



XENOPHOBIC COLONISERS IN THE WORKS OF HARPER LEE

CIBYNA THOMAS

Lecturer, Department of English, St Aloysius College, Edathua

Mail: cibynathomas@aloyuscollege.ac.in



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Abstract

African-American criticism seeks to contest the prevailing notion that the literature of African-Americans stand inferior to the whites. This notion was not just peculiar for the literary works of the Age of Slavery of blacks with its literal servitude and indentured labour which came after emancipation. Instead, it sought apartheid in every forms-political, economic, social and intellectual-in order to treat the blacks as the 'other'. It is at this point that it coincides with colonialism. Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *Go Set a Watchman* is redolent of the colonialism in America with its prejudices and conventions, which decided to place a segment of the diaspora under slavery, all in the name of racism.

This project tries to forward the bare human flaws which prompted the whites to consider the blacks as inferior. Hence, it levels the binary-white/black. But it does not try to justify the evils perpetrated by whites in the name of race.

Keywords: Xenophobic, Post-colonialism, Racism

The desire to exalt one's pride and prominence can be traced to the *Book of Genesis*, when God asks to Cain of his brother and he replies; "I do not know; am I my brother's keeper" post his fratricide of Abel.

Man cannot lead an isolated existence. It is his pride and desires that lead to his misery and prompts selfishness in him. When one decides to acknowledge others by creeping into their skin and understand them, the man becomes free of ego and prejudice. This is the conspicuous tenet behind Tagore's verses from *Gitanjali*:

Where the clear stream of reason
Has not lost its way in the dreary
Desert sand of dead habit;
Where the mind is led foreword by
Thee into ever widening thought and
Action _

Into that heaven of freedom my,Father, let
my country awake. (42)

The convoluted occurrences that haunted the conscience of blacks and distorted the integrity of the whites smothered the American South in the first half of the twentieth century. Harper Lee through her industry illustrates the narrow - mindedness of the whites which evoked them to restrain a section of humanity under captivity.

To Kill a Mockingbird and *Go Set a Watchman* represents the chronicles of American slaves and their masters.

Lee paints the ancestor of Atticus Finch , Simon Finch , who raises his homestead with the labour of slaves recounts the history of South whose economy thrived under the toil of negroes .

Simon has forgotten his teachers dictum on the possession of human chattels, bought three slaves and with their aid established a

homestead on the banks of the Alabama river some forty miles above Saint StephensSimon lived to an impressive age and died rich. It was customary for men in the family to remain on Simon's homestead and , Finch's landing , and make their living from cotton. (3-4)

The Simon's homestead - mentioned in *To Kill a Mockingbird* - is the symbol of the black man's wonders which they have forged for whites as slaves. These slaves attributed for the development of South but the profit pumped into the pocket of the whites.

A deviation from the convention was established by Atticus Finch, as he decided to stay at May comb with his legal practices.

.... The tradition of living on the land remained unbroken well into the twentieth century when my father, Atticus Finch, went to Montgomery to read law, and his younger brother went to Boston to study medicineWhen my father was admitted to the bar, he returned to Maycomb and began his practice. (4)

This alteration proved to be an effective measure in transgressing from the criterion of feeding oneself with the drudgery of slavery. The point that *To Kill a Mockingbird* begins with expounding on this deviation, raises the hope for an egalitarian societal set - up in the near future.

It is not just white/black divide which we situate in these works. The class divide pertaining among the whites fosters a milieu where prejudice and hypocrisy is incessantly practiced.

When Walter Cunningham decides not to take money from Miss Caroline, Scout explains that he is a Cunningham.

I rose graciously on Walter's behalf: 'Ah - Miss Caroline'.

'What is it, Jean Louise?'

Miss Caroline, he's a Cunningham'.

The Cunningham's never took anything that they can't pay back.... They don't have much,

but they get along with it. (*To Kill a Mockingbird*, 22)

This form of hypocrisy is made evident through the lines which Scout suggests to elaborate on Aunt Alexandra's classification of families on the basis of their peculiar features:

Aunt Alexandra, in underlining the moral of young Sam Merriweather's suicide, said it was caused a morbid streak in the family. Let a sixteen year old girl giggle in the choir and Auntie would say, it's just goes to show you, all the Penfield women are flighty'. Everybody in Maycomb it seemed had a streak, a Drinking Streak, a Gambling Streak, a Mean Streak, a Funny Streak. (*To Kill a Mockingbird*, 142 - 43)

This idea is reinforced in *Go Set a Watchman*, when Aunt Maudie alias Alexandra says of Henry Clinton: "There is a Drinking Streak in the Family". (14)

The streak which is common to whites in Maycomb (except few) is the racial streak which fails them recognises black men as their brethren.

