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Marxist Reflections in Postcolonial Literature of India

Mudasir Rehman Najar

Exercising Power Structures

There had been numerous changes in the existence of history and it has been elucidated that these changes occur at times due to conflicting experiences of different ideas, economic pursuits and other political and social ideals. While analyzing the causes and effects of these changes, we find that power structures and their exercises are the main concern there.

There are some thinkers who stress that the state should perform most of the functions, while there are others who say it should perform only limited functions. From the very outset, this difference causes an expanding gap in the organization of society. But there are some others who are very critical of this system of power structures between the states and individual.

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Attack on Liberalism

Later, the immediate attack on liberalism came from Marxist and Socialist thinkers. When liberalism gained roots in Europe during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and caused the emergence of a new materialistic tendency called Capitalism. The tenants and landlords in the feudal societies got transferred into the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, capitalists and working class. If one owns and controls the means of production (land, capital, machines etc.) and the other owns only the labour power, then he or she has to sell to the Capitalists in order to survive. The contribution of the German philosopher, Karl Marx, is very pertinent, because, he has an appealing point of view in this regard.

Karl Marx

Karl Marx (1818-1883) was born in Trier, Germany, studied at the University of Bonn, and later at the University of Berlin. His initial thoughts were just contradictory to the institutionalized thinking of the then German people. Compelled to leave Germany by the government in Germany, Marx migrated to France in 1843. Later, Marx met Fredric Engels in Paris in 1844, and there grew a friendship between them.

Because of his revolutionary ideas, Marx was expelled from France as well, and moved to Belgium along with his friend Engels. In 1848, Marx returned to France and from there to Germany. In 1849, he moved to England and lived in London till his death.

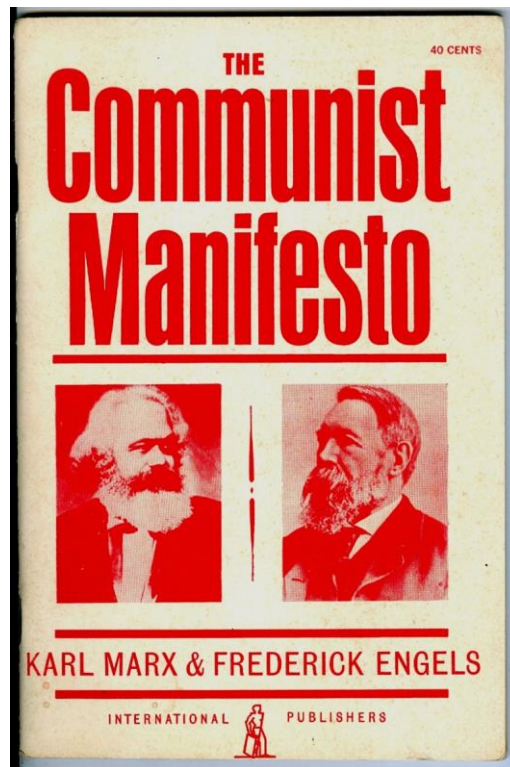
Focus on Class Consciousness

Being a genius in the world of sociology, politics and economy, he studied critically, the following terms: class, history, labour, capital, value, bourgeoisie, proletariat, etc. Taking economy as a point of departure, he says that economy is one of the major sources for class-consciousness; and class becomes an obsession in the social dialectics. This obsession is responsible in breaking and the making of an organization of societal totality.

The Communist Manifesto

In *Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels wrote to emphasize the role of class in social, cultural, and historical emergence. He studied also history and various terms in the bent of theory of historical materialism or materialistic reflection of history. While delivering a lecture on 'Marx's Theory of Historical Materialism' a lecturer . . . refers to Marx's work

A Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law: An Introduction as, "The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it" (5).



The Germany Ideology

In *The Germany Ideology*, the joint work of Marx and Engels, Marx presents the causes of history throughout the ages in three ways. He says, in 'spiritual interpretation' history comes into existence due to divine dispensation or God's will; in 'idealistic interpretation' history emerges due to the ideas inherited in the minds of the times; but in his own viewpoint, the Marxist view point of history from the materialistic interpretation, "it is matter which is primary and the mind is secondary."

