

Marxist alienation in Daniyal Mueenuddin's short stories

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Abstract

The aim of this research is to discuss Marxist alienation in selected stories from Daniyal Mueenuddin's *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders*. These stories revolve around a rich Pakistani landowner K.K Harouni, his family, and employees. These stories are set in the socio-economic transitions in late 20th century. In them we find the exploitation between social classes. The result of this exploitation is alienation. The Marxist Critical Theory is applied to highlight the factors that create alienation between classes and show how this alienation leads to the destruction of the individual.

Introduction

Daniyal Mueenuddin was born in 1963. His debut collection of short stories set in contemporary Pakistan, *In other rooms, Other wonders*, was released in 2009 to near universal acclaim for bringing alive the world of rural Pakistan to English-language readers worldwide. The reader finds something very unique in this work of fiction. The stories announce themselves instantly as classic and in this labyrinth of power games and exploitation, Mueenuddin instills luminous glimmers of longing, loss, most movingly unfettered love. Mueenuddin's stories show a clarifying beauty and sophisticated language.

In *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders*, Daniyal Mueenuddin aims at telling about the exploitation which the shrewd and wicked landowners do to sustain their power and dominance over underprivileged people. Set in the Pakistani district of Punjab, the short stories in this excellent book follow the lives of the capitalist Harouni's family and its employees, managers,

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drivers, gardeners, cooks, servants. This research paper is based upon the events which lead to Marxist alienation in the book.

Research Methodology

The topic of the research is the exploration of the factors of socio-economic alienation in Daniyal Mueenuddin's short stories "Saleema", "Provide, Provide", "In Other Rooms, Other Wonders", and "A Spoiled Man" by using Marxist criticism as a tool. The paper will comprise Marxist analysis of the text. In taking into the consideration the Marxist analysis, the paper will meticulously juxtapose the text with Marxist Critical theory and figure out the important points of the Marxist criticism related to this research. The research is in descriptive form and an interpretative type of research which will involve the textual analysis of the proposed text. The research done is purely based on analytical approach. It's a qualitative work.

Literature Review

Daniyal Mueenuddin's stories *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders* highlight the art of the short story narrative form. One moment, one life evokes a whole world. ' Michael Dirida in an article comments on *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders*: "We learn about a character's past, and then zero in on the central crisis of his or her life and, even while we expect more development, suddenly find everything wound up in a paragraph or two: "The next day two men loaded the trunks onto a horse-drawn cart and carried them away to the Old City."(137)

Swagata Pal reviews, Daniyal Mueenuddin's short stories highlight the class tension and hierarchy of exploitation in this vast society. She says: Ruled by the values of a traditional society in the throes of change, tension between the classes and power struggle between the genders take central place in these string of short stories. Simple and direct in its style the stories bring out universal emotions of love, betrayal, decadence as they concentrically revolve around the Harouni empire in its decadence. The social context of the late 20th century Pakistan with its westernized glitzy elite often given to crass immorality and the hierarchy of exploitation within their retinues of domestic help different rooms spill out in different wonders for the reader; a world where a thriving middle class is practically non-existent.(n.page) W. W. Norton in an essay ' Power and Desire: Change and the limits of change' says: . . .the estate gives a haunting picture of a larger landscape and culture. . . Daniyal Mueenuddin's stories offer an unsettling, sometimes humorous but mostly tragic look into a landscape divided by class, a landscape in the midst of change but where the constraints of station, family structures and gender often leave individuals open to the

whims of more personal smaller scaled changes. DaniyalMueenuddin has a gift for drawing the reader into the lives of his characters, their dreams and hopes, their relationships and their difficulties and humanity. (n.page) The word “haunting” has been used by the two critics. Both are showing different concerns regarding the understanding of Mueenuddin’s stories. Swagata Pal uses this as “haunting in its content” whereas W.W. Norton uses it as “a haunting picture of a larger landscape and culture”. Jeffery A. Trachtenberg establishes in an article published in New York Times in which he evaluates the short stories by DaniyalMueenuddin: “What distinguishes this collection is that it focuses on class struggles within Pakistan. . .Mr. Mueenuddin unveils a nuanced world where social status and expectations are understood without being stated, and where poverty and the desire to advance frame each critical choice. "He captures the experience of the class system," says Jill Bialosky, who acquired the book for Norton”. (n.page) Swagata Pal further states: “A deep understanding of people across the social pile, also the extreme honesty in depicting the loss, infidelity, the livelihood smuggle of real characters, this collection of short stories is one that brings you closer to the inevitable quandary of the human condition”. (n.page) In Other Rooms, Other Wonders, the poor are trying to better themselves by whatever means are at their disposal, fair or foul. And the rich are trying to hang onto what’s theirs and what they believe to be theirs. New York Times published an article based on one of the DaniyalMueenuddin’s interview in which he stated:

“Actually, the book is about the end of the feudal era. It is becoming less and less significant. (For instance those) who have gone into business have done better. In Punjab, the landholdings are smaller now and, more and more, owned by the locals”.

