

Assumed Free, Terrifically Chained: A Marxist Study of Hand Pump by Khadija Mastoor

* Shazmeen Nawaz

Lecturer in English, Govt. Associate College for Women, Quaidabad

Maria Najam

MS Scholar, International Islamic University, Islamabad

*Email of the corresponding author; shazmeennawaz@hotmail.com

ABSTRACT

This study aims at analysing a short story The Hand Pump (2008) by a well-known Urdu writer, Khadija Mastoor. This short story is taken from Modern Urdu Short Stories from Pakistan (2008) by S. Viqar Azam. The study is qualitative in nature and based on the framework of The Communist Manifesto (1848) of Karl Marx and Frederick Engels (Marx, Engel, & Taylor, 1967). Mastoor (2008) has used similar class struggles and stratification of bourgeoisie and proletariat in her The Hand Pump (2008) as given in the Manifesto. The significance of this study lies in the fact that it highlights Marxist notions, of class division, class struggle, commodification, and false consciousness in a Pakistani writer's work through the character of Begum of Delhi, Begum of Lahore, and Chunni Begum. It explores how the labour of poor like Chunni Begum is exploited at the hands of the bourgeoisie and they are treated as commodities.

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INTRODUCTION

Pakistan is considered as an agricultural country since, its 63% population occupies villages (PBS, 2018). Various accountants and managers work under the lords occupying these lands. The roots of this stratification can be traced back to colonial rule by Britishers in the Sub-continent (TFT, 2015). This stratification resulted in exploitation of labour power of the poor working class at the hands of the stable middle class.

The Communist Manifesto (1848) (Marx, Engel, & Taylor, 1967) highlights vices of capitalism resulting in downfall of any nation. It has proposed a revolutionary system for rise of any nation which involved rise of lower working class. The modern bourgeoisie society is a child of the feudal system that cannot keep away from class antagonistic views.

Pakistani writers have got inspiration from Marxist ideas to express the class struggles and tussle of occupation of resources in their novels and short stories.

Khadija Mastoor is one of the most acknowledged Urdu writers, who have used their dexterity and wit to broaden the artistic value of Pakistani novels. She is known for her masterpiece *Aangan* (1962). Her reflection of characters is deep and has mature breadth. Her works display social and political insight of the time. She confines her short stories to middle class with themes directing social and moral values of characters.

The present study aims at exploring Marxist subjects such as class stratification, class struggle, false consciousness, and commodification in her short story *The Hand Pump* (2008). The study is significant in exploring Marxist notions in Pakistani Literature. This story is considered from *Modern Urdu Short Stories from Pakistan* (2008) by S. Viqar Azam.

Research Objectives

This study aims

- To explore different class stratification present in the society
- To find out ways in which poor working class becomes victim of exploitation by the upper class
- To find the ways to get rid of false consciousness of proletariat

Research Questions

This study aims to find answers to the following questions:

- In what ways does bourgeoisie exploit proletariat in *The Hand Pump* (2008) by Khadija Mastoor?
- To what extent, Mastoor has agreed to social, and economic revolution of Karl Marx as solution to the class conflicts and economic exploitations.

Literature Review

Karl Marx ideology of socialism has influenced the literary circle. In 1932, the movement called for union of soviet writers to propagate social realism in literature (Alexandrova, 1963). This influence circulated throughout colonial world and provided a theoretical framework in order to articulate their desire for freedom and social equality and oppressive regime.

Barua (2000) discusses class distinction found in Pakistani Society Crime and Social Control in Pakistan. According to her history is all about conflicts between the employer and the employee. Yaqoob (2010) explored similar class stratifications in Mohsin Hamid's *Moth Smoke* (2000). She displays a powerful, and authoritative upper class and passive and repellent poor class. The novel is reflective of Pakistani society where upper class enjoys all luxuries of life with no check on money whereas poor class strives for earning money to earn basic need of life.

Ali (2011) in *Communists in a Muslim Homeland* highlights the competing ideologies and imbalance shifting of alliances and the rise of All Pakistan Progressive Writers inclination towards Marxist ideology.

