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Assessment of the Role of Father in *To Kill a Mockingbird*

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Abstract: *To Kill a Mockingbird* is a modern American classic that presents, among other issues, an important family concern i.e. how to rear up children in a particular way so as to make them independent and responsible citizens. It has almost assumed the status of a father's manual guide to teach him the methods of socialization. The novel is more than just a book in children literature. Scout is the protagonist/narrative voice of the novel, which has attracted the attention of readers for her manner and sophistication. There is ample textual evidence of gender sensitive issues in upbringing of Scout taken up by her father that indicates that the protagonist's trajectory from naivety to maturity in this bildungsroman happens through his mentoring. The role of her father and other people in the environment seems very significant in constructing Scout's self-esteem and identity. She is groomed under Atticus's parenting style, attachment style, and his personality. This is what is duly focused on in this research paper. Harper Lee successfully manages objectivity in dealing with serious issues of racism and Southern social attitudes, along with questions of good and evil, caste division and class distinction, education of children, gender socialization, and the development of an individual's /daughter's conscience.

Keywords: Father, gender, education, socialization, parenting style, attachment patterns, social attitudes.

It is significant to note that the plot structure of *To Kill a Mockingbird* gets constructed around father-daughter interaction, which makes this book basically a tale of father-daughter relationship. The father-daughter relationship, at first, takes its shape through the daughter's /Scout's perspective. The adult Jean Louise Finch narrates the story from a vintage point by recollecting memories in first person narrative chiefly through child Scout's point-of-view. All the events, episodes, and reports are personally witnessed by child Scout herself, and her father, Atticus, is almost present everywhere in the text. The narrative becomes compelling as soon as the reader enters it and realizes that "the best evidence that Atticus has reared an intellectually sophisticated daughter is that she remembers her formative years in significant detail and then narrates them with charm and wisdom. She has become the good daughter of a good man..."(Going, 61). Atticus as an individual identity is morally strong, socially independent, and legally assertive; and, as a father, he is tenderly affectionate and warmly supportive. Atticus' identity as a friend to Scout and Jem is an amalgamation of masculine and feminine traits characterized by "support, trust, loyalty, and other relevant dimensions"(Burke and Stets, 64). There is something angelic quality about him, a cut above both literary and real fathers, which could be

understood in Guna theory of personality that he is a *sattvik* person exhibiting the qualities of self control, generosity, good intelligence, guiltlessness, truthfulness, and yearning for liberation. He does not lose mental equilibrium and believes in harmony. With these endowments, Atticus is consistent throughout the narrative. He unfailingly teaches Scout how to appreciate goodness in human beings and forgive their follies.

Scout is around six, when she begins her narrative in a circular plot, and at the very outset she poses a question to her father regarding the root cause(s) of Jem's broken arm at the elbow over which she and her brother have different opinions. She frequently asks her father directly for an answer because she is attached with him not only in an affectionate bond but also in a teacher-taught relationship with him. She writes, "We (Jem and I) were far too old to settle an argument with a fist-fight, so we consulted Atticus. Our father said, 'We were both right'" (Lee, 3). The simple, if not naive, connotations of Atticus's reply refer to (a father's) concern for gender equality, and his caring and affectionate attitude towards both Jem and Scout. He leaves them to brood over both standpoints again and reach their own conclusions. Atticus contends that Scout and Jem should accept the dissenting opinions. The difference of ideas and opinions may seemingly invite chaotic situations; however, the celebration of chaos or the democratic acceptance of diversity is atypical postmodern attitude. Hence, Atticus's remark or answer implies that people who have different/dissenting ideas have their own subjectivity and referentiality. As usual, Atticus pragmatically approaches the question and answers it in a way that is convenient for smooth conduct of life situations. He seems to have brought home to Scout that there are no foundational truths, there are only facts. His answer informs his typical permissive parenting style that he has imparted the children the self-explanatory answer to their question but they have to depend on their own experiential findings. He teaches Scout and Jem not only manners and behavioural propriety but also imparts precious life lessons. His pedagogy informs his style of communication with his daughter wherein his motive is to discipline, socialize, and educate her.

Atticus's permissive parenting style was already foreshadowed in his conversation with Scout when the latter was reluctant to go to school. The first day at school is important for both Scout, who was eager to go to school, and her father, who like any father understands or knows a child's natural reluctance thereto. Atticus has promptly given some coins to Jem to look after his sister at school. Jem keeps his promise and he guides Scout in school. Scout admits that Jem is assigned what has actually been the duty of a gentleman father to take her to school. But Atticus wants Jem to lead as a responsible elder brother.

