

The Dialectics of Class struggle in Marquez's 'One of These Days' and The Biblical Parable 'Ahab and Naboth'

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Abstract

This paper attempts to explore the class conflict and the struggle implicitly or explicitly inherent in "One of These Days" and "Ahab and Naboth" applying the conceptual frameworks of Conflict theory based on Marxism. Conflict theory views social and economic institutions as tools of the struggle between groups or classes, used to maintain inequality and the dominance of the ruling class. The dialectics of class struggle is inevitable in most of the societies. The ruling class or the oppressors exploit their subjects or even do not lag behind to take their life in order to serve or suit their interest and desires. The victimized cannot react immediately due to the fear engendered by the pomp of power and money of the higher class. Rather, they either face the terrible fate or become submissive unwillingly. When the interests and the desires of the higher or the ruling class center upon the exploitation and the oppression of the lower class for their happiness, there appears the conflict between them resulting into the class struggle. This paper explores how the ruling class having the feudal ideology oppresses and exploits the innocent people misusing their power. The paper seeks to answer the prominent question: why and how do the upper and the ruling class oppress and suppress the lower class or the common people? The pomp of power and money corrupts man as it instigates man to render atrocities towards common people. Being scared, the subordinate people cannot raise their voices and launch their protest for justice. Instead, they attempt to suppress their voices due to their apprehension.

Key words: Class conflict, bourgeois, proletariat, struggle, Marxism, feudal system, conflict Theory, submissive etc.

Introduction

The stories 'One of These Days' and 'Ahab and Naboth' demonstrates class conflict and struggle underlying in society. The upper class or the ruling class always oppresses the lower class on the ground of money or power. Their higher economic status becomes the utter tools or means for them to bully, threat, scare and exploit them in different ways. This situation generates a kind of conflict between upper and higher classes. The article is based on the Conflict theory that holds that social order is maintained by domination and power, rather than by consensus and conformity. According to conflict theory, those who have immense wealth and power attempt to retain the same status by any hook or crook by exploiting the poor class. A basic premise of conflict theory is that individuals and groups within society tries to maximize their own wealth and power. Conflict theory, as associated with Karl Marx, is a social theory that states that society is in a state of perpetual conflict because of competition for limited resources

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Every society is made up of multiracial people having different economic levels and standards. Those who are economically sound or wealthy belong to higher or bourgeois class and the people who have poor base in their economic standards belong to the lower or proletariat class. When higher class manage to oppress and exploit the lower class for the economic benefits or any other advantages, the lower class stand against it and revolt overtly or covertly. Then, there emerges the class conflict and struggle between them. The structure of every society relies upon the economic base of every society according to Karl Heinrich Marx (1818-1883), a German philosopher, economist, sociologist, historian, journalist and revolutionary socialist. His ideas play a significant role in the development of social science and socialist movement.

Marx hold that all societies progress through the dialectics of class struggle: a conflict between an ownership class which controls production and a lower class which produces the labor for goods. This is the real ground from which social protest engenders and takes the form of class struggle. Marx considers it as a protest :

The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles. Freeman and Slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild-master and journey man in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, how hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended, either in a revolutionary reconstitution of society at large or in the common ruin of contending classes. (1848)

Marx argues that the working class governs society under socialism. He calls it the dictatorship of the Proletariat, the workers state or workers 'democracy. He actively fights for the implementation of socialism so as to carry out organized revolutionary action to topple capitalism and bring about socio-economic change. Marx believes that he can study history and society scientifically and discern tendencies of history and the resulting outcome of social conflicts.

