



Social And Class Oppression Of Women In Pakistan: A Marxist Feminist Interpretation Of Daniyal Mueenuddin's Selected Short Stories

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ABSTRACT

This research paper attempts to analyze the short story collection *In other rooms, other wonders* by Daniyal Mueenuddin from a Marxist-feminist perspective. The study adopts a qualitative research design using Fredrick Engels' (2021) viewpoint as a theoretical lens. Marxist Feminism offers a potent framework for analyzing the stories; it emphasizes how capitalism exploits both the labor of women and the patriarchal norms that shape their roles in society. It focuses on how women suffer exploitation and oppression in a new emerging capitalist society of Pakistan. The female protagonists of the short stories suffer victimization at the hands of the capitalist mindset; their financial support for their family goes ignored and unappreciated in a patriarchal setup that appreciates only male chauvinism. In this context, Marxist feminism seems apt and helpful in understanding women's oppression in capitalist society. The lower or working-class women have endured suffering, not solely due to the oppression of feudal lords but also as a result of the hardships imposed by women from the upper class. This study is an in-depth analysis of all key characters in the light of theory of Marxist Feminism chiefly based on Engels' views about gender discrimination in capitalist society. The study concludes that women in the capitalist societies suffer physically, mentally and financially. Furthermore, it highlights the problems faced by the female characters and implies that despite their conscious struggle to attain social and economic stability, the tragic end can be attributed to a complex interplay of structural inequalities, economic exploitation, and patriarchal norms that reflect societal realities.

Keywords: Capitalism; Daniyal Mueenuddin; Feudal Class; Marxist Feminism; Pakistani Society; Patriarchy

Introduction

Literature can often be a reflection of the social, economic and cultural life of a society. In *Other Rooms, Other Wonders* (2009), Daniyal Mueenuddin offers a strong and vivid description of rural Punjab, Pakistan, where the lives of people are affected by feudalism, patriarchy, and class inequality. The short stories, which are interconnected, reveal the disparity in power between the feudal elite and the working class, and show how wealth and social status affect power, dignity and opportunity. In exposing the harsh realities of



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exploitation and social injustice within a highly patriarchal and capitalist society, Mueenuddin shows through the experiences of marginalized characters, especially women.

The most prominent female characters in the collection are Husna, Saleema and Zainab who all represent the struggles with gender oppression and class oppression. These women are allowed to work in the homes of powerful landlords like K.K. Harouni and Jaglani, where they are exploited economically, emotionally and sexually. They are poor and dependent, and are therefore easy to be exploited by powerful men who are exploiting them for their own pleasure without giving them any social recognition and security. In addition, these women are also victims of oppression in their families, which are patriarchal systems under the domination of their fathers, husbands and employers. The collection also reveals that women are not only oppressed by men but oppressed by elite women who uphold class divisions and which calls into question the universal sisterhood.

Marxist feminism theory can be used to investigate the problems that are presented in the stories that are selected. The Marxist feminist theory sees the oppression of women as the result of the interplay of capitalism and patriarchy, which devalues women as unpaid domestic workers and as objects of economic and sexual exploitation. The causes of women's subordination are discussed by Friedrich Engels in *The Origin of Family, Private Property and the State* which he wrote, and it is noted that this subordination arose with the development of private property and class divisions, and made women economically dependent upon men. Likewise, Simone de Beauvoir asserts that patriarchal societies constitute women as the "Other" and Kate Millett points out those patriarchal institutions perpetuate gender inequality through political, social and cultural power. These theorists believe that women's oppression is a social and economic condition, not biological.

These concerns are evident in Mueenuddin's fiction, which depicts a class privileged society where lower class women are exploited by both class and patriarchy. All of the female leads are continually fighting for their lives, livelihoods and social status, but each time their efforts are thwarted by the imbalance in power and resources. They are resilient, but they are locked up in a system of exploitation where they are treated as commodities, their bodies are exploited and they lack independence and dignity. Their sad stories illustrate how one cannot exist without the other: economic dependence and gender oppression.

To study the causes and effects of the exploitation of women in the context of Pakistani feudal society, this study uses Friedrich Engels' Marxist feminist theory on three selected stories; namely, "In Other Rooms, Other Wonders", "Saleema" and "Provide, Provide". It examines the role of class, capitalism and patriarchy in the economic, social and gender oppression of working class women. This research will aim to show how financial insecurity and patriarchal domination primarily rob women of their agency, social recognition, and their dignified living through the experiences of Husna, Saleema, and Zainab. Finally, the study helps to make the study of class and gender inequality in the present literary context in Pakistan more comprehensive.

Literature Review

This section reviews literary works on the relevant topic which is significant as it connects the topic with the previous works done by other literary scholars, theorist like Hegel, Karl Marx, Simone de Beauvoir and historians. The literary figures, critics and scholars have discussed the selected stories from different perspectives. This section



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provides an overview of the literary works which are directly or indirectly related to the research.