Bibi (2015) conducted a Marxist study on the poems of a pakhtoon poet Khatak. She discovered the Marxist patterns in the poetry of Khattak through the word choices he made by keeping in view the socio-cultural background of the poems and the class struggle of the time.

Farooq (2017) explored alienation, class struggle and capitalist repression of the working class under the lens of Marxist Theory in the work *The Murder of Aziz Khan* (1967) by Ghose. He portrayed how class conflicts and stratification leads the working class to alienation from the world around them.

Parveen & Awan (2017) endeavored to study the Marxist impacts on the characters of Hamid's *Moth Smoke* (2000). They shed light on the factors responsible for oppression of working class and the struggles that poor working class has to make in order to live and earn their food.

Khadija Mastoor explores complexities of life with great dexterity by making complex things easier to comprehend. She is known for her collection of short stories such as *Bochar* (1951), *Thanda Meetha Pani* (1981), *Khel* (1944), *Chand Roz or* (1951) and *Thaky Hary* (1962). *Angan* (1962) is one of her most acknowledged works. In her short stories, she talks about the lives of poor people and their exploitation at the hand of upper powerful lots.

Unfortunately, the stories of Mastoor remained unexplored. The present study aims to bridge the gap by studying *The Hand Pump* (2008) under the lens of Karl Marx theory 'Marxism'. This study will explore the elements of alienation, class struggle, status, false consciousness, and devastation of proletariat at the hands of bourgeoisie.

Theoretical Framework

This study is qualitative in nature and data for the study is taken from short story "The Hand Pump (2008)" by Khadija Mastoor. Marxist theory is drawn primarily from *The Communist Manifesto* (1848) of Karl Marx (Marx et al., 1967), considered as the basis of Marxist criticism, serves as the theoretical framework for the present study. Marxist view has been employed as a proper framework for displaying the class division, and exploitation of the lower class (proletariats) at the hands of the upper capitalist classes (bourgeoisie) due to similarity between the upper capitalist classes condemned by Marx and the system of class distinctions of Pakistan. Marxism aims to unravel the shapes in which our socioeconomic system is a great source of our experience. The sample for analysis is Khadija Mastoor's short story titled 'The Hand Pump (2008)'.

The present analysis employs Marxist notions, of class division, class struggle, commodification, and false consciousness. This analysis argues that Chunni Begum in the story "The Hand Pump (2008)" experiences class struggle. Chunni, who works for the begum in Haveli, does more labour than all the other servants combined. She gets alienated from other human beings, establishing herself as the only best servant. In a struggle to achieve greatness and being unique, she falls into pit of alienation and starts feeling detached from the society around her. Consequently, leading herself to complete devastation.

Discussion

Marxism

Karl Marx was born on the land of Germany on 5th May 1818. Marxism is based on the ideas of Karl Marx regarding economic system of the society in which he lived. He is known for putting forth many different social, political, and economic theories. With passage of time, his ideologies propagated in the world and people

started feeling inclined to his theories. His followers are often considered as Marxists and the main tenets of Marxism are:

Status and Class

The knowledge of capital control has divided the people into two distinctive classes. The people who enjoy power over all means of production in the society are called bourgeoisie and those who are exploited and have nothing other than their labour to present for earning their source of living are called proletariats.

‘Class is a group of people who stand in a common relationship to the means of production - the means by which they gain a livelihood. Before the modern industry, the means of production consisted primarily of land and instruments used to tend crops or pastoral animals. In pre-industrial societies, therefore, the two main classes were those who owned the land (aristocrats, gentry, or slaveholders) and those actively engaged in producing from it (serfs, slaves, and free peasantry)’ (Giddens, 1991:210).

‘Status is a marked distinction that divides people according to their respect and honour. The status is accorded by the people living in the same society. The status distinction often varies independently of class divisions, and social honour may be either positive or negative. Positively privileged status groups include any groupings of people who have high prestige in a given social order’ (Giddens, 1991:212).

The social behaviours and their views about themselves are dependent on this distinction of status. Wealth is a chief element that distributes and promotes this division system in any society.

