

**Q: How does Mansfield explore the theme of social class in “ The Doll's House?”**

**( B.A.English Subsidiary, Part-2. Paper-2)**

**The Doll's House** is a beautiful short story written by Katherine Mansfield. Mansfield is the best artist in portraying the trivial activities of men. In this story she reveals the cruelty of grown up people in the society. She shows the innocence of small children and the cruelty of the society that draws a line between the rich and the poor, higher and lower status of people.

There are five child characters in this story. They are the Burnell daughters and the Kelveys daughters. Besides this, there are grown ups like the Aunt Beryl, Mrs. Kelveys, the school teacher and so on.

This story reveals that small children are innocent but they are poisoned by the grown ups and become cruel very slowly. Once Mrs. Hay had sent the Burnell children a

doll's house. It was more beautiful than a real house. It had bed rooms, living rooms, kitchen, chimneys, bedclothes, doll family and all painted, decorated and excellent ones. It was unique and large. It was newly painted so it was kept outside in the courtyard for a few days until the smell of the paint was disappeared. Above all there was a lamp that Kezia thought to be a real one.

The Burnell children were overjoyed to find the excellent doll's house. The next day they reached school with great excitement. They were burning to tell about the wonderful doll's house. Burnell's eldest daughter Isabel told her friends about it during the lunch hour at the school. All the children came together. Among them there were Emmie Cole, Lena Logan and the rest. But two of the girls did not come near them. They were downtrodden, lower class children or the daughters of Mrs. Kelvey. Mr. Kelvin was a jailbird. Mrs. Kelvey used to walk from door to door, asked for bits of cloth and gave them to her daughters. Besides, the Burnell's mother had forbidden their daughters to speak with the Kelveys. All the school children, two at a time came to the Burnell's house to see the doll's house. Only Else Kelvey and Lil Kelvey were left uninvited. Nobody spoke with them.

One day, Kezia, the youngest daughter of the Burnells asked her mother to call the Kelveys her home, but her

mother abused her and she was silenced. The Kelveys were shunned by all, hated by all. Only the two sisters understood each other.

Then one day Kezia saw those two girls coming towards her gate. She invited them to go and see the doll's house. With much hesitation they went into the courtyard and saw the wonderful house. Else saw the little lamp. At this very moment Aunt Beryl's harsh voiced was heard. She shooed them off as if they were chicken. Afraid of the situation, they squeezed through the gate and ran away. Far off they sat on a drainpipe and the younger sister expressed her pleasure. In this way the poor children were hated by all. Innocent child like Kezia saw no difference between one and another but the elder people create difference in society.

Apart from the old story of rich and poor you can find another interesting theme of rebel child in the story. In the story school is used as a small society representing the bigger one in real life where different kinds of people interact and live together with all their differences. However, there are always people who do not fit in their own society, "Kezia", because they do not think the same way as the people who are living there. Also, there are group of people who are suppressed by the majority for many reasons and maybe the major one can be social status

“But the line had to be drawn somewhere. It was drawn at the Kelveys.” (Mansfield: 2).

The story attempts to tell us how different people react toward life, symbolized by the house itself. People look differently at life according to their expectations and intentions, major group of them are just trying to gain power and money in order other people around and show off, “Isabel”. There is another group of people whom try to pave their way in life using the first group by keeping themselves close to them and flatter them as much as possible, “Lena Logan”. The minor group can be those ones who believe in goodness of everything in and that gives them hope to continue living against all bad things that are out there in cruel world “Else”. And, the writer tried to use show these things through children’s eyes, maybe because children world is simpler than grownups world. Also, we can see that always older generation has effect on the younger generation and their way of thinking toward different subjects.

The Brunell family represents the upper-middle class and The Kelvey family represents the lower class. Nobody wants to talk to The Kelveys because they are poor and they are aware of that themselves: “they knew better than to come anywhere near the Brunells” (Mansfield: 2). The mother of the Kelvey girls is a washerwoman and it was said that the

father is in prison but nobody knew that for sure. The text informs us that the Kelvey girls did not have a proper, good parental supervision and care which a child should have “But where was Mr. Kelvey?” (Mansfield: 2).

On the one hand, one can find typical selfish and arrogant upper class behaviour in Isabel’s character – the oldest girl of the Brunell family – “I’m to choose who’s to come and see it first” (Mansfield 1992: 2). “They walked past the Kelveys with their heads in the air” (Mansfield: 2) one can clearly sense the superiority feeling among Brunells and also other children who are having a better social position than Kelveys. It was a very common thing between upper class members not to contact people who were not in same social level as themselves “[t]he school Brunell children went was not at all the kind of place their parents would have chosen it, there had been any choice” (Mansfield: 2) . Aunt Beryl is a common type of bitter and miserable women who gets happy at the expense of making other people miserable and suppressing them “But now that she had frightened those little rats of Kelveys and given Kezia a good scolding, her heart felt lighter” (Mansfield: 6). However, the reason behind her behaviour can be rooted in a terrifying letter from Willie Brent. What was written in the letter? Is she keeping a dark secret?

On the other hand the reserved and outcast Lil and Else Kelvey characters “Only the little Kelveys moved away forgotten” (Mansfield: 3). Kelveys knew that they cannot play or talk with other children because of their social status. Although Kelveys and Brunells have so many differences but Else and Kezia have something very precious and beautiful in common and that is the little lamp. The little is the symbol of last shred of humanity and hope for all humans that of course not everybody pays attention to it. “The lamp was perfect the lamp was real” (Mansfield:

By nature The Doll’s House story is narrative and the writer mainly uses past tense through the story. Most of the things are explained in details like a report which gives readers opportunity to make a good and vivid image of events and characters in their minds. “Imagery is rather vague critical term covering those uses of language in a literary work that evoke sense-impressions by literal or figurative reference to perceptible or ‘concrete’ objects, scenes, actions, or states, as distinct from the language of abstract argument or exposition”. The past tense usage also gives reader the sense that someone is telling a story. “She was a tiny wishbone of a child, with cropped hair and enormous solemn eyes” (Mansfield: 2). In addition, adjectives and colours were widely used during the text to show emotions of characters and objects in the text “There stood the doll’s

house, a dark, oily, spinach green, picked out with bright yellow" (Mansfield: 1).

Another thing which stands out in text is the repetition of "Our Else" during the story. The text implies that the narrator is being very sympathetic about Else's situation and relate to this character more than the other ones. Also it gives us the idea that narrator has experienced the same thing just like little Else in real world and to some extent sees himself in herself in Else.

Last but not least, the story ending is as touching as the whole story. The closure happens at the level of expectation because the narrator is telling us to find the closure in our own silence. Else and Lil are quite most of the time and they do not make conversation with other ones, however, they have lots to say when it comes to their facial expressions and gestures. The story ends by silence because it is in silence where one can sit and find the truth and save a happiness even if it only last just for a second. There are times when silence has the loudest voice.

Mansfield brought out the bitter truth that the discrimination between the wealthy 'haves' and the deprived 'have nots' was based solely on wealth and class. The following words of author "the line had to be drawn

somewhere” expressed volumes of interpretation to the social hierarchy prevalent in society.

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