Marxist Feminism

Marxists acknowledges that women are oppressed, and attributes this oppression to the capitalist system. So, they insist that the only way to end the oppression of women and liberate women from men control is to overthrow the capitalist system completely. Jaggar (1993) points significant differences between socialist feminism and Marxism. Marxists and socialists often call themselves "radical," but they use the term to refer to a completely different "root" of society: the economic system. They view that the theory of 'Marxist Feminism' is further elaboration and derivation of Marxism. According to this theory, capitalism is the main cause of women's oppression and in order to get the women out of oppression, a total restructuring of such a society is needed. There are four main types of feminism; Liberal Feminism, Radical Feminism, Marxist Feminism and socialist Feminism. Irrespective of the types of schools, all of them have significantly contributed to the growth and advancement of feminist literary criticism. (Guo, 2018).

Delmar (2018) analyzes that there are people for whom the question 'what's feminism?' has little meaning. The content material of terms like 'feminism' and 'feminist' seems obvious, something that can be taken without any consideration. It has turn out to be an impediment to understanding feminism, in its variety and in its differences, and in its specificity as properly. Histories of feminism which treat feminism as social motion tend to concentrate on chronicling the vicissitudes of that movement and subordinate any exploration of the intellectual content of feminism to that primary reason. The exploration of feminist records is significantly constrained if the arrival of the social movement is believed to be feminism's apotheosis and privileged form. Feminism's fascination with ladies is also the situation of the smooth slippage from 'feminist' to 'woman' and returned: the feminist becomes the consultant of woman just as 'feminist history' turns into similar to 'women's history' and so on. Marxist Feminism primarily focuses on division of labor which results in discrimination and power role thus resulting in gender discrimination. Engels states:

The first division of labor is that between man and woman for the propagation of children, and today I can add: the first class opposition that appears in history coincides with the development of the antagonism between man and woman in monogamous marriage, and the first class oppression coincides with that of the female sex by the male". (Engels, 2021, p.27)

Moreover, Abbasi (2015) views that women are exploited due to the gender and economic oppression and it is possible to bring about their emancipation by removing the cause of oppression. One of the causes of women's subjugation according to the Marxist Feminist ideology is lack of opportunities for women to earn and own sources of production. Concluding from what is in relevant literature about Marxist feminism, the advocates of this theory believe that the freedom of women lies in wiping out the social and economic class structure within the society raised by capitalist class. They assume that patriarchal society leads to class distinctions between men and women. With the support of the state in financing women, they would no longer need the meta- produced by the capitalist class and could also take part in the inevitable fight against capitalists. With the fall of the capital, the artificial class structure in the society would also come to an end, granting women the status of free individuals in the end.



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Daniyal Mueenuddin's stories In Other Rooms, Other Wonders

Daniyal Mueenuddin's stories *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders* highlights the art of the short story narrative form. One moment, one life evokes a whole world. Dirda (2009) in an article comments on *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders*: "We learn about a character's past, and then we are on the central crisis of his or her life and, even while we expect more development, suddenly find everything round up in a paragraph or two" (Dirda, 2009, p. 116).

Pervaiz (2014) notes that Mueenuddin's stories show how poor women are the most deprived members of the population. All classes of women are disenfranchised. Mueenuddin explores the double standards for men and women. In religion, education, tradition, customs and everyday reality, men are considered to be "bread-winners" and women are perceived as a "burden" on the family. Pervaiz looks at the three main themes in Mueenuddin's stories: the effects of patriarchy, the oppression women face in family system and the relationship between class and gender.

Arshad (2021) says that the collection of the short stories by Daniyal Mueenuddin is full of such scenes where the upper class exploits the lower class particularly the domestic female workers due to the wealth they possess. For instance, "In Other, Rooms Other Wonders" Husna is treated badly by K.K Harouni. In Pakistan, class distinction is visible almost in all societies. The upper class or elite class (Bourgeois) always ill-treat the lower or marginalized section of the society. "In Other Rooms, Other Wonders" K.K Harouni who belongs to elite class exploits the people of lower class. Husna, a key character in the story is exploited by Harouni, a feudal lord of upper class of Punjab.

Akbar (2009) states that these stories take the readers from the outwardly glorious and sophisticated rooms of Lahore to the mud villages and beyond, showing the interconnected lives of masters and their servants. Mueenuddin exposes the complicated power structures of master-servant, parent-child, husband-wife and loverbeloved relationships in these stories. The victims are not only the economically marginalized women, but even women belong to elite class also struggle to gain control over their lives.

Khan & et.al (2004) in their review of Pakistani fiction state that along with the issues of displacement, struggle for independence and culture, feminism is a major issue that Pakistani writers discuss in the context of post colonialism. They portray that the colonial enterprise doubly affects women. It deliberately kept women outside the main flow of activity and denied them their due rights: They are colonized and declared to be the 'others' and silent majority (subalterns). This subaltern status also dates back to past traditions of the subcontinent and is skillfully portrayed by Daniyal Mueenuddin in his collection of short stories *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders*. The postcolonial men re-colonized the bodies and minds of their women as a reaction and in an effort to preserve their cultural values". They survey Pakistani fiction from Zulfikar Ghose to Mohsin Hamid to see the roles and portrayal of women by these writers. They conclude that the writers portray women in various hues ranging from poor and suffering to educated and independent, from struggling to survivors in the face of marginalization to those winning their fight against powerful patriarchy.

