

Racial Injustice in *To Kill a Mockingbird*

Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960) is a powerful critique of racial injustice in the American South during the 1930s. Set in the fictional town of Maycomb, Alabama, the novel exposes how deeply ingrained racism distorts moral judgment, legal systems, and human relationships. Through the trial of Tom Robinson, the moral integrity of Atticus Finch, and the innocent perspective of Scout Finch, Lee reveals the devastating consequences of prejudice and challenges readers to confront the ethical failures of a racially divided society.

At the heart of the novel lies the trial of Tom Robinson, a Black man falsely accused of raping a white woman, Mayella Ewell. Despite clear evidence of his innocence, Tom is convicted solely because of his race. The courtroom becomes a microcosm of Southern society, where racial bias overrides truth and justice. Atticus Finch, defending Tom, underscores this injustice when he declares: "In the name of God, do your duty." His appeal is not merely legal but moral, emphasizing that the law should be blind to race. However, the jury's guilty verdict reflects a society unwilling to relinquish racial hierarchy.

Lee demonstrates that racial injustice is not limited to individual acts of cruelty but is systemic and institutionalized. The legal system, which should protect the innocent, instead reinforces racial inequality. Atticus articulates this hypocrisy when he states, "The one place where a man ought to get a square deal is in a courtroom, be he any color of the rainbow, but people have a way of carrying their resentments right into a jury box." This observation reveals how personal prejudice contaminates public institutions, rendering justice inaccessible to marginalized communities.

Tom Robinson's character embodies the tragic consequences of racism. He is compassionate, hardworking, and respectful, yet these virtues fail to save him. His crime, as Atticus explains, is not rape but sympathy: "He felt sorry for her." In Maycomb's racial order, a Black man feeling pity for a white woman is seen as a threat to white supremacy. Tom's eventual death—shot while attempting to escape prison—symbolizes the ultimate destruction of Black lives by an unjust system. His fate highlights how racial injustice extends beyond the courtroom into every aspect of social existence.

The Ewells, particularly Bob Ewell, represent the corrosive effects of racism on moral values. Although Bob Ewell is abusive, dishonest, and socially despised, his whiteness grants him power over Tom Robinson. After the trial, Bob Ewell spits in Atticus's face, boasting that he has disgraced him, yet faces no consequences. This incident underscores how racism enables morally corrupt individuals to assert dominance over others. As Atticus explains to Scout, "In our courts, when it's a white man's word against

a black man's, the white man always wins." The statement starkly captures the racial imbalance embedded in the justice system.

Scout Finch's childlike narration plays a crucial role in exposing racial injustice. Her innocence allows readers to perceive the irrationality and cruelty of prejudice.

Observing the segregated seating in the courtroom, Scout notices that Black spectators sit in the balcony, physically and symbolically marginalized. Later, when Reverend Sykes tells Scout to stand as Atticus passes, it reflects the Black community's recognition of Atticus's rare moral courage. Scout's gradual awareness of racial inequality mirrors the reader's moral awakening, reinforcing the novel's ethical message.

Atticus Finch serves as the novel's moral center and a voice of conscience against racial injustice. He believes in empathy as a means of overcoming prejudice, famously advising Scout to "climb into [another person's] skin and walk around in it." Atticus's defence of Tom Robinson, though unsuccessful in legal terms, represents a moral victory. He teaches his children that integrity involves doing what is right, even when defeat is inevitable. His quiet resistance challenges the normalization of racism and offers hope for moral progress.

In conclusion, *To Kill a Mockingbird* presents racial injustice as a deeply rooted social evil that deforms laws, relationships, and moral judgment. Through the tragic trial of Tom Robinson, the courage of Atticus Finch, and the evolving consciousness of Scout, Harper Lee exposes the cruelty and irrationality of racism while advocating empathy, justice, and moral responsibility. The novel remains relevant because it reminds readers that confronting racial injustice requires not only legal reform but also profound ethical change in individual and collective attitudes.