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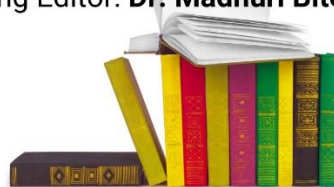
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The Marxist Approach in Sam Shepard's *Buried Child* and Raja Rao's *Kanthapura*

Dr. (Ms) Ramandeep Mahal

Assistant Professor in English,
Guru Nanak Khalsa College, Yamunanagar.
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Abstract:

Drawing on the theories of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, Marxism in literature is a critical theory that emphasizes the connections between societal structures, economic power, and class and how these affect literature, culture, and ideology. Marxism is centered on historical materialism, which contends that economic elements, such as the mode of production, influence of culture and society. This perspective holds that the dominating economic basis is reflected in the prevalent ideals, especially those found in literature and the arts. According to Marxist critique, literature frequently serves to uphold the ideology of the ruling class by portraying the world in a way that validates their supremacy. The concept of alienation, which characterizes how workers in a capitalist society are estranged from the outcomes of their labor, the working process, and even themselves, is one of Marx's central ideas. While Sam Shepard himself did not explicitly identify as a Marxist, his play *Buried Child* contains elements that resonate with Marxist themes, particularly those of alienation and the disintegration of the American Dream. The colonial experience in India is a major theme in Raja Rao's *Kanthapura*, and a Marxist interpretation can highlight the ways in which colonialism and class systems combine to

exploit the rural population. The novel examines how Gandhi's nonviolent resistance campaign gained traction in the 1930s in the little town of Kanthapura.

Keywords: Marxism, Class, literature, ideology, alienation, colonialism.

Introduction:

Marx grew increasingly interested in trying to comprehend the modern capitalist mode of production, which is motivated by an unrepentant quest for profit that derives from the exploitation of the oppressed proletariat.

Marx said that in order for capitalists to be able to brutally exploit workers, they must have a privileged and firm position as owners of the means of production. Despite paying workers the right salary, the capitalist somehow forces workers to put in longer hours than are necessary in order to generate their labour power—Marx was incredibly ambiguous in this regard. If the capitalist gives each worker \$5 a day, he may have them work, say, twelve hours a day, which was a typical workday in Marx's day. The Marxist theory had deep roots in the early twentieth century.

The superstructure consists of politics, law, and culture, including literature. Economics shapes all of this. Marxist theory asserts that the literature of a society reflects its material circumstances and class conflicts.

Sam Shepard's *Buried Child*: One of Sam Shepard's masterpieces is *Buried Child*. It is part of the family drama, which is regarded as the second in his trilogy of plays that deal with infanticide and incest themes: *Curse of Starving Class* (1977), *Buried Child* (1978), and *True West* (1980). Without a doubt, *Buried Child* has psychological ramifications that examine how the secret affects the family's ability to unite. (Hammood, et.al, 2020).

Alienation: Many Americans were profoundly disillusioned and distrustful of the government and the basic principles of the American Dream as a result of the Vietnam War. The broken family at the play's core represents this disillusionment in *Buried Child*. Secrets plague the family, making them feel that something is seriously off in their remote house. Dodge, the father, is an alcoholic who is reluctant or unable to face the truth about his family's decline.

Every member of the family has a secret that they have concealed or covered up from one another. Dodge retreats into his own world—the world of alcohol—as a result of this disappointment. He runs away from the fact that he cannot create the perfect family. He is unsuccessful in instilling moral and religious ideals in his wife and kids, particularly Tilden. He is troubled by his wife's incestuous relationship with Tilden, which is a grave transgression of the family. He becomes a sickly husband and father who shows little affection, concern, or regard for his family. Once a prosperous farmer, he is now destitute, ill, and an alcoholic.

In *Buried Child*, there are other situations where distinct dichotomies, which establish order by opposing two apparent opposites, are not clearly distinguished. A community's established ties grow hazy as it moves toward a new catastrophe. Society determines the presumed ties in a family—parent and children, husband and wife, guest and host. The loss of these connections renders the family dysfunctional. We can gauge a society's cohesiveness by its degree of difference; in a differentiated society, power dynamics are distinct, and we can view violence as either justified or not.

The majority of the family members in Shepherd's plays lack love, care, attention, and a sense of belonging, making them an ideal family. According to Abdelsemie, Shepherd plays portray the American family as all life, which is violent and contradictory, rather than as a haven of safety from a hostile world. Its members suffer from family famine, a loss of a sense of

belonging, and a lack of assertiveness instead of living in an environment of love, security, comfort of soul, and fulfilment. (Abdelsamie, 2013).

