

The Struggle for Equality in *An American Marriage* by Tayari Jones

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Abstract

This study is entitled "The Struggle for Equality in An American Marriage by Tayari Jones". In this thesis, the writer analyzes the forms of inequality namely racial inequality, social inequality, and this thesis also aims to reveal that literary works reflect social reality. The object of this thesis is a novel entitled "An American Marriage", a novel published in 2018 written by Tayari Jones. This novel shows that the struggle for equality always exists in every race. The impact of inequality in every race tends to have a negative impact. In this thesis the writer has two problems to discuss: how are the struggles of racial inequality to black couples in An American Marriage novel, and how are the struggles of social inequality in An American Marriage. The research method used in this thesis is the qualitative descriptive method. Data is obtained from words, phrases, clauses, or sentences that relate to racial and social inequality. The data in this thesis are analyzed with a sociological approach to literature. The theory that the writer uses in this thesis is the forms theory of Equality by Bhikhu Parekh (1970). The results of the study indicated that racial inequality and social inequality still occur in society and occur to both men and women, this thesis can be a reference that can provide useful information about equality for all readers.

Keywords: *discrimination, equality, racism, racial inequality, social inequality.*

A. Introduction

Literature reflects the various experiences, ideas, passions, of human beings in their daily life that express on several forms and styles of literary works. Since literature directly derives from human life, it can increase our knowledge and experiences about human problems including values, morals, cultures and human interest. Therefore, literature helps human being grow, both personally and intellectually. It provides an objective base for knowledge and understanding. It links them with the broader cultural, philosophic, and religious world of which they are a part. In living a social life frequently find social issues such as inequality, race, ethnicity, religion, social lesson or the other status. Social issues are exceptionally curiously issues to proceed to be talked about in each life indeed in their claim scholarly works since scholarly works be obtained never be able to elude from society. The racism that happens due to bias towards certain races do not as it harmed inter-racial relations, but it too comes about in numerous of the drawbacks picked up within the social life of individuals who get negative preferences from certain races.

The phenomenon of struggle often occurs at a time when concerns over injustice inspire writers to make their literary works. Such racial inequality as workload inequality, harsher

punishments, socioeconomic injustice, and correct discrimination can be known in literary works. One example of a literary work that figures in racial inequality, skin color phenomenon is “An American Marriage” by Tayari Jones. The majority or dominant group that oppresses in this case is white people in America. The Minority groups or subordinates are black people in America. Most white people in the United States generally and consistently show a preference for lighter browns, and to the extent that they make a difference among blacks.

Racial treatment such as discrimination against minorities, racial discrimination, oppression of women and immigrants has a negative impact on people who receive such racial treatment, such as loss of self-confidence, bad self-image, and great anger within them. due to unfair treatment. According to Gill and Gilbert (1988) in Liliweris’s (2009, p. 19) race is a biological understanding that describes a group of people that can be distinguished according to the physical characteristics produced through reproductive processes. Everyone who is treated unfairly often be obtained not take the treatment for granted, they be obtained fight or at least they be obtained harbor red feelings towards people who have treated them unfairly. So far, racism has occurred because of significant differences between race, ethnicity, culture and religion. Each place has a different treatment of racism according to the situation and conditions in that place.

Clark et al. (1999) define racism as “the beliefs, attitudes, institutional arrangements, and acts that tend to denigrate individuals or groups because of phenotypic characteristics or ethnic group affiliation”. Contrada and others (2000, 2001) use the more general term ethnic discrimination to refer to unfair treatment received because of one’s ethnicity, where “ethnicity” refers to various grouping of individuals based on race or culture of origin. According to Clark, considers racism as a special form of social and racial exclusion in which phenotypic or cultural characteristics are used to assign individuals to the status of outcasts or outcasts, making them targets of social exclusion, harassment, and unfair treatment in society.

Inequality is a phenomenon that still exists in some countries. One of them is in the United States. When we think of inequality, we tend to think of black people in America today. It's important to remember that inequality transcends just today's problems, and beyond race. In the United States, white inequality with blacks is a permanent social problem. This led to a number of major city setbacks and bankruptcies to be poor, ever shorter life expectancies, higher crime rates, and various woes among blacks themselves. The inequality experienced by black people caused black people to start fighting for this inequality. Struggle comes from the word 'struggle' which means the struggle for one's survival or the struggle to become an independent human being. The struggle in this research is intended as an effort by black people to defend the rights and dignity of the black race who are oppressed due to arbitrary injustice from the white culture that is quite developed in society. That is, the struggle is a hard work and effort that is fought for in achieving something good and as the key to success.

