

Class Consciousness and Socio-Economical Conflict: A Cogitation of Katherine Mansfield's "The Doll's House"

Dr Ajay Prakash Pasupulla ^a, Temesgen Thomas Halabo^b, Lavanya G^c, A.Madhavi Latha^d and Firos. A^e

^a Professor, Oral and Maxillo Facial Pathologist, Department, School of Medicine, Wochemo University, Hosanna, Ethiopia, East frica

^bAssistant Professor of Peace and Security Studies, Wachemo University, Hossana, Ethiopia.

^cAssistant Professor (SS), Department of Science and Humanities (English) Rajalakshmi Institute of Technology – Chennai-123

^d,Assistant Professor, Nalla Narasimha Reddy Education Society's Group of Institutions and Research Scholar,Osmania University.

^eAssistant Professor, Department of Computer Sciecnce and Engineering, Rajiv Gandhi University, Doimukh, Arunachal Pradesh.

Corresponding Author Mail: drpajayprakash@gmail.com

Article History: Received: 11 January 2021; Accepted: 27 February 2021; Published online: 5 April 2021

Abstract: "Class Consciousness and Socio-Economical Conflict: A Cognition of Katherine Mansfield's "The Doll's House"" is an attempt to explore class consciousness and socio-economical conflict and prejudice insinuated in Mansfield's short story, "The Doll's Hose". Mansfield lived between 14th October 1888 and 9th January 1923 in New Zealand and is New Zealand's famous writer. The present research paper investigates the notion of class conflict and class prejudice seen Mansfield's society through the socio-economic status of the Kelveys and Burnells. The Kelveys are portrayed as underprivileged and the Burnells are depicted as socially and economically affluent. The social hierarchal structure dealt in the story renders a space to trace the conflicts existing between the classes. The present paper traces the distinct lines that is draw between these two classes. It analyses what made the young minds to prioritize class discrimination and what is the cause behind it. Besides, it ventures to discover the position of grownups in class discrimination and class conflict and their contribution to such social evils.

Keywords: Class, Consciousness, Socio-Economical, Prejudice, Conflict

1. Introduction

The present research paper purports to explore the socio-economical conflict and class consciousness revealed in "The Doll's House", a short story by Mansfield. Katherine Mansfield is the pseudonym of Kathleen Mansfield Beauchamp who lived between 14th October 1888 and 9th January 1923 in New Zealand. She is New Zealand's famous writer who has tried her hands at poetry, short stories, journals and letters. She has a distinctive prose style with many overtones of poetry. Her short stories emphasized on the psychological and social conflicts and other problems of society. She has undergone tribulations, failures and abuses, as a result, she perceived writing as the mirror of her life. Predominantly, her short stories are cogitated and treated as a reflection of her own life. Her oblique narration and the subtle observation disclose the fact that she has been influenced by Anton Chekhov. She uses symbolism to convey her ideas about society; this has been validated by Wright as the "power of Katherine Mansfield's short stories resides partly in symbols" (204).

"The Doll's House" is a remarkable short story by Mansfield which portrays the trivial activities of human beings. It describes the class conflict that happening due to economical differences. This story revolves around the Burnell children and Kelvey children. It portrays how women are ill-treated and subjugated by the people of their gender. The story sketches the Burnell children as high-class children and the Kelvey children as the low-class children. Isabel, Lottie and Kezia are the Burnell children, and Lil and Else are the Kelvey children. The Burnell children are from an affluent family so they do not suffer for their survival. The Burnell parents have earned a superior and dignified position, whereas the Kelvey parents could not do so. Mr. Kelley, the father of Kelvey sisters, is presumed to be in jail and his wife Mrs. Kelley works as a washerwoman. Because of the mean economical status, the Kelvey sisters are disrespected and kept beyond the line of discrimination.

