

**EXPLORING MARXISM IN ZAKIA MASHHADI'S NOVEL *THE COVER FACES*:
THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF POVERTY AND EXPLOITATION**

د نکیه مشهدی په ناول "دی کور فیسس" کی د مارکسیزم سپرنه: د فقر او استحصال موضوعی تحلیل

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Abstract

In every culture, poverty is the fundamental reason for exploiting the poor lower class by the wealthy upper class, resulting in a feeling of self-pity among the working class. This study aims to extract themes of exploitation & poverty from Zakia Mashhadi's short novel 'The Cover Faces,' set in the Indian subcontinent. The textual analysis approach is used to Karl Marx's notion of the bourgeoisie's pitiful attitude toward the proletariat. The inquiry established that the upper class brutally abuses the lower working class to further their own vested interests. Without remedy, the impoverished are driven to suffer and tolerate heinous behaviour. As a result, exploitation and poverty lead to class division and poor class distress.

Keywords: Poverty, exploitation, class difference, bourgeoisie, proletariat.

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1. Introduction

Social life and literature are firmly connected. An extensively recognised fact about the literature is that it accurately depicts life (Ahmed, Shafi, & Masood, 2021). Society is undoubtedly reflected by its literature: good morals and ills. Literature aims to figure out society's issues and mistakes. Emotions and social issues are mirrored and represented in literature. Karl Marx condemns this harshness and proposes that an ideal society might be created if money were divided evenly among the social classes.

Exploitation is a practice in which the lower class is exploited and compelled to labour for the upper class, even in the most challenging circumstances. Nevertheless, instead of appreciation, they are exploited and treated inhumanly. The lower class is treated as inferior and is controlled by the high society. Karl Marx's theory on poverty tells us how poverty prevails in jobless and underclass societies due to capitalism. It also tells us about the innocence and ignorance of the lower class and how they are manipulated and exploited in the hands of the upper class (Masood & Shafi, 2020).

The writers of the subcontinent mainly highlight the theme of poverty and exploitation in their writings. Zakia Mashhadi is also one of them, and she is a famous Urdu writer in Pakistan. She has made a significant contribution to Urdu literature. *In Search of Butterflies*, a book edited and translated by Saeed Naqvi consists of many Urdu writers' English translations of short stories. The most highlighted issues in her work are the distinction between the upper and lower class and the exploitation of the lower class in the hands of the upper class (Fatima, Ahmed, & Shafi, 2021).

1.1 Research Objectives

The research aims:

- i. To analyse the theme of exploitation of lower-class by the upper class in *The Cover Faces* by Zakia Mashhadi
- ii. To elucidate the theme of poverty in *The Cover Faces* by Zakia Mashhadi

1.2 Research Questions

The research questions are as follows:

- i. How is the theme of exploiting the lower working class by the upper class depicted by Mashhadi in the selected short story *The Cover Faces*?
- ii. How is the theme of poverty highlighted by Mashhadi in the selected short story *The Cover Faces*?

1.3 Delimitations

The short story to be analysed is taken from the book *In Search of Butterflies*. There are twenty short stories in the book, out of which just one short story, *The Cover Faces*, by Mashhadi was examined. The current examination is restricted to the literary investigation of the content that speaks to the Marxist point of view in *The Cover Faces*. The research work is delimited into two sub-theories within perspectives of Marxism. These are the concept of exploitation and the concept of poetry.

2. Literature Review

Oxford Advance Learner's Dictionary (2014) defines exploitation as “the fact of using a situation to get an advantage for yourself.” Davis and Sanchez (2014) described poverty as a root cause of exploitation as a failure to get basic needs necessary for survival and self-respect. Moreover, “poverty also encompasses low levels of health and education, poor access to clean water and sanitation, inadequate physical security, lack of political voice, and insufficient capacity and opportunity to better one’s life.”

Engels and Marx founded the Marxist school of thought in Germany. To address the issues of ideology, economics, and history, they published *The Communist Manifesto*, a book in 1848 that outlined the principles of communism. The French theorist Louis Althusser (1990) has provided a variety of Marxist viewpoints, including Freudo-Marxism and Structuralism. To put it another way: Art is priceless because it teaches us about our existence. Althusser derived this theory from Marxist thought. On this premise, Marxism is advanced theoretically in the literature.