He describes a hidden world of servants and their feudal masters, the powerlessness of poverty and the corruption that glues it all together in a very impressive manner.

Through these stories we find social exploitation and its consequences in the shape of alienation of an individual.

Data Analysis

Daniyal Mueenuddin’s short stories In Other Rooms, Other Wonders give us a detailed description of the exploitation which creates alienation in a society.

In this book, he explains the socio-economic transitions in late 20th century. Society and individual are seen as forces thrusting each other to suppress. This opens the ways of exploitation

in a society resulting in social alienation. In this regard, Marxism gives us reasons behind the socio-economic exploitation.

Marx believed that historical change was primarily the result of class struggle and that the State, for as long as it has existed, has used its power to oppress and exploit the laboring masses for the benefit of a wealthy elite. He thus developed an oppositional relationship between the proletariat (the working class) and the capitalist bourgeoisie (those who own the means of production). (244)

In *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders*, the capitalist K.K. Harouni makes his oppositional relation with the proletariat in order to gain the socio-economic benefits. In the story "Provide, Provide", Harouni's elderly and opportunistic estate manager Jaglam, who has long been exploiting his master's property, sells Harouni's vast lands at half price, keeping the best parcels for himself as "though he had become crooked on a larger scale, Jaglani did not believe himself to have broken his feudal allegiance to K.K. Harouni, but instead felt himself appropriately taking advantage of the master's incapacity and lack of oversight. . . .(56) Shrewdly tracking his thoughts, Mueenuddin tells us that in the end Jaglani has to confront with his inner alienation. This paragraph gives a clear depiction of Jaglani's 'whole life as :

Jaglani has lived an opportunistic life, seizing power wherever he saw it available and unguarded, and therefore he had not developed sentimental attachments to the tokens of his power, land, possessions, or even me. Walking into the silent dark house, he felt, for the first time, that he would regret losing a place. . .he had aged greatly in the past weeks as the disease bit into him. He had never loved his wife, his children were fools, and he had no friends.(80)

As the Marxist criticism comments on this kind of alienation as: Marxism sees progress as coming about through the struggle for power between different social classes. . .the result of this exploitation is alienation, which is the state which comes about when the worker is 'deskilled' and made to perform fragmented, repetitive tasks in a sequence of whose nature and purpose he or she has no overall grasp.(157) The overarching character of *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders* is K. K. Harouni, an aging Pakistani landowner who has shepherded his lucrative family assets reasonably well as the country moves into the industrialist age. Harouni is not much competent as the family is still well off, the serfs are treated well, the landlord is still respected. As Marxist theory believed: "the capitalist-run system would eventually and inevitably break down, due to the chasm of

inequalities it engenders between the privileged few and the deprived, overworked many.” (244) This situation is well described when the story “Provide, Provide”, begins we observe that K. K. Harouni is at a dinner. At the dinner there is a discussion of the

Industrialists and through this we come to know about a capitalist's approach “like other members of the feudal landowning class, Harouni greeted the emergence of these people with condescension overlaying his envy. He had a capital, as he observed expansively. . . he began selling tracts of urban land and pouring more and more cash into factories”. (51) Through this illustration of a capitalist approach Mueenuddin shows that how the proletariat is exploited and this socio-economic exploitation frustrates the proletariat and at the end it leads to an individual's alienation. In the story, “In Other Rooms, Other Wonders”, in which we meet K.K. Harouni in his last days. In this story, we come to know about his wealth that brings him on an alienated stage. His wife has long been dispatched to another location, his children are distant at best, he is alone. Into his world comes Husna: “Husna needed a job. She stole up the long drive to the Lahore house of the retired civil servant and landlord K. K. Harouni, bearing in her little lacquered fingers a letter of introduction from, of all people, his estranged first wife”. (107) In these lines, Mueenuddin explains the struggle for power between different classes as Husna is on a mission; K.K. may be 70 but he is the key to her need as these

Lines show: she had always believed she would escape the gloominess of her parents' house in an unfashionable part of the city. She would escape the bare concrete steps, layered with dust, leading up into rooms without windows, the walls painted bright glossy colors, as if to make up for the gloom, the television covered with an embroidered cloth. She had spoiled herself with daydreams, until her parents were afraid of her moods. (113-114)

So in both stories, lack of money is a persistent issue for servants locked into a lifestyle they hate, living great distances from their families (who are not always their loved ones) just to make it from day to day, perhaps holding on to hopes that they can acquire the wealth that will make their struggles end.