Even though, such stratification of society in unequal terms are unacceptable, it is a harsh reality that those who stand in the lowest of the hierarchy constituting whites assume more respect than blacks who are branded as the 'other'. Whites persevere with their status as masters who are incapable of making mistakes. This proves to be the reason behind the assertion on Tom Robinson committing the rape of Mayella Ewell. Even though the evidence is liable to bestow on him acquittal, he is falsely testified of insulting her physically.

The witnesses of the state, with the exception of the sheriff of Maycomb County, have presented themselves to you gentlemen, to this court, in the cynical confidence that testimony would not be doubted: confident that you gentlemen would go along with them on the assumption - that all Negroes are basically immoral beings, that all Negro men are not to be trusted around our women,.... (*To Kill a Mockingbird*, 225)

The evidence of race, their physical, biological and genetic distinction is demarcated, to establish Tom Robinson guilty of crime. They are delimited as barbaric, uncivilised 'other' who does not deserve justice.

After a while the natives internalises the white - black divide and empathises with their black skin. The natives accept the niche beneath the whites. They begin assuming the need to wear a white mask as they feel inferior to their masters. Calpurnia explains to Scout that the superstition about Hot Steam (one who cannot get to heaven) as nigger talk:

A Hot Steam is somebody who cannot get to heaven, just wallows around on lonesome roads as if you walk through him, when you die you will be one too, an' you will go around at night sucking people's breath _'.... 'Don't believe a word he (Jem) said, Dill; I said: Calpurnia says that's nigger talk. (*To Kill a Mockingbird*, 41)

This is due to their internalisation that, to be white they have to hide their blackness.

The limitations imposed on them stating them as marginal enforces their inferiority - complex. This serves to preserve the superior position of whites as masters, civilised. Aunt Alexandra's argument in *Go Set a Watchman* makes it evident.

Negroes bless their hearts, couldn't help being inferior to the white race because their skulls are thicker and their brain pans shallower - whatever that means - so we must be kind to them and not let them do anything to hurt themselves and keep them in their places. (102)

As a result, the blacks start to emulate the whites. This creates a double consciousness or hybrid identity in them. He behaves differently with white and black men.

With company came Calpurnia's company manners: although she could speak Jeff Davis's English as anybody, she dropped her

verbs in the presence of her guests." (*Go Set a Watchman*, 70)

This behaviour is expected of them. They begin to show the urge to purify the race. One way to achieve this is by demeaning one's culture. In the presence of blacks Calpurnia speaks English as if she is unwary of it. The creole creeps in insidiously.

A.K Ramanujan in his poem *The Striders* elucidates this idea. The dispersed community struggles with a sense of rootlessness. They remain withdrawn from their domicile and struggles, unable to enfold the alien culture and their aboriginal culture. The poet, by means of comparing an insect to a displaced individual sings:

"... This bug sits
on a landslide of lights
and drowns eye-
deep
into its tiny strip
of sky."

Another way is by lactification. The whites oppose it. Scout explains Mr. Dolphus Raymond an evil man. She feels that Aunt Alexandra will not approve of him. Scout says:

"I had a feeling that I shouldn't be here listening to a sinful man who had mixed children and didn't care who knew it.... I had never encountered a being who deliberately perpetrated fraud against himself." (*To Kill a Mockingbird*, 221)

He is sinful because he has bred children (mulatto) of his wife who is black. Raymond seems the 'hero of emancipation' than Atticus Finch who leaves them behind, mid-way, trying to secure and assert his superiority over blacks.

Negroes struggle to wrench away their stain of being slaves. But the whites violently neglects their effort. Mr. Grady O' Halan extempore is deep-seated decision to preserve the institution of discrimination as it has become a dire necessity to maintain the merit of the white culture. In a way he

announces that the whites does not wish to corrupt their culture with the culture of the diaspora:

“Mr. O’ Halan made plain to her who he was- he was an ordinary God- fearing man just like any ordinary man, who has quit his job to devote his full time to the preservation of segregation.” (*Go Set a Watchman*, 108)

Here the expression, ‘any ordinary man’ is emphatic for it signifies that white man is the ordinary man. This becomes more evident when Atticus Finch decides to stand for segregation. This is in sharp contrast to Atticus Finch in *To Kill a Mockingbird* who acts as the messiah of the emancipation of the slaves. In *Go Set a Watchman*, we find an Atticus Finch who recommends:

“Have you ever considered that you can’t have a set of backward people living among people advanced in one kind of civilisation and have a social Arcadia.” (*Go Set a Watchman*, 242)

He advises Scout that the blacks are “unable to share the responsibilities of citizenship.” He evokes Scout why he takes no notice of the proposal of considering the blacks as citizens. He claims himself to be a Jefferson democrat:

“ Jefferson believed full citizenship was a privilege to be earned by each man , that it was not something given lightly. A man couldn’t vote simply because he was a man, in Jefferson’s eyes. He had to be a responsible man.” (*Go Set a Watchman*, 244)

This transition of Atticus Finch calls for a re-reading and un-reading of Atticus Finch in *To Kill a Mockingbird*. It ‘subverts’ or ‘undermine’ the proposal that the system of language is based on the grounds that are adequate in itself and the meaning that can be interpreted is limited. The deconstruction of Atticus Finch makes possible to understand the reason why the whites found it impossible to stand with blacks for their liberty.

