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SOCIETAL DISCRIMINATION IN KATE GRENVILLE'S NOVEL: THE IDEA OF PERFECTION

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ABSTRACT

Discrimination covers sexism, racism, stereotypes, behavior and action. Here this paper explores the societal discrimination in Australian society, before that many studies proved, how Australian society was mingled with this crime. Many kinds of discriminations happened in society like race, gender, religion, etc. Moreover this paper explores all kinds of Australian societal discrimination through the novel of Kate Grenville's The Idea of Perfection. Australia seems to be the most biased country in the world, if we study the history, multicultural people were settled there from all over the world, some were convicts, and some were soldiers. When gold mines discovered in Australia workers from other countries also relocates from their native places in 1851. Grenville explores the variety of discrimination in The Idea of Perfection. She portrays psychological characters as well as her genius for portraying states of human feeling. The whole novel is about the human strengths and frailties to bear upon a pair of unlikely soul mates connected by the wooden bridge. This bridge is set in Karakarook rural town of New South Wales and bridge has become an object of fierce debate in the town. This becomes the serious issue for people and taking it as duty. The Idea of Perfection also shows the conflict between past and present, people struggling among themselves with their heritage. All the characters tried to show their perfection only because of the fear of prejudice, society would not accept the misfit people.

KEY WORDS: Sexism, Racism, Stereotypes, Discrimination, Pathetically.

Societal discrimination means execute differential treatment of a social group or a person for reasons of certain generalized attributions, sometimes individuals could be bias of disability, sickened, sexual orientation, religion, or any other measures of diversity. Discrimination also refers to a certain behavior of a person or a group of people, against a member of that particular category or class. “Social discrimination is defined as sustained inequality between individuals on the basis of illness, disability, religion, sexual orientation, or any other measures of diversity” (Bhugra 2). All human beings are born free in rights. It is an approach or action that excludes the disadvantages or simply differentiates an individual or group based on personal characteristics. Micro-identities related to race, gender, religious, age, sexual orientation, and other components all get trumped by the label of being unstable or unsound

Social justice is aimed at promoting a society which is equitable, valuing diversity, providing equal opportunities to all its members, irrespective of their gender, race, age disability, ethnicities, sexual orientation or religion and ensuring fair division of resources and support for their human rights. It is studied by number of disciplines such as sociology, psychology, anthropology, and political science to describe or clarify the context in which differentiation occurs, the condition that generates it and its associated factors. To define the Discrimination is a difficult exercise. It may be as follows: victimization, harassment, attaining the dignity of the person. Discrimination covers sexism, racism, stereotypes, behavior and action. Here this paper explores the societal discrimination in Australian society, before that many studies proved, how much Australian society was mingled in this crime. Many kinds of discrimination happened in society like race, gender, religion, etc. Moreover this paper explores all kinds of Australian societal discrimination enlighten through the novel of Kate Grenville’s *The Idea of Perfection*. Australia seems to be the most biased countries in the world, if we study the history, multicultural people were settled there from all over the world, some were convicts, and some were soldiers. Workers also relocates from their native places in 1851 when gold was discovered in Australia and for that reason many settlers came over to find gold and some came to find other works. “Racism are dynamic and constantly changing concepts...To unravel the social reality of ‘race’ and racism as an ideology, we need to examine how the two logics of racism have evolved over time in Australia” (Jayasuriya 3)

Grenville explores the variety of discrimination in *The Idea of Perfection*. She portrays psychological characters as well as her genius for portraying states of human feeling. *The Idea of Perfection* is the bestseller novel of Grenville and in 1992, Britain’s most valuable literary award-winning of Orange Prize, and also shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize. The whole novel is about the human strengths and frailties to bear upon a pair of unlikely soul mates connected by the wooden bridge. This bridge is set in

