

Exploitation: A Marxist Analysis of The Great Gatsby by Fitzgerald

Exploitation: A Marxist Analysis of *The Great Gatsby* by Fitzgerald

Maleeha Akhtar Mulghani

M.Phil in English Literature, Institute of Southern Punjab Multan.

Email: maleehaakhtar5@gmail.com

Tanzeela Mushtaq

Ph.D Scholar (Urdu) BZU Multan.

Email: tanzeelam008@gmail.com

Asra Fatima

M.Phil in English Linguistics, Institute of Southern Punjab.

Email: asrafatimakhan7788@gmail.com

Received on: 08-07-2023

Accepted on: 13-08-2023

Abstract

This study investigates the issues of exploitation and manipulation by the upper class through the Marxist study of Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925) under the theoretical framework of Marxism. Applying this framework, the data has been collected and analyzed through the techniques of textual analysis. Marx opines that the power relationships between capitalists and workers are naturally exploitative and would inevitably create class conflict. The study focuses on how the lower class is exploited by the upper class and authorities are also manipulated by them. The findings of the study reveal how the inequality of wealth, status and power can manipulate and exploit the people and distort fate. The study explores the manner in which Fitzgerald highlights the failure of unending desires and dreams through the lives of his characters.

Keywords: Marx, Class, Exploitation, Theory, Great.

Introduction:

Since the beginning of the human species and the result of social, political and economic developments, sum of complicated and problematic issues are raised and disparities in the society is one of them where bourgeoisies have always manipulated and exploited the lower class through their words and actions. F. Scott Fitzgerald's iconic novel depicting the roaring 1920s has been the focus of constant literary research for decades. *The Great Gatsby* (1925) has been evaluated as a tragic love story and its symbolism with references to American political, economic and social history is familiar. *The Great Gatsby* is Fitzgerald's remarkable piece of writing, which highlights the time period and the circumstances of America after the First World War. Fitzgerald demonstrated the lifestyle of the 1920s in the novel. *The Great*

Exploitation: A Marxist Analysis of The Great Gatsby by Fitzgerald

Gatsby takes place in the United States and the protagonist follows his dream at any cost. *The Great Gatsby* is a master piece because it contains the layers of meanings. This novel not only talks about the famous American dream but also the exploitation which is faced by the proletariats and the bourgeoisies manipulate the higher authorities for their own good. (Falth, 2013).

In this novel, all the characters are so passionate about achieving their dreams that they become wildly eager about achieving a particular class or lavish life style. All the characters are quite different from one another but there is one thing which was pretty common and that was lust for wealth and position. They wanted to buy all the lavishness of life even the love and gone time too. It was all about money, jazz and alcohol. Although many people believe that hard work and determination are the ways through which a person can be as prosperous as he wanted. Showing off was one of the major parts of their lives. (Licari, 2019). This study aims at exploring how Marx has talked about the exploitation and manipulation in the society by bourgeoisies. Similarly in this novel the upper class manipulates and exploits the working class in the name of religion, patriotism, government and consumerism. This helps in exploring the bitter reality of society where man's worth is recognized through material possession and self worth is compromised in the name of power and ownership. This study explores the superficial elements of society at deeper level where multilayered aspects are unveiled and exploitation and manipulation is coexisting in the foundation of society which is making it hollow.

Objective of the Study

This research argues over how power manipulates the people into thinking they can exploit any individual through materialistic disparities but the main focus of this research;

- To study the class disparities which lead to exploitation and manipulation.

Research Question

- How do bourgeoisies manipulate the authorities and exploit the proletariats in *The Great Gatsby*?

Significance of Study

The study explores the significance of class difference and exploitation and manipulation by bourgeoisies from Marxist perspective. The study provides the essence of roaring 20s where there was a political and economic upheaval. This helps in exploring the bitter reality of society where man's worth is recognized through material possession and self worth is compromised in the name of power and ownership. This study explores the superficial elements of society at deeper level where multilayered aspects are unveiled and exploitation and manipulation is coexisting in the foundation of society which is making it hollow.

Literature Review

Many researchers have done a lot of work on this novel where they observed several aspects. Like Lucic (2014) has talked about the American dream in *The Great Gatsby* by F. S. Fitzgerald.

Exploitation: A Marxist Analysis of The Great Gatsby by Fitzgerald

In her work she had used the theory of American Dream to analyze the characters. She also talked about the Jazz age and confusion of that era which had affected everybody. Similarly, Hyun (2018) has concluded *The Great Gatsby* through the Lens of Feminism. In her work she observed that the women in this novel are shown to be victims of social and cultural standards.

Wulick (2020) had analyzed Money and Materialism in *The Great Gatsby*. In her article she examined that In *The Great Gatsby*, money was a huge motivator in the characters' relationships, motivations, and outcomes. Most of the characters revealed themselves to be highly materialistic, their motivations driven by their desire for money and things. Akesson (2018) had examined the representation of the American Dream in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* and Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* with the title *The Failed American Dream?* In his work he had argued over the illustration of the American Dream. He further argued the American dream has been an innermost theme of American literature since the early nineteenth century. The American dream has subsequently become a tool for depicting the individuality of America.