According to Gill and Gilbert (1988) in Liliweris’s (2009, p. 19) race is a biological understanding that describes a group of people that can be distinguished according to the physical characteristics produced through reproductive processes. Race is often a social status defined by cultural terms rather than race in biological terms. Sometimes, differences between ethnic groups include more than one culture. Racial and racial classification includes physical appearance, which also forms the basis for distinguishing ethnic groups.

Racial equality is also known as race justice, is the view that all people should receive equal treatment and not be discriminated against based on their race identity, which is natural. It impacts people of all ages and backgrounds. According to Banton (1967), race is a sign of role, physical differences that serve as the basis for assigning different roles. This notion of race concerns biological aspects (physical characteristics, skin color, body shape, etc.) and social aspects (regarding roles and habits carried out). Racial equality is usually defined as balance in the distribution of power, economic resources, and opportunity.

Social equality is a condition in which all human beings in society have the same rights, freedoms and status. This may include civil rights, justice, freedom of expression, and equal access to certain public goods and social services. Rousseau (1755) declared social inequality to be the result of a decline from the natural equality that characterized our harmonious state of nature, a decline catalyzed by the human urge for perfection, property, and possessions. For Rousseau (1755, 1762), the resulting inequality and rule of violence can only be overcome by binding individual subjectivity to a common civil existence and popular sovereignty.

This thesis focuses on analyzing *An American Marriage*, in 2018 a book written by Tayari Jones. The story in this novel then shows how black couples are not easily accepted by American society because of differences in skin color and tension between couples from different economic class backgrounds as well as wider injustices of racial and class equality. Roy is a black man who is arrested and sentenced to twelve years for a crime that Celestial knows Roy did not commit. The fact that Roy and Celestial's lack of solid evidence could not protect them from the criminal justice system's prejudicial assumptions about black people allows Jones to particularly highlight the dangerous reach of racism.

The example of cases of inequality occurs in America to black people. The death of an unarmed black man, George Floyd, after he was arrested and kneeled by police in Minnesota has sparked yet another outcry over police brutality against members of minority groups in the United States. George Floyd, 46, worked as a security guard at a restaurant in Minneapolis. He was approached by several police officers who responded to a phone call on the evening of May 25, reporting fraud. Floyd groaned and repeatedly said "I can't breathe" to a white police officer who pressed his neck to the ground with his knees. Even though Floyd repeatedly said that, the police did not stop the pressure until Floyd was finally taken to the hospital and died there. Floyd's death highlights dire statistics regarding the inequality of police detention of blacks in America.

Tayari Jones is a consolidated example of an author who acknowledges her work as belonging to a part of American literature. In the study, we were able to look back to the American colonial past to account for present-day diversity in contemporary society, acceptable without any racists. She was born in Atlanta; Jones has written a number of short stories and articles but is best known for her novels, *Leaving Atlanta*, *The Untelling*, *The Silver Sparrow*, and *An American Marriage*. After working seven years on it, Jones published her novel in 2018 and it was very well-received. Barack Obama also expressed his opinion about the book "An American Marriage is a moving portrayal of the effects of a wrongful conviction on a young African American couple". Obama's opinion appears in the front matter of the book together with many other comments of famous people, newspapers and websites which praise her work. This book was a New York Times Bestseller. In her novel, *An American Marriage*, Jones explores the racism struggle for equality of the criminal justice system through its impact on a black people.

The reason why the writer chooses this novel is that *An American Marriage* has become a classic of modern American literature. This novel is containing of problems that the writer wants to prove and analyze; they are the forms of equality. Tayari Jones novel is one of the most anticipated novels of 2018 according to Entertainment Weekly, Goodreads, Esquire, Elle, Cosmopolitan, BBC, Huffington Post, Southern Living, Newsday, and Bookish. This novel also gets the Nobel Prize in 2018 as the best of the year. The writer is interested to analyze the topic of the forms of racism struggle for equality because forms of inequality are as follows racial inequality, social inequality, and discrimination still are the happening phenomenon that exists in society nowadays. The topics discussed are related to social life in society, so in this study, the writer uses a qualitative descriptive method.

According to Danim (2002) mean that qualitative includes constructivism that assumes that reality has a plural and interactive dimension. It can also be interpreted as an effort to

exchange social experiences that can be defined through the results of research. Thus, qualitative research assumes that truth is dynamic and can be found through the study of people through interactions or through social situations.