Deivasigamani and Saravanan (2018) have textually analysed a novel, *Disgrace*, highlighting the inhuman treatment and miserable exploitation of women from the lower poor, suppressed, and abandoned class by the corrupt elite within society. Women are exploited by corrupt patriarchal society and forced to work as prostitutes (Hassan, Shafi, & Masood, 2021). As a result of their plight, they are forced to take on humiliating employments like that of a dog sitter. To the degree that the top affluent elite ostracises them, they choose solitude as their final resort.

As mentioned earlier by several researchers, by applying the Marxist theory of poverty and exploitation to the manuscripts. Through qualitative research, the upper class's discrimination, ill-treatment, and degradation are shown in society. These issues, as mentioned earlier, have prevailed in Asia's literary work, which should be explored. Based on this proposition, *The Cover Faces* by Zakia Mashhadi requires detailed and in-depth study and critical analysis from different points of view and leaves a knowledge gap to be filled in the current study.

3. Research Methodology

This section provides an overview of the technique used to perform the study. Furthermore, this chapter explains how to carry out the analysis in question. The data was extracted from the manuscript for discussion and research. It is widely acknowledged that Zakia Mashhadi is one of the most influential figures in English writing today. Poverty and exploitation are prevalent themes in her writing, making her a well-known English literary character.

The method used in this research is thematic analysis following the Marxist ideology as a model for this research. The respective research is qualitative. Moreover, the data collection, analysis, and conclusion are according to the researchers' point of view.

3.1 Theoretical Framework

The study's theoretical framework or "blueprint" is central to thematic studies (Shafi, 2019). The researcher's theoretical framework compromises on the *Philosophical and Economic Manuscripts of 1884* by

Karl Marx: “It is clear that the more the worker spends himself, the more powerful becomes the alien world of objects which he creates over and against himself, the poorer he— his inner world – becomes, and the less belongs to him as his own” (1959, p. 29). Marx added, “The worker in his human functions no longer feels himself to be anything but an animal. What is animal becoming human and what is human becomes animal” (1959, p. 30).

Karl Marx’s idea is used as a theoretical framework on which the study is based. It gives us the idea of exploitation and poverty of the lower class living in the line of poverty. The attitude of the upper class is inhuman towards them, who take benefit of their poverty and exploit them brutally for their interests. The poor class worked like animals for the whole day to earn a few rupees to meet their basic needs but failed to achieve that. These elements are very clearly depicted in the manuscript. To conclude the research, the method involves thoroughly going through the manuscript and finding out the themes of exploitation and poverty under Marxist perspectives by picking some textual examples from the chosen short story for discussion and analysis.

4. Data Analysis

The researchers have performed data analysis in this chapter. Marxist analysis of exploitation & poverty is applied to selected textual instances from Mashhadi’s *The Cover Faces*, translated by Saeed Naqvi. Based on the theme of exploitation and poverty under Marxist ideology, many examples are mentioned by the researchers that depict the attitude of the upper class toward the lower class of society.

Text 1:

“Her mother had died wishing for a small two-room house of her own” (Mashhadi, 2017, p. 142).

Kulsoom belongs to a low-income family. She lives in a rented house, and her mother always wished to have her own home. Nevertheless, her mother’s wish was not fulfilled in her life, and she died. Kulsoom is working for a magazine, and she must interview ladies of the

upper class. This story shows two extremes: the wealthy upper class directs one, and the low poor class demonstrates the other. As mentioned by the writer:

“Getting off the auto-rickshaw in front of what looks like a fairy tale castle” (Mashhadi, 2017, p. 142).

She arrives at a home of a lady from the upper class. The house is big enough that the first thing that comes to her mind is a fairy castle because, for poor people, these houses are no doubt either less than a castle. She comes in a rickshaw, which shows her poverty. On the contrary:

“Two foreign cars appeared behind each other and zipped out the gate past her” (Mashhadi, 2017, p. 142).