The most striking features of father's role in this novel is that he allows his children to address him with his first name 'Atticus'; they don't call him father or dad, which would be indecent gesture in traditional and conventional society. He is bringing up motherless children with extraordinary affection and empathic understanding and without sentimentality. His permission that to address him by his name, so they call him 'Atticus', and not 'father' or 'dad', indicates a unique behaviour in this family and unique parent-child bonding, in which father is a friend and educator and a moral teacher. However, children's speaking to Atticus by name cannot be misunderstood as ungraceful and discourteous, because he conscientiously socializes them into mannerism of courtesy, obedience, and etiquettes of proper speech. As both Scout and Jem respond to seniors, and more after even to their father and Calpurnia also with deference by using the words "Sir"(34), "Ma'am"(22) and "Miss"(24).

Her father has inculcated in her the courage to communicate to the older people in society the truthfulness of situations which she often does in the narrative. First incidence occurs on the very first day at school, when her teacher, Miss Caroline, having found the boy named Walter Cunningham without lunch, tries to help him with a quarter which he painstakingly refuses through gestures each time she presses. One of the pupils prompts Scout to speak up for Cunningham and Scout leads, "That's okay, ma'am, you will get to know all

the country folks after a while. The Cunninghams never took anything they can't pay back -- no church baskets and no scrip stamps. They never took anything off of anybody; they get along on what they have. They don't have much, but they get along on it"(22). In fact, Scout has learnt this piece of information about the Cunninghams from her father in an intimate and frank conversation, which emphasizes the father's role in educating his daughter about the ways of Maycomb society. Atticus defines social surroundings and cultural realities for Scout with a view to developing her personality. He performs the role of a primary socializer.

Scout is too outspoken and gradually displeases her teacher and finally receives corporal punishment. Scout is at odds with her teacher, and when leaving the classroom she notices Miss Caroline "sink down into her chair and bury her head in her arms. Had her conduct been friendlier towards me, I would have felt sorry for her. She was a pretty little thing "(Lee, 24). Scout's bitterness and apathy account for her inability to comprehend others' perspective. Her id is predominant and she has yet to acquire superego from her father. Caroline's hard day's perspiration, especially with uncivilized brute, unclean, and lousy Burris Ewell, whose head is full of lice, and who made her cry, is in sharp contrast with civilized, intelligent, and communicative Scout. Importantly, what Scout needs at this point of time are her lessons in empathy and compassion. Immediately thereafter Atticus happens to expand Scout's consciousness not only into a moral vision of empathy and compassion but also teaches her prudence in what to reveal and what to hide for a harmonious and peaceful life at school and in society. Miss Caroline's disapproval of Scout's advanced learning with respect to her age and standard simply informs the institutional apathy and rejection of an individual who as the talent and appropriate upbringing to lead, and who consequently loses, as did Scout, reverence in her teacher, but she certainly respects her teacher because she wants her father to be proud of her. Scout is, post-dinner and before night sleep, given regular reading sessions by her father, so when she joined school she already knows how to read and write. This advanced stage of her, as compared to her peer group in first grade, doesn't go well with her teacher, Caroline, who ordered her to stop reading with her father. Because the evening sessions of Atticus's reading are important to her, she approaches and pleads with Atticus not to send her to school anymore and teach her home as his grandfather had taught him. Father and daughter have a very amicable relationship as is illustrated by the fact that Scout neither screams nor shouts but only asserts her decision, while Atticus "wait(s) in amiable silence"(36). She reinforces her position. But Atticus reasons out as clearly and convincingly as suits a lawyer that that is not possible, for he would be put in jail for keeping her at home. The indirection to obey the law is latent in his straightforward and blunt assertion herein.

'Bit by bit, I told him the day's misfortunes.

'--- and she said you taught me all wrong, so we can't ever read any more, ever. Please don't send me back, please, sir.'

Atticus stood up and walked to the end of the porch. When he completed his examination of the wistaria vine he strolled back to me.

'First of all,' he said, 'if you can learn a simple trick, Scout, you will get along better with all kinds of folks. You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view ---"Sir?'

'-- until you climb into his skin and walk around in it' (Lee, 33).