Hai (2009) focuses on Pakistani-American writer Daniyal Mueenuddin's notable first collection of interlinked short stories *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders* as an example of an emergent wave of contemporary transnational fiction that foregrounds the figure of the domestic servant as central rather than marginal and emphasizes diverse servants' vulnerability and agency. Her essay situates Mueenuddin's fiction in the contexts of Anglophone South Asian literary history and Pakistan's postcolonial feudal system and



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argues that he makes a significant intervention by crafting strategies of subaltern representation that explore servant inferiority and highlight the interlocking systems of power that dehumanize, stigmatized subaltern individuals locked in domestic servitude. Hai further examines the intersections of gender, sexuality, and class evoked in Mueenuddin's stories; the psychic complexities of individuals who struggle against habitual objectification, subordination, and disempowerment; and the ways that servants, working in the intimacy of employers' homes, strive to ameliorate their lot within frameworks of patriarchy, corruption, and violence. Mueenuddin's cultural work aims to shift readers' ways of seeing, de-familiarize the familiar, and encourage empathy and ethical action in specific postcolonial contexts.

Moreover, Ahmed (2009) states that feminism is a major issue that Pakistani writers discuss in the context of post colonialism. They portray that the colonial enterprise doubly affects women. It deliberately kept women outside the mainstream of activity and denied them their basic rights: These women are colonized and declared to be the 'others' and silent majority (subalterns)". These subalterns are artistically portrayed by Daniyal Mueenuddin in his collection of short stories, *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders*. According to Saeed and Anjum (2019), Daniyal Mueenuddin in his story "About a Burning Girl" depicts a married Pakistani woman of lower social class struggling not just for her acceptance but also for her life. Socially as well as economically subjugated, she is a scapegoat and the softest of the targets in a male dominated patriarchal society. To highlight the destruction and de-structuring of female identity through language in the text, in relation to Hodge and Kress's analytical model, their aim to analyze the selected text from the Marxist feminist perspective, which sees women as the exploited working class. The study exposes the underlying ideology of the text and its social implication as discourse with respect to women being represented as weak, speechless objects of male manipulation in Pakistani literature.

Karim (2019) explains that Female sexuality has stayed a no-discuss subject in Pakistani scholarly and social portrayals. Be that as it may, a significant shift has happened in contemporary Pakistani English fiction. Focusing on female substantial conduct, the fiction explains different shades of female sexual relations and encounters outside the social and strict standards in a curiously immediate and express design. This investigation examines the way Pakistani fiction, written in English, reacts to the wide range of belief systems forced upon women bodies and sexuality. It examines some key sexual encounters of pubertal sexual arousing, post marital sex, women' desire for proactive sex, and denial of parenthood, pregnancy and birthing. The aggregate portrayal of female sexuality for each situation exemplifies an intrusive encounter outside the disgrace and indecent as well as illicit and unlawful parallels. Nonetheless, the portrayal, notwithstanding its equivocality, does not establish in any capacity ladies' sexual self-sufficiency against the transcendent manly talks. The issues have been broken down inside the system of discussions on the female body, heterosexuality, the male look and product fetishism.

Daniyal's story "In Other Rooms, Other Wonders" unfolds to us the sorrowful and depressed tale of a young girl, Husna. She needed a job. In the hunt for a decent job, she reaches the house of a landlord & ex-bureaucrat K. K Harouni. She needs a job, and unlike other girls in a patriarchal society, she revolts against her family, which is the most critical & prominent institution of patriarchy. Tyson says that revolt is the first step toward a woman's liberation & independent life (Tyson, 1998, p.89).

Similarly, Hannan (2009) views that Mueenuddin portrays an unequal social hierarchy marked by self-interest and corruption, in which characters depend upon the whim of



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other people for their jobs, social approval and the calculated indulgence in love and sex. Even when a character secures patronage, things often go terribly awry. For instance, Rezak reports his wife missing and afterward is abused by the police, who suspect that he has sold her into prostitution". Nicolas says that "in collection of short stories, In Other Rooms, Other Wonders, Daniyal Mueenuddin describes a feudal world reminiscent of that described by 19th century Russian novelists. It is a world inhabited by landlords with vast estates in the Southern Punjab, countless servants, peasants, cattle, criminals, peasant girl mistresses and crooked farm managers and politicians. Like their counterparts in 19th century Russia, these Punjabi feudal lords belong to a class of elite that looks up to the cultural achievements of Europe. Whereas, their Russian counterparts spoke French and spent their winters in Paris, these feudal lords speak English and spend their summers in London.