Marx's thoughts on labor are related to the primacy he gives to the economic relation in determining the society's past, present and future. Hoarding of capital shapes the social system. Social change, for Marx, is about conflict between opposing interests driven by economic forces. The society's organization depends on means of production. He differentiates between base and superstructure, with the base referring to the economic system and superstructure to the cultural and political system. He regards the mismatch between base [economy] and superstructure [social] as a major source of social disruption and conflict, from which the seeds of social protest sprout. Marx and Federic Engels highlight class struggle:

The proletariat goes through various stages of development. With its birth begins its struggle with the bourgeoisie. At first the contest is carried on by individual laborers, then by the workpeople of a factory, then by the operatives of one trade, in one locality, against the individual bourgeois who directly exploits them. They direct their attacks not against the bourgeois conditions of production, but, against the instruments of production themselves, they destroy imported wares that compete with their labor, they smash to pieces machinery, they set factories ablaze, they seek to restore by force the vanished status of the workman of the Middle Ages. (41)

Marx argues that capitalists take advantage of the difference between the labor market and the market for whatever commodity the capitalist can produce. He refers to them as to Vampires sucking worker's blood but at the same time, he notes that drawing profit is by no means an injustice.

Social protest germinates from the conflict between two social opposite forces. In this connection, Marx proposes what is known as the conflict theory. The conflict theory looks at how certain social interactions occur through conflict. People engage in conflict every day to gain more power than others in society.

Marx argues that the bourgeoisie are the capitalists who own the factories, the products made in the factories and control all the trade. The proletariats or working class people have gained nothing in society but the thrill of their own labor. The proletariats feel that the middle class society treats them poorly. They receive only enough in life to survive and have no chance of achieving a higher, class status. The bourgeoisie or middle class people in society exploit and degrade the proletariat people. The proletariats help to improve production in society which develops capitalism and helps it to grow faster. The proletariats do not get the wages they deserve for the labor that is accomplished. The middle class is taking over and the rich are staying rich and the poor continue to be poorer, which causes a class conflict. Marx and Frederic Engels argue about class conflict:

In the earlier epochs of history, we find almost everywhere a complicated arrangement of society into various orders, a manifold gradation of social rank. . . ., The modern bourgeois society that has sprouted from the ruins of feudal society has not done away with class antagonisms. It has but established new classes, new conditions of oppression, and new forms of struggle in place of the old ones. Our epoch, the epoch of the bourgeoisie, possesses, however, this distinctive feature: it has simplified the class antagonisms. Society as a whole is more and more splitting up into two great hostile camps, into two great classes directly facing each other: Bourgeoisie and Proletariat. (*Manifesto of the Communist Party* 31)

Marx asserts all stratified societies have two major groups: a ruling class and a subject class. The ruling class derives its power from its ownership and control of the forces of production. The ruling class exploits and oppresses the subject class. As a result, a basic conflict of interest arises between the two classes. The various institutions of society such as the legal and political systems are instrument of ruling class domination and serve to further its interests.

He ushers in radical change, advocating proletarian revolution and freedom from the ruling classes. He wants the proletarians to rise up against the capitalist and overthrow the capitalist system.

The class conflict between the Oppressors and the oppressed

Gabriel Garcia Marquez is a Colombian novelist and short story writer. His story “One of These Days” depicts the conflicts between the middle class and the politicians. Marquez mainly focuses on the reality of power and revenge. The story relates to advantages and disadvantages between middle class and ruling class politicians in sense of their power. The story inspires for all who think they have power and try to take advantage of it, whether in a good manner or a bad manner. The story begins with a poor town dentist, Aurelio Escovar who is polishing false teeth in early morning. He continues working until his son interrupts him and asks if he will pull out the Mayor’s tooth. At first he refuses:

“Papa”

“What ?”

“ The Mayor wants to know if you will pull his tooth.”

“ Tell him I am not here.” [...]

“ He says you are, too, because he can hear you.” (61)

The dentist, who tells his son to lie to the mayor about his presence, expresses his dislike towards the mayor by refusing his medical service to him. This reflects the hatred towards the feudal ruling class who always enforce their power upon the ruled. Afterwards, his son says that the Mayor will shoot him, if he does not fix the Mayor's sore tooth. He poses his threats to the dentist against his rejection, "He still hadn't changed his expression. He says if you don't take his tooth, he will shoot you"(61). The refusal of the dentist and the subsequent threats posed by the mayor indicate the real class conflict between the oppressed and the oppressor represented by them respectively. The reaction of the dentist after the threats shows his intention to struggle against the mayor in a manner of challenges:

Without hurrying, with an extremely tranquil movement, he stopped pedaling the drill, pushed it away from the chair, and pulled the lower drawer of the table all the way out. There was a revolver.