Class Struggle

Class struggle is the core issue of Marxism. According to Marx (1969), the struggle of classes to be better than one another is an unending process and history is not about the lives of great men rather it is about the struggle of various classes to gain power.

‘The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles. Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman, in a word, oppressor, and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended, either in a revolutionary re-constitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes’ (Marx & Engels, 1969:98).

The relationship between the bourgeoisie and proletariat is loaded with conflicts and is a tussle of superior authority and subjugation. Marx (1969) was of the view that someday the lower oppressed class will wake up from the slumber of ignorance about their subordination and will rise up with united power to revolt against the oppressing lords.

Marx & Engels (1969) claimed that a society that is stratified is surely prone to conflicts of classes and therefore, the only solution to those conflicts is a classless society. The lower class is always exploited by the bourgeoisie for the sake of earning profit and therefore, Marx & Engels (1969) propagate their ideas of revolt against this unjust exploitation of proletariats whose life is full of struggle from the

very beginning to the end. The aim of this revolt should be the destruction of every sort of exploitation.

The exploitation of proletariats is obvious in a stratified society. Marx & Engels (1969) define a proletariat as “a class of laborers, who live only so long as they find work, and who find work only so long as their labour increases capital”. The laborers are left with no choice other than to work and present their labour for selling in order to live. Moreover, Marx & Engels (1969), put forth the notion of commodities for the suppressed proletariats who work like machines and are “consequently exposed to all the vicissitudes of competition, to all the fluctuations of the market,” and when “the repulsiveness of the work increases, the wage decreases”. Similarly, when “the use of machinery and division of labour increases, in the same proportion the burden of toil also increases”. However, the exploitation of labourers is beyond comprehension for the wearisome tasks, that they perform to earn their living. The capitalists remain the main beneficiaries, although, their efforts are nothing in front of those proletariats.

False Consciousness

It refers to a certain way of thinking about oneself that obstructs him from perceiving the actual nature of his situation in any social setting.

‘There are, however, criteria such as a person’s occupation or the amount of money he earns, which all can agree about, irrespective of their ideas about class in general or this or that person position. It might seem possible, then, to find a way of the class quite objectively. We all know that it is very often the case that whilst X’s neighbours insist that X is working-class, X obstinately considers himself to be middle-class. X’s ideas (and his neighbours) cannot be ignored because they affect their behaviour. He is more likely, for instance, to associate with people he regards as middle class, follow middle class patterns of recreation, try to use a middle-class accent, have middle-class ambitions for his children, etc. His subjective perception of his class position cannot, therefore, be simply written as ‘wrong’ or - more sophisticatedly – as ‘false consciousness’ (Worsley, 1970:421).

The oppression and exploitation on the hands of bourgeoisie lead to a false consciousness of self in the proletariats who become accustomed to exploitation and oppression. They fail to understand the fact that they are being exploited by the same ruler whom they are serving. This false consciousness obstructs them to stand up for their own freedom and they behave like a bird in the cage who forget to fly and accepts cage as its heaven from miseries in the world. The never let the blindfold of slavery go away.

Analysis

The story is about a lady who has to work throughout her life. She starts working at Haveli and later she is married off. After some clashes with her in-laws, she leaves their home and again starts to work in a Haveli. After some years, Chunni Begum’s son gets employment with Begum’s husband, and she marries him with an orphan girl. The girl being active in her dealings soon becomes favourite of everyone. Chunni Begum realizes that she is of no use to Begum, so she decides to leave for Lahore. After days of the search for work, she finds the work of an ayah at a house where she controls everything. As time passes, she feels tings of arthritis

in her knees and begins to neglect her work, when confronted by Begum she leaves her second house.

She then takes up a residence in a nearby slum compound and begins to cure her arthritis. At the same time, Pakistan emerges on the map of the world, and she loses her contact with her son residing in Delhi. While thinking about her future prospects, she decides to get a hand pump installed in the compound of slums and asks the residents to pay her some money in exchange for water. Only four houses give her money, and the remaining ones decide to go and search for water.