Martin (2009) discusses the introduction of another class, Industrialists. He says world is changing. Members of this feudal class are no longer the wealthiest or the most influential people in the country. The wealthy aristocratic landlords whom the 23 British once used to rule the Punjab are overtaken both politically and economically by members of a prosperous Punjabi yeomanry as well as industrialists. Those who overtake these landed aristocracy then adopt similar lifestyles like them. They buy property in Lahore, send their children to elite schools and to universities abroad, and they even invest in properties abroad, particularly in Middle East. Socio-economic conflict between various classes is generated due to the unequal distribution of wealth.

Judd (2006) summarizes "The frustration and anger of the less fortunate in a country whose ruling class is thoroughly corrupt and where the economic divide is so vast that the wealthy can insulate themselves from the rules that bind the rest of the society, and can nearly avoid physical contact with the lower classes". In the three-volume work *Das Capital* (1867), Marx argued that history is determined by economic conditions, and he urged an end to private ownership of public utilities, transportation, and the means of production. Despite the variations and additions that occurred in the century that followed, on the whole, Marx's writings still provide the theory of economics, sociology, history, and politics called Marxism'. (Dobie, 2012; 84- 95)

Socio-political historical context is necessary to understand Mueenuddin's short stories. At the time of division of India into two states in 1947, both newly created states, Pakistan and India inherited a feudal landlord tenant-farming system of private land ownership that was created by British colonial rule. With the aim of consolidating colonial power after the Mutiny of 1857, the British introduced a system of indirect rule through zamindars or Jagirdars, many of whom were originally revenue collectors without legitimate or ancestral claims on the cultivators' lands. They were rewarded with land ownership for their loyalty to the British government and reliable collection of land revenue from tenant farmers (Cheeman, 1997; Rahman, 1981).

Marxist Theory of Class Distinction and Its Social Implications

Marxist theory of class distinction is a social and economic theory which explores that there is a constant struggle between the upper class and the lower class but there is also a struggle in between the minority people who shows hatred and disrespect to the people of the same class. He further says that capitalist exploitation thus consists in the forced appropriation by capitalists of the surplus value produced by workers. Workers under capitalism are compelled by their lack of ownership of the means of production to sell their labor power to capitalists for less than the full value of the goods they produce. Capitalists, in turn, need not produce anything themselves but are able to live instead off



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the productive energies of workers. And the surplus value that capitalists are thereby able to appropriate from workers becomes the source of capitalist profit, thereby “strengthening that very power whose slave it is” (Marx 1847, p. 40).

According to Marx (1867) the worker’s day is split into two parts. During the first part, the laborer works for himself, producing commodities the value of which is equal to the value of the wages he receives. During the second part, the laborer works for the capitalist, producing surplus value for the capitalist for which he receives no equivalent wages. During this second part of the day, the laborer’s work is unpaid, in precisely the same way (though not as visibly) as a feudal serf’s corvée is unpaid. Awan and Nasir (2018) state that people lives are the product of their financial conditions. Material conditions and historical circumstances actually shape the society. He can manipulate the major institutions like government, art, education and politics that have the ownership of the means of production. According to Marx one worse effect of capitalism is the commodification which means placing the value of articles not on the basis of utility but on the power through which it impresses others.” (Awan & Nasir, 2018, p. 664)

Likewise, Sadaf (2014) examined *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders* through a lens of masculinity. She examined that it depicts a crisis of identity of Pakistani men in a postcolonial and capitalist society. While the men have economic power and social authority, they are shown to be emotionally alone. They have been shown as growing old and spiritually empty; the women are represented mainly in terms of their bodies and sexuality. Sadaf argues that the theme of death is pervasive and signals the fading away of the old manhood, highlighting the conflict between colonial past, corruption and shifting social dynamics. The study does not suggest the end of masculinity as a wholly negative phenomenon as there is a chance for the resurrection and re-emerging of a positive and productive masculinity in modern-day Pakistan (Sadaf, 2014).

Hannan’s (2009) work explores “unequal social hierarchy marked by self interest and corruption” in the stories but his work does not cover all aspects of the protagonists’ lives. This study will be an in-depth analysis of all key characters in the light of theory of Marxist Feminism chiefly based on Engels’ views about gender discrimination in capitalist society. Though Pervaiz (2014) Akbar (2009) and Ahmed (2009) have studied the stories from different perspectives but it has not been studied from Engels’ (2021) viewpoint. Marxist Feminism is an apt lens through which these stories can be studied as working women and economy have been woven together in it.

Research Gap

The study finds that *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders* have been discussed from various perspectives like Feminism, Marxism, post- colonialism and post modernism but still there is gap to study the stories from Marxist Feminism lens as the protagonists in the selected stories are working women who struggle hard for their survival.

Methodology

The method of this research is qualitative research in the form of text analysis in order to explore the selected short stories in *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders* by Daniyal Mueenuddin. The research uses a close reading of the text to interpret the experiences of the female protagonists, Husna, Saleema and Zainab, and to uncover issues of class exploitation, patriarchy, gender discrimination and economic oppression. The main source is the original short story collection, and the secondary sources are scholarly books, journal articles, and critical studies in Mueenuddin's fiction, Marxism and Marxist feminism. The study is an interpretive analysis of the extent to which the feudal and



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capitalist system exploits the working class women of Pakistani society.