People who live in that fairy castle have imported cars and are numerous. So, people of both classes are depicted in this story. One is those who live in a castle and have luxury cars while the other class lives in a small two-room rent house. The upper class spent their lives in luxury and comfort, and they had everything in excess. In contrast, the others wish even for basic needs. Apart from that, their wish becomes a dream, and they want the completion of their goals.

Marxists consider the unequal distribution of wealth as the root cause of poverty and class distinction. The wealth is always in excess for the upper class, and the lower class is deprived of basic needs and accomplishing them becomes a dream for them. The way of living in one course is a dream for the other classes. In the same society, these two extremes are shown in this story.

Text 2:

“As some people chew bones so thoroughly that they are not even use to dogs, Kulsoom’s mother continued wearing her clothes and sandals until they were useless for anyone else” (Mashhadi, 2017, p. 145).

Kulsoom comes to interview Mrs Singh. She belongs to the elite class and belongs to a renowned wealthy family in the city. She is famous

for her collection of shoes, clothes, and jewellery. She has everything in excess and is expensive. As shown by the writer:

“Her soft, crafted, polished hands were a testament to the expensive beauty parlours and jewellers of the city” (Mashhadi, 2017, p. 144).

When Kulsoom meets Mrs Singh, she wears expensive jewellery and branded dress. She is loaded with ornaments and is wearing the best diamond in the city. At that point, Kulsoom flashed back to her lifestyle. She remembered her mother that she always wore old cheap clothes. Her mother had only a limited number of clothes because she was poor to buy new clothes. The writer compared two social classes. On the one hand, a poor woman is wearing old and used clothes of her daughter. As the writer says:

“When Kulsoom grew up, her mother would even wear her daughter’s discarded clothes and slippers” (Mashhadi, 2017, p. 145).

So, a collection of clothes is far ahead. A poor woman struggles for new and good clothes and wears discarded clothes. While on the other hand, Mrs Singh has a lot to unravel. By remembering the condition of her mother and the current situation of Mrs Singh in front of her eyes, many questions were raised in her mind. As mentioned by the writer:

“How does she remember how much she has? When she goes out, how does she decide what to wear? When she used a dress once, and it becomes out of fashion before she can wear it again, what does she do with it” (Mashhadi, 2017, p. 145)?

These questions show the mentality of girls from a poor class who have only observed poverty in their houses. They have seen their mothers wearing old and worn-out clothes. The clothes are used to such an extent that they become useless. While on the other hand, a lady is shown with countless garments. She has so much to wear that it is not easy for her to remember her clothes. On one side, Kulsoom’s mother has no new clothes even for the eve of Eid, and she must wear old clothes. While on the other hand, Mrs Singh has to decide what to wear when she is just going outside.

Text 3:

“An old woman Kulsoom used to know could walk five miles of a dirty path, barefoot, from her village of Bahadurpur to Sultanpur” (Mashhadi, 2017, p. 144).

The writer here grabs readers’ attention toward those suppressed poor class of society, living beyond the poverty line. Mrs Singh is showing Kulsoom her collection of shoes. While looking at the variety of expensive shoes, Kulsoom remembers an older woman who was so poor that she had no shoes to wear. That woman walked five miles on a dirt, thorns, heat, and mud road. The writer shows the poverty of women as:

“Six years ago, I had a pair of slippers” (Mashhadi, 2017, p. 145).

The writer again here shows two types of classes in the same society. The older woman presents one poor class and lives beyond the poverty line. The woman cannot buy a pair of shoes to protect her feet from heat and thorns on the road. She is so submissive that she must bear the hot earth and acacia thorns. Kulsoom’s mother once gave the older woman the sleepers, and after wearing them, she said:

“My feet are not used to these anymore” (Mashhadi, 2017, p. 146).

So, these people become so valuable for the harshness of life that the things of comfort become useless to them. At the same time, the writer also diverts the reader’s attention toward other classes of a society living a very luxurious life. They do not only have all the things but also have things in excess and variety. As shown by the writer:

“In a large room, they were displayed in glass cabinets, elegantly, as in a shop for its customers” (Mashhadi, 2017, p. 154).