Karakarook rural town of New South Wales and bridge has become an object of fierce debate in the town. This debate starts with one question mark of shaping the bridge, some people want to destroy the bridge and again make it with a more modern way but some people want to save the bridge to preserve the region's heritage. This becomes the serious issue for people and taking it as duty. It is about the old bend bridge in Karakarook which was bent by flood into the question mark shape. Grenville says, "The Bridge had not started life bent, but during some long-distant flood the middle of it had been pushed down-stream by a raft of drifting timber. Generally that was the end of it with bridges: they broke up then and washed away. But this one seemed to have chosen to bend rather than break" (The Idea of Perfection 61-62). Some people of that town, planned to break the bridge but all the people did not agree with the decision, people of Karakarook were divided by this issue. Some people think, that the town requires tourist place for economic growth with the dollars. Besides all the discussion, people of Karakarook got the engineer Douglas Cheeseman to demolish the old bend bridge by the concrete one. One more important character in the novel is Harley Savage. Both who also gives her point of view on the bridge, according to her local heritage committee has to plan for the museum. Harley and some other townspeople think, tourists love to visit the bridge. He does not agree with the decision of Harley. Both are the central characters in the novel.

Two different people came from different cultures both fighting for their idea and create cultural discrimination. This opposite thinking generates the war and discrimination between the people of Karakarook and here the bridge becomes the reason for their discrimination. There was no match between them. Both had opposite thinking and this opposite thinking came from their own culture. Sometimes cultural racism called new racism, neo-racism, or differential racism. This discrimination is based on the cultural differences between racial and ethnic groups.

From the day one Douglas and Harley have too much contradiction. There was no combination between each other both always fight for their idea. Even both are aware of their inadequacy but still always try to prove their superiority in front of villagers. Both the characters tried to give their advice to the people of Karakarook but most of the time they were haunted by The Idea of Perfection. Here Grenville shows the paradox between Douglas Cheeseman and Harley Savage both belong to different places both have different ideas to prove the point. Douglas and Harley's personal life was not also good with too much conflicts. Some people believe that it's natural for human being who is different to have conflicts. They get inferiority, humiliation and injustice in their personal life but apart from their personal life both have professional behavior. It was the most important chapter of their life, because here they get one more chance from life to prove their ability. Grenville uses a bridge as a module to present the life of Douglas and

Harley both are living afflicted life. Douglas was a very good engineer, but could not succeed in his life, he is good at sums, plan out everything, he has no idea how to demolish the bridge. All his plans and ideas are just on papers it would not easy to work on the town. He knows his work is not up to the mark it would not exist in front of others and here he thinks of his image and reputation, and the other side people do not easily accept the variables. He always try to shout out one problem then another problem is created because some people thought and behaved like war but for him, it was like a simple conversation. "There is no major twist in the tale. Douglas and Harley, the main characters struggling with their self-images" (Ball).

Apart from his difficulty, and any situations of his life, try to enjoy his work, spends a lot of time thinking about what we can do better with the bridge. In the novel, Grenville relates the bridge and town with nature and says each timber has its own color and own personality. It seems to know the novel is opposite to the name just characters try to prove them perfect, everything is weird in this village Karakarook sun is oppressively hot, colorful timber in the village, some look like red, pink and grey there are the various color of the timber. "Everything is uncomfortable. The sun is oppressively hot, clothes don't seem to fit properly and everybody is a weird shape — stomach too fat, ears too big, eyes too close together" (Reviewed by James Marriott). Grenville collects all the elements very beautifully just like river, grass, and rock and wood. All these things are observed minutely and illustrated beautifully in the reader's mind. She reveals the simplicity and create happiness. People could not talk to each other, that means social interaction was most awkward there, the people of the town looking odd, their body shape is not like a normal person that's why their cloth was unfit in the improper shape, ears was too big eyes completely different it is too close together, here Grenville openly shows the discrimination with characters. A key to understand why we have the cultural clashes and social problems, this research explores the theme of justice throughout Australian history.