B. Method

In analyzing the novels, the writer employed a qualitative descriptive method. Most data were analyzed in the form of words and sentences rather than numbers. According to Danim (2002), qualitative research methods embrace constructivism, which assumes that reality has a plural and interactive dimension. This approach can also be understood as an effort to exchange social experiences that can be defined through research results. Qualitative research posits that truth is dynamic and can be discovered through the study of people via interactions or social situations. To support the qualitative method, the writer used collected data as material for analysis through sentences, dialogue, and quotations from the literary work "An American Marriage."

The source of the data was the novel "An American Marriage," a 310-page novel by Tayari Jones, published in 2018 by Oneworld Publications. The data for this study consists of quotes related to equality and inequality.

In the process of collecting data, the writer employed several steps. The first step was reading the primary data, namely the novel "An American Marriage" by Tayari Jones. The second step involved collecting data sources from books, theses, journals, and articles related to race and class equality. The final step was underlining important data related to each of the research problems, serving as evidence for answering the research questions.

In writing this thesis, the writer collected and analyzed the data using descriptive methods. The writer followed several steps to analyze the data. The first step was re-reading the data source, specifically the novel "An American Marriage" by Tayari Jones. The second step involved selecting the data, where the writer chose excerpts from the novel that provided important information on research issues, including citations, sentences, and dialogue related to inequality. The third step was interpreting and analyzing the data. The writer interpreted how the novel "An American Marriage" by Tayari Jones addressed the topic of the struggle for equality, using Bhikhu Parekh's theory of equality. The final step was making conclusions and suggestions.

C. Findings and Discussion

1. Struggle for Social Inequality in "An American Marriage"

Social inequality is the belief that not everyone should be given equal opportunities to take advantage of aspects of society, such as occupation, gender, or economic status. Historically, and especially in society, achieving social equality for ethnic minorities or blacks has not been an easy task. In *An American Marriage*, there are many forms of inequality or struggle related to what happened between them. Social inequality in this novel is defined as a minority and a majority, the majority has great power to defeat the minority because on average the majority has a larger number than the minority. So that makes the minority have to fight for their rights and equality as the majority. It is narrated in the stories that Roy and Celestial make every effort to make their existence accepted by society, but not all of Roy and Celestial's struggles make equality go well. This statement can be proven from the quotation below: "To be a "virgin with experience," and therefore you should never talk about your past relationships with a man because he wants to pretend like they never happened." (Jones, 2018, p. 53). The quote illustrates that Celestial has experience in relationships with men. Celestial decided to refuse to tell it too because it would not achieve social equality. The image of women in the eyes of society, especially in the eyes of men, be obtained be bad if women are not "virgin", thus making it difficult for Celestial to open up. However, people around and men like women

who are "virgin with experience" as a statement by a friend gave. As happened to Celestial, she wants to marry Roy the man she loves because she doesn't want to get negative views from people in her environment. "If my childhood were a sandwich, there would be no meat hanging off the bread. We had what we needed and nothing more." "And nothing less." (Jones, 2018, p. 5).

The quote above shows that Roy and his family are aware that it is not easy for them to be successful, and that is why they work harder. Roy and family had enough money to provide for their needs, and he was raised to value it all. On the line "If my childhood were a sandwich, there would be no meat hanging off the bread." this is a case of social comparison of blacks and whites in America; they have to work hard to live a normal life. Also, whenever Roy saw that or his family doing expensive things, white people questioned him and hated them even more. Achieving social equality for ethnic minorities or blacks in America is not an easy task. Another quotation that it is difficult to get social equality in America is evidenced from the quote below: "You are rags to riches and I was rags on my way to riches." (Jones, 2018, p. 69).

From the quote above shows when he tells Mr. Davenport, Roy's willingness to achieve the dream of social status in America, and the frustration of this pursuit. The mass incarceration of black people at a time when Roy and his family was struggling, many found their cause stymied, and Roy was representative of this section of the African-American population. Roy be obtained not have the same opportunities because he be obtained always be an ex-convict and despised for his social status, it can be seen "You are rags to riches and I was rags on my way to riches". So, he be obtained be twice condemned to be of low social class, because he is black people and for being a former prisoner, so he cannot achieve social equality in his environment. "But you don't want to spend the rest of your life with a man who has something to prove." (Jones, 2018, p. 114). Based on the quote, it shows that the social inequality that Celestial's father did to Roy can be seen from the sentence "But you don't want to spend the rest of your life with a man who has something to prove". In this quote, from the start Celestial's father did not like Celestial's choice to marry Roy. Roy as a black person proved to get negative social views. Celestial's father reminded Celestial not to spend the rest of his life with people who have been proven or considered unfavorable from social circles and of different economic status. Celestial's father doesn't like Roy because of getting a bad image of social status, he had warned Celestial from the start not to be Roy as her husband. "I knew that I couldn't be a prisoner's wife." (Jones, 2018, p. 111).