"Ok," he said. "Tell him to come and shoot me." (66)

The violent reaction of the dentist against the mayor symbolizes the revolt against the entire feudal system of the ruling class who impose the power upon the lower or middle class against their desire. The mayor forcefully appears at the door of the dentist. Later, the dentist agrees to pull out the tooth after he sees that the Mayor has been suffering since the last five days. The dentist examines the Mayor's tooth and agrees to pull out without using anesthesia and makes the Mayor suffer from pain. The revenge taking motive of the dentist against the mayor can be observed when the dentist intends to torture him against his pomp of power: "It has to be without anesthesia, he said. Why? Because you have an abscess" (62). He gives the reason as he pulls out the tooth saying, "now you will pay for our twenty dead men"(62). After the mayor has recovered, he leaves, telling the dentist to send the bill. When the dentist asks where he should send the bill to the mayor personally or to the town. The mayor replies, "It's the same damn thing" (62). The mayor issues an order to send him the bill. The style of his order and the tone suggests the oppressive mood and motive of the ruling class. The ending of the story still suggests that the conflict between them is not entirely over.

The statement of dentist after pulling the mayor's tooth out seems revenge of an excessive abuse of political and military power. It shows that there might some political and social issues going on in the town. Even though the mayor was suffering from the pain since last five days and he really needs cure from the dentist, he uses his power to make dentist to help him. After he recovers in the end, besides thanking the dentist, he shows his power by referring him and the town as the "same thing." His character represents of all people whose thoughts have been surrounded by the power that they have, and they make unnecessary use of it. The story uses the description of the place and all the items stored there to symbolize the middle class. It mentions an old wooden chair, the pedal drill, a glass case with ceramic bottles, and a window with a shoulder-high cloth curtain to show a poor office of a middle class dentist. It also mentions about the crumbling ceiling and a dusty spider web with spider's eggs and dead insects. The author does not say enough, besides the political power, to symbolize the mayor. The theme of the story is mainly about political power and corruption. Another theme is revenge. The mayor, who is trying to show his power from the beginning, has nothing to say when the dentist, who is from a middle class and has no power, makes him suffer from pain to take revenge of corruption in the town.

The misuse of power can be observed in Bhim Nidhi Tiwari's one act play "*The Bull*" which dramatizes an incident related to King Ranabhadur Shah's craze for bulls to make a satire on the feudal system. Drawing the historical references of Nepal, Tiwari displays how king Ranabhadur

Shah, the grandson of King Prithibi Narayan Shah used to threaten the bull doctor –Laxminarayan Dahal to care the bulls painstakingly, otherwise he would be shaved or beheaded. The play shows how power dominates and scares the common people:

Jitman: We have to sleep on the straw in winter. Mattress, quilt. Mosquito net for that beast. Oh God !

Laxmi: You are right . Go and stay in the cowshed. Don't utter 'The bull is dead from your mouth in any case. Keep taking care of it. I go to the palace right now. Let's see what happens. If I don't go, I have many enemies. If somebody reported to the king about it, no hope for survival would be left. I am going to lose my property. I am about to get shaved. How can I have hookah in such a situation ?(Tiwari 295)

Jitman, a cowherd states his miserable situation as he has to sleep on the straw but the four footed animal – The Male bull is endowed with all the facilities unlike theirs. On the other hand the bull doctor is scared with losing the property or being shaved. It shows how power and money frighten the common people .

