

## Unveiling Socio-Economic Struggles: A Marxist Critique of Class Suppression in Mueenuddin's Short Stories

Khalid Naveed\*<sup>1</sup>, Rabia Faiz<sup>2</sup>, Dr. Ijaz Asghar<sup>3</sup>

Original Article

1. MPhil Scholar, Department of English, University of Sargodha  
Email: mna14346@gmail.com
2. Assistant Professor, Department of English, University of Sargodha  
Email: rabia.faiz@uos.edu.pk
3. Professor / Chairperson, Department of English, University of Sargodha  
Email: ijzasghar@uos.edu.pk

### Abstract

*This paper delves into the theme of class suppression in Daniyal Mueenuddin's short stories, namely "Provide, Provide," "About a Burning Girl" and "In Other Rooms, Other Wonders". Employing a materialist interpretation of historical development and adopting a dialectical perspective influenced by Marxist philosophy, the study scrutinizes the dynamics of class relations and societal conflicts depicted in these narratives. The stories illustrate a stark reality where landlords and industrialists oppress the lower classes for their own gain and pleasure. Drawing on the foundational ideas of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, specifically the notion that "whole hitherto history is the history of working class" (Newton, 199, p.82), the analysis centers around characters such as K.K. Harouni and other influential figures in his circle who exploit the working class in various dimensions—socially, economically, physically, and emotionally. The female characters from the lower middle class, exemplified by figures like Husna and Zainab, become objects of pleasure and sexual exploitation for these aristocrats, enduring such exploitation for minimal financial compensation and job security for their male counterparts. The study reveals that urgent attention is required to elevate the consciousness of the proletariat, empowering them to recognize their position and assert their rights.*

**Keywords:** Social Class, Suppression, Marxist Philosophy, Proletariat, Bourgeoisie

### Introduction

This research undertakes a thorough examination of class consciousness, conflict, and the working class's awareness, aiming to unravel the intricate web of exploitation woven by feudal landowners. Employing a Marxist lens to scrutinize Mueenuddin's short stories, the analysis encompasses the comprehensive spectrum of struggles faced by the working class. Grounded in the philosophical foundations of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, the study posits that history is a narrative of class struggles, and economic structures intricately shape class distinctions.

The crux of this exploration lies in depicting the role of class in society. By leveraging Karl Marx's concepts, the paper illuminates the nuances of class consciousness, conflict, and struggle. It accentuates a key contention: the upper class often extends support to the working class not out of genuine humanity but with the calculated intent of wielding power and influence over them.

### Research Questions:

- How has the class stratification been presented in those selected short stories?
- What are the factors involved in creating gaps in a society?
- Why is working class (especially the women) forced to be exploited by the upper ones?

### Literature Review

Marxism, a socio-political and economic ideology developed by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, finds application in literary analysis to elucidate the underlying social, economic, and political dynamics portrayed in literary works. Fundamentally, Marxism views society through the lens of class divisions based on control over the means of production. In the context of literary critique, this entails investigating how power relations, societal disparities, and economic frameworks are mirrored and evaluated within literary compositions. Marxist literary criticism explores themes such as class conflicts, labor issues, exploitation, and the impact of ideology. Its aim is to reveal how a text can either uphold or question the prevailing ideologies and power hierarchies of the society it emerges from, shedding insight on the motivations, conflicts, and societal environments depicted in the literary narrative (Burns, 1939; Sayers, 2021).

In a study (Arshad et al, 2021), the analysis of "In Other Rooms, Other Wonders" reveals the societal expectations placed upon women, wherein they are tasked with domestic responsibilities and fulfilling the physical desires of men. The study also underscores the extent of women's dependency on men. Power, authority, and agency are portrayed as inherently male attributes, while submission and subservience are associated with female roles. The male characters are depicted as embodiments of supremacy, authority, and power, while their female counterparts are portrayed as reliant on them. Men are characterized as individuals, while women are primarily viewed through the lens of their physicality.

Cline (2016) provides insights into "In Other Rooms, Other Wonders," emphasizing its exploration of a culture marked by both richness and callousness. The interconnected stories unfold the lives of K. K. Harouni, a wealthy Pakistani landowner, his family, friends, and the diverse set of servants. These narratives create a cultural tapestry that spans over decades, regions, and social classes, documenting Pakistan's shift from a feudal land-based system to the industrialization of the 70s and 80s. The focal point remains the people — Harouni in Lahore, his daughters in distant cities, relatives navigating upper-class expectations, and rural servants finding employment with the Harouni family.

Ray's (2010) review delves into the complexity of "In Other Rooms, Other Wonders," drawing on Dalia Sofer's and Michael Dirda's insights. Sofer (2009) notes the sharp weapon of rage in a patriarchal society, where manipulation unifies the stories. The review concludes that, for a country named the land of purity, Pakistan is startlingly blemished. Dirda describes the connected stories as offering a kind of miniaturized Pakistani human comedy, shedding light on the lives of both the rich and desperately poor.