Dialectics

Marx's idea of materialistic history is dialectical in nature. This dialectical tendency has been adhered to by Marx, from Hegel who gave us a three way process of change in his - thesis, antithesis and synthesis. That may be interpreted as idea, counter-idea and resolution or appropriation of contradiction within the idea.

The Concept of Alienation

Marx discussed the concept of alienation that has a great relevance to the field of psychology. In his work *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, (1844), Marx was attracted to Hegelian idealism and he criticized Capitalism, because it exploits the power of the labourer. The central concern of this book is wages, profit, rent and alienation.

Marx says that alienation is the outcome not of ideas, but of the material world. In the Capitalist mode of production, the worker becomes the object of production. Because in the act of production they are not able to determine their identity in their production, because, labourers are bound to surrender their production and see themselves as instruments of exploitation in the clutches of Capitalists. This immoral grouping of labour as commodity alienated the worker from his product and takes him or her away from the integration of self. Lecturer.... in 'Marx's Theory of Alienation' in Macmillan Centre at Yale University, refers to Marx as 'Marx has the theory in nature, What makes us human, Marx says, is the fact that we work and plan our work, otherwise one could say, even animals work.

Historical Approach

Historical approach to literary criticism helps us to assess the causes of composition and identify the relevance of texts to the emergence of history. Literature is somehow the outcome of historical events; hence, the study of history is presupposition for the analysis the text. At the Macmillan Centre at Yale University, a speaker on 'Marx's Theory of History' refers to Marx as a creative philosopher. While quoting Marx in *Germany Ideology*, he says that basically Marx examines history and takes not 'property relationship' but 'the division of labour' as the foundation of society and social phenomena. Speaker.... discusses different modes of labour and production across history.

Initially, as per natural division of labour, it was hunting and collection for men and women, respectively. Another mode of production is slaves who are volunteer producers. Third mode of production is under Feudalism where, because of unwillingness, slaves are forced to produce. This unwillingness comes from the familial sense of slaves, as they marry and have social existence. They possess land as well.

Finally, it is the Capitalist mode of production that dominates the social structure and is the richest period of production in history. Capitalism dispossesses the labour class first of

their exercise of labour, then of their land. Now, workers are bound to go to the supermarket, to the factories in the cities.

Thus, one can interpret history as a field of discourse in which literature imparts its own traces on the politics of power structure.

Marxism and Literature

Edmund Wilson, in his essay "Marxism and Literature" claims that it is the means of productivity that lays the foundation of any society, as believed by Marx and Engels. Superstructure is basically the reflection or the skilful summation of base, masses. This superstructure takes the shape of different fields of activity, as in politics, law, religion, philosophy, literature and art.

After studying Marx and Engels, Wilson proclaims that there should be such situations in the literature of Marxism when a reader is bound to think of the situations not by any force, but by will. Edmund Wilson visions Marx and Engels under the influence of the Renaissance spirit. Wilson comments that Marxist and Socialist approach grew up out of bourgeoisie society. In the concluding point about Marxism and literature, Wilson says that one has to be a very keen and inquiring about the future societies and political culture. He says that:

A man may be an excellent Marxist, but if he lacks imagination and taste, he will be unable to make the choice between a good and an inferior book, both of which are ideologically unexceptionable. What Marxism can do, however, is throw a great deal of light on the origins and social significance of works of art (CP 387).

Capitalism, Modernism and Postmodernism

In *Capitalism, Modernism and Postmodernism*, Terry Eagleton discusses the concepts of art with reference to alienation, utopia and dystopia, idea of avant-gardism, commodity, value etc. He says that in postmodern culture there occurs dilution of various ideals. In it, we can say that this dilution is a tool for suppression or hijacking of the utopian idea like that of Marxism and other utopian thoughts.

