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A Study of Humiliation of enslaved laborers in the Novel “*Uncle Tom’s Cabin*”

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Abstract: Uncle Tom’s Cabin is a well-known novel written by Harriet Beecher Stowe and it was published in 1852. It was renowned for its social consequences more than its artistic merits (1). This nineteenth century novel is presenting the concept of anti-slavery. Being an abolitionist and American author, Stowe painted a clear picture-story of miseries and sufferings of slaves. This novel framed the lives of African American slaves in South and the readers from North in America got to understand the situations of slaves through this Novel. The aim of this research paper is to make acquainted with the humiliation of enslaved laborers like Uncle Tom, Eliza, George and Prue through the novel.

Keywords: Anti-Slavery, Abolitionist, African American Slaves.

Introduction:

Harriet Beecher Stowe did opening of the Novel with Arthur Shelby. She told that Arthur Shelby is a Farmer in Kentucky and is a generous slave-owner. Mr. Shelby is compelled to sell his slaves named Tom and Harry due to financial crisis in his own life. Haley, a slave buyer is ready to negotiate for trading related to slaves (2). Before signing papers, Mr. Shelby decides to talk with Mrs. Shelby on selling his slaves. Mrs. Shelby who has no information of her husband’s financial conditions, requested him not to sell them. Mrs. Shelby gets upset with the news of selling Harry, who is a son of her maid named Eliza. Mrs. Shelby promised Eliza that her son will not be sold. But due to unfortunate conditions in Mr. Shelby’s life, He signed the paper with Haley to sell Tom and Harry. When Mrs. Shelby discusses with her husband that they can save Harry from being slave by selling her watch, Mr. Shelby tells his wife at that moment that he already signed the papers. Eliza, the mother of Harry hears the conversation between Mr. and Mrs. Shelby. Now, Eliza is worried for her son as she has already lost her two children. Now, Eliza wants to save Harry from the cruelty of slavery. And, she decides to run

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away with her child to protect this young Harry.

Humiliation and miserable conditions of Slaves in the novel “Uncle Tom’s Cabin”:

a) **Uncle Tom:** Uncle Tom is the slave with kind-heart, loyal and helpful in nature. When he gets to know that his master is going to sell him. Uncle Tom could run away but he did not take such step due to loyalty in his nature. He religiously follows his master and considers that it is his duty by being a slave to serve his master anyhow (3). Aunt Chloe prepares last meal to have it with together with Uncle Tom and children. When He reaches into the hands of Halley, cruel slave buyer chained his feet. After moving towards the slave market with Haley, Uncle Tom spends night in the jail. Keeping Tom into the jail is an example of injustice and puts a question mark on Humanity. Uncle Tom, Being true and honest throughout his life, loyal towards his master, faithfulness in Christianity, still he is forced to spend the night in jail without any crime. This is shameful example of humiliation of slaved person who is full of ethics and moral values.

b)

While going towards New Orleans in ship through Mississippi river, Tom earns faith of Haley as he is obedient in nature. So, Tom gets a permission to roam freely in boat and reads bible. He and Eva, young girl in the same boat becomes friend. Eva tells Tom that she is going to ask her father to buy Tom (4). Meanwhile, she slipped out of boat and Tom saves her. Being thankful to Tom, Augustine St. Clare gets ready to pay any price to buy Tom. For the happiness of his daughter, St. Clare finally buys Tom. Now, Tom accompanies St. Clare and Eva to go to their house. St. Claire’s wife, Marie is unkind towards slaves as she behaves harshly and rudely with slaves by calling them selfish creatures. Eva and Tom shares good bond together. They spend time together and read Bible with each other’s company. Eva is impartial and sophisticated in nature. She is humble and kind for all the slaves around her. Tom sings hymns and her heart fills up with joy in such moments. Eva becomes thin due to her illness and coughs. She asks her dad to free all the slaves on some day. She tells that she can give away her life, if this brings freedom for all the slaves. Due to decline in her health, Eva’s father promises her that he will definitely set free to Tom, if she dies (5). After the death of Eva, her father dies too soon and he could not fulfill his promise done with Eva. Eva’s mom, Marie is cruel in nature, who forgets the promises made between father and

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daughter. So, Marie decides to sell all the slaves including Tom. Now, Tom is entrapped in the web of plantation owner, Simon Legree. Simon Legree asks his slaves to sing songs. When Uncle Tom sings hymns, Legree asks him to close his mouth. When Legree asks Tom about the escape of Emmeline and Cassy, he denies. His Denial of opening the mouth become the cause of beaten by Legree and Uncle Tom dies at the end due to the miseries caused by slavery.

2) Eliza: Eliza Harris is a maid of Mrs. Shelby. She lost her two children and does not want to lose Little Harry. Her Husband, George Harris moved away in the direction of Canada to breath in free airs of freedom, away from slavery (6). Eliza dies at every moment with fear of losing her child and thus, she decides to flee away with Harry. She directed herself to meet her Husband, George. She waits at Tavern to cross Ohio River to distant herself away from slave buyers. She herself was victim of slavery in childhood due to which she was sold to Shelbys and departed away from her mother, Cassy.