Nazir's (2013) article "Impact of Class on Life; A Marxist Study of Thomas Hardy's Novel Tess of the D'Urbervilles" aligns with Karl Marx's views on class conflicts and struggle. Nazir (2013) elaborates on class consciousness, class struggle, and the factors contributing to the exploitation and miseries of the working class, providing a Marxist lens to interpret Hardy's novel.

Khan (2012) scrutinizes societal divisions and fissures. Khan highlights the class division between bourgeoisie and proletariat, focusing on the novel's portrayal of the breach between upper and lower societal strata and the exploitation of the working class.

Shagufta's (2013) analysis of Aravind Adiga's "The White Tiger," offers a remarkable effort in Marxist criticism. Shagufta interprets the novel's society at two levels—the India of Light (bourgeoisie class) and the India of Darkness (proletariat class)—exploring themes of class difference, subjugation, and social layers.

Jajja (2012) examines the novel "The Murder of Aziz Khan" through Marxist elements. Jajja portrays it as a reflection of the superior financial and social status of capitalists, revealing the struggles of farmers against capitalism and critically analyzing the impact of capitalism on the working class, aligning his perspective with Marxism.

### **Theoretical Framework and Methodology**

To conduct the study, textual evidences are collected to explore and analyze the role of economy in class suppression and the exploitation of working class on the part of bourgeoisie in these three short stories of Mueenuddin: "Provide, Provide", "About a Burning Girl", "In Other Rooms, Other Wonders".

The concepts of class, class consciousness and dialectical view of Historical Development have been taken from the philosophical views of German socialists Carl Marx and Fredrick Engels. The method of research is qualitative and descriptive in nature.

### **Data Analysis**

In this paper, the researcher has analyzed the notion of class stratification and subjugation with reference to the three selected short stories of Daniyal Mueenuddin. The materialistic approach and the relationship of master and servant, are hovering over many societies like Southern Punjab in Pakistan. There is a huge cleft between the capitalist class and the laborers on the basis of their sources of earning. The gap between them is not only vast but is continually expanding. Their interests starkly contrast with each other. As stated by Marx, capitalism operates on a fundamental conflict between two primary classes: the bourgeoisie and the workers (proletariat). The bourgeoisie, as the minority ruling class, are characterized by their control over the means of production and subsistence, encompassing land, raw materials, technology, and more. In contrast, the proletariat, constituting the majority, is specifically defined by their lack of access to these means of production (Daly, 2016)

According to Seldon (1985), Marxists contend that one's understanding of the world, beliefs, and values are intricately tied to their position within the larger social and economic structure rather than being solely products of individual thought or awareness. Similarly, in the short stories of Daniyal Mueenuddin, societal status that is based on financial empowerment is actually the main parameter to set place of person in any area. This social status based on financial empowerment develops a crystal-clear breach between upper and lower classes in his short stories. In the short story *Provide, Provide*, Chaudrey Nabi Bakhsh Jaglani has been centered. In the start of the story, he is Harouni's manager at his lands in Dunyapur. Jaglani, who later becomes a rich landowner and an influential political leader. He has a feudalistic kind of personality. He exploits the villagers at Dunyapur, who work on his land, with power and money because "he ruled his area in the old way, with force (80)." Jaglani's chaffer Mustafa and his calamity-stricken sister Zainab are dependent on him completely. Mustafa tells Jaglani about his sister Zainab's miserable condition:

My sister, just fled back from Rawalpindi, leaving her husband there. He works in *Pindi* as a peon in a bank. She couldn't stand the city. Her husband doesn't send any money, because he wants to starve her out and force her back to his home (65).

This helplessness of Zainab is exploited by the rich landlord Jaglani. He marries her but does not give status of wife to her, he marries to her only to develop a physical relation. He remains grief stricken throughout his life after marrying Zainab by considering his marriage to a servant a slur on his rich prestigious family as he says:

Yet Duniyapur had been spoiled for him by the presence of Zainab (a girl from poor class), he minded very much that he had given his son a stepmother of that class, a servant woman. He minded that he had insulted his first wife in that way, by marrying again, by marrying a servant (86).

Zainab remains deprived of respect, place and other rights of wife and he never thought about her for once. This stigma of being poor class woman deprived her to enter into the house of Jaglani on his funeral after his death.

K. K. Harouni in the story "In Other Rooms, Other Wonders" is a powerful landlord, with great social and political influence in his area, a retired civil servant and landlord K. K. Harouni. To the side stood a photo of Harouni in a receiving line shaking the hand of a youthful Jawaharlal Nehru (114)." He is revered because of his wealth and property. His opinions are considered valuable and final for those who are financially dependent on him.