Socio Economic Decline: As per Sharma many significant socioeconomic developments that profoundly affected family ties led to the breakdown of the American family as a fundamental social unit. By the start of the nineteenth century, the commercial and industrial sectors had advanced led to terrible functioning of the human psyche. Free sex interactions, which are made feasible by shifting moral beliefs and birth control methods, have accelerated the breakdown of the family. Dodge, the father represents the generation left behind by the more extensive political and economic structures of post-World War II America. Given Sam Shepard's plays' suggestion of deeper truths about his own society are seen from one's perspective. Bottoms discovered that, "there is also a sense that these stories might contain lingering truths, that the fragments might still resonate" (12). When Tilden or Dodge attempt to bring up the buried child, perhaps in an attempt to expose and confront the violence at the heart of the current crisis, Halie consistently works to suppress the truth.

Buried Child focuses on a single family while avoiding the capitalist critique. This choice advances Shepard's ongoing emphasis on family. Although he acknowledges that national ideology has a significant impact on American families, he also shows in *Buried Child* how alienating many of these forces are. Stephen Bottoms believes that "Buried Child is... tighter and more unified than *Curse* in its thematic concerns, dispensing almost entirely with the issue of external cultural pressures, so as to make the family's internal dynamics the play's central, uncontested subject" (173). The play's seclusion creates a stark distinction between family inside characters and outside characters. This mismatch strengthens the family's isolation from a societal order that nevertheless affects them.

When the family is functioning well, it serves its members in many beneficial ways. Possibly most importantly, it offers emotional and psychological stability, primarily via the warmth, affection, and camaraderie that cohabitation fosters between partners and, consequently, between them and their children. However, here in the play *Buried Child* there is a completely different picture presented. Dodge initially becomes an unseen individual who is shunned by his family after becoming the patriarch. Death is deeply entwined with his image.

The “fester[ing] away [and] decompos[ing]” (1.388) atmosphere indicates a hue of dying, and Dodge’s appearance in “a well-worn T-shirt, suspenders, khaki work pants, and brown slippers [, covering] himself in an old brown blanket” (1.102)

All of Dodge's sons inherit his frailty and infirmity. The family's eldest son, Tilden, who was “once a star athlete and a model son” (70), deteriorates into an elderly man suffering from a serious mental illness. He avoids the past, particularly the period when he lived in New Mexico. Additionally, Tilden denies the fact that he only acknowledges Vince, his lone descendant, who is living, as opposed to the buried infant. So, “he is a shell of himself” (69)

Suppression of truth: Everything in the family is altered by Tilden and his own mother's incestuous relationship. Dodge becomes despondent as his wife and son betray him. Halie becomes pregnant and gives birth as a result of the incestuous connection. Given that he and his wife have not shared a bed for years, Dodge is aware that Tilden is the baby's father. He dislikes it and wants the child to grow up and live with the rest of the family. No one is aware that he killed the infant and buried it somewhere on the farm. For almost thirty years, the entire family has kept the secret.

DODGE: Tilden was the one who knew. Better than any of us. He’d walk for miles with that kid in his arms. Halie let him take it. All night sometimes. He’d walk all night out

there in the pasture with it. Talking to it. Singing to it. Used to hear him.....nothing.

Everything was canceled out by this one mistake. His one weakness. (58).

Raja Rao's *Kanthapura*: Through the powerful, intense, and varied tones of emotions, ideas, and sensations, Indian English writing demonstrates India's genius and character. Since various individuals, authors, artists, and novelists express Indian nature and the Indian way of life differently, it is challenging to describe. Indian English literature is given colour and beauty by the abundance and diversity of experiences it may access. The novel as a form of writing was introduced to India by the British. The novel as a form of writing was introduced to India by the British.

In the 1920s, the Indo-English version initially appeared. Numerous pieces of nonfiction writing were impacted by societal changes, political upheaval, and other literary works. Many writers, leaders, reformers, artists, saints, and philosophers rose to fame between the late 19th and early 20th centuries thanks to their avant-garde English-language works, including Raja Rammohan Roy, Ramesh Chandra Dutt, Rabindranath Tagore, Manmohan Ghose, Aurobindo Ghose, Sarojini Naidu, and Vivekananda. These works have Victorian objectives and were written in a romantic manner. In important Indian languages, the novel as a form of writing began to gain popularity during this period.

The entire nation is the same as *Kanthapura*. It depicts the emergence of the little town of *Kanthapura*, which is really a miniature representation of the whole Indian subcontinent. This was the site of the victorious national independence struggle in the 1920s and 1930s. The settlement is located in the Kara region. It is perched atop the rocky mountains overlooking the Arabian Sea and the Ghats. Numerous Indian communities have awakened to resist the foreign overlords, much like *Kanthapura*.

Colonialism: When discussing India, the term "colonialism" refers to the 1757–1947 British dominion over the Indian subcontinent. India and its people were subject to political, economic, and cultural authority throughout this period by the British East India Company and then the British government. India was exploited and made poorer as a result of colonialism. The British deprived India of its riches by taxing Indians heavily and exporting to Britain Indian raw products like cotton and opium. The deindustrialization of India was a result of British policies that also weakened Indian industry.

British colonial control is portrayed in the book as a damaging force that upends Indian society's social, cultural, and economic foundation. The British Resident Thomas, who is shown as an authoritarian person attempting to impose his own cultural and social standards on the *Kanthapura* populace, is one of several characters that illustrate the British presence in *Kanthapura*. The economic exploitation of India by the British through trade and taxation policies is also depicted in the novel.