Kathrine Mansfield has dexterously designed "The Doll's House" to point out how class consciousness can lead to socio-economical conflict and how class prejudice can result in ill-treating and taunting fellow beings. Usually, class consciousness is interpreted as the notion of overly getting obsessed with a particular social class. Society has various class divisions and, looking at the hierarchical order, the high class always weighs the low class as inferior to them in all the way. The people belonging to the high class have a strange distinguishing look and approach to the low-class people. The people associated with the low class have observed such discriminatory treatments and remain quiet as they do not have the strength and space to voice out their despondency. In the present era such treatments are not widely found but decades back it was quite common. Generally, writers stand

as a voice for such ill-treatments, and Katherine Mansfield's writings are considered as an epitome of a similar style of portraying the exact society what she perceived with her own eyes.

Society is a socially constructed structure where human beings live according to their will and ability. But this society has innumerable divisive factors which divide innocent people and make their lives complicated. Factors like caste, class, race and creed are perceived as significant factors dissecting the people of the society ruthlessly. Such divisive factors introduce domination and suppression. It also encourages the idea of victim and victimizer and profoundly promotes victimization. It snatches away the harmony existing among the people. Hence, the socio-economical aspect is also viewed as one of the factors which draw a distinct line between the people of high-class and low-class. It refrains the higher-class people to socialize with the low-class people. Such class divisions stand an obstruction to the development of humanity in society. The socio-economic status of a person is designed by the business that he does and the amount of income that he draws to make his survival. This notion has emerged long back and has been living since time immemorial.

It is unconditionally true that the socio-economic rank of a person is determined by the job and the salary that he earns. It is pretty much noticed in Katherine Mansfield's "The Doll's House". The author explicitly portrays the class conflict that happens due to the economical status of the characters. The Kelvey sisters and the Burnell sisters are children belonging to two different class divisions. The former belongs to the lower-class and the latter belongs to the upper-class society. This separation and prejudice occur because of the occupation of their parents. The parents of the Kelvey sisters were poor. Their father is a jailbird and their mother is a washerwoman who goes to different houses to do the household works. Whereas the parents of the Burnell daughters are from a well-to-do family; therefore, they face no humiliation in the name of class division. The story unwraps the idea of socio-economical conflict and class consciousness recurrently, and the present paper explores these social evils to visualize Mansfield's society.

"The Doll's House" begins with the arrival of the gift present by Mrs. Hay to the Burnell daughters. The gift itself is an implication of the socio-economical status of the Burnell children because the other children were unprivileged to have such a gift at home. The doll's house elevated the social status of the Burnell sisters because no other child in the village has such a doll's house to exhibit and draw the attention of the children. The doll's house became the topic of conversation among the children of that village. Everyone in the village started asking each other whether they have seen the doll's house. This idea has been conveyed in simple words by Mansfield to uncover the position that the doll's house occupies in raising the socio-economic status of the Burnell sisters:

Days passed, and as more children saw the doll's house, the fame of it spread. It became the one subject, the rage. The one question was, "Have you seen Burnell's doll's house? Oh, ain't it lovely!" "Haven't you seen it? Oh, I say!" (7)

The Kelvey sisters did not get any gift from anybody because they belong to an economically deprived community and for them, making their survival itself is a challenging responsibility. They do not have decent food and clothing. Mansfield discloses the socio-economic conflict and discrimination through food and clothing. While describing the clothing of the Kelvey sister, the author sketches it with humor and adds that "they were dressed in "bits" given to her (Mrs. Kelvey) by the people for whom she worked" (Mansfield 6).

The author makes a humorous depiction of the dress of Lil and Else. Lil, a stout and plain child, goes to school in the dress that has been tailored "from a green art-serge table-cloth of the Burnell's, with red plush sleeves from the Logans' curtains" (Mansfield 6). Likewise, the dress of Else is described humorously in the story. It is penned that Lil's little sister, Else is wearing a long white dress which seemed to be a nightgown. Her footwear is like that of a little boy's boot. This shows the socio-economic status of Kelvey's family. These children are unlike the other children living an underprivileged life yet happily. They never failed to understand each other, which exhibits that they are content. The self-reliantly mother is unable to render a comfortable life to her children as she is a single-handed mother. She struggles to make her survival and endeavors to put her children on par with the status of the other children, but unfortunately, she fails. Though she does not have money, she works hard to earn every single penny. For this, she moves from house to house snubbing her self-respect and honor among the snobs.

