



Class Clash in Lament of the Lovelorn Cook: A Marxist Study

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Abstract

Marxism emphasises that the economic reality is the real force that shapes the human experience, behind all the social and political activities is a driving force for getting the economic power. In other words economics is the base on which superstructure is made. Bina Shah sheds light on almost every aspect of life in her literary work. Similarly critics look at her work from different lenses of interpretation. *Lament of the Lovelorn Cook* is a short story by Bina Shah, a Pakistani English fiction writer. The present study aims to analyse the portrayal of class system from Marxist perspective. It focuses the role of economic condition in shaping the society and building the relationship of characters. The study is qualitative in nature based on the close reading of the text. The textual analysis of the story shows that the root cause of class system is the unfair division of wealth therefore the society is broadly divided into two classes i.e. the bourgeoisie (capitalists) and the proletariat (workers). Furthermore the study reveals that the economical resources determine one's social status in society.

Keywords: Class system, material resources, Marxism, the bourgeoisie, the proletariat



Introduction

Bina Shah, though one of the younger generations of Pakistani writers in English, has produced a number of novels, short stories and blogs describing various aspects of human life in general with the particular focus on social and psychological problems prevailing in Pakistan. The Lament of the Lovelorn Cook is a short story of Bina Shah. The story is a critique of capitalism which divides this society into two classes of haves and have-nots. The author depicts two families; Mr. Arslan Butt, his wife and children representing bourgeoisie class; The Cook, Salman Gul, the Pathan guard; John, the Christian driver and the Hindu houseboy, Krishan; representing the proletariat low working class. The wealthy live a lifestyle of rulers whereas the poor cannot keep their body and soul together. The study focuses upon the portrayal of socio-economic reality from Marxist perspective.

Literature Review

Marxism is a critical tradition that seeks to comprehend literature from the perspective of historical materialism developed by Karl Marx. This ideology pays attention to class struggle in society and draws attention to the unfair and exploitative conditions.

Various scholars of 20th and 21st century focus capitalism as usurper of the rights of the working class. The political force and the state help the capitalists to perpetuate class system so that they may collectively exploit the working class for their personal interest.

The researcher finds class distinction in World War II literature in every culture of the world based on wisdom, ancestry, gender, profession but mostly on wealth. The literary writers pinpoint the social problems specially the class struggle, exploitation, corruption, extreme poverty etc. in their writings. They held capitalism system responsible for these social problems in their literary work and thus, provided a chance to the researchers to decode their work and expose the hidden facts there in. The present study is an endeavour that interprets the author's work reflecting the class conflict between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat which demarcates big difference.

Fagunwa a modern writer of Nigeria, in his novels *Iqbo-olodumare* (1949), *Irkeonibudo* (1949), *Agiitu Olodumare* (1961) clearly portrays the destiny of working class in the hands of capitalism.

Adiga (2008) in his novel portrayed the society which is based on two worlds that is darkness and light. The inhabitants of darkness are the proletariat and those of light are the bourgeoisie landlords, politicians, and businessmen etc. who shamelessly exploit the ones from darkness, making them even poorer and grow their own grandeur.

Emmanuel (2014) in his study exposes Kenyan society and Africans at large to stand-up as a unit, an insurmountable force in the face of political instability, corruption, slavery, neo-colonialism and all other sorts of inhumanities and injustices in order to achieve equality, fairness and political freedom. Notwithstanding he thinks that Ngugi hopes to unburden his heart, on such a level he did, about the monumental injustice, corruption, dictatorship, exploitation and oppression among other ill-practices that in no small way have impacted negatively on the desired growth not just in his Kenyan society but the African continent at large.



Jan Austen's (1813) work is such a piece of literature in which class difference and its evils are quite visible. As Darcy expresses, "There are not many in my rank of life who can afford to marry without some attention of money" (p.125).

Roy (1997) uses transgression as a sign of revolt by the oppressed and marginalized people who out of alienation and frustration get against the principle imposed on them by Indian society. The character Valutha reflects the evil of capitalism that being poor has been categorized as an untouchable.

Adeosun (2007) finds out the evils of capitalism in Fagunwa's novels. He uses his narrative technique and artistic language to expose some features of capitalism. Furthermore, his findings reveal the havoc capitalist economy wrecks on the poor masses of Nigeria in massive that the few bourgeoisie occupy the wealth of the generality of the people to themselves, thereby using the wealth to perpetually oppress the masses. Also, the study emphasizes the need for the political leaders to be socially aware of and to consider the consequences of their economic policies on the masses.