The coloniser is dependent on colonised. Atticus Finch says to Scout when she asks him to dismiss Calpurnia:

“I’ve no intention of getting rid of her; now or ever. We couldn’t manage a day without Cal; have you ever thought of that? You think about how much Cal does for you, and you mind her, you hear?” (*To Kill a Mockingbird*, 28)

This dependency prevents the masters from freeing the slaves. When anti- colonialism reached its summit with the emergence of movements such as NAACP, parallel associations and meetings flourished among whites to prevent the upward mobilisation of the Blacks. The major agenda of the blacks was the acceptance of their culture as equally significant to whites. But the whites turned a blind eye to it. Apropos; Scout concedes that they are infantile and stupid she stands as the voice of the slaves.

“We have agreed that they’re backward, that they’re illiterate, that they are dirty and comical and shiftless and no good, they’re infants and they are stupid, some of them, but we haven’t agreed on one thing and we never will. You deny that they are human You deny them hope.... They are simple people, most of them, but that doesn’t make them subhuman.” (*Go Set a Watchman*, 251)

Her creed makes her emotionally crippled before the superior-whites. Jack Finch says of her:

“You’re colour blind, Jean Louise,” he said. “You have always been, you always will be. The only difference you see between one human being and another are differences in look and intelligence and character and the like. You’ve never been prodded to look at people as a race, and now that race is the burning issue of the day , you’re still unable to think rationally. You see only people.” (*Go Set a Watchman*, 270)

Jean Louise comment: “I do not want my world disturbed, but I wanted to crush the man who’s trying to preserve it for me;” is in divergence with what the whites petition. They neither want their world disturbed nor seek anyone to thwart them from preserving their social, political, economic and mental venue.

Race and associated prejudice used to be an innate presence in the mental avenue of the whites. It was due to the fear which encroached them of permitting migrant hands to invade and fix themselves as part of a culture to which they does not belong. *To Kill a Mockingbird* and its first draft *Go Set a Watchman* publicise the resentment of whites in having to accept the niggers whom they believe and treated as sub- standard to their mainstream culture and blacks who hoped to evade their rootlessness by acquiring an identity in a white nation which stares at them in disgust .

BRIDGING THE BLACKS AND WHITES

Providence has given human wisdom the choice between two fates: either hope and agitation, or hopelessness and calm.

_ Yevgeny Baratynsky 1800-44: *Two Fates* (1823)

William Shakespeare in Hamlet opined: "Lord! We know what we are, but not know what we may be". It echoes of a future about which humans are unaware. What needs to be done in the moment is doable but what can be done in the next second is beyond mortal comprehension. At times deeds perpetrated at the right time will provide better prospectus for time ahead.

The violent and lacerating emancipation struggle following the heart felt need to open doors which placed hindrances upon blacks and whites in leading a unified existence became responsible for the their posterity to lead a time to come sans hypocrisy, prejudice and fear against their comrades. It helped the whites and blacks acquire a new sensibility which will permit them to benefit America reach the acme of prosperity.

The scuffle between whites and blacks became a crusade in the pages of history for it stemmed to choose hope against hopelessness, protest against calmness.

Harper Lee's literary oeuvre bloomed and flourished to shake the rock which remained undisturbed for centuries in the haven of subordination and dominance. It raised a segment of people from slumber who believed sleep as safe and

satisfying. It is for this reason that it was widely acclaimed and accepted by the blacks and whites. It provided the whites to understand that "it is a sin to kill a mockingbird" and blacks gain individuality among public who treated them as bestial.

This project speaks of racism which remained ubiquitous in the white cognizance and the motivation that prompted them to not respect blacks as humans. It underlines the apprehensions of the white in accepting migrant labourers as part of their ethos. The work also tries to reason the judgements of the whites and intention of the blacks in making their voice visible. Jean Paul Sartre famously commented: "Man must be invented each day". The whites and blacks open before themselves new vistas of experience to straighten what is born crooked.

Atticus's suggestion; "equal rights for all, special privileges for none" foreshadows an America which shall chime equality for all irrespective of race and creed. This project outlines the rights and wrongs which governed the conscience of blacks and whites in leading a secluded subsistence.

Rather than presenting blacks and whites as colonised and coloniser respectively, we are made to see them as humans with flaws. It provides a glimpse of realisation on the aloofness of blacks and whites in accepting each other.

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