Mrs. Kelvey works to give good clothing to her girls, but disgracefully it ends up in mockery. She borrows tablecloths and curtains to make her girls' dress colorful and impressive. Though she could not afford an ample amount to buy clothes for her children somehow, she manages to procure their needs. This seems to be funny and ridiculous for the other people of society. Everyone in the society irrespective of their age had a separate dominating tone for the Kelvey sisters and the teachers are not exceptional. A school is a place where the children learn equality and humanity, but the school to which the Kelvey sisters went was not so. This school is a bit strange to its readers because it is a rare school. There is no other school for many miles; therefore, the parents doing different jobs had no other choice other than to admit their kids to this school.

Mansfield reports that the children of judge, doctor, store-keeper and milk-man have put their children in this school as they do not have any other school close-by. So, it is a school of a mixed group. This becomes the primary reason for the penetration of socio-economic prejudice into the educational milieu. It is said that even "the teacher had a special voice" (Mansfield 5) for the Kelvey sisters. A school is a place where the students learn equality and practice the act of treating everyone equally and with courtesy. But Mansfield depicts that the Kelvey

sisters are ill-treated even in the school. They have been discriminated against by the teacher and their fellow-mates, yet the Kelvey sisters are strong enough to endure it. Besides, they are cornered by their fellow-mates as the Kelveys belong to a socially underprivileged economical class.

The fellow-mates of the Kelvey sisters prejudiced and avoided them. This is portrayed in the school scene wherein Isabel was describing the beautiful doll's house and her friends were hanging to her. They try to get the attention of Isabel, but the Kelvey sister did not attempt to do it as they were already overlooked by the entire group of students: "The girls of her class nearly fought to put their arms round her, to wall away with her, to beam flatteringly, to be her special friend." (Mansfield 5). This discloses that due to the socio-economic status, the Kelveys are left unminding by their fellow friends. It also points out the class differences that existed among the young children.

The fellow girls seek to befriend Isabel because they knew that if they have to see the doll's house then they must need her favor. To get her favor and attention, the other girls were hanging to her shoulder and giggling: "Nudging, giggle together, the little girls pressed up close" (Mansfield 5). The prejudiced girls have minted to pretend to get with Isabel. They force themselves to mask their real nature to seek attention of Isabel. Here, the little girls learn to pretend and abandon humaneness. The class conflict that Mansfield deals rightly points at the inhumane nature of the grownups and the young ones. Due to the poor economic status, the Kelveys have been inhumanely treated in school. The socio-economic status has impacted to such an extent that "Many of the children, including the Burnells, were not allowed even to speak to them." (Mansfield 5). Through such inhumane behavior, Mansfield exposes the disadvantage of socio-economical rank.

The socio-economic status seen in the house has traveled to school and then back to the house. Firstly, this conflict occurs at the courtyard of the Burnells with the arrival of the doll's house. Slowly, it creeps into the school and affects the students. The innocent students were also giving notice to the socio-economic status with the arrival of the doll's house. When Isabel boasts about the doll's house to a crowd of girl students gathered around her to hear more about the house, but the Kelveys did not dare to reach near them as they knew that they will be abused if they do so. The young minds have learned their economical status and their friends' and have acted accordingly in order to aloof themselves from fights and quarrels. When all the friends of the Burnells visited their house to see the doll's house, the Kelveys alone were not invited to see and even they did not show interest to see it.

Isabel, the oldest among the Burnell sisters, has the dominating voice among the rest of the Burnells was describing the doll's house to her friends. But the Kelveys are not added to the group and it is because of the socio-economic status and prejudice. Isabel flaunts her socio-economical rank by dominating her friends with the narration of the doll's house. She invites her friends but creates demand by limiting the strength to two to come and view the beautiful doll's house. She also frames the rigid rule that they can only see the doll's house and should not touch it. Analyzing the nature of Isabel sheds light on the reason behind her dominating voice. She is from an economically mighty family and does not lack any need; therefore, she inherits this controlling tone. There is one more reason which can be added to it. She is the eldest of the three which has also added more strength to it.