Post-modernism

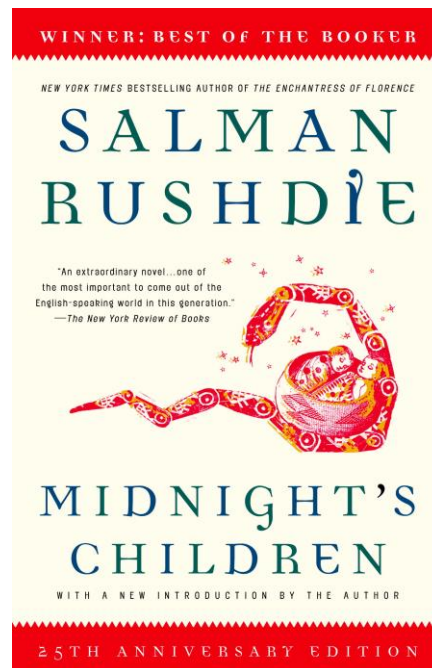
In order to efface the revolutionary idea of Marxism, Postmodernism has deconstructed the very idea of alienation. This co-incidentally helps the Capitalists to determine more and more their controlling agencies upon their subclasses, which are the working classes. Thus, in turn the very idea of utopia is changed into dystopia. Likewise, the theory of *avant-gardism* is caricatured by late-capitalism through demeaning the aesthetic sense of art. Terry Eagleton also talks about value in his own way against the metaphysical value. He writes, "The dilemma of David Hume (British Empiricist Philosopher) is surpassed by a simple conflation: fact is value. Utopia cannot belong to future, because the future, in the shape of technology, is already here, exactly synchronous with the present" (CP 394).

Post-Colonial

A Marxist cum post-colonial critic, named Aijaz Ahmad, discusses power with the age old conflicts between hierarchy and equality. With issues like class struggle and identity, he studies postmodernism and post-colonialism. Commenting about term 'post' in one of his lectures, "Post-colonial Theory and the 'Post-'Condition", he writes: "prefix 'post' in these terms not only partakes of a generalised 'post-' condition but contains within it a sense of that ending, even if that sense of endings produces in most of them not a sense of loss but a feeling of euphoria" (364). These views enhance the validity of this concept for its extended project.

Another critic J.C. Young discusses Marxism in relation to post-colonialism. In his book, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction*, he says that there is persistence of colonialism even in free and independent countries. He writes, "postcolonialism's central preoccupation is with the politics of the 'fourth world' still colonized within many officially decolonized countries. . . . The problem is compounded by the fact that at independence, power often passed to native bourgeois elite, produced during the time of colonialism, that took on board many western presuppositions; for examples, the idea of nation state-itself (Young 59). There are many literary figures in history, that have enforced the ideas of individual freedom against the suppression of different institutions. Among them, some directly take Marxist thinking as a central point, some others take this thought as a support to put forth their thesis or points of view; a few have taken it referentially.

Midnight's Children



Salman Rushdie was born in Bombay of British India in 19 June 1947. He had his schooling in Bombay, then at Rugby in England and read history at St. King's College, Cambridge. Being the honorary professor in Humanities at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), he is also a fellow of the Royal Society of Literature. He is one of the most awarded literary figures in Indian English Writing and has authored several novels. *Midnight's Children* (1981), is his second and the most famous novel. In this novel, he uses an innovative narrative technique and presentation of British and Indian history through the story of Pickle-factory worker, Saleem Sinai. The title *Midnight's Children* is very mysterious, as Saleem Sinai is one of the 1,001 children born around or on the midnight of 15 August 1947, Indian Independence Day. The novel has thematic layers— Post-colonialism, Marxism, Postmodernism, History and other philosophical and thematic issues. It reflects the voice of individual freedom and highlights the suppressions from various institutions.

Once in the novel, Jawaharlal Nehru made noble statements about free India. Nehru dreamt of a progressive India. When Saleem Sinai was born at the exact moment of India's birth, the first prime minister of India, J. L. Nehru writes to him, "Dear baby Saleem, My belated congratulation on the happy accident of your moment of birth! You are the newest bearer of the ancient face of India which is also eternally young." (*Midnight's Children* 167).