Tyson (2006) in his book *Critical Theory Today: A User-Friendly Guide* had examined the critical theories with the relation of *The Great Gatsby*. In his book he had critically examined all the critical aspects and compared it with Gatsby and other characters of this novel. *The Great Gatsby* is a great American novel which is still significant and quite popular. This novel not only explores the jazz age and American life style but also the fundamental issues in society. In his book he had examined several theories with reference to *The Great Gatsby*.

Different researchers have used their vision from the representation of American dream to the failure of American dream. The researchers have tried their best to explain all the features of this novel in the best possible way but no one has completed information in this regard. So every researcher misses some valuable points for the upcoming researchers to explore in a very comprehensive way in this field of study. Kusumaningrum (2007) analyzed that how materialistic life-style is reflected in the novel *The Great Gatsby*. In 2013, there was a film adaptation starring Leonardo DiCaprio, Tobey Maguire and Carey Mulligan. It was a high budget film, 105 million USD and this movie was directed by Baz Luhrman. Leonardo DiCaprio also won the Academy Award for the best leading role in the movie. Baz Luhrmann's 2013 version of *The Great Gatsby* is an exceptional example of how production design can make a well-known story and loved characters come to life.

Neha (2013) has also talked about Materialism and American Dream in *The Great Gatsby*. There is no significant research on this particular piece of fiction from the point of view of class difference and the manipulation. This research does its best to explain the entire significant factors which are responsible for the exploitation and manipulation in this novel. This framework analyzes the exploitation and manipulation by the elite class which promotes the class disparities in the society. Research is based upon the theory of Marxism by Karl Marx. Marxism is social, political and economic theory which focuses on the struggle between capitalists (upper class) and the working class (lower class). The Marxist approach is noteworthy because it talks about the exploitation of upper class which also manipulates the authorities.

Exploitation: A Marxist Analysis of The Great Gatsby by Fitzgerald

Theoretical Framework

The research is based on the theory of Marxism by Karl Marx which is social, political and economic theory which focuses on the struggle between capitalists (upper class) and the labor class (lower class). The most prominent theory of exploitation put forward is that of Karl Marx who held those workers in a capitalist society are exploited in so far as they are forced to trade their labor power to capitalists for less than the full worth of the commodities they make with their labor. The Capitalist exploitation consists in the forced appropriation by capitalists of the surplus value produced by workers and the 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 make (Marx, 1847). Marx's theory of exploitation appears to presuppose that labor is the foundation of all value. While according to Allan Buchanan, Exploitation is "the harmful, merely instrumental utilization of him or his capacities, for one's own advantage or for the sake of one's own ends" (Buchanan 1985). According to Marx, understanding the nature of capitalist exploitation involves recognizing the inner essence and inner structure of capitalism as well as the relationship between the inner essence and its outer appearance (Capital, 1967). Marx stated that the capitalists profit insofar and just insofar as they exploit laborers and thereby gain possession of surplus-value is not evident in actual capitalist society's surplus-value is the invisible and unknown essence of capitalist exploitation (Capital, 1967). Exploitation is the act of greedily taking advantage of someone or a group of people in order to gain something from them. Therefore, Marx has focused on this term in order to elaborate the capitalist concept. Exploitation is sometimes vision to happen when an essential agent of production gets less income than its marginal product. Exploitation can only take place in flawed capitalism due to damaged competition. According to Marxist perspective, the capitalism is based on the exploitation of the proletariat by the bourgeoisie and the workers, who hold no means of production, must use the possessions of others to manufacture goods and services and to make their livelihood. In 19th century, German philosopher Karl Marx, the creator and main theorist of Marxism, considered religion as the soul of soulless conditions or the opium of the people. At the same time, Marx saw religion as a structure of protest by the working classes against their poor economic surroundings and their estrangement because the bourgeoisies manipulate the lower class in the name of religion and life hereafter. Marxism (in the opinion of the author of the utterance) is not an overactive imagination of its author; it is an ideal reflection of material reality (Demmerling, 2017).

By applying this theory on *The Great Gatsby* this research helps in explaining how the rich becomes richer and poor becomes poorer. By using this framework, it will help in accepting and understanding how bourgeoisies generate and defend what he calls hegemony. Marx argued that in capitalist society, the working class feel estranged and exploited. Marxian economics have concerns on the criticism of capitalism brought out by Karl Marx in his book, *Das Kapital* (1867). To uphold their status of power and privilege, the bourgeoisies (upper class) exploit social institutions as tools and weapons against proletariats (lower class).

Analysis:

In Marxist theory, socioeconomic class is a strong aspect when it comes to dividing people. In *The Communist Manifesto* (1848) and *Das Kapital* (1867), Marx argues that more than any

Exploitation: A Marxist Analysis of The Great Gatsby by Fitzgerald

other thing, class shapes and mould who we are, what we understand and experience, and how we perceive ourselves. In *Communist Manifesto* Marx and Engels believed that "The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles" (Engels and Marx, 2004).