In the same story, "In Other Rooms, Other Wonders", Rafik is Harouni's valet for more than fifty years but in fifty years he is not able to move from poor class to middle class. All his life spent in managing his basic necessities. Husna, the protagonist of the story, is the member of lower class. She is only twenty years old. For Harouni, she is like her daughter. In the start of the story, she comes to Harouni to get job because she is struggling for her financial needs as she utters:

And now I've come to you for help. I'm poor and need a job. My father can give me nothing, he's weak and lost his connections (114).

But later on, she sleeps with Harouni to fulfill his desires. She yearns to become his mistress but she remains mere a source of pleasure and a tool to lessen Harouni's loneliness in the last days of his life. It proves to be merely a bargain. She is dejected after the death of Harouni by his stubborn daughters. Apart from them, there are drivers, cooks, maids and gardeners in that story who remain busy in service of their master. All of them represent the suppressed and exploited proletariats.

The class subjugation is prevalent in "About a Burning Girl", where there are two aristocratic families, usurping the rights of their servants; one is Harouni's nephew and second one is sessional judge. They have transformed their servants from emotional beings to emotionless machines. These servants are appreciated only when they silently observe the orders of their masters, their thinking for their selves is strongly prohibited, as sessional judge praises his servants on the basis of their machine-like qualities:

All three have the mute expression of servants in a modest household such as mine (98).

The researcher has explored the idea of class consciousness, the breach between the master and the slave, and humiliation and exploitation of the working class in selected three stories. In "About a Burning Girl", some remarks about a servant unveils the demand of the rich class from their subordinates,

The bearer, named Khadim, is a boy of twenty, from one of the villages in the valleys near Abbotabad. He has no personality whatsoever. He cleans, takes care of the children, washes the car, waters the few plants arranged along the driveway, brings lunch in a tiffin carrier to my office, lays out my clothes, and does all this with a lugubrious expression consistent with the tone of the house. He has no opinions and no dissipations, at least that

I know of, although as a judge I am often amazed by the behaviors of seemingly my people. In short, he is the ideal servant. (98)

Through these lines it can be deduced that human beings as servants are not accepted as ideal servant but ever ready ghosts to oblige their masters are acceptable. The wish and order of masters prevail over all kind of thinking and wishes of servants. In the houses of aristocratic figures, the servants have no opinions at all. They are regarded as the ideal servants when they do not raise their voice.

The capitalist ideology foregrounds in the exploitation of the proletariat in the story *About a Burning Girl*, the wife of the session judge remarks in a strange way about their servant who is in lockup in a murder case. She, instead of, showing humanity says: "Nonsense, good servants are impossible to find (104)." It means that there is no value of a servant as he is a human being rather, he is a good servant who is fated to serve the cruel powerful class. The capitalist has no regard for human beings but for material entity, only the possessions are regarded valuable. The insensitivity of the feudal landowners for the working class can be identified from these lines:

By his luggage and his manner I knew him to be a serving man of the old type, of the type that believes implicitly in his master's right to be served. They are impossible to get now, unless you own land and bring a man from your own village, and even then you have to choose a simpleton, a real feudal peasant (*About a Burning Girl* 106).

It means that the bourgeoisies have the privilege to be served by the lower class. They demand this service as an obligation of the proletariats.

In another short story "Provide, Provide", where the feudal landowner, Jaglani has all the commodities of life in his house because "Only Jaglani's house had electricity (65)." On the other hand, the miserable conditions of workers' huts has been sketched as:

Lowering his head to walk under the lintel of the small door, stepping carefully in the slippery mud, he approached the family, an old woman and her husband Loharu, who has worked on the farm as a laborer since he became old enough to be useful. They were standing room by the light of a lantern (71).

Jaglani is enjoying lavish life style on expense of hard work, health and time of lower class. In exchange of his luxuriant life he is giving only that much money to his servants by which they can eat only that much food so they may remain alive to serve him.

The gap between the rich and the poor is also evident through the appearances of the characters in the short stories of Daniyal Mueenuddin. In other words, appearance is a parameter to judge someone in high class societies. The ladies from upper class use a large amount of money to be looked fashioned and updated. On contrary, the females from poor families even do not have money to run their houses. As in *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders*, the writer gives the physical description of Sarwat, the daughter of a landlord, K.K.Harouni:

Sarwat settled back into her chair. She wore an understated tan sari, a gold watch, several unusual rings, a star sapphire and a Burmese pigeon-blood ruby. Her salt-and-pepper, worn up in a high chignon, lengthened her beautiful face; and her slender manicured body suggested lotions and expensive soaps, a hairdresser and a masseuse, idleness and ease. (129)

On the contrary, for Husna, there is not any kind of description related to her dress. The ladies from upper class like Riffat comments disgracefully over Husna's appearance:

Riffat looked meaningfully at Husna once or twice. When she went out in society with Begam Harouni, Husna was not a guest, not even really a presence, but a recourse for the old lady, to fetch and carry, to stay beside her so that the begum would not be left sitting alone (116).

