

Exploitation Of The Voiceless: A Marxist Reading Of Ishmael Beah's Radiance Of Tomorrow

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Abstract:

Exploitation is taking advantage of someone or something for their own purpose. Karl Marx portrays that workers are exploited to a greater extent by the capitalist society. Literature also mirrors the exploitation of voiceless through various literary genres. Many writers through their works expose the sufferings of voiceless people and one among them is Ishmael Beah. Ishmael Beah is one of the prominent writers of Sierra Leone. In his works, he usually documents the sufferings and humiliation of the voiceless people. His novel Radiance of Tomorrow exposes the untold miseries of middle class and low class people. Through various characters the writer brings to light the sufferings of the voiceless people. The present paper "Exploitation of the Voiceless: A Marxist reading of Ishmael Beah's Radiance of Tomorrow" is an attempt to showcase, how the voiceless people are exploited by the capitalists in Sierra Leone.

Key words: commodification, class domination, high class, voiceless, currency.

Introduction

Exploitation is taking advantage of someone or something for their own reason. It means the use of another person's susceptibility for one's own profit. It is said, "Exploitation risks exposing workers to poor and unacceptable conditions. Ignoring consent denies workers' agency, and denies them the choice they identify as the lesser of two evils, inflicting on them an even worse fate" (Niezna). Ishmael Beah, a Sierra Leonean writer also showcases how workers are exploited in a class dominated society. The paper highlights how the voiceless people are exploited by the capitalists in Sierra Leone.

Commodification plays a major role in Marxism. It is the subordination of both private and public realms to the logic of capitalism. In this logic, such things as friendship, knowledge, women, etc. are understood only in terms of their economic values. They are no longer treated as things with fundamental worth, but as commodities. They are valued extrinsically in terms of money. By this logic, a factory worker cannot be seen as a human being with specific needs that, as humans but are obliged to provide a mere wage. Prostitution is also a type of commodification. It is an economic exchange which is understood as happening within a definite set of social relationships. Karl Marx finds prostitutes as the victims of the capitalist

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system. During the war, women start trading sexual favours for food, protection, and for other goods. It is not as buying or selling bodies, but it is the selling of service. Marx suggests that prostitution is a quite straightforward issue. Workers are exploited by capitalists, not through cheating but by the nature of wage labour itself. Workers exchange commodity for wage. The commodity is not the product of their labour, but their capacity to labour, their labour power. The exploitation exists in the difference between the value of the labour power and the value of the commodities they produce. The labour power is used by the capitalist. Exploitation results from the fact that the workers do not own the product of their labour but merely their capacity to labour. Even when the wage is paid for the labour power, the worker is exploited. Giddens views prostitution as,

(It is a fallacy that) purely “economic” relations can be treated in abstracto. Economists speak of “capital,” “commodities,” “prices,” and so on as if these had life independently of the mediation of human beings. This is plainly not so.... Any and every “economic” phenomenon is at the same time always a social phenomenon, and the existence of a particular kind of “economy” presupposes a definite kind of society. (qtd. in. Monto and Julka)

Beah also pictures the commodification of women in his novel *Radiance of Tomorrow*. In the novel, women are forced to involve in prostitution because of their poverty. They are treated as an object by men. Men are the capitalist who exploit the women. Women exchange their body for money. In *Imperi*, after the war, prostitution is considered as a booming business. At first the women in *Imperi* start getting money from the foreigners in exchange of their body. They do this because of poverty, but later they take money from anyone. Soon women from other parts of the village start coming to *Imperi* to do prostitution. Beah says, “Wives and daughters, without means and desperate, began to take money from foreigners at first, and eventually from anyone, in exchange for their bodies. And soon enough, young women arrived from other parts of the country to do the same” (ROT 122). In *Freetown*, prostitution becomes business. When Bockarie stays in a hotel to meet Albert, he finds a large number of young women wearing transparent dress and walk around to sell their body. Some girls are young and a minister comes in a car and picks two girls with him. His influence in power and money make him do such things. Bockarie says