From the quote above, it can be seen that the social inequality that Celestial did to Roy. Celestial wants a divorce with Roy because he doesn't want to be labeled by society as the wife of a criminal. He wanted no more close relations because Roy was a prisoner. In social life, often encountered phenomena like this, do not want to be labeled bad so that their future is guaranteed. When a husband gets a criminal sentence, not many wives can accept the situation and are loyal to their partners. Most of every wife leaves her husband. The wife is not proud when it comes to getting the title that she is the wife of a convict. People around must have a negative view of Celestial when her husband was in prison. This situation is very detrimental to his wife who has a job related to social life, however Roy is also very disappointed that he does not get the opportunity for social equality. "Don't treat me like a criminal, Celestial." (Jones, 2018, p. 248).

From the quote above, it can be seen that Roy's social status was attacked again by Celestial. Celestial refuses to have sex with Roy when Roy is released from prison. Celestial rejected Roy because he accused Roy of having a venereal disease, even though Roy was not the perpetrator of the rape that occurred at the hotel where they were staying. Roy's already negative social status as a former criminal makes it hard for Celestial to trust her husband. On the one hand Celestial did not want to have children from Roy. Celestial has doubts about having children from a husband who was once a suspect in a rape case. Roy feels cornered by

the attitude of people who accuse him of being a rapist and even his own wife begins to distrust him. "What can I say to make you see that this isn't about shame?" (Jones, 2018, p. 66). From the quote above, Roy's social status is questioned by Celestial towards her husband. Celestial refuses to talk about his relationship with Roy when he is being interviewed at an exhibition to showcase his doll shop business. Celestial answered all questions about her personal life and told the people who inspired her life but she didn't talk about her husband Roy because it would ruin her business. Celestial is embarrassed to say publicly about his relationship with Roy, even though Celestial tells the truth, the truth to be obtained not be accepted by the public. She wants the public to recognize and label her as an artist, not as a convict's wife. Another citation evidence that Celestial does not want the public to know that she is the wife of a convict can be seen in the quote below: "Don't you see? If I say that my husband is in prison, that's all anyone can focus on, not me or my dolls." (Jones, 2018, p. 66).

From the quote above Roy's social status was attacked again by Celestial. In this quote, when Roy is in prison. Celestial and Roy always send messages to tell each other about their lives, where the message is written in a letter. If Celestial had said that her husband was in prison to the people who attended the doll fair at the time, she would be ashamed to have a husband who was a convict. Celestial doesn't want anyone who attends this magnificent exhibition to be out of focus with the doll exhibition and instead focus on Roy's case. White society has a negative view of black people. Even though black people did not commit a crime, they never believed it and continued to accuse it. The situation is detrimental to Celestial in his business and future social status, but Roy is also very disappointed with Celestial who is selfish and dishonest. "I thought that maybe black love went that way, too, integrated into near extinction." (Jones, 2018, p. 135). From the quote, Celestial talks about his relationship with Roy. Celestial thinks that black love be obtained not work because Roy has a bad social status and be able get damage the business in the future. Celestial doesn't want to continue his relationship with Roy, with evidence of the word "extinction" meaning it won't go well. This situation is not only detrimental to Celestial but also detrimental to Roy. Roy who didn't commit such a despicable act didn't deserve social inequality even Celestial knew about it.

The assumption of white society blinds Celestial's heart toward her husband Roy. Roy is also very disappointed with the Celestials who are not loyal to him. "All I knew was that table 6 was a party of eight, seven of whom were white." (Jones, 2018, p. 136). From the quote Celestial attends a party and sits at a big round table. Celestial sat with seven white people and felt they had always looked down on her social status. The seven's white people at his desk grinned and talked about the Celestial. Actually, Celestial didn't want to sit at the table because she knew someone was comparing and talking about her social status. The opinion of white people that black people do not deserve to sit on the same level with them. Celestial was also deeply disappointed with the social inequality and inequality that had happened to her. Celestial who is struggling and trying to increase her rank gets the same treatment as Roy because she is black.

