

## Politics and Caste System Portrayed in Kiera Cass's *The Selection*

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### ABSTRACT

Kiera Cass in her novel *The Selection* (2012) depicts the caste differentiation in a country known as Illea. Cass has succeeded in creating this novel as a dystopian and romantic young adult fiction but also in clearly manifesting its political issues through the demonstration of rebel conflicts and the struggles between the high and low classes. Through the character America Singer, the novel discusses how people are attracted to such offers provided by higher caste and how they adapt to their norms once they enjoy leisure life. Thus, the study intends to specifically expose discrimination, inequality, and injustices based on economical status and political aspects.

### KEYWORDS

Caste System; Poverty; Subjugation.

*The Selection* is a romantic as well as a dystopian young adult fiction by the American author Kiera Cass. The first book in *The Selection* trilogy is *The Selection* published in 2012 by HarperCollins. The first three books - *The Selection*, *The Elite*, *The One* are from the perspective of America Singer, the protagonist of the novel, and the two sequels, *The Heir* and *The Crown* are written from the standpoint of Princess Eadlyn, the firstborn daughter of Prince Maxon and Lady America Singer.

*The Selection*, one of the series of five young adult novels, is set in the fictional country known as Illea formerly the United States. "*The Selection* includes mixed genres, portraying consumer society and the depthlessness through the character" (Wulandari). The book is about a contest known as the 'Selection'. America Singer is a seventeen-year-old girl living in the country of Illea, the futuristic kingdom where the United States used to be. She lives in a caste system society which is divided into eight castes, the lowest and poorest being Eight and royalty One. America is a Five, which defined her reputation in society as an artist. America is in a secret relationship with a Six named Aspen. A process of Selection is suddenly held in the Illea kingdom which was proclaimed by the royal family, inviting younger women of 16 to 18 years old. America is forced by her family and her lover to apply for the Selection. Thirty-five girls are selected at random and are taken to the

palace where all the girls have to submit to the rules proclaimed by the King. The rules involved claiming them as the property of the royal crown and their sincerity in their relationship with the Prince. "Ruling characters are the characters who have the rule in the course of the event. The ruling characters have the right to punish the selected if they make mistakes" (Hanifah 6).

As soon as they consent to these terms and conditions, the lower caste such as the Four, Five, Six, and Seven are instantly elevated to Caste Three. On the first night in the palace, America encounters a panic attack and runs outside of the palace which was forbidden due to safety issues. It is Prince Maxon who finds her and thus, they become friends. She confides to him that she was there unintentionally and that she joined this Selection so that her family could live better with the money provided by the palace authorities. America and Maxon became increasingly close. During her stay at the palace, she learns that there were rebels who often attack the palace. As she begins to enjoy Maxon's company, Aspen is drafted and transferred to the palace as a soldier, thereby becoming an instant Two. On meeting Aspen, she realizes that she is still in love with him but her feelings for Maxon also grows stronger. Rebels attack the palace and the rest of the girls are sent to their home by Maxon, keeping six of them as elites with whom he believes to have a future. In the end, Maxon tells America that if he could have an assurance that she will be with him,

he could have already chosen her. In the same way, Aspen tells her that despite their relationship being illegal, he will keep fighting for her.

"Literature and literary criticism have had an ambivalent relationship towards issues of class in that much literature and criticism would appear to be oblivious to questions of class, representing the literary work as in some way transcending specific social and historical formations" (Webster 58). The novel describes various caste differentiation based on professions and status in society. As a young adult fiction, the novel as a whole congregates an affectionate and remarkable ambiance. However, certain ideologies constructed by the upper caste or the so-called elites are unrolled throughout the society which, in turn, attempts to suppress the protesting power of the people making them mute.

"At over three thousand years old, caste hierarchy is one of the oldest forms of social stratification in the world. Caste conflict and discrimination remain a potent force in everyday life" (Paul). *The Selection* novel discusses the sociological discrimination faced by the lower castes through the predominant ideologies inflicted upon them. The economy plays an essential role in the division of different castes. Considering the castes from five to eight, their economic background is comparatively inferior to the higher castes. They work hard to earn for their survival and to get food for their family and themselves. On the contrary, the rest of the castes from two to four are considered to be the standard castes who can lead their life smoothly and are not on the brim of poverty.

One is the highest caste having a well economical background. This is the royal family, the prestigious one, on account of the hierarchical structure of the family from its ancient generation. The royal family consists of the King, the Queen, and their only son who is the Prince. Though dominating, this caste has to depend on other castes for marriage. They make others consider this chance to be a prestigious occasion for getting access to the higher caste.

The novel can be considered as an outlook of social divisions based on economic, social, and political aspects. The proletariat, assumed by society as a lower or inferior class, faces a major crisis in their lives through some factors that make their life exasperating. Poverty is

common in many of the underdeveloped as well as developing countries. The main reason for poverty is the lack of employment opportunities based on the caste system. This is reflected in the novel as the division of society in the Illea kingdom is of eight different castes. Each of the eight castes has different jobs considering their social status. This, in turn, becomes the main cause for the eighth caste to be poverty-stricken as their caste is given jobs that provide low wages. This wage is not sufficient for their family to afford all the daily necessities. Poverty affects people's health and also forces them to find other ways of surviving by committing crimes like stealing.

The difference in the acceptance of society influences the mindset of the people in considering each caste. The indifference in attitude shown by the high caste is reflected through their ideologies which are embedded in the society which, in turn, becomes a favourable key to subjugate the lower caste. "When the caste system was implemented, families had to change their last names to names that were appropriate with their given castes" (Diary of an Aspiring Loser). The ideology is dispersed through the rich people who determine everything based on their requisites. But the penniless are unaware of the fact that they are being fooled by these people to become subordinates. The main caste leading its subordinating caste contributes to the hierarchical structure of a society in which subordinates are made to feel that they are not being suppressed but are given the freedom to choose what they want. The novel covertly displays the suppression of subordinates by the ruler in power. It also brings into light the various factors responsible for the poor lives of the lowest rung of society.

## Conclusion

Kiera Cass, in her novel *The Selection*, depicts the caste differentiation in the country known as Illea. The people of Illea were oppressed by power. The economy is considered to be an important possession that decides one's status in society. People with a poor family background often become prey to the power's abusive and oppressive nature. This novel creates a social rethinking in the mind of its readers provoking the necessity of eradicating the discrimination on the basis of status, power, economy, social as well as political aspects.

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