Marxist Ideas in the Novel

Here, Saleem's birth is paralleled with the rise of India as a nation. The Marxist ideas against the persistence of colonial practices are openly expressed in the novel when Joseph D'Costa, a communist-minded character, is introduced. He tells Mary Pereira that she is not aware of the unbalanced structure of society in the country. Then, he expresses the jubilation of independence in India is casual for poor and minority groups. Because, these people would be once again colonized and exploited by the elite class of India. He says, "The independence is for the rich only; the poor are being made to kill each other like flies. In Punjab, in Bengal, riots, riots, poor against poor. It's in the wind" (MC 139). This experience of suppressed selves recurs in the novel.

Once in the 'Midnight Children's Conference,' there is a discussion session and Saleem tries to convince others, especially his rival, Shiva, to agree 'for a purpose'. Shiva reacts very ferociously:

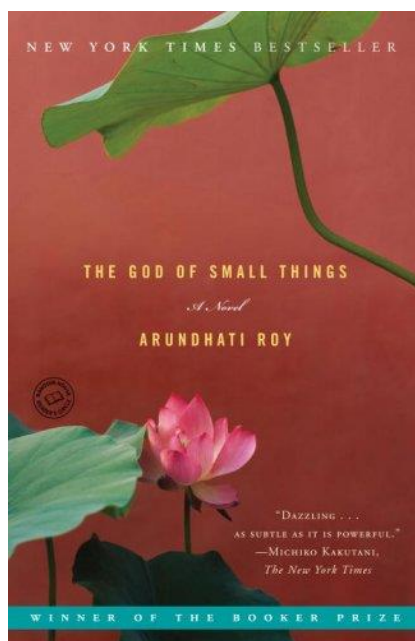
'Rich kid.' Shiva yelled, 'You don't know one damn thing! What *purpose*, man? . . . For what reason you're rich and I'm poor? Where is reason in starving, man? God knows how many millions of damn fools living in this country, man, and you think there's a purpose!' (MC 306).

Shiva, a symbol of destruction, no doubt possesses strength but he also becomes a victim to the history of class-struggle between the poor and the rich, he openly rejects the discriminatory economic structure of the country. He mocks Saleem's 'purpose', the purpose of building a multicultural nation. Therefore, Salman Rushdie also projects the Marxist perspective of literature.

Arundhati Roy's Marxist Posture

Arundhati Roy was born in Shilling. Being the little child of divorced mother, she lived in a broken family and had to suffer many worries and anxieties of life. After facing such pains of life, she came out a scholarly and literary figure. The masterpiece novel *The God of Small Things* provided great fame to her by winning Booker Award in 1997. As a social reformer, Roy scans the inner conflicts of Indian society and exposes the menace of

casteism. She says that our country, India needs to be refined and reformed for her true advancement and satisfying for individual.



In this novel, Arundhati Roy portrays fragmented nature of Indian social structure. She provides a platform for the ruthlessly suppressed section of society. The central character Velutha, a very charismatic and efficient person, falls victim to extreme jealousy and hatred from the richer section of society. Dealing effectively with the problem of untouchability and class-consciousness, Roy openly makes it clear that Velutha, an able person is hated, because he is untouchable and is economically backward. This insincere and unjust divide on the bases of money again takes us to materialistic interpretation of society. Hence, the novel ironically reflects the pitiful condition of a person born in the lower class, who remain like an animal labourer, no matter how capable he or she is.

The powerful people are hypocrites and have no sympathy for the poor. About K. N. M. Pillai, a character in the novel, narrator says in ironical tone, "He walked through the world like a chameleon. Never really revealing himself, . ." (*The God of Small Things* 8) A chameleon is known for changing its colour as the environment. Likewise, Pillai claims of being a Marxist, but suppresses individual freedom. This is how the novelist unveils the injustice for the lower class people, "Paravans like other untouchables, were not allowed to walk on public roads, not allowed to cover their upper bodies, not allowed to carry umbrellas" (*TGOST* 36).