There were young women and girls clearly hanging about the road to sell their bodies in broad daylight. Some looked younger than Miata. They wore next to nothing and some of their skirts were so short that if you walked by you saw everything... sirens got everyone’s attention. Two police motorcycles were coming down.... The young women began to stand in ways that allowed them to open their legs even more, laying their hands on their breasts. The black car rolled into view and its license plate was a ministerial one. It pulled up next to some of the girls. A minister rolled down the window and called on two of them. (ROT 217-180)

Whenever men find a woman near a hotel they think them to be a prostitute. Even ordinary women who wait near the hotel are mistaken as a prostitute. Kula, wife of Bockarie, works in a hotel. Her daughter, Miata and her friend, Isatu wait for Kula outside the hotel. An old English fellow mistakes them as prostitutes and invites them to his room. But most of the women do prostitution because of their family situation.

Class domination plays a major role in Marxism. Sklar in his article, *The Nature of Class Domination in Africa*, says of class domination as,

Classes in society are determined by the mode of economic production; they emerge when people who occupy similar positions in the economic structure of society become aware of their common interests. A dominant class is then defined as one whose members own and control the means of economic production In Marxist thought, the presumed economic basis of class determination is a major obstacle to the

comprehension of class structures that may appear to have been reared, largely, upon non-economic foundations. (531-532)

Low class people are dominated by high class people. With the power of money they dominate the subordinate classes. Subordinate people are voiceless and they are victims of high class people. Beah in his novel *Radiance of Tomorrow* pictures the domination of high class over the subordinate classes. With their power, they control the high officials of the country. Powerful people are corrupted by the high class people. Wode in *Radiance of Tomorrow* is a powerful man. Even the police of the country are under his control. When the elders of Imperi come to meet him, they are stopped near the gate. The security guards told them that they have to get appointment to meet him. The guard cannot do anything for this matter because he is subordinated by Wode. When the guard tries to contact Wode through his walkie-talkie he is scolded by Wode. He cannot raise voice against Wode because he depends on the wages that are given to him by Wode.

The high class people corrupt even the police with their money. The police are blind to the truth and they side with the powerful people. Beah narrates an incident in which the police supports the mining company even though the justice is with common people. A young boy of sixteen years dies by stepping on a live electric wire in the dark. This happens because of the ignorance of the mining company. They lay electric wires but do not indicate any danger sign near it. So people of Imperi create commotion and they uproot electric poles and destroy the things of the mining company. But the police officers arrive there and throw tear gas into the crowd. Then the groups disappear with coughing, with burning noses and eyes. The police officers are blind to the justice because they are blind folded by the money. Beah says,

The police did nothing further. Instead of investigating what had happened, they blamed the boy who died for his carelessness. They neglected to mention the fact there had been no danger signs alerting the presence of live electrical wires, or that the wires should have been covered in the first place. (ROT 88)

Currency finds a prominent in dominating the subordinate class. Since the dominant class are given access to currency, they use it as a weapon to dominate the subordinate class. Beah also pictures another incident in which a principal subordinates the teachers who work in his institution. The two teachers Bockarie and Benjamin are dominated by the principal. The principal Fofanah takes advantage of the toil of the working class people by corrupting their salary. The teachers are denied of their salary for three months, so that the principal can lead a sophisticated life. But when he is caught red-handed by the teachers, he blames the teachers Bockarie and Benjamin for using the disposed black board for personal reasons. The principal says, "This is the school's property and you have removed it without permission. Therefore, I must report it and you will be sacked for stealing" (ROT 66). This scenario remains one of George Orwell's *Animal Farm* in which Napoleon takes advantage of the ideas and labour of fellow members like Snowball, Benjamin and Boxer corrupt the fodder in the food stock. The people in the hierarchical order make asset of the labor of the working classes.

Thus this paper exposes how voiceless people are exploited in a class dominated society. They work hard for their masters but paid a meager amount. On the other hand, the capitalist enjoy their life. In order to avoid this, people should raise voice against such exploitation and fight for it. Thus through his writing the writer has given voice to the voiceless people.

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