According to Leonardo da Vinci, "An arch is two weaknesses which together make a strength". Grenville was highly inspired by the quote, and it is the opening line of the novel. She is talking about the bridge and this novel is all about the possibilities. Grenville says, "Struck by how well it applies to human relationships, where two people, each with his or her own flaws, come together in such a way that one's weaknesses are absorbed by the other's strengths." (Interviewed by Jai Arjun Singh). The quote of Leonardo is applied for two imperfect human beings, combine of two people to make it stronger because human beings are weak, when they are together, use their double power and make it more perfect, both can provide each other's strength. Two people's weaknesses can hold each other up. This novel develops the relationship between the unlikeliest people and it is the seed of a story. Harley Savage and Douglas

Cheeseman are two arches, who came to the small town of Karakarook, both had unhappy past but try to give the new shape to the life. She shows how two imperfect people hunted by their idea of perfection besides their imperfect personal life they learn to forgive themselves and accept no one is perfect in the world. In this novel characters hide their real-life from each other.

This novel shows the discrimination through the two stories. One is based on the life of Douglas and Harley and another one is Alfred Chang and Felicity Porcelline. Grenville uses the character, Felicity, as a reference point because sometimes she is removed from the center narrative. Grenville says, "But Felicity's strength, her self-dependence, is also her crutch, and in a sense, she is worse off than the "weak" Douglas and Harley"(interviewed Jai Arjun Singh). Apart from unhappy life of Douglas, Harley, Felicity and Change, all four tries to find some light of happiness. Both the pair knows each other's strengths as well as weaknesses. All learn to forgive themselves for not being perfect and create the possibility to love each other. All learn from their life it's just human being unhappy baggage is not a moral failure. They just try to live happily. It doesn't mean they are monsters. Other side Felicity and Chang are two different characters; Felicity is so afraid because nothing is perfect in her life. Grenville includes almost all imperfect characters in the novel. This novel is concerned about the ethnic differences and racism, different characters coming together, and shows their perfection in different ways, and all share different points of view. Chang and Felicity do not have a relationship. Grenville shows the narcissism and Chang is just the mirror of narcissism. "It was nothing like love. It was not even that she liked Freddy Chang particularly. They certainly had absolutely nothing in common" (Grenville 312). Felicity feels uncontrollable lust for him. She had many affairs, some other Freddy in other country's town. Grenville discriminates against the Chinese butcher but at the same time she also reveals his goodness, just like, "... a butcher, but also a photographer; a ladykiller, but also a conscientious son of the family; amoral, but also a good man" (interview with Magdalena Ball). Felicity, Douglas, and Harley all were influenced by society's expectations about what women or men are supposed to be. Grenville shows two stories about male female relationship, Douglas Cheeseman and Harley Savage and Alfred Chang and Felicity Porcelline. They all are aware of each other's failings, they see the mirror image of their own. Grenville gives message, unhappy baggage is not a moral failure, and it's just human being. They all accept the possibility of being love and forgive themselves for not being perfect. According to Grenville all these kinds of perfection in life are just like death.

Grenville's illustration for her characters is extremely good from the beginning of the novel, she describes every movement of Douglas and Harley's life very minutely like what they wear how they talk even their gestures and posture also reveal. Even she reveals Douglas used zinc cream from sun protection.

She presents the psychological characters, through their personal life because they had inferiority for their beauty and physical structure. Douglas is always conscious of his hair and big ear whereas Harley is conscious of her beauty and wrinkles. “She knew that intent look. She had received it a lot in her younger days, in spite of her lack of looks. She knew what it came from, and she knew exactly what it led to” (Grenville 174-75). In this novel Grenville proves beauty attracts the people.

The people of Karakarook used that bridge for business purposes. Harley and Douglas live like a bent bridge. It would bend but not break and live with a doubtful future. In the details of Karakarook Grenville pokes fun but at the same time she presents the journey of two misfits. “The book is Grenville's most charming and enjoyable, a romantic comedy descended from *Pride and Prejudice* in which two lonely, awkward middle-aged people meet when posted to a small-town backwater, and overcome misunderstandings and reserve to discover a second chance.” (Rustin) In this novel, Grenville shows romantic comedy and two imperfect middle-aged people who try to give the second chance to life.