"I won't say that this will hurt me more than it hurts you because I know how much you're hurting every day and no matter what is happening to me, it will never compare. I understood that I'm not in the same agony as you are, but I'm in pain and I cannot continue to live this way." (Jones, 2018, p. 86)

From the quote above, it can be seen that Celestial has also received negative social evaluations from society and that is painful. Celestial can also know that Roy gets hurt every day. People around had a negative view of Celestial when her husband was in prison. He needs to keep his bearings and seem to follow the actions of his white friends. This situation is very detrimental to Celestial and does not want to continue his relationship with Roy. If you continue to live like that Celestial does not get the opportunity for social equality in society. These social

beliefs are learned from others and maintained through the rules of social interaction. Social inequality is a person's judgment based solely on the perception of the group into which that person can be categorized. Social inequality can allow people to see what they expect to see and predict how often they see it. From this, we can see that people in America cannot accept their identity as social status as husbands of black convicts. "Maybe it was selfish, but I wanted to have my moment to be an artist, not the prisoner's wife. Please write me back." (Jones, 2018, p. 67). From the quote above, it can be seen that Celestial is replying to each other's letters from Roy. Celestial said he was selfish for not telling the media what happened to his husband. He wants to be an artist and doesn't want a close relationship anymore because Roy is a prisoner. This situation is very detrimental to his wife who has a job related to social life, but Roy is also very disappointed that he does not get the opportunity for social equality. From this, we can see again that people in America cannot accept their social status as husbands of black convicts.

"I understand what you're saying and I understand what you're not saying. Are you ashamed of me? You are, aren't you? You can't go to the National Portrait Museum and tell them that your husband is in prison. You could, actually, but you won't. I empathize — it's a lot to get used to." (Jones, 2018, p. 67)

From the quote above, it can be seen that social inequality has returned to Roy. Roy asked Celestial if he was ashamed of being a prisoner and not telling the truth in the interview. Actually, Roy already knew and understood why Celestial could do this. Celestials didn't tell them because they didn't want their social status to be looked down upon by society. The Celestial struggling and trying to increase his rank would degenerate if he announced that his husband was a prisoner. If they continued to live like that, the Celestials didn't get a chance for social equality in society. They thought all black people were evil and did not give them equality. Discriminates black people and gives them social inequality, which is why Celestial and all black people continue to shirk, Roy wants equality, justice, and honesty for all black people who are racist and discriminated against by white people.

D. Conclusion

After analyzing, the writer needs to make conclusions and suggestions based on the problem of researching this thesis. In this research, the writer has two issues to be discussed. The first issue is how the struggle for racial inequality in black couples, and the second problem is how the struggle for social inequality in "An American Marriage". This has given white people more power than black people. In the global picture, black people have always been perceived as disobedient, always inferior, can be accused without evidence and helpless. On the other hand, whites are described as a dominant, more aggressive, competitive, confident, and strong race. These images created racial and social inequalities between blacks and whites of the time, mostly in social relations. Whites are considered stronger and have greater authority, racial and social power than blacks. This condition is often called racial and social inequality. The benefit of this issue is that we can appreciate the presence of other people, even though they come from different races, ethnicities, cultures, and religions.

Based on the findings on the first issue, racial inequality has always been directed in the main character Roy and also his wife Celestial. Racial inequality Roy received was being accused of raping a woman he did not commit and not only was it done by giving a twelve-year prison sentence by a trial judge but was also illustrated by the actions of Andre, his best friend, who had the heart and betrayed him by teaching the Celestial that black Roy was not good for him. In addition, the Celestial was accused of being a maid of a black man and was called a black baby. Roy and the Celestials as blacks were treated inhumanely by the police at the time they were arrested. Roy's struggle as an African-American for racial equality was particularly difficult because of the color of his black skin.

Based on the second problem, social inequality occurs in black ethnic minority objects in America. Addressed to the main characters in the novel, Roy and Celestial. American society judged those blacks had a lower social status than whites and were addressed to the young couple Roy and the Celestials. Social inequality was created by society and by the Celestials' own parents to Roy. After Roy is taken captive, Celestial's father asks Celestial not to take Roy as her husband because it would be bad for her status. Roy be obtained not have the same opportunity because he be obtained always be insulted because of his social status as an ex-prisoner. Social inequality is also reflected in the actions carried out by his wife, the Celestial. Celestial divorced Roy because he did not want to be labeled by society as a prisoner's wife. Roy's struggle to achieve social equality in his environment is very difficult because of actions that he did not even take.

There are still many phenomena of racial and social inequality that occur today, so the writer hopes that by reading this thesis readers can reduce or even eliminate inequality and racism towards different tribes, races, or tribes that exist in the social environment. It is also important for the reader to be aware of such forms of inequality as racial inequality, and social inequality. The writer hopes that readers can understand and distinguish between racial inequality and social inequality. Last but not least, it is also advisable to read and look for as many references as possible when analyzing a novel, the writer hopes that this thesis can help all readers who want to discuss the same topic.

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