americans and had a separate church and grocery store.

Kathryn Stockett, has beautifully portrayed the characters in her novel *The Help*, in which an unusual happening in the society where for the first time the black maids raised their voice against the discrimination by the white people. Usually, they won't utter against anything that happened to them. They were under heavy depression, which made them to burst out by revealing their inner feelings and how they were treated by the white Boss. Skeeter being a white the intended to treat everyone equally rejecting any sort of discrimination whether they be based on it may be race, gender, education, religion. Though there are many themes on racial discrimination hovering in the novel, the concept of colour blindness is vivid where characters like Skeeter and Celia Foote, try to show empathy with the feelings of the black American maids. She is also viewed as an outcast in the society, but she still embarks on a rough journey, in support of the entire black community for their sacrifices that they have made for the families.

Aibileen Clark, is the first narrator in the novel '*The Help*'. In the story, Aibileen was a black maid and have raised seventeen white children. The author has this character making offensive statement about her skin colour, and Aibileen serves on life appear harmless. Though Aibileen is well aware of the danger she faces in helping Skeeter with the book and even says so in the earlier chapter. It mainly focuses on the struggles of the black maids who are suppressed by the dominant group in the society. This is revolutionary by which the colored people raise their voices against them. The novel is different. It reveals the cruel discrimination, she narrates of events which cause and refer to demarcation and racism seen in the practice of placing black maids house separated

far away from the white people in a location insecure and under threat. The black maids are not allowed to use the toilets used by the white boss. The author considered this major offense by the dominant society. The blacks were severely punished for the offence. Minny was discharged from her job because she used the white boss's toilet. Hilly punished her and falsely accused her for theft and spread rumour about her. This made Minny to avenge on Hilly and raised out her voice for the first time.

The Help by Kathryn Stockett gained its significance for its profound language use.

The help does not have a boundary for itself depicting the voice of black American, who underwent various suffering in the dominant white society.

The times were against the black American, for being racially different and the narrative, inspires the black maids to raise their voices against the dominant society with the help of Skeeter who was white. The harsh lives of black people in the past may no reoccur in this era because of the success of the civil rights movement activists. It ushered in a new world wide. There can no more be separated spaces between black and white. America had an African –American president Barack Obama for the first time in history. Skeeter's novel is a humane act. Initially there were adverse reactions from the dominant community. Immediate angry consequences did not matter to writer. Thus the novel is a rendition of faith for every daunt ridden and oppressed people who long for a change in their life. It is in the storms of trouble that the entire self begins to take on a form of shape and meaning. It is only through a brave stand for the self like that of an Aibileen and Minny, will life make its meaning. The little change in Aibileen and Minny life's then obvisoluly brings a tremendous change, which is applicable for the rest of the world.

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