Daniyal Mueenuddin in his stories highlights the materialistic approach which shows that the struggle of reforming any individual, in this specific exploited society is proved to be a vain attempt. As in one of the stories “Saleema” in which we find a character Saleema “was born in the Jhulan clan. . . her father became a heroine addict, and died of it, her mother slept around for money and favors” (19). The story shows that how the proletariat are exploited in the world of

capitalist K. K Harouni. After his death, Saleema along with other servants has to suffer. The following paragraph is very well described according to the uncertainty of the servants as: “Crushed, they all left. They had expected this, but somehow hoped the house would be kept. . .the servants would never find another berth like this one, the gravity of the house, the gentleness of the master, the vast damp rooms, the slow lugubrious pace, the order within disorder”.(50). In this regard Marxism defines this materialistic philosophy as:

“Marxism is a materialist philosophy: that is, it tries to explain things without assuming the existence of a world or of forces beyond the natural world around us, and the society we live in”. (156) When Rafiq leaves Saleema after his master’s death, Saleema turns to drugs and street begging before an early death and an orphaned son: “ Within two years she was finished. . .she cradled the little boy in her arms, holding him up to the windows of cars. Rafiq sent money, a substantial amount, so long as she had an address. And then, soon enough, she died, and the boy begged in the streets, one of the sparrows of Lahore” (51).It all happens because of the change in existing system, the proletariat will experience dispossession, unemployment and uncertainty leads to alienation. In *Other Rooms, Other Wonders*, centering as it does on class conflicts and the futility of such divides, bringing pleasure to no one. From servants struggling to feed their families to rich men bored with their luxurious life, the stories cast a dismal yet true light on the varying hardships we all experience. These stories elaborate the vicious circle of socio-economic struggle that leads to exploitation of an individual. Even the capitalist K.K.Harouni experiences this alienation but in a different way because this alienation is brought by the money as Harouni’s life depicts in the end: ‘K.K. sat impressive; on the chair, raised above the crowd, then lowered at the doors, like an awkward king, three king onstage’.(132) According to Marx, alienation is a systemic result of Capitalism. Marx's theory of alienation is founded upon his observation that, within the Capitalist Mode of Production, invariably lose determination of their lives and destinies by being deprived of the right to conceive of themselves as the director of their actions, to determine the character of their actions, to define their relationship to other actors, to use or own the value of is produced by their actions. Workers become autonomous, self-realized human beings, but are directed and diverted into goals and activities dictated by the bourgeoisie, who own the means of production in to extract from workers the maximal amount of surplus value possible within the current state of competition between industrialists. (n.pag)

As we see the same situation in one of the stories named as “A Spoiled Man”, in which a woman named as Sonya, who is a mistress of Sohail Harouni, she possesses a mind of a liberal country, United States. When there is a situation in front of her when she is asked to help an old man Rezak, “he can’t do hard labor, but he is a reliable person”(229). This idea made her happy when she thought of spoiling that man in his old age. Therefore, we find another fine example of exploitation and power game in a capitalistic society. To Marx, the character of an individual’s consciousness (his will and imagination) is conditioned by his relationship to that which facilitates survival; since any individual’s survival and betterment is fundamentally dependent upon cooperation with others, a given person’s personal consciousness is determined inter-subjectively or collectively rather than merely subjectively or individually.

That is to say, feudalism is a recurrent theme throughout this book. Feudalism is an economic system where money and power are in the hands of traditional families. Feudalism is mainly related to land ownership. A particular family reigns over a particular series of land and gains income and control as a result. In many ways the owner governs the lives of those people who work under his supervision. Feudalism is primarily associated with the European Middle Ages. In the minds of many observers and experts, it is still the dominant social, political, and economic system in Pakistan, hence the setting of the stories within the context of the Harouni family.

As this condition is highlighted in the end of the story “A Spoiled Man”, where we find the old man dead, his survival is ended with his death but the power game is still on. Sonya takes the charge of his house just for the fulfillment of her lust for the sake of exploiting people. The alienation within the society and one’s self is evident through the textual references and Marxist Criticism. Mueenuddin evokes the complexities of the Pakistani feudal system as it emerges within the roots of our society.

Conclusion

This research describes the socio-economic transition which occurred in twentieth century in *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders*. Marxist criticism which explains class distinction and power struggle is reflected throughout the short stories. The objective of this research project was to highlight the Marxist perspective in Mueenuddin’s stories, where exploitation leads to alienation in different classes. Further research on this book can be employed but this paper only highlights the points which led to the facts of alienation created by exploitation. In this course, gender

concerns are strongly noticed. Gender inequality is further elaborated. From the outstanding title to the final pages of *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders*, Mueenuddin takes us to a far away land. Mueenuddin is a prodigiously talented writer whose stories have given us the complicated power structures that we find between master and servant, parent and child, husbands and wives and even lovers. We can say that this is a collection which is full of pleasures and it has revealed the violence and callousness of everyday life in rural west

Pakistan. We have found a bold portrayal of a truly troubled society especially a feudal society.

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