Soon her savings end completely, and she is only left with water drawn from her hand pump. When the news of her hunger spreads, two more families come with their money. Chunni Begum buys her provisions with that money. The boys one day attack *The Hand Pump* (2008) and start using its water. Chunni begum loses control of *The Hand Pump* (2008), and all the families start to draw water from it. The only thing that she could do was to hurl curses and abuses on them. One day when she had nothing to eat, she goes to *The Hand Pump* (2008) and faints there. When she wakes up, she finds herself in her room, and in the evening, two ladies come with bread, lentil, and pickle. She refuses to eat it and only asks to be paid for her water. She spends the night with difficulty and in the morning when a lady comes with food, she asks her to be more careful and generous in providing her with food.

In the story, there is a line clearly drawn between the *two classes* the bourgeoisie represented by Begum of Delhi and Begum of Lahore, and proletariat represented by Chunni Begum who is working for these ladies. Chunni Begum can be considered as representative of proletariats who are exploited for their labours and has to work hard in order to earn her living. Her poverty is an unavoidable hurdle in her struggle for a better survival. In order to get rid of this poverty, she goes to Begum of Delhi at the beginning and later turned her eyes toward house of Begum of Lahore. She works hard to get rid of the life of struggle and is more competent than all other servants working along with her at the workplace. Thus, she demonstrates the oppressed and socially exploited class, and the begums depict the bourgeoisie outlook.

There is *no room for concern about the health* of proletariats in a capitalist society and many proletariats go out of this world unnoticed. According to Yuill (2015), the exploitation of capitalists leads to a sense of alienation in the mind of proletariat worker from his services and from all the other human beings, thus, putting a negative impact on the health of poor workers who forget about their health in their concentration to work hard and beyond any calculations. Their minds are mentally exhausted, and they forget the smell of freedom and self-love. Marx & Engels (1969) claimed that the proletariats working in a capital-governed society lose their existence and “decline to a mere machine, a bondservant of capital”. Likewise, Chunni Begum is exploited at the house of Begum of Delhi. When she loses her power to work effectively, she is considered as a useless commodity and is replaced by her daughter-in-law. Thus, losing her source of survival. This will for survival leads her to Begum of Lahore, where she works with full determination but after her capability to work hard is exploited completely, she is replaced with a new ayah. Thus, there is no room for health concerns of the proletariats and if they show

any glimpse of weakness in presenting their labour to bourgeoisie, they tend to lose their source of living and ultimately lose the battle for survival.

According to Marx & Engels (1969), the proletariat have no option other than selling their services and labours in order to earn their livelihood to survive in the oppressing world because otherwise they will starve to death in absence of food. Thus, money is the main insect that is the driving system of this class web and bourgeoisie are the exploiting spiders who treat proletariat as *commodities* which are machines to provide them with their services and have no value and feelings of their own. Chunni Begum in the story is treated as a commodity by both Begum of Delhi and Begum of Lahore because she is working like a machine at their houses with full determination and providing her services. She is actually working for her livelihood irrespective of being treated as a commodity.

History is a story of *never-ending struggle* of various classes according to Marx & Engels (1969). The story presents a never-ending struggle of Chunni Begum to raise her status and to live peacefully in an oppressed society full of class distinctions. She wanted to be independent, but the web of capitalism never lets any proletariat rise up and walk freely as independent human being.

In order to achieve their independence and freedom, the poor working class always look forward to the capitalist upper class as a source of refuge. This is mainly due to **false** consciousness implanted in their minds by the capitalist domination society who never lets any stone unturned to exploit poor for their own benefit. These proletariat always dream of a life full of luxuries and free from struggle just like those of bourgeoisie because they consider them as their ideals. At the end of the story Chunni Begum tells Allah Rakha's wife,

'Why couldn't you put more milk in the tea? And why is there no butter on my roti? If you are going to draw water all day long, you had better take some trouble over the food you bring for me, hadn't you?' (Mastoor, p. 198)

We can see Chunni Begum was sad that she cannot be independent. This can be reflective of false consciousness of Chunni Begum to achieve her ideals by struggling hard in the same system that was exploiting her. She was blinded by this false consciousness and forgot that she cannot rise upon by remaining the part of same exploiting system. In the story, Chunni Begum mourns being victim of the same false consciousness after losing her hand pump because according to her *The Hand Pump* (2008) was the only source which could lead her out of this struggling life and make part of the upper bourgeoisie class. *The Hand Pump* (2008) seemed to be a commodity to be independent from the life of struggle and labour. Here, she tried to imitate the same patterns of exploitation as used by the bourgeoisie to parallel them. This way of living into false hopes of being independent one day brought downfall of Chunni Begum and all her will to propagate and live started to deteriorate and her grand edifice of false consciousness come to ashes.