When Isabel invited all her friends, she deliberately neglected the Kelveys. However, Kezia, the youngest of the three Burnells, has a soft corner for them. So, she attempts to invite the Kelveys and take them to their courtyard. Kezia is portrayed as kind and gentle among the Burnells. She wished to bring the Kelveys and show the doll's house to them as they are the only ones left out in the group, who have not seen the doll's house. Fortunately, she encounters them while she was standing outside her home. As soon as she recognized the Kelveys, she invites them to come and see the house. However, Lil refuses to get inside the courtyard to see the doll's house, but little Else is fascinated to see it. Eventually, they both are taken to the doll's house by Kezia. Unfortunately, this is noticed by Aunt Beryl and she starts scolding Kezia for bringing the Kelveys here, besides, she shooes away the little children like chickens:

"How dare you ask the little Kelveys into the courtyard?" said her cold, furious voice. "You know as well as I do. You're not allowed to talk to them. run away, children, run away at once. And don't come back again," said Aunt Beryl. And she stepped into the yard and shooed them out as if they were chickens.

"Off you go immediately!" she called, cold and proud. (Mansfield 11)

These lines scintillate the wickedness of Aunt Beryl and shed light on the ill-treatment that the grownups show toward the young ones. Being a motherly figure, Aunt Beryl has failed to embrace the little Kelveys instead she has embarrassed them out of her prejudice. After shooing them like chicken and scolding Kezia, her heart feels lighter. Mansfield describes this as "now that she (Beryl) had frightened those little rats of Kelveys and given Kezia a good scolding" (12). Aunt Beryl has frightened the Kelveys like that of little rats. This shows that she has failed to treat the Kelveys on par with the Burnells. Also, it points at the socio-economic status that Beryl has preferred to value. Her treatment shows that she prefers dignity rather than humanity and prioritizes much on the socio-economical rank. For Beryl, mingling with the underprivileged people would defile the sanctity of her socio-economical class. She is inefficacious in handling children because of her class consciousness. Instead of teaching equality to the kids, she poisons them with her evil class consciousness. It is noticed in the story that class consciousness travels swiftly to corrupt the grownups and the young ones.

There is another scene wherein Kezia seeks to bring the Kelvey sisters to her courtyard for which she approaches her mother. Mrs. Burnell, like the other women in the society, ignores the request that is meant to

invite the Kelvey sisters home. Kezia wants to know the reason for not letting the Kelveys into the courtyard but the mother does not give an explicit reason. In the lines mentioned-below, Mansfield is endeavoring to exhibit the conversation between Kezia and her mother:

“mother,” said Kezia, “can’t I ask the Kelveys just once?”

“Certainly not, Kezia.”

“But why not?”

“Run away, Keziah; you know quite well why not.” (8)

Kezia’s mother, Mrs. Burnell, like every other woman in the society has been dominated by the socio-economic conflict. She becomes the victim of class consciousness and class conflict. It is seen as a shackle of chain that has bound the society subtly and divided the people into high class and lower class. When the daughter wants to know why she is not allowed to bring the Kelveys into the courtyard, the mother could not give a transparent reply as she is dominated by the class consciousness and is struggling to maintain a balance with the socio-economical conflicts.

Mansfield has dealt with class consciousness in almost all the scenes of the short story. Class consciousness and class conflict reoccur throughout the story. Class consciousness is seen as the result of economic growth and likewise, economic growth can result in class conflict, and this is observed in every scene of the story. It gets reflected inside the classroom and outside the classroom. Inside the classroom, the class conflict is depicted through the special voice of the teacher and outside the classroom, the class conflict is noticed while the children sitting together and chewing their dinner. The narration that Mansfield uses to describe the dinner of the children discloses class conflict. The Burnells and their friends, during dinner time, sat under the pines and were eating. The burnells started chewing “their thick mutton sandwiches and big slabs of johnny cake spread with butter” (Mansfield 7), whereas the Kelveys were eating “their jammed sandwiches out of a newspaper soaked with blobs” (Mansfield 8). The socio-economical conflict between the Kelveys and Burnells has been unfolded even through the food that they eat. Economically strong children take ‘mutton sandwiches’ whereas the underprivileged children eat ‘jam sandwiches’.