Velutha is considered the god of small things, as he is an excellent and efficient man of his class. Because of his approach in loving Ammu, a high caste widow, he is blamed for this daring act of crossing the boundaries of casteism. It doesn't matter; Velutha has greater capabilities than those of the majority of untouchables. This is how the discrimination is surfaced, when narrator gives reference to the old character named Mammachi: "Mammachi (with impenetrable touchable logic) often sad that If only he (Velutha) hadn't been a Paravan (untouchable), he might have become an engineer" (*TGOST* 36).

Clash between High Class and Low Class

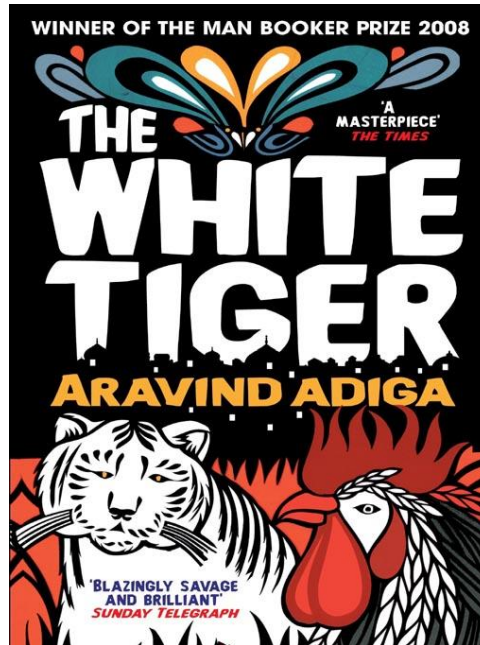
When we cogitate regarding the structural patterns and thematic thrust of the novelist, we find that in essence, there is the clash between two sets of people-- high class and low class. The high class people stand powerful, economically sound; they hold politics, law, religion, tradition and above all their monopoly over sources of economy. And the low class are lower-castes, untouchables, economically backward. Thus, this rich or powerful group of society has no difficulty in crushing the weak and helpless. They have full opportunity to exploit the social bindings and economic limitations of poor or working class.

Here, we find that Roy shifts her readers to Marxist perspective of literature. If Chako, a character from a rich family, exercises his natural urges, it is ignored as youth indulgence. When Velutha, a character from a poor family and lower caste, simply releases his natural desires and gives emotional solace to Ammu, a widow, he is punished to die, because he is poor and has no rights to have any enjoyment of life. In the title of third chapter of the novel, we can say that a great message has been conveyed through this maxim, "Big Man the Laltain, Small Man the Mombati". 'Big Man' is considered a member of the rich class, Capitalists who are secure and well protected as 'laltain', but 'Small Man' is considered a member of the poor class, labourers who are unprotected like 'mombati'. These words spoken by a Bihari coolie, convey to the readers the pathetic divide that is prevalent in Indian society.

Roy enforces the characters to revolt against the false codes and conducts and preaches individual freedom. On another occasion, Roy refers to Pillai in an ironical tone, because, he is claiming to be a true Marxist, and is actually a hypocrite and a greedy fellow. Narrator says, 'Comrade Pillai's arms were crossed over his chest, and he clasped his own

armpits possessively, as though someone had asked to borrow them and he had just refused.’
(9612)

Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*



A well-known Indian English novelist, Aravind Adiga, is a very daring writer, who was born in Madras in India and lived in Australia, the US and the UK. Presently, he is living in Mumbai. He surprises readers with his keen observation and analysis of Indian social structure in his debut novel, *The White Tiger*. In this novel, Adiga gives reflections on Marxist analysis of society with other issues like casteism, class-consciousness, politics, and ill-governance of so-called modern India.

Adiga gives a very blunt tongue to a lower class character, Balram Halwai. He is an exceptional character from his class with all ambition and charisma. No doubt, he is a servant and heinous murderer, but possesses the mind of a philosopher and entrepreneur, having been born in an imaginary dark village of Laxmangarh, Bihar.