Scout is too young and naive to stop raising queries. If she is not given satisfactory answers, she may develop into a criticizing and rebellious personality. Importantly, the ideal situation in the narrative is that she is always in personal interaction with her father, who not only solves her problems but also exceptionally encourages her to feel safe, secure, and good in his company. In short, she is reared up in secure attachment pattern. In fact, Atticus, being an atypical father, communicates with his children as if they are mature adults. Herein it is easily discernible that Scout's imploring tone is tense and uncomfortable, but her father responds to her in a very attentive, friendly, and calm tone which induces in her psychological comfort; as a result the emotional ties between father and daughter strengthen. Atticus's thoughtful gesture, appropriate body language, and cool stroll around --- which is his typical behaviour of a cultivated calm exhibited at trial also --- supports his daughter and gives her a respite from her troubled mind. Lee has deliberately used the apt symbol of the plant wistaria vine which means expanding of consciousness, as well as love, support, sensitivity, bless and

tenderness. Thus, Atticus teaches Scout a moral principle and the virtue of empathy that are prerequisites for comprehending other's perspective. Atticus is a sensitive father with a high degree of awareness (*Sattva*) as he disciplines his daughter without resorting to anxiety and anger (*tamsik* quality). Scout and Atticus sealed an agreement, not to be disclosed at school, that if she would "concede the necessity of going to school, (they would) go on reading every night just as (they) always (had)"(Lee, 35). Usually, a father suppresses daughter without listening to her point of view in such a situation or expresses disapproval of the teacher; the former may cause harm to the daughter's self-esteem, while the latter may make her arrogant and misfit in school and later on in society. Atticus does not behave either way and Scout is given a slice of life by her father so as to create a more harmonious society by inculcating in her the Christian virtue of abnegation of self centred approach and to give compassionate attention to the other person's life and standpoints. Thus, she develops a positive self-image and learns to tackle others', herein, her teacher's whimsical and unjustified demand. Both Atticus and Scout are growing together: her father's perspective inculcates in her a sense of compassion and sympathetic understanding. Scout's perspective helps him in defining the difference between "(b) ending the law" and "compromise" which means "an agreement reached by mutual concessions"(34, 35). Thus there is a strong father-daughter bond in a very close relationship that daughter feels quite secure in her father's company. She cannot stop going to school but cannot either afford missing the evening session of Atticus's reading out to her in cosy physical proximity with him. She always follows him and loves him.

Scout is a young and energetic tomboy, and she continues ignoring the social code of dress mannerism suited to her gender while growing up in Southern America. Her father supports her as usual, "Sometimes it's better to bend the law a little in special cases"(Lee, 33), yet he has invited aunt Alexandra with a view to socializing Scout into gender roles. The bossy and authoritative aunt informs, "We decided that it would be best for you to have some feminine influence. It won't be many years before you become interested in clothes and boys --"(Lee, 140). Aunt was right, for Scout has already started taking interest in a boy, Dill, who promises that "he would love me forever and not to worry, he would come get me and marry me as soon as he got enough money together..."(Lee, 128). Scout, the mature narrator, reminisces romantically, "... the swiftness with which Dill would reach up and kiss me when Jem was not looking, the longings we sometimes felt each other feel. With him, life was routine, without him, life was unbearable. I stayed miserable for two days"(Lee, 128). Although Scout is in an intimate relationship with her father, she does not share with him that she has a "permanent fiancé"(128), as well as her soft feelings for Dill. It can be discerned that Jem perhaps has no objections to their affair, as the narrative goes, "We said Goodbye, and Dill went inside the house. He evidently remembered he was engaged to me, for he ran back out and kissed me swiftly in front of Jem" (Lee, 61). It cannot be counted as a serious affair because she is just little over seven years old, yet it is quite a feminine behaviour in heteronormativity, and more feminine to keep it to herself. Atticus' permissive parenting style is in discord with or does not go well with the authoritative temperament of aunt Alexandra. Atticus has an androgynous mind as he takes interest in passive activities such as reading leisurely, and more importantly, showing no masculine interests in a suitable match for himself in Miss Maudie. When Atticus asks Scout how she likes for her aunt Alexandra to come live with them: "I said I would like it very much, which was a lie, but one must lie under certain circumstances and at all times when one can't do anything about them"(Lee, 141). This wisdom is certainly not taught by her father, but it is something self-acquired as a girl's experience. Or it is because a girl is socialized that way, or naturally she is sympathetic and tolerant to family members so as to maintain harmony. Because Atticus feels the growing daughter needs to be guided by a motherly woman into behavioural propriety, and he couldn't stay home all day during hot summer time, aunt Alexandra would be of great help. On aunt Alexandra's provocation at Jem's callous talk about Cousin Joshua, Atticus tries to impress upon the children in rather a serious and dry tone and in his authoritative "lawyer's voice" that "you are not from run-of-the-mill people, that you are the product of several generations' gentle breeding ... 'She asked me to tell you you must try to behave like the little lady and gentleman that you are..."(147). Both the children get stunned and are on the verge of crying, as the narrator says, "This was not my father. My father never thought these thoughts. My father never spoke so. Aunt Alexandra had put him up to this, somehow. Through my tears I saw Jem standing in a similar pool of isolation, his head cocked to one side" (147). Atticus, having realized the grim situation, soon covers up the damage and leaves. His attachment style is involving and affectionate. Atticus has a mixed parenting style,