Socio-economic conflict treats the Kelveys with discredit and embarrassment. Mansfield sketches a scene wherein the peers mock the underprivileged status of the Kelvey sister. They make fun of their economic status and bully them to the core. One day when all the students were under the pine tree waiting for their dinner, a student named Emmie Cole disturbs Lil with her abusive and mocking comments. She started whispering into her friends’ ears that Lil is going to work as a servant in the future. This rumor was widely spread among the girls and started defaming and bullying Lil. Along with Cole, even Lena Logan joined to mar the image of Lil. She went to the extent of confirming this rumor with Lil Kelvey. The following lines underline the class conflict and class consciousness present among the schoolgirls:

“It’s true – it’s true – it’s true,” she said.

Then Lena Logan’s little eyes snapped. “Shall I ask her?”

She whispered.

“Bet you don’t,” said Jessie May.

“Pooh, I’m not frightened,” said Lena. Suddenly she gave a little squeal and danced in front of the other girls.”

Watch! Watch me! Watch me now!” said Lena.

“Is it true you’re going to be a servant when you grow up, Lil Kelvey?”

shrilled Lena. (Mansfield 8-9)

The above-mentioned extract sheds light on the victimized position of Lil. Lena Logan wants to verify the rumor that she has heard from Emmie Cole. The rumor is that Lil is going to be a servant in the future. The girls were zealous to clarify this rumor with Lil despite being hesitant. Lena Logan is zestful whereas Jessie May challenges Lena that she does not dare to verify this with Lil. But Lena opposed telling that she can prove herself brave thus “sliding, gliding, dragging one foot, giggling behind her hand, Lena went over to the Kelveys” (Mansfield 8-9) and asked her “Is it true you’re going to be a servant when you grow up” (Mansfield 9). To prove her bravery, Lena dares to throw an insulting question at Lil. The girls are not enough matured to understand the emotions of others and they had no mind to value others’ self-respect. They have played their funny game at the cost of the self-respect of the Kelvey sisters. This has happened because of class consciousness. It is vivid that class consciousness results in producing socio-economical conflict.

There is another scene that will substantiate the notion that economic depravity leads to disgrace and ill-repute. The schoolmates of Lil knew that her father is not with her. Knowing this truth, Lena wants to taunt Lil and poke fun of her. Lena is zestful as she has already taunted Lil, now again she attempts to irk Lil’s status; therefore, she stands bold and spreads to her friends that “yah, yer father’s in prison” (Mansfield 9). It is transparent that Lena is intensely active in mocking the weak ones with no strength to fight back. Previously, she scoffed at Lil asking her if she is going to be a servant, which upsets Lil and makes her hesitant of her state. Thus, she ceases eating and begins wrapping the rest of her food. Immediately Else habited from chewing the food. This displays the truth that the Kelveys have got a victimized position and have no further strength to oppose oppression thus quietly faces and tolerates the bullies. Mansfield hints at the fact that such ill-treatment is happening due to class consciousness and class conflict.

Class consciousness not only affects the grownups but also the young minds. Mansfield's description sheds light on the fact that class consciousness is an impact of prejudice and discrimination on the grounds of financial prosperity and stability. This idea is recurrently validated in the case of the Kelvey sisters. Lil is sheerly mocked and bullied by her fellow schoolmates. Her fellow schoolmates tease Lil looking at her present financial status and the future. Those girls have played the role of a victimizer by mocking the Kelveys. In return, the Kelveys occupy a subjugated position and get victimized by the ruthless comments and disgracing treatment of her fellow mates. Like the grownups, even these children do not have concern for the Kelveys and perceived them merely as untouchables and lowly ranked. This was because of the class consciousness that have been injected by the parents and society. They neither empathize nor sympathize with the Kelvey.