The wealthy class has everything beyond their needs. The older woman could not buy shoes, while Mrs Singh has many shoes in her house that look like a shoe shop. One class of society is struggling for basic needs of life while another class has beyond their requirements. According to Marx, this unbalance in a society is due to the inappropriate distribution of resources that compels the poor to live beyond the poverty line.

Text 4:

“Poor woman, that rotten Hashmat, the mill owner works her all day to give her two pounds of grain” (Mashhadi, 2017, p. 146).

The upper class of society violently exploits the lower class. The rich took advantage of the poor working class by selling the working class's labour at a very cheap cost. The poor woman refers here to that older woman in a story who is living beyond the line of poverty. Who is struggling for food? She is working at the mill of Hashmat. Hashmat here depicts a picture of the upper class. He exploits the poor older woman by paying her just two pounds of grain for her whole day's work. The older woman is living with her grandson and mother. His son has left him, and he has no one at home to feed him and take care of his family. The whole family is dependent on that poor older woman. As shown in these lines

“To avoid starvation, the old woman took the new and the past generation onto her weak, stooped shoulders” (Mashhadi, 2017, p. 148).

To feed her mother and grandson, she works in the Hashmat mill. The only hope that saves him and her family from starvation is Hashmat, so the older woman is dependent on Hashmat. Hashmat takes advantage of this dependency and brutally exploits the older woman by paying her a very low wage. Moreover

“Since she could not pay the grinding cost, some ounces of flour were withheld to cover this” (Mashhadi, 2017, p. 149).

On the one hand, she is paying her very low, and on the other hand, she takes some flour from her. It is very miserable, but the older woman is helpless because she has no other way to stop starvation. As shown below

“Someday, they ate only one meal, the other day two” (Mashhadi, 2017, p. 148).

The greedy Hashmat does not pity the older woman. She hardly manages meals for her family, and instead of supporting her, she is also burdening her by taking flour. It is also mentioned in Marxist ideology that workers are treated like animals. They are given no value in society, and this older woman is the best example of this.

Text 5:

“He is seven. Hashmat hired him. He sweeps the shop and also learns how to roll a Biri. Hashmat has started a Biri Business as well” (Mashhadi, 2017, p. 152).

The older woman holding the burden of her mother and grandson has died. Her mother also has died. Now her grandson has been left alone. He is just seven years old. Hashmat is aware of the situation, and he has hired that child for his Biri business. Hashmat, who has first exploited the older woman and took advantage of her poverty and innocence, is now using that seven-year poor child. The upper class took advantage of the poverty of the lower class by hiring them at very minor wage. Hashmat has done the same thing, first with the older woman and now with the child. The child works at the shop for the whole day and just gets food and shelter. Hashmat has found labour at a meagre cost for his new business and takes advantage of his poverty by providing him with minor things and taking his labour work in return. The child is also humiliated by Hashmat. As shown below

“Does he ever hear two kind words in Hashmat’s shop” (Mashhadi, 2017, p. 153)?

Although the poor child devotes all his efforts to Hashmat’s business, he is exploited. At a very innocent age, he must work like an animal for the whole day. Nevertheless, in return, he receives only abuse and harsh words. The upper class is never thankful to the lower class for providing them comfort and ease. They burn their sweat and blood for their masters, but their masters always treat them inhumanly and brutally. Marxist perspective is apparent in these lines that how the rich class of society exploits poor people. The wealthy upper class brutally exploits the low poor class by providing trivial goods that mean enough to them.

5. Conclusion

In a nutshell, there are specific examples of extreme poverty and exploitation in the short story *The Cover Faces* by Zakia Mashhadi, which falls under Marxism. The aims and research questions relating to poverty and exploitation at the outset of this project have been met. The upper

class exploits the lower class, and the lower class bears all this exploitation because of their poverty.

Future researchers can do the stylistic analysis of this short story on how the subcontinent writer uses English as a medium to highlight the specific humiliating elements that prevailed in this region. Moreover, this short story, *The Cover Faces*, can be analysed through a different perspective of discourse analysis, linguistic imperialism, and language appropriation (Masood, Shafi, Rahim, & Darwesh, 2020).



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