Research Methodology

The study is qualitative in nature based on the close reading text analysis from the Marxist perspective to prove the basic aim of the study that the economic resources shape the structure of society and built the personal relationship as portrayed in Lament of the Lovelorn Cook by Bina Shah. The study finds out the following research questions as suggested by Tyson (2006) to keep the study focused:

1. Is the story a critique of capitalism?
2. Does the story support the idea that you are what you own?

Discussion and Analysis

The Cook and his Circumstances

Class distinction has been a big issue which draws attention of literary critics since 19th century. Marx divides the society into two classes' haves and have-nots. Bina Shah in her story Lament on the Lovelorn Cook has very artistically portrayed the class system in Pakistani society. The protagonist of the story The Cook owns nothing except his meagre wages given by his employer which he sends to his family living far furlong northern area of Pakistan. His job is to serve his employer and his family with delicious food whereas he is unaware whether his own family can make both ends meet. He gives his whole energy and potential to make his master happy. He says, "Every day I presented a new creation at the dining table and hung around, waiting for a word of praise from Bibi" (p.10) if any of the cooked dishes does not suit their taste it causes humiliation and threat for his job. The same threat hangs on the all other servants like a Damocles sword who work with the cook in the house. The servants have to care their masters more than their religion or likings. Expressing his view the cook says, "We had to know their likes and dislikes better than we knew our prayers". (p. 2)

The cook shares his observation that in city, the proletariat like him are believed as stupid and uneducated fools. The proletariat have to remain as the bourgeoisie want to see them that is why they go on doing the stupid and reckless things which perpetuates their status in the society.



The Cook tries his level best to please his master by his delicious food but sometimes if mistakenly he puts a little more spices in curry he must be ready not for his humiliation but his thrashing and threatening of life by his masters. The author of the story introduces Salman Butt, a bourgeoisie, an influential beaurcrate living in Karachi; doing a worldwide business of tiles. He owns a huge property and his children study in London. He has hired a number of servants on meagre wages and keeps them work for him 24/7. He has no feelings for his servants. He takes them his slaves and expects them to be perfect in their services and no argument from their side if they are unable to do according to his wishes. Being a bourgeoisie he uses his influence calling DIG to arrest the Cook and to get rid of the scandal between the Cook and his daughter this confirms the Marxist postulates that the economic base shapes and controls the surface phenomena like social and political status and other related issues.

Salman Butt uses his influence get the Cook bitten brutally by another servant and then hanged him on the tree and called the Police to arrest him to put him behind the bar till his hanging by the court. On the other hand the poor Cook remains helpless bagging for his life doing nothing wrong but remains unable to get the mercy he bagged for. On the other hand Salman Butt let his daughter go to abroad secretly so that she may not be inquired of by the police in the scandal. This is the alarming situation and a clear cut demarcation between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat which is the Marxist contention that the economic base plays the key role in the lives of the individual and communities.

Both the classes depict a wide gulf between them not only the status but in other aspects too like nationalism; they are not nationalistic, patriotic, loyal, integrated and sincere with the country they live in and the people who serve them. At the time danger of war, anarchy and chaos they prefer to fly abroad rather than to a helping hand and sharing situation with their country people. Whereas as the poor remain loyal, patriotic, nationalist and sincere with the people and the country in any situation.

Perpetual Class Structure

The Marxist reflect the society under the capitalism system that controls the life of the proletariat. The philosophy reinforces the base and superstructure which is perpetual because it safe guards the interests of the elite and the ruling class on the cost of the poor who work for them. The proletariat see no choice to survive on their own because they do not own property, business or any means of production consequently they have to bow before the rich for their survival. Had the poor Cook had his own means of production he would have not worked in the house of Arslan Butt who not only deprived him of livelihood but also took his life to save his own reputation.

Conclusion

The study explores the conditions of low working class depicted by Bina Shah in her short story Lament on the Lovelorn Cook. The study shows the society is divided into two classes of haves and have-nots. The story reinforces the basic Marxist postulate that the economic realities shape and control the human experiences in the society. The present study shows the negative impact of capitalism upon the general individual. The possession or lack of material resources determines one's social and political status and rank in society. The study shows that the belief system of a culture is shaped to protect the interest of elite class and reinforces the rigid class structure. The society created by author advocates the Marxist philosophy by introducing the Cook,



the low working class employee remains same forever and the rich get richer. Thus the status quo gets strong roots which are in the favour of the rich and against the low working class like the Cook as reflected in the author world. The study identifies the capitalism a curse for the common mass which defends the interests of the elite class and let them free to treat cruelly to their employers to the extent that they do not think twice to take their lives.

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