Each and every character had his agenda and way to achieve success and happiness. For this purpose, they wanted to exploit as well as steal other's lives. They were imitating to be someone they were not and they were all absorbed in their own lies of mirage. Their hidden desires were turned into lust which was impossible to execute. This novel comprises all the events and incidents which prove that human desires have no end and how people reach to such extent where it is impossible to identify their true self as well. Karl Marx had analyzed that how ideologies drive people and how their true self is revealed through their materialistic approach and even the ruling ideas belong to the dominant class where they can control the perceptions and way of thinking of the inferior class. Gatsby believes that money can recreate the past and everything will be back to normal good old days and he is capable of repeating the past because of the surreal state he lives in, having no firm grasp on reality as he said, "I'm going to fix everything just the way it was before," he said, nodding determinedly. "She'll see." (Fitzgerald, 2001, p. 88). To some extent, all the characters have deluded themselves into thinking that they are planning their whole life. Marx has talked about the power relationships between capitalists and workers that they were inherently exploitative and would inevitably create class conflict which will create inconsistency. The exploitation of one social class by another is seen particularly in modern industrial capitalism and the consequence of this exploitation is alienation. Exploitation exists when a group of agents reins society's primary means of production and in virtue of that control is able to extract surplus labor from subordinate producers. The past has always haunted Gatsby When Nick tells Gatsby that you can't repeat the past; Gatsby says "Why of course you can!" (Fitzgerald, 2001, p. 87). Gatsby has devoted his whole life to recapturing a golden, ideal past with Daisy. Exploitation was not just limited to economic resources. All the characters were epitome of self exploitation and self deception. Wulick (2020) argues that each and every character was driven by wealth and material possessions and they did everything to achieve highest rank in society. In this novel, exploitation was not just limited to the poor labor class but the authorities and law was just a pawn in the hands of elite class. Gatsby once pulled over by a police officer for speeding, but he was released once he showed the officer a white card. The police officer made an apology for pulling him over and Gatsby told Nick that "I was able to do the commissioner a favor once and he sends me a Christmas card every year." (Fitzgerald, 2001, p. 54) and he doesn't get tickets any longer. Karl Marx examines capitalism as a mark of exploitation, dehumanization, marginalization, manipulation and alienation of the working class which is a system based on discrimination and disparity.

Findings and Conclusion:

The finding of study discloses that the bourgeoisies are responsible for the exploitation of lower class and manipulation of authorities which leads to the disparity of wealth, status and power. The burning and raging pursuits of materialistic ambition, the prevailing charm with assets through fair and foul means seems to have swallowed up the ideal America. *The Great Gatsby* speaks of the insignificance that lies at the very heart of glamour and deception

Exploitation: A Marxist Analysis of The Great Gatsby by Fitzgerald

signifying the Jazz Age. Fitzgerald creates the illusion of the careless society on the materialistic pursuit by using exploitation and manipulation to create deeper thinking in the reader and to emphasize his genuine concern about society in *The Great Gatsby*.

This study investigates the superficial elements of society at deeper level where mysterious aspects are exposed and exploitation and manipulation is coexisting in the foundation of society which is making it hollow and depressed. In this, power, wealth and position play a horrible role because each and every character was blinded by the shimmering glam of supremacy. Power manipulates them in a bitter way which damaged their rational abilities. This study argues that the bourgeoisies are responsible for the exploitation of lower class and manipulation of authorities which leads to the disparity of wealth, status and power. The data is analyzed in significant manner that confirms that actions performed by elites were malice and they exploited individuals without any guilt.

References:

1. Åkesson, J. (2018). The Failed American Dream? Representation of the American Dream in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* and Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*.
2. Cohen, G., 1978, *Karl Marx's Theory of History: A Defense*, Oxford: Princeton: Princeton University Press.
3. Engels, F., & Marx, K. (2004). *The Communist Manifesto*. Broadview Press.
4. Fitzgerald, F. S. (2001). *The Great Gatsby* By F. Scott Fitzgerald. *Wordsworth Editions Limited*
5. Falth, S. (2013). Social Class and Status in Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*.
6. Fitzgerald, F. S. (2001). *The Great Gatsby* By F. Scott Fitzgerald. *Wordsworth Editions Limited*
7. Kusumaningrum, I. (2007). Materialistic Lifestyle in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*: A Sociological Approach (Doctoral dissertation, Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta).
8. Lucic, I. N. (2014). The American dream in *The Great Gatsby* by FS Fitzgerald. *International Journal of Languages and Literatures March*, 2(1), 67-76.
9. Licari, T. S. (2019). *The Great Gatsby* and the Suppression of War Experience. *The F. Scott Fitzgerald Review*, 17(1), 207-232.
10. Marx, K. (1867). 1976. *Capital*, vol. 1. Chicago: Charles H Kerr & Co.
11. Marx, K. (1967). *Capital: The process of capitalist production*, translated from the 3d German ed. by S. Moore and E. Aveling (Vol. 1). International Publishers
12. Tyson, L. (2006). *Critical theory today: A user-friendly guide*. New York: Routledge.
13. Tavandashti, S. P. A Feminist Reading of *The Great Gatsby*.