The racial and gender discrimination both the issues focused on a particular point but here She illustrates all kinds of discrimination which were never revealed before, including racial and gender. Her characters are suffered by other kinds of discrimination in the society, also feels pain and fight for the justice. This literature covers many kinds of discrimination in Australia and through her characters she wants to show how women were discriminated and how they suffered. She goes against all taboos and restrictions imposed by men over women. She illustrates the key issue in all spheres of the society. Why this discrimination occurs in the society, elsewhere people are saying we all are equal, we all have red blood in the body, and all the promises of humanity are false means nothing is true in the society. Grenville's novels emphasize three things-originality, excellence, and accessibility. She achieved the orange price only by all these three qualities. The *Idea of Perfection* starts the journey with two imperfect, opposite characters but both have a one common thing both are introspective and humble. This novel is full of humor, nothing is perfect but the characters try to prove them perfect and also try to prove superior to each other, both fight and dominate to each other, the whole story set on small town Karakarook in New South Wales. This was attached to the main road, which is empty and covered by too much pollution. This novel is completely different from others shows people dominates each other; the concept is also complicated because throughout the novel Grenville talks about main issue that is domination and humiliation.

Grenville has high observation and imagination for her novels. The *Idea of Perfection* is an acute psychological portrait of Grenville, and shows the human strength as well as weakness through the characters of Douglas and Harley. It is all about humor and never loses the irony. It is also endearing and

pathetically. This novel shows the confusing pair of neither Douglas nor Harley is quite sure how to deal with the bridge, even their first meeting is completely embarrassing, both don't know how to deal with that issue. Harley has a different priority, she loves heritage museum on the other side Douglas loves concrete according to him concrete would be more perfect for that bridge, and to save from floods.

Grenville uses different types of words in the novel which occurs the curiosity in the reader's mind just like, 'white Ute' and 'marcel wave' all those kinds of things make the author different. It creates curiosity in reader's minds about what kind of people are living in the town; they want any changes and growth in their life or don't want any change. All types of discrimination which is related to the society, they all are illegal either based on race, sexuality, nationality or religion but it occurs in society and frequently increases. Some types of discrimination openly happen and some are confidential but all these differences are wrong either it is on minority or between black and white, disability and anything else. All types of discrimination arises a question in the society what is the discrimination and why all this discrimination happens in the society, and how we can get free from all these troubles.

The measurement of discrimination is difficult in the society because it's limitless and no instrument available to measure. It is a completely frustrating subject for people. Only those people can understand, who suffered are by this type of scene in life. People search the new techniques and try to find out the discrimination and also try to control them but still there is no solution. Some societal discrimination we easily spot in our surrounding like in school, colleges and other. In totality, she reveals happy incidents but during all these incidents, Grenville shows discrimination between people, their contradictory thoughts, forced to others to prove perfection. In most of the novel, women were shown very weak but here she stands equal to the men. This is the most attractive and stronger taste of the novel during the conversation of the characters so many comedy scenes happen, so people are taking to Grenville as a comedian rather than a writer. Douglas and Harley both came from different families, different nations, both dominate each other, and Grenville shows the social domination in the novel. "The culturally different, that is, those who do not subscribe to norms and values dictated by the dominant culture, have become the outsiders who are alien to the nation" (Jayasuriya 42). In social functions white people are more likable as compared to black people, even those people more lovable who look good as compared to normal people, means beautiful people always in priority even in jobs or any kind of social functions. All these hierarchies are not only between black and white but also encounter between the middle-class black and working-class black. Before the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, there was no sign of race. It occurred only when European

encountered with non-European civilization. People fought for national identity after that scientist and philosopher gave the biological meaning of race.