Theoretical Framework

This research is based on Marxist feminism theory of Friedrich Engels, which states that there are interrelated systems of oppression in which women are oppressed, these systems include capitalism, private property, and patriarchy. Engels claims that the subordination of women became apparent when class society began to develop, with its economic subordination bringing women under the control of males. Marxist feminism is a development of Karl Marx's concept of class struggle but takes into consideration the interaction of class and gender in oppressing women, especially the working class. This framework is especially applicable to the stories that have been chosen, since the characters of Husna, Saleema and Zainab suffer economic, social and sexual exploitation at the hands of the powerful feudal landlords. The research also draws on the ideas of Simone de Beauvoir, Clara Zetkin, Alexandra Kollontai, Lise Vogel and Silvia Federici, who all stress that the inequality of genders is socially created and maintained by patriarchal and capitalist institutions. Based on this framework, the research examines the entanglements of class and gender oppression in the rural Pakistani society as depicted by Mueenuddin.

Data Analysis and Discussion

In this section, the researcher has analyzed the text of the stories, keeping in view the theory of Marxist feminism as a framework. For this study, different lines from different parts of the stories are taken and the elements which cause women oppression through class differences are highlighted. The study highlights the problems of working women particularly the lower class domestic servitude women in Pakistani society, depicted in Daniyal Mueenuddin's short story collection, *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders*.

Systemic Oppression and Exploitation of Women and their Social Implications

The society presented by Daniyal Mueenuddin in his short stories collection "*In Other Rooms Other Wonders*" is congested and vicious, rooted in its postcolonial, patriarchal setup. With the rural backdrop of southern Punjab and Lahore and Islamabad as the urban centers, these stories portray the realities of life for each character impartially. Mueenuddin's stories demand an inherent understanding of the social and cultural inhibitions of Pakistani society. The characteristic male centered society where women may not have the right to choose their partners but men can keep two at the same time is not comprehensible for the readers in the western world. 36 In the short story, "*In other rooms, other wonders*" Husna belongs to the working class division of society having no skills or education to climb up the social ladder of the society. Her only hope to get a decent job is her youthful body which is vulnerable to exploitation at the hands of the feudal class such as K.K. Harouni. The division of class is depicted by Daniyal in the start of the story when he gives details about the living room of K.K. Harouni's mansion: Ushered into the living room by the secretary after a quarter of an hour, Husna gazed around her, as petitioners do, more tense than curious...several of women in saris, their hair piled high in the style of the fifties, one in riding breeches, with an oversized dedication in looping script (p. 124).

The sophisticated details about the living room give an idea to the reader about the lavish living style of the upper class as compared to the lower or working class of the society in Punjab. Husna is mesmerized by the luxurious living room and seems perplexed in the start of the story. She makes a firm determination that she will strive to get out of her



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middle class life by working hard in the Harouni's house hold. Harouni, when informed about the purpose of Husna's visit asks her about her lineage though he has excellent memory: "Although he had an excellent memory, and knew the lineage of all the old Lahore families, K.K. allowed Husna to explain in detail her relation to him, which derived from his grandmother on his mother's side" (p. 124).

Husna then narrates the glorious past of her ancestors who were wealthier than K.K. Harouni now but lost all their wealth due to poor management. Husna's parents still dwell in the splendid past though they live in the old-internal city of Lahore. Husna attributes that fall of her family riches as a divine intervention: "In this world some families rise and some fall" (p. 125). Husna's family has lost the wealth and position in the society. Through the narration of Husna, we see the causes of the down fall of her once high lineage family and how they ended to be poor now.

Economic Exploitation of Women: A Marxist Feminist Analysis

According to Marxist feminism, the oppression of women has its roots in capitalism, class, and distribution of economic resources. Marxist feminists believe that women are doubly exploited as they are enslaved as workers and as women in patriarchal capitalist societies. Daniyal Mueenuddin's *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders* brilliantly captures this exploitation in the lives of Husna, Saleema and Zainab who are defined by poverty, economic dependence, and class inequality.

The economic power continues to be the most important instrument of the feudal ruling class to maintain its control over the working class. Economic power is the control over resources, mobility and access to jobs, as written by Pharr (2001). In the same way, Marxist theory holds that there are two classes in society: the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, the former class being the richer, who build up their wealth at the expense of the latter class. This imbalance is highly apparent in Mueenuddin's stories, where the servants give their lives for their masters but are rewarded with little economic security or recognition.

After K.K. Harouni's death, Sarwat says that the compensation for household servants is revealed to be the exploitative nature of this relationship.

The people who have served over ten years will receive fifty thousand rupees, the rest will receive two thousand per year of service (Mueenuddin, 2009, p. 49).

This imbalance stems from the capitalist valuation of labour, which sees how many years someone has worked as a worker in the capacity of a commodity rather than as a human being. Although the servants are needed in the household, they are paid scarcely more than the price of their labour, a point Marx made in his argument that labour under capitalism is merely a commodity. Lifelong service by the servants does not give them economic security: employment and wages are at the total discretion of the feudal elite.