This novel, in a way, is written in an epistolary style. After murdering his master, Ashok, Balram becomes a successful entrepreneur. Under the shadow of a chandelier, he writes letters to the Chinese Premier and narrates the whole tragic tale of a lower class individual in modern Indian social structure. In this structure, the poor class is bound to be poor; they can survive only in the cruel clutches of rich people. Any member from the poor

class can change life only after being extremely daring. This is how Balram indicts the unjust divide in modern India to the Chinese Premier:

Please understand, your Excellency, that India is two countries in one: an India of Light, an India of Darkness. The ocean brings light to my country. Every place on the map of India near the ocean is well off. But the river brings darkness to India-- the black river (*TWT* 14).

Criticising the Indian government, Balram exposes the corrupt institutions of India where social and political life has become barren. There is illegal intervention of the rich class with certain politicians to grab the profit in different fields. Ashok, an upper caste person, is an example of this. It is only on the surface level that society reflects equality and liberty of individual, but inside the social structure, we find poor class or working class is being crushed by rich class or Capitalists.

Balram, as a mouthpiece of Adiga, blames the Indian democracy. He says that lower class people have no opportunities to rise above the miserable condition of poverty, because, they are always exploited and suppressed. As we find in the novel, Balram's master Ashok and his mistress Pinky Madam have once mocked the Indian government of having illiterate and ignorant people. He writes: "And our nation, though it has no drinking water, electricity, sewage system, public transportation, sense of hygiene, discipline, courtesy, or punctuality, *does* have entrepreneurs (*TWT* 4).

Adiga highlights the dark side of Indian society by illustrating the symbolic characters like the Stork, the wild Boar and the Raven who unjustly owned the river, agricultural land and barren land respectively. They control the means of production and exploit the lower class people's power of labour. These rich people (Capitalists) enjoy comforts in life and leave the poor people (proletariats) in miserable condition. Therefore, in Marxist perspective, it is at the cost of the labour class, the Capitalists have luxurious life. That is why, Balram says, "A rich man's body is like a premium cotton pillow, white and soft and blank. *Ours* are different. My father's spine was a knotted rope, the kind that women use in villages to pull water from; . . (*TWT* 27).

Religion – a Misused Weapon

As we know that religion is used as a main weapon to misuse the poor class, the servants are made to be moral and faithful. Balram says, “Do you know about Hanuman, Sir? He was faithful servant of the god Rama...” (*TWT* 19). Adiga, no doubt praises the advancement of modern India but lashes out upon the selfish politicians and bureaucracy at the false claims of individual freedom, which exists actually nowhere in the society. The tragic tale of the underprivileged class is exposed, where an individual is rooted in a trap of deep dungeon called 'rooster coop'. This peculiar symbol is apt to explain and illustrate the exploitative situation of the poor class. In the 'rooster coop' one has the limited desire and restricted will, where one is ultimately at the mercy of the rich class. “The greatest thing to come out of this country in the ten thousand years of history is the Rooster Coop.” (*TWT* 173) Talking about the Darwinian jungle of survival of the fittest, Adiga emphasizes the vulnerability of the poor section of people in modern Indian society. Here also we find the working class is helpless in the hands of the rich class. Balram examines the sociology of India as:

To sum up- in the old days there were one thousand castes and destinies in India. These days, there are just two castes: Men with Big Bellies, and Men with Small Bellies. And only two destinies: eat- or get eaten up (*TWT* 64).

Adiga is ironic over the claims of individual freedom under the shadow of democracy in India. He says that in our country, there is hardly any opportunity for underclass of excelling in their future. Poor men always dream of making their life better but can earn only to survive.

To Conclude

In conclusion, we can say that Marxism is the predominant thesis or philosophy regarding the socio-political issues across the world and it has influenced the creative minds of almost every community. The literary figures have patterned the incidents and characters to think and change the traditional way of life. The mouthpiece of different writers has raised the voice against the cruel and dictatorial institutions and paved the way for the up rise of suppressed ideas among the underprivileged classes. With this there occurred some

development in individual freedom and economic development. The modes of production and source of labour are justly discussed and left to be exercised in society.

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