3) George: George Harris is husband of Eliza Harris and Slave of a jealous master. George Harris is a talented and hard working man with innovative ideas. He invents machine and his master abuses him for the invention. His master says that George invented the machine just with a

view not to work and just because he is a lazy man. His cruel master exploits him by forcing him to do manual labor (7). As George is unable to bear more cruelty of his master, so he decided to go to Canada. He plans to earn money to have freedom for his wife and child in coming future.

4) Topsy: Topsy is a young slave, who was abused by her previous slave owners. She misbehaves with everyone. And, St. Clare buys Topsy for Miss Ophelia, so that this young slave may get educated. Miss Ophelia gets a task to up-bring Topsy with Education. But, Topsy is difficult to get tackled by Miss Ophelia due to her behavior. Miss Ophelia tells that she is unable to handle Topsy (8). Afterwards, Eva gets friendly with Topsy and asks her to behave properly with Miss Ophelia. Eva tells her that Miss Ophelia loves her. Topsy becomes comfortable with Eva, due to her kind behavior. She tells Eva that Miss Ophelia does not love her as she even does not bear when Topsy touches her. Due to presence of prejudice and discrimination between black and white, Miss Ophelia didn't let even Topsy touch her. Miss Ophelia never realized that Topsy knows her prejudice.

5) Prue: Prue is the one who comes to sell hot bread to St. Clare Kitchen. She tells Uncle Tom that she wishes to die. Uncle Tom asks her not to drink and keep her faith in Christianity. She tells him that her

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drunkenness is just to forget her sadness. She tells her tale to Tom that her child dies of starvation. Because, she was forced to serve her lady owner who was sick and that's how she was unable to see her own child, who died because of starvation. Her story makes Tom very sad. He further shares Prue's worst take with Eva (8). After some days, Kitchen staff gets to know that Prue is beaten up till death for her drunkenness.

6) Cassy: Cassy is a sex slave of Simon Legree. She is a half-black woman. Her father was a white man and was enjoying her luxurious life style. Her happily married life was going well and unfortunately, her husband fell for other girl. As a result he sold Cassy and her children to slave buyer. She was further sold to another master along with her children. She gave birth to child of one of those masters (8). She herself killed that child with poison as she was unable to bear further pain of separation from her child. She was passed on in various hands of different masters until she reached to Legree.

Cruel behavior of ruthless Slave Buyers and Slave Owners:

- George's master removes him from his job, because he invented machine to speed up the cleaning hemp. He forced George Harris to do menial and heavy labor. He exploited George, due to which

George decided to move to Canada to have freedom from enslavement.

- Haley is the one, who comes to Mr. Shelby for buying slaves. He told that Tom is not sufficient in their deal, so Mr. Shelby must send one more girl or boy as a slave along with Tom. He tries to catch Eliza across the river but is unsuccessful. So, He does deal with Mr. Loker and Marks to catch Harry, the son of Eliza Harris. Haley sells Tom to St. Clare and Haley is a harsh master who chained Tom. He also keeps Tom in jail for spending the night on the way of their journey.
- Tom Loker and Marks promises to Haley that they will find out Eliza and her son, Harry. They also say that they will hand over Harry to Haley, a slave buyer. And, Eliza will be sold for prostitution. George Harris shot Loker to save Eliza and Harry. Loker gets wounded and taken in care by Quakers (9).
- Simon Legree, a cruel slave owner uses his slaves at worst of their conditions. Woman like Cassy is his mistress (9). He consumes alcohol to overpower his slaves. He asks his slaves to sing for him. He orders Uncle Tom to shut his mouth, when

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Uncle Tom sings hymns. He buys woman slaves to have pleasure with them. When Cassy and Emmeline escapes, Mr. Legree asks Tom about their escapism. But, Uncle Tom refuses to tell anything. So, Mr. Legree himself beaten up Tom and wounded him near to his death. At the end, Uncle Tom dies due to unbearable wounds and pain.

Conclusion: It can be seen clearly that Slaves have suffered from the oppression and suppression done by their masters and slave buyers. Female slaves like Cassy and Emmeline suffer from sex slavery. Slaves like Topsy had no idea about kindness, until she comes in contact with Soft hearted girl, Eva. A victim of exploitation, George goes away from his family too, just to avoid oppression of enslavement. Obedient Uncle Tom dies as a worst victim of bonded labor as he went into many hands of slave owner, before reaching to Mr. Legree. Master George, a son of Mr. Shelby visits Tom to meet him. But unfortunately, Tom is in wounded condition near to his death. He promises Tom that he won't be buying slaves. In fact He contributes to get freedom by slaves like Cassy. After coming back to Home, He gives a bad news of Uncle Tom's death to Aunt Chloe (7). He also freed Aunt Chloe and her children from slavery. In front of Tom's Grave, Master George decided that he will never

buy slaves. He favors to vanish enslavement and bonded laborers.

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