Likewise, the happiness of Chunni Begum can be seen when she drew water for some of the families with the hope to get rid of struggling and oppressed life. Proletariat always dream to control the sources of income just like bourgeoisie. This control over hand pump is depiction of similar dream of proletariat in form of Chunni Begum who wanted to be owner of source of production in order to enjoy the same prestige and luxuries that the bourgeoisie and upper class enjoys when

they own the sources of production that are not available to all. Thus, for time being Chunni Begum enjoyed her dream of independent and superior.

Apparently, it seems that Mastoor is highlighting the class division and class struggle, but on a closer scrutiny we observe that she is also propagating some ideas. Like in the character of Chunni Begum. She is not satisfied with her position in the society and endeavours to raise her status up but to imitate the ways of bourgeoisie in order to occupy the source of production is her false consciousness that leads to her downfall. She is accepting the system as it is and not struggling to set aside this system of suppression rather, she wants to adopt the role of suppressor. According to Marx & Engels (1969), to change the situation of people, a revolt is necessary which breaks away with all the exploitation system and lead to a system which has no stratification of classes and no status discriminations. By accepting our current situations, she is propagating the idea of accepting things as they are and view that we should not struggle to change our socio-economic conditions.

Likewise, the character of Chunni Begum has been constructed in a way to show that these class divisions are deeply ingrained in our minds and remain embedded there unless and until a revolt rises. When Chunni Begum gets the control of water, she commodifies it in a similar way as Begum of Delhi and Begum of Lahore used her as their commodity. She treats the slum dwellers as proletarians as they have no resources. She views herself as a bourgeoisie since she has the control over water resource and everybody else was dying for water in order to survive. All this shows that the class division has deeply rooted in our minds and when one gets control of resources, he starts implying the same system on society. This stratification of classes is a web, and exploitation is the main ingredient of this web. Everyone looks for the opportunity to exploit other for his services. The main ingredient or main insect of this disease is money that drive people crazy and results in conflicts of classes and struggle to achieve a better status. The more money one has, the more honourable he is. Thus, Mastoor depicted the same game of struggle of classes in the “*The Hand Pump (2008)*” as shown by Marx & Engels (1969) in their “*The Communist Manifesto (1848)*”.

Conclusion

Class struggle is not a new thing rather it began the day when first human was born on the earth. Man has remained victim of this chain of classes struggle and achieving higher status throughout the history. Marxists believe in repudiating this difference by ending all the system of class discriminations. The poor and the dejected are at the mercy of powerful lots and fall prey to false consciousness of the nature of situation in which they reside and deteriorate. They are active victims of both personal and collective violence at the hands of bourgeois.

The Marxist view of seeing the world emerged after the revolution of 1917 that gain momentum in Russia. Various authors and poets propagated this view in their writings and advocated the demolition of class stratifications and equal access to means of production for all. *The Hand Pump (2008)* reflect a similar society where there are people who are living a lavish and luxuries lives without any worry for survival and poor on the other hand, such as Chunni Begum who is exploited as a commodity throughout her life and became victim of false consciousness. She started exploiting others in the same way she was exploited. Thus, the story reflects

how this mindset is imprinted in the minds of people and they do not bother to get rid of it, rather they feel pleasure in remaining part of the same web. Chinni Begum showed the social classes and how one has to struggle in order to achieve one's goal of life, how society gave birth to this social system, and how she was blinded by her own false consciousness for desire to be independent. People tend to make false notions regarding their existence, and they live with it throughout their lives, unknowingly. Likewise, the character in the above-mentioned story were victims of this social stratification and imbalance.

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