Marxist feminist scholars also claim that economic dependence is a factor that heightens the oppression of women. According to Abbasi (2012) women are still subordinate as they do not have control over productive resources and do not have financial independence. This is how Mueenuddin portrays it, by following the life of Saleema, who has grown up in poverty and a turbulent family life. Her father became a heroin addict, her mother slept around for money and favors, and at fourteen she became a play thing of a little land owner's son (Mueenuddin, 2009, p. 19).

The passage illustrates the various types of exploitation that women face due to economic deprivation. At home, Saleema's father is addicted to drugs and her family is too poor to afford a living for Saleema, so she is forced to work as a domestic servant. This means that she has to rely on others for her financial needs and thus is susceptible to



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both economic and sexual exploitation. Her experience is consistent with the Marxist feminist approach that capitalism and patriarchy work hand-in-hand to marginalise the poorest women.

In the same manner, Barrett (2014) insists that women's liberation will not be attained under the capitalist system as it relies on women's unpaid and underpaid labour. This is echoed in the movie 'Provide, Provide' where Zainab wants to work after leaving an abusive marriage. Mustafa asks Jaglani to hire his sister:

"Mustafa said; let my sister work for you and keep the house" (Mueenuddin, 2009, p. 57). Zainab seems to be helped by Jaglani, but the narrator is right away aware of his hidden agenda: Jaglani was silent about his delight at meeting his driver's request, in this very personal regard, "That's fine," he said (Mueenuddin, 2009, p. 57).

So, the opportunity of employment isn't generosity, it's meeting individual wants. Through his position as an employer Jaglani can turn a professional relationship into a sexualized exploitation of a female, illustrating the unequal power dynamics between men and women in the context of economic dependency.

After the arrival of Zainab to the house of Jaglani, this imbalance is more and more apparent:

While Jaglani was eating, Zainab had slipped away, but "the food could not have been better" and "Zainab listening to the village falling asleep, smoking the hookah, he decided that he would keep her on" (Mueenuddin, 2009, p. 59).

The rationale behind 'keeping her on' will indicate that Zainab's worth is more than just in domestic labour. She is not seen as an employee, but as a thing of male desire that will be transformed into it. Progressive feminists criticize capitalist societies for often simultaneously objectifying women's bodies and their work as commodities, as instruments to profit from.

Later on, Jaglani marries Zainab but it is still unbalanced. Marriage is not a partnership, but an economic contract with Jaglani providing shelter and Zainab domestic and sexual duties. Her work remains useful to the patriarchal household, but not for her to have any real authority or independence. This echoes the Marxist feminist view that women's economic dependence is maintained by capitalism and patriarchy (Clara Fraser, Lise Vogel, Simone de Beauvoir, Jyoti Puri).

Capitalism, Class, Gender and Patriarchy

Throughout the stories chosen, the intersections of capitalism, class hierarchy, patriarchy, and gender inequality are clearly seen to influence women's experiences. In accordance with Engels' (2021) argument that the oppression of women has grown up with the rise of private property and class society, Mueenuddin portrays Pakistani feudal culture, which is evident throughout the novel. The distinction of classes is created at once by the characterisation of K.K. Harouni:

Harouni, being a polo and tennis player who had suffered from a heart attack, "until he went to his grave, had been a player in both sports and enjoyed a lifetime of competition" (Mueenuddin, 2009, p. 111).

Polo and Tennis are mentioned here to indicate the elite privilege; these sports are traditionally associated with wealth and aristocracy. Thus, Harouni embodies the bourgeoisie land owning class, which gives him authority over others in society, based on his economic privilege.

Whereas Husna represents the hopes and fears of the lower class. Being aware of her poverty, she tries to hide her social status:

She was hesitant to say so and felt embarrassed to be seen riding a rickshaw, as only poor



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people used them. (Mueenuddin, 2009, p. 112).

The rickshaw is a symbol of class identity. Capitalist societies teach people that they are inferior to the capitalist class and that is reflected in Husna's embarrassment. It is class consciousness that is nurtured through unequal social relations as argued by Wright (2015) and Husna's behaviour is an example of this psychological dimension of class oppression.

Harouni slowly takes advantage of Husna's aspiration for social mobility. In one battle he tells her, "Why don't you take them off. Don't be shy, there's no one here" (Mueenuddin, 2009, p. 127).

The only reason for Husna to obey is because her work relies on Harouni's approval, and she resists when he doesn't. The seemingly innocent command is a reflection on the imbalance of power between the employer and the servant. Harouni's subsequent remark "Well done! 'Ponies do not do as well as I have,'" said I (Mueenuddin, 2009, p. 127) dehumanizes Husna by likening her to an animal. He does not recognize her dignity, instead objectifying her body for his amusement. The episode illustrates a class privilege which enables sexual dominance of economically subservient women.