In the last section of the story when Harouni dies, there is a clue about her cheap and miserable condition:

Husna found a suit of clothing that she brought with her when she came into the household, a cheap shalwar and kurta, with a simple white head scarf (139).

Capitalists use force to gain their interests. The suppression and capitalism both move in a parallel way. Oppression is the core of feudalist social system like Southern Punjab in Pakistan. This exploitation can be of many folds; exploitation through labor, low income and the sexual exploitation. All of the bourgeoisie characters in the stories of Daniyal Mueenuddin exploit the proletariat.

The men would be paid a portion of their wages throughout the year in wheat, which they preferred, saying that money might be spent, but as long as they had the monthly allowance of wheat their families would not starve (67-68).

It elaborates the notion of low income for the hard labor of the proletariat. They remain from hand to mouth throughout the year; they have to remain dependent on landlords. They, even, have to keep their fundamental needs in limit. They do not have the choice of enjoying the commodities of life like the persons, belonging to the upper strata. As a result, landlord like Jaglani made their servants do what he wants. The dependency on upper class and the race to fulfill the desires, even, make them corrupt and senseless. As Mustfa, the car driver of Jaglani, also brother of Zainab, does not interrupt his sister's physical exploitation by Jaglani because his own mercenary interests are attached with him.

The women from working class especially the maids are fated to sell their bodies to their masters who are mostly the landlords and industrialists. As in the short story "Provide, Provide" where a landowner Jaglani has been portrayed as a true exploiter. Once or twice he had slept with the wives of peasants in the village, when the women threw themselves at him. He would give the husband job, something that might as well go to one man as to another (68). Similarly, in *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders* K.K. Harouni does so "As a boy Harouni slept with maidservants, lost his virginity to one of them at fourteen (122)."

In the words of Sinha, "...means of Production are directly linked with class determining process. Hence the realms of ideology, politics, law, religion and art are not independent but an outflow of people's material behavior (193). "By the same channel, Jaglani in "Provide, Provide" is a rich landowner as well as an influential politician. He dominates people by using his political power as Zainab remarks in response to a question by Jaglani regarding the secrecy of their marriage as "the Villagers! They knew the first night. They leave me alone because they are afraid of you. It's nice, it's a proof of just how much they do fear you (70)."

What Marx demonstrated was that far from comprising an open and neutral environment the capitalist economy is first and foremost a power structure. The basis of this power structure is class oppression. Jaglani acts like an exploiter who crushes down the people of Duniyapur. This crushed class works at his lands and in response they get humiliation and exploitation. His misuse of power can be envisioned at an occasion where he becomes the member of Provincial Assembly. He utilizes all the means for his personal gains.

Jaglani could order men arrested or released, could appoint them to government posts, could have government officers removed. He decided whose villages the new roads pass through, decided which areas got electricity, manipulated the flow of water through the canals. He could settle cases, even cases of murder, by imposing reconciliation upon the two parties and ordering the police not to interfere. (80)

### Conclusion

This research paper provides an ultrasonic analysis of Daniyal Mueenuddin's short stories "Provide, Provide", "In Other Rooms, Other Wonders" and "About a Burning Girl". The Capitalists exploit the have-nots in many ways. They are unconsciously exploited; they have accepted their manipulation as a set pattern and tradition and their poverty makes them susceptible to the capitalism. And finally if workers resist them, force is followed to subjugate them. As the characters like Husna, Zainab, Mustafa, Loharu, Aslamm Rafik, Khadim et al. are being exploited, humiliated and suppressed by the bourgeoisies such as Harouni, Jaglani, Riffat, Sarwat and many more.

The study carries significant implications for pedagogy. Primarily, it emphasizes the integration of critical literary analysis into educational curricula, aiming to expose students to a variety of perspectives and encourage their critical engagement with societal issues like class oppression. It advocates for the inclusion of Marxist theories and dialectical viewpoints in literature education, fostering a deeper comprehension of power dynamics and social conflicts depicted in literary works. Moreover, the research urges educators to facilitate discussions regarding gender roles, power imbalances, and societal exploitation, particularly focusing on the oppression experienced by women from lower middle-class backgrounds. The objective is to promote awareness and empathy among students, motivating them to challenge inequalities and advocate for social justice. Ultimately, the study advocates for an empowering educational approach, enabling individuals, especially those from marginalized backgrounds, to understand their societal position and actively work towards asserting their rights and improving their circumstances.

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