Society treats a single status person differently especially if it is female, without knowing the reason behind the scene, everyone thinks only woman would be responsible for her marriage. In the novel, Harley had three husbands and all died but according to others she was responsible for everything, not pointed out her directly but she always blames herself for everything, and no one consoles her. Here societal discrimination is co-relates to the social justice which is applied for the villagers of Karakarook and it can also say it is social responsibilities which are fulfilled by Douglas and Harley. Australian society is a multicultural society 49 percent of the population are born overseas or have a parent born overseas. It is the fact of Australia which is declared officially in 2016. People enjoy this multiculturalism and day by day it is increasing and it's also good for the country.

Grenville tries to portray the human's feelings and psychological status of the people of Karakarook. Psychology is the scientific study of behavior and mind. Grenville explores the psychological characters because most of the characters are wired and human behavior at the individual level is psychology's second problem. She got the orange prize for this brilliant and judicious knowledge of human strength as well as to perform their weakness through the pair of doubtful souls. In this process she also offers a memorable emotional bond that is easily broken because here protagonist is married three times, separated easily, again love, all these things shown by the Grenville. It means their love is completely fake; there is no intimacy between the characters. The rickety old wooden bridge covers more part of the novel, the whole fight for that people dominate each other also let down each other during all those catfights between the characters, Grenville reveals the discrimination.

Australia is the only country where rapid changes happen every day and Australian authors also update everything in their writing, one common thing in all the Australian writers is about feelings. Throughout the novel, Grenville uses so many metaphors and most of it related to the textile content she uses one word in different ways. She compares the fabric with the human emotions how the fabric cuts, arranges and stitched emotions also created like this. Some artistic work was also presented by Grenville like embroidery and Knitting "But the mention of quilts had started them all off reciting the names of their favorite patterns" (Grenville 149).

Though The Idea of perfection she clears many things. In this novel people hide their lack with each other and pretend to be perfect but Grenville reveals everything. "Douglas and Harley, the main characters

struggling with their self-images, end up together and Felicity, the shallow ex-Palmolive girl who has internalized the pages of a woman's magazine, ends up in the arms of the butcher, their foreplay a series of photographic images." (Reviewed by Magdalena Ball). Essence of the novel is in the hope of perfection two opposite minded people come closer but in the end they come to realize that there is no perfection, only two opposites have to compromise with each other.

This research reveals societal discrimination in the novel *The Idea of Perfection*, social groups can be religious or cultural when the lives of certain people or groups of people surrounded by special laws that limit their lifestyle or human rights than discrimination is created. Sometimes discrimination creates difficulty for those social groups who do not fit into the majority of the norms. Grenville says, "Only God can make something perfect, was the idea, according to the books" (Grenville 114). The name of the book is *The Idea of Perfection* but no one can be perfect in the world only God can make perfect. For Douglas and Harley, the failure to fit a particular idea of gender role contributes to their status as outsiders and Felicity fitting the mold has become an obsession. "It was just another part of the perfection, really, not being perfect. But it only counted if you were not being perfect on purpose" (114). *The Idea of Perfection* also shows the conflict between past and present, people struggling among themselves with their heritage. All the characters tried to show their perfection Douglas, Harley, Felicity, and Chang only because of the fear of prejudice, society would not accept the misfit people. In this novel Grenville uses the narrative, descriptive and argumentative technique throughout the novel and, also uses the elegant and lucid style. The opening line of the novel is an arch is two weaknesses which together make strength, is the most powerful line of the novel. Her novels examine historical nuances of race, class, gender in Australia's colonial as well as contemporary society. Her modern classic works are admired by most of the readers, authors, and critics all over the world. She describes the insightful relationship of two different people's marriage and despite flaws; they fall in love with each other and plans for the home of their own. Grenville shows discrimination as well as teaches so many things by the novel, everyone wants physical beauty in life but if someone is not fit in this category, society treats differently or creates biases. People are mentally and physically affected by these biases. Grenville shows the history of Australian people and the contemporary society, discrimination was present and still exists in the society.

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