Husna also acknowledges that marriage to the higher class is still not possible as it is still determined by a class hierarchy:

Husna was aware that she would never be able to marry or be wooed by a young man from one of the established wealthy families" (Mueenuddin, 2009, p. 128).

Her sensitivity to rigid class boundaries suggests that Marx is correct in asserting that capitalist societies are perpetuating inequalities through social institutions, such as marriage. Thus, Husna sees nothing more effective to improve her social status than to become Harouni's mistress. Her curiosity towards a life of the elite is further demonstrated:

"Seeing a girl her age stepping from a large new car in Liberty Market... Husna's mind would hang on these symbols of wealth... She sensed that all this might come to her through Harouni, if she became his mistress" (Mueenuddin, 2009, p. 130).

Thus, material wealth becomes a means of exploitation and a desire. Harouni plays with Husna's dreams and uses economic power to uphold the patriarchy.

The Tragedy of Saleema as the Outcome of Social Structures and Class Exploitation

The tragedy of Saleema is the result of capitalism and class exploitation. The tragedy of Saleema is a consequence of capitalism and class exploitation. Marxist Feminism states that capitalism uses women as disposable labor and denies them any economic independence. In Saleema, Mueenuddin depicts the main character as a victim of capitalist oppression and oppression by patriarchy. Everything she does is exploited from the inside to the outside, including in her family, and at her job, which is an excellent example of how class and gender go hand in hand. Saleema is one of the first victims in the changing power structure in the household after K.K. Harouni's death. Sarwat tells about the future of the servants:

Those who have served for more than ten years will receive fifty thousand rupees. You will get two thousand for every year of service; this house will be sold but until then you will get your salaries and you'll be able to live in your quarters" (Mueenuddin, 2009, pp. 49–50).

It may be offered as compensation, but the payment is according to the capitalistic logic that only values the worker based on his/her economic usefulness. Having been employed for just one month, Saleema's reward is virtually nothing, for she must rely completely on the household for her sustenance. Her firing is evidence of Marx's point



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that labour under capitalism is precarious, for the employers have a complete control over production and employment. In the beginning of the story Mueenuddin stresses Saleema's role as a minor player in Harouni's family:

After just a month's service, Saleema was worthless, and she didn't have patronage (Mueenuddin, 2009, p. 22).

It is especially noteworthy in a feudal society where jobs are not based on merit but on connections. If there's no influential support, Saleema is dispensable, presenting the vulnerability of poor women in a hierarchical society.

When Sarwat tells Saleema to go because she is lazy, it reinforces the attitude of the upper class towards the domestic workers as indolent, as a response. When Saleema is dismissed by Sarwat, who says that she is lazy, it is another example of the upper class attitude towards the domestic workers being lazy.

"What am I going to do with me?" asked her. You came with nothing, you leave with nothing, you have been paid, you have been fed for some time at least,' said Sarwat' (Mueenuddin, 2009, p. 50).

Sarwat's answer is an attack on Saleema's dignity and humanity. Her job becomes a transitory thing and there is no concern for her personal situation. In Marxist feminist understanding, such treatment is a testament to the capitalist societies' commodification of workers, especially women who are more vulnerable economically and can thus be easily replaced.

Hostility Towards others among Working Class

In addition to class oppression by employers Mueenuddin also shows intra-class conflict between members of the working class. According to Marxist theory, unequal social relations create such inner struggle: oppressed people fight against each other instead of uniting against oppression. In this pattern, Shah Sahib tries to get Saleema out of the household via this method:

Through Rafik's efforts it was decided that Saleema would be kept on and 'Kamila Bibi' was sent back to New York; the account manager Shah Sahib was planning to tell Master that the girl was 'corrupt' and a bad 'character' – such terms used in English. Whereas Shah Sahib helps to oppress another servant. His actions illustrate how capitalist systems foster intra-worker competition and mistrust rather than unity. Hence, Saleema is not only exploited by the feudal family but is also exploited by the other people of her social class.

Patriarchal Exploitation and Fall of Saleema

However, the oppression of the economy is not the full reason for Saleema's suffering. Her life is continually influenced by patriarchal power. She suffers from neglect in her home, exploitation at the hands of male employers and servants, and abandonment by Rafik. The narrator explains the abuse she suffers within Harouni's family:

When Hassan squeezed Saleema, she stiffened, Rafik said, 'Uncle, what's the point of bothering the poor girl?' Hassan said, 'You should ask her what she hasn't done to me!' (Mueenuddin, 2009, p. 32).

The joke is a clever concealing of sexual harassment in the workplace. The joke is a clever way of normalizing sexual harassment in the workplace. Saleema is still not able to vent her frustration as she has to continue working for economic survival. Her quietness, then, is not a sign of acceptance, but of structural powerlessness.

Rafik seems to be a kind-hearted man but ends up taking advantage of Saleema's weaknesses. Their relationship leads to the birth of an outlaw before the leaving of Rafik



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from both of them. The narrator just observes: So Rafik had abandoned her.