Similarly, Ahab and Naboth , an expert taken out from the holy Bible , deals about the unkind action that occurred in Samaria during the tenure of Ahab, the king of Samaria. It shows the external conflict between the ruling class and a common folk on the issues of the possession of land property. The story depicts the king's jealousy, treachery, and his brutality towards the common folk in order to possess their wealth and property. This is a sheer instance of feudal system in which common people are oppressed and exploited by the so called higher or ruling class. Hence, there emerges the class conflict and struggle between

One day the king Ahab goes to Naboth to ask his vineyard situated near his palace. So, Ahab requests him to give his vineyard as he intends to make a garden of herds. The king offers to exchange another better vineyard for it or to pay the worth of it in the way Naboth likes. But Naboth rejects his proposal immediately, " The Lord forbid it me, that I should give the inheritance of my father unto thee"(27). He says that he cannot give the inheritance of his father. The direct rejection of Naboth invites the conflict between them implying the conflict between the ruling class and the common folk represented by the king and his subject respectively. Jim Chappelow asserts the basic premise of the conflict: "According to conflict theory, those with wealth and power try to hold on to it by any means possible, chiefly by suppressing the poor and powerless. A basic premise of conflict theory is that individuals and groups within society will work to maximize their own benefits" ("Conflict Theory").

Being heavy and displeased with the word of Naboth, the king returns to his house and sleeps on the bed without eating any bread. Having seen Ahab's sadness, Jaz'eble his wife tries to console the king. She assures him that she will provide him the vineyard of Naboth: "Dost thou now govern the kingdom of Israel? Arise, and eat bread, and let thine heart be merry : I will give thee the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite."(27) Then Jaz'ebel writes a fake letter in Ahab's name and seals and sends them to the elders and nobles of Naboth's city.

According to Jezebel's plan, she asks the sons of Belial to create a false story against Naboth. They are asked to be false witness. The letter says, "proclaim a day of fasting, call the people together and give Naboth the place of honor. Get a couple scoundrels to accuse him to his false of cursing God and the king. Then take him out of the city and stone him to death"(28) . When the officials and

leading citizens gets this message, they do as Jezebel has instructed. Then Jezebel gets the message that Naboth dies. Then Jezebel can provide Ahab Naboth's vineyard, "Arise, take possession of the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, which he refused to give thee for money : for Naboth is not alive, but dead"(28). When Ahab tries to possess his Vineyard, the God asks Elijah to go to Ahab and see whether he has possessed the vineyard of Naboth.

Elijah goes to Ahab and warns him that dogs shall lick his blood where dogs has licked the blood of Naboth because he has committed a crime killing innocent Naboth. Ahab said to Elijah: "Hast thou found me, o' mine enemy And he answered, I have found thee: because thou hast sold thyself to work evil in the sight of the lord" (29). The king does have no sense of repentance over the crime perpetrated by him with the help of his wife. His mind has totally been bent over the possession of the vine yard, slaughtering the right of the innocent folk like Naboth . It clearly suggests the utter callousness of feudal class represented by the king. Forceful possession of other's property by the king symbolizes the entire feudal system or the greed and brutality of the ruling class suggesting the prejudices and injustices of feudal ideology.

Conclusion

This paper shows the underlying conflict between haves and have-nots engendered by power and money in society. It shows how power makes a man corrupt, cruel and callous. It is power that flares greed and brutality of the ruling or the higher class. As a result, they oppress and exploit them for material profits or adopt the foul means to grab the property or money of the innocent people or they issue the order to them to fulfill their interest and desires. In the story "One of the Days", the innocent poor doctor cannot go against the order issued by the mayor. He is compelled to be submissive towards the mayor. He even has to surrender to him for the late payment of the bill. He cannot react against him for the immediate payment. It is power and even the money that becomes the means of threats towards him. On the other hand, in the story "Ahab and Naboth", the innocent folk Naboth is made to sacrifice his life to serve the desires of the king Ahab i.e the possession of his beautiful Vineyard. The mayor and the king represent the feudal class who oppress and exploit the common folk represented by the poor dentist and Naboth in different ways. Therefore, the dialectics of class conflict and struggle are overtly or covertly underlying in both stories.

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