A significant element of Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* is the influence of Mahatma Gandhi's *Satyagraha*, or peaceful resistance, ideology on Moorthy's character development and his fight against colonialism. A young, idealistic peasant named Moorthy is greatly impacted by Gandhi's nonviolent resistance ideology, which he learns by reading Gandhi's works and from a local Brahmin. After becoming a follower of Gandhi, Moorthy is motivated to unite the *Kanthapura* populace in opposition to British colonialism and in defence of their rights. Under Moorthy's direction, the *Kanthapura* villagers begin to oppose the British by peaceful means, such as by boycotting British institutions and products and demonstrating against their repressive practices.

One glaring illustration of how British colonialism was marked by social injustice and economic exploitation is the mistreatment of workers on the Skeffington coffee farm in

Kanthapura. In the book, we learn that Mr. Nair, the British owner of the Skeffington estate, mistreats the Indian employees who work there by giving them inadequate pay and putting them through difficult working conditions.

The main character of the book, Moorthy, is regarded as Mahatma Gandhi's actual pupil. He adheres to Gandhiji's values and ideas. "The villagers of Kanthapura consider him by saying that 'He is our Gandhi, The State of Mysore has a Maharaj, however, that Maharaja has another Maharaja who is in London, and that one has another one in heaven, and so everybody has his own Mahatma, and this Moorthy will be our Mahatma'. (109) Paresh Shah believes that "He is considered as a social reformer, a satyagrahi, and the leader of the non-violent movement in Kanthapura." Gandhiji's principles are applied in order to oppose the violent actions of colonial authority." (2) Raja Rao believed that the villagers thought; "Oh, no, the Mahatma need not go as far as the sea, like Harishchandra before has finished his vow, the gods will come down and dissolve his vow, and the Britishers will leave India, and we shall be free, and we shall pay less taxes, and there will be no policemen." (172). The author muses on Gandhi's vision of India's emancipation. Gandhi passes his exiled life after leaving his house and wanders the breadth and length of India. Like Ram, Rao believes Gandhi would travel to Britain, Lanka, and will acquire our independence, Sita. The people of Kanthapura after believing Moorthy who followed these ideals became aware of the oppression by the British Raj. Their struggle reflects the class struggle according to the Marxists beliefs.

Peasantry and Class Oppression: Both the Indians at the top of the caste and class structure and the foreign rulers inflicted hardship on the working class. There were no labour rights or platforms for them to voice their grievances. The English officer who owned Skeffington Coffee Estate took advantage of the labourers there, and the young girls who worked there were the

victims of his passion. Girls who refused to comply with the master's wishes were subjected to harassment and beatings. A Brahmin clerk named Seetharam had to sacrifice his life to preserve his dignity. He became the target of his gunshot because he refused to transfer his daughter to the Saheb, an Englishman. The English officer was not charged with any crimes. Under Moorthy's leadership, Kanthapura's anti-colonial struggle was non-lethal. They adopted Gandhi's nonviolent stance. Moorthy calms Range Gowda down when he uses derogatory words to discuss the British government and its agents in Kanthapura, and he proposes that, “‘hatred should be plucked out of our hearts, and that the Mahatma says you must love even your enemies.’ (80) Neelam Srivastava believes that, “‘The breaking of caste barriers in the village is one of the most significant ways in which Gandhi’s message is brought home to its inhabitants’”(4) However, removing caste boundaries wasn't a simple process. The societal customs that were unbreakable at the time even frightened the main character, Moorthy. His trips to the Pariah quarters, where he ate meals before touching the sacred Ganges water and consuming a teaspoon for self-purification were a sign of caste oppression. Raja Rao remarks that, “‘After all a Brahmin is a Brahmin sister!’ (84) During India's colonial era, the pariahs faced severe societal discrimination. Pariahs like Madanna and Rachanna, together with their wives, were not permitted to enter temple sanctuaries to swear loyalty to Gandhi in front of God. The social boundary of untouchability was rigidly enforced in villages, and Kanthapura was no exception. In Indian civilisation, women were always a weaker and timid group, regardless of their caste. The police are drawn to Moorthy's Gandhian activity in the area. The police arrive in Kanthapura to apprehend Moorthy and end the agitation in deference to their colonial overlords. The villagers are beaten down by the police when they are confronted. A significant method of colonial control over their colonists was beating, which occurs often throughout the novel.

‘and from this side and that there is the bang of the lathi and men shriek and women weep and the children begin to cry and groan and more and more men go forward towards Moorthy, and more policemen beat them.’ (98)

Conclusion:

The system of class oppression and freedom struggle is deeply ingrained in Raja Rao's *Kanthapura*. This class oppression deeply affects economy as well as people whereas the play *Buried child* has shown the destruction of the so called American Dream in the capitalist society of America. These factors also affect the psychological and social structure of the characters in both the works. Hence both the works have Marxist impact in them which is beyond the control of a human being.

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