This is an overview of the total neglect of Saleema. She now lacks a job, a family and emotional support, and slowly spirals into drug addiction, till she finally dies, and leaves her son to live on the streets of Lahore begging. Her untimely death shows that the exploitation of women does not just happen at the level of sexual relations, but also when they are not given long-term responsibility.

Marxist feminists see Saleema as the embodiment of the class oppression and gender oppression. She is exploited first through poverty, then through labour relations and finally through the abandonment by the Patriarch. Her life is a sample of Engels' observation that no understanding of women's subordination can be gained apart from economic relations, and private property.

Zainab, The Role of Labour, Marriage and Capitalist Patriarchy

"Provide, Provide" introduces another facet of the exploitation of women through Zainab. While Husna and Saleema manage to break out of a marriage, Zainab does so only to find another way of being patronized at work.

She is at first hired as Jaglani's cook but slowly finds herself becoming a part of his family. The narrator remarks:

Zainab grew harder and more rigid than ever before; she did what he said. (Mueenuddin, 2009, p. 66).

The sentence is a reflection of Zainab's emotional composure yet her total subservientness towards Jaglani. Her obedience is not her own, but comes about because of economic need, and helps to support the Marxist feminist claims about women's reliance on male-regulated work.

Jaglani eventually turns the employer/employee relationship into a sexual one:

But one evening, he grabbed her and led her inside; sometimes they would make love before he would send her home; if he was tired, he would send her home without making love at all. "She did this without a word of complaint, and gave him what he wanted" (Mueenuddin, 2009, p. 60).

The relationship demonstrates the unequal power distribution that is found in capitalist and patriarchal societies. No analysis of Zainab's consent is possible without analyzing her economic situation, as Jaglani determines her job, as well as her livelihood. Jaglani later marries Zainab, but the marriage does not solve inequality. Rather, it establishes her dependence. She is still a marginalized person in the house and does not have the same status as or a right to inheritance. Just prior to his passing, Jaglani tells her:

"“I have told the boys to give you something after I'm gone,” he said, “fine,” she replied, “both of them knew that this meant nothing” (Mueenuddin, 2009, p. 83).

The support for the future is empty, Zainab has no legal claim to property. Marriage does not ensure an economic security, and this is what Engels meant: Women's oppression is based on unequal property rights and inheritance.

Industrialization, Capitalism and Women's Labour

In addition, Mueenuddin links women's exploitation to the development of capitalism in Pakistan. Harouni's metamorphosis into an industrialist is a reminder of the downside of economic modernization on women. The narrator observes:

"Like other members of the feudal landowning class, Harouni greeted the emergence of these people with condescension overlaying his envy. He had capital... Why should not he play along a bit, how difficult could it be?" (Mueenuddin, 2009, p. 54).

Industrial Capitalism only generates new modes of exploitation, which maintains



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patriarchal power. Economically, women like Husna, Saleema, and Zainab are still in the same situation despite the transition of the economic system. They keep working for the benefit of men who own wealth, have land and hold political power. Likewise, Jaglani's power has also spread to the political arena, illustrating the interdependence of economic and political power. Women's labour is still not visible yet they bear the dual burden of domestic and capitalist production.

Conclusion

In short, using Marxist feminist theory, this research utilized the theory of women oppressed by Friedrich Engels with the selected short stories in this study being "In Other Rooms, Other Wonders," "Saleema," and "Provide, Provide." The results suggest that the exploitation of women characters is situated in the nexus of capitalism, patriarchy, class hierarchy, and economic dispossession. Husna, Saleema and Zainab are double marginalized as they are of working class and belong to women group and thus are vulnerable to social, economic, psychological and sexual exploitation. They are excluded from education and from economic activities because they are not able to make any decisions regarding money and property, and they are thus subjected to unequal relationships with powerful men like K.K. Harouni and Jaglani, while women from the upper class like Sarwat add to their oppression by merely reinforcing the class divisions. Class inequality, patriarchal ideology, economic dependency, and capitalist exploitation as a whole result in the tragic fate of these female characters despite their constant efforts to create a dignified life, economic stability, and social mobility, therefore answering the research questions. In the realistic depiction of Pakistani feudal society of Mueenuddin, women's rights and opportunities are being denied to them, and a true equality of the sexes can only be achieved through a change in their social and economic situation, as postulated in the Marxist feminist theory.

Recommendations

More studies could be conducted in future that explore the other stories in *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders* and can be analyzed using other theories like socialist feminist, post-colonial feminist, intersectional feminist or eco-feminism in order to find a wider feminist framework of women's representation in Pakistani literature. Comparative studies can alternatively cover Mueenuddin's works in conjunction with other Pakistani writers (Bapsi Sidhwa, Mohammed Hanif and Abdullah Hussein) to examine the trend of class/gender oppression. Moreover, the study needs to explore the place of the women characters of the elite class, especially Sarwat who question the solidarity of women by being involved in exploiting and marginalizing the working class women. These studies would help to enhance the knowledge about the interaction of gender, class and power in Pakistan and would be part of the continuing debate on women's rights, social justice and economic empowerment.

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