he is authoritative and permissive, but he's never avoidant. He admits that he has "never laid a hand on her" because he has "been able to get by with threats"(97). Atticus authoritatively commands Scout, if she is in the wrong, to apologize at once. However, Atticus tries his best to answer Scout's queries honestly. Scout informs the reader directly,

Aunt Alexandra was fanatical on the subject of my attire. I could not possibly hope to be a lady if I wore breaches; ... Aunt Alexandra's vision of my deportment involved playing with small stoves, tea sets, and wearing the Add-A-Pearl necklace she gave me when I was born; furthermore, I should be a ray of sunshine in my father's lonely life. I suggested that one could be a ray of sunshine in pants just as well, but Aunt said that one had to behave like a sunbeam, that I was born good but had grown progressively worse every year. She hurt my feelings and set my teeth permanently on edge, but when I asked Atticus about it, he said there were already enough sunbeams in the family and to go about my business, he didn't mind me much the way I was (Lee, 90).

The idea of femininity is overly expressed in this paragraph as it indicates what it means "to be a lady"(253) for a growing up girl in Maycomb. As aunt Alexandra feels it her responsibility that Scouts be socialized into acceptable gender behaviour. Scout's preference to wear overalls to dress and camisole is severely reprimanded by Mrs Dubose (112). Mrs Stephanie doubts Scout's growing up into a lady until she "starts wearing dresses more often"(254). Scout is pressured to change her dress mannerism and her tomboyishness so as to develop into a traditional or stereotypical Southern woman. Scout is at odds with female authority figures, namely, Miss Caroline, Miss Fisher, Calpurnia, rs Dubose, Miss Stephanie, and importantly, aunt Alexandra, because they object to her idiosyncratic or exceptional relationship with her father. Atticus rather not only encourages her tomboyishness, as he presents her a rifle as a gift and not a doll or something suited to her gender but also gives his consent to her wearing overalls. Atticus, being primary agent, influences the socialization of her into a gender bending role identity in early childhood, partly because he himself is not a stereotype of Southern male, he is rather weak and effeminate and lacks expressive "masculinity"(93). However, Atticus's sexist approach manifests in his belief in gender based division of occupation when he replies Scout's rather indignant question why women in Alabama can't serve on jury: "'I guess it is to protect our frail ladies from sordid cases like Tom's. Besides,' Atticus grinned, 'I doubt if we'd ever get a complete case tried -- the ladies'd be interrupting to ask questions'"(244).

Feminine temperament is expressive; hence, women focus on maintaining harmonious interpersonal relationships in the family. Importantly, Atticus continues with the services of California, and invites aunt Alexandra with a view to providing Scout a traditional Southern female role model. So the latter detains Scout purposefully in a women's get-together-party at home which she counts "this was a part of her campaign to teach me to be a lady"(253). Miss Maudie and aunt have agreed to teach Scout the ways of a lady in middle class white society of Maycomb, which she feels, "There was no doubt about it, I must soon enter this world, where on its surface fragrant ladies rocked slowly, fanned gently, and drank cool water"(258). But Scout confesses, "I was more at home in my father's world" wherein people are less critical whereas the "ladies seemed to live in faint horror of men, seemed unwilling to approve wholeheartedly of them. But liked them... there was something about them that I instinctively liked ... "(258). The way these Southern ladies talk informs about their gossiping nature, extremist position, regional favouritism, unfounded prejudices, superficial mannerism, and frailty, as Scout defines aunt Alexandra as "an incurable gossip"(142). Scout notices that when aunt Alexandra declares that everybody and every family has a "Streak" in Maycomb, Atticus silences her, "'Sister, when you stop to think about it, our generation's practically the first in the Finch family not to marry its cousins. Would you say the Finches have an Incestuous Streak"(143). Aunt Alexandra embodies characteristics of a lady, she is a representative of stereotypical Southern womanhood. Hence, Scout is ambivalent to be a part of this ladyhood because she cannot identify with such women as are apprehensive of their powerlessness, and who believe in

racial discrimination. Importantly, she easily identifies with her father. The world of her father represents rationality, empathy, empowerment, optimism, faith in humanity, and democratic spirit.

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