Katherine Mansfield has sharply portrayed class consciousness and socio-economical conflict and they have proved to be the recurrent notions in the short story, "The Doll's House". The author has depicted the notion of victimization and its components such as victims and victimizers. The victims undergo socio-economical conflict and prejudice in the hands of the victimizers. The victimizers are the people with class consciousness who give no space to humaneness. They are obsessed with evilness such as class consciousness and prejudice. The Kelveys are described as the victims and sufferers of power hegemony. They occupy the least position in Mansfield's description. Lil and Else undergo socio-economical conflict and discrimination. They are the passive bearers of power exertion thus they do not react to the ill-treatments and prejudice. The Burnells and their schoolgirls have always played the role of victimizers and oppressors. They take the upper hand over the vulnerable and oppressed to such an extent that they get exhausted and do not react and fight back to restore their space and rights. It can be argued from Mansfield's point of view that the people of the lower class are considered as underprivileged people having no voice to shout for the ill-treatments that they face. The Kelveys have been portrayed as the symbol of disgrace and misfortune because their parents are poor and nobody voices out on behalf of them.

References

1. Al-Sammarai, A. H. S. *The Portraits of Female Characters in Selected Short Stories of Katherine Mansfield*. M.A. Thesis University of Tikrit, 2006.
2. Bennett, A. "Hating Katherine Mansfield." *Angelaki, Journal of Theoretical Humanities*, vol. 7, no. 3, 2002, pp. 3-16.
3. Bolshakov, Andrey. "The Concept and Essence of Economic Conflict." *Journal of Advanced Research in Law and Economics*, vol. VII, Winter, Issue. 8, no. 22, pp. 1946 – 1950.
4. Garver, Lee. *The Political Katherine Mansfield. Modernism / modernity*, vol. 8, no. 2, 2001, pp. 225-243.
5. Greenwood, L. *The Technique of Kathrin Mansfield*. University of British Columbia, Thesis, 1965.
6. Hanson, Clare. "Katherine Mansfield and Symbolism: The "artist's method" in Prelude". *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, vol. 6, no. 7, 2005, pp.26-37.
7. Kadhim, Rawaa Jawad. *Negative treatment of women in selected short stories by Katherine Mansfield and Ernest Hemingway*. *African Educational Research Journal*, Vol. 6(4), pp. 228-235, October 2018, pp. 228-235.
8. Kaplan, S. J. *Katherine Mansfield and the Origins of the Modernist Fiction*. Cornell University Press, 1997.
9. Lawrence, B. "Katherine Mansfield and Thomas Hardy." *The Thomas Hardy Journal*, vol. 4, no. 1, 1998, pp. 32-35.
10. Mansfield, K. *Bliss and Other Short Stories*. Alfred A. Knopf, 1920.
11. Mansfield, K. *Stories by Katherine Mansfield*. Vintage Books, 1956.
12. Mansfield, K. *The Garden Party and Other Short Stories*. Penguin Modern Classics, 1954.
13. Mansfield, Kathrine. "The Doll's House." *Spectrum-III*, edited by Geetha Bhasker et al., Prasaranga, 2020. pp. 1-11.
14. Ren, A. *Women Characters in Katherine Mansfield's Short Stories*. *Cscanada Studies in Literature and Language*, vol. 5, no. 3, 2012, pp. 104-111.
15. Rogers, Michael. "Katherine Mansfield: A Darker View." *Library Journal*. vol. 127, no. 8, 1 May 2002, pg. 140.
16. Schneider, B. H., et al., *Children's Peer Relations: Issues in Assessment and Intervention*. Springer-Verlag.1985.
17. Srisikandarajah, Dhananjayan. "Socio-economic inequality and ethno-political conflict: some observations from Sri Lanka." *Contemporary South Asia*, vol. 14, no. 3, September 2005, pp. 341–356.
18. Tereshina, Elena A. et al. "Socio-Economic Conflict: The Concept and Typology." *Journal of Organizational Culture, Communications and Conflict*, vol. 20, Special Issue 4, 2016, pp. 40-45.
19. Wright, Celeste Turner. "Darkness as a Symbol in Katherine Mansfield." *Modern Philology*. Vol. 51, no. 3, Feb. 1954, pp. 204-7.