THE RECIPROCITY OF DIALECTICAL MATERIALISM AND DISCOURSE AS REFLECTED IN MOHSIN HAMID'S *HOW TO GET FILTHY RICH IN RISING ASIA*

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Abstract

The paper draws upon the study of socioeconomic reality as linked with discursively manipulative strategies in Mohsin Hamid's How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia, and in that it determines the context to which power works behind the discourse of the ruling classes, investigates how the socially established identities (such as constituted by caste and race) serve the vested interests of the ruling classes, and, finally, traces how the lower classes' reaction to the monopoly of the ruling classes leads to the materialistic evolution of the former. The study scrutinizes this notion in Mohsin Hamid's How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia. It reviews the available literature, and determines the scope for the research on the subject on the basis of the vacuum needed to be filled by applying the methodological theory of Dialectical Materialism and the concept of Discourse and Manipulation. A qualitative content analysis, the study uses Van Dijk's approach of Discourse and Manipulation as a model as well. The analysis of this fictional work also highlights how individuals with exceptional calibre from the lower strata of society, as constituted on the basis of caste and race, react to the supremacy of the few powerful, and through consistent struggles, transcend beyond the class boundaries. The study adds a new dimension to the relevant field in that it not only focuses the tussle between the social classes on the basis of socioeconomic disparity, but also traces out the emergence of the individuals from the socioeconomically victimized groups. Besides, it studies this social reality, as based on class distinction, from the perspective of discourse as well.

Key words: *dialectical materialism, discourse, Mohsin Hamid, how to get filthy rich in rising Asia*

INTRODUCTION

There has been an endless debate on the topic as whether it is the social being that determines man's consciousness or it is the latter which regulates the former. In this debate, the first argument has remained sounder, as it is the social reality that more controls the being of an individual and seems to regulate their social conduct as well. The concept of social classes, that is the classes based on economic status or in other words the classes based on the Marxian concept, stems from the same fact. Looking at this Marxian-based economic concept, the depleting resources create a context which limits the social outcomes for the individuals of economically lower stratum. Contrarily, in the same way, the profuse resources and elevated ranks make context which enhance the freedom for the individuals of the upper classes and create self-centred social mental tendencies that is that such individual are concerned with their own internal states, emotions, and motivations. Under this framework, differences in socioeconomic class, when looked from Marxian perspective, divide people in a much stronger way than do the differences in any other reality, whether it be religion or race or ethnicity or gender.

However, this social reality, as based on Marxist concept, is not that simple. It is impacted by very complicated phenomena, one prominent among which being language. Linguistic reality has much to do with this social reality. Since language is itself social in its function, it basically determines the socioeconomic values. So, ultimately the upper social classes exploit the language in order to impose themselves on the lower strata of society. There are multiple ways for this exploitation. They may use the rhetoric which is in fashion within their circle and which is inaccessible to the individuals of the lower side. Then, they may hide the things unfavourable to them by linguistically making them vague and general, and make those things prominent which are good for them by highlighting them or making them clear and explicit. Similarly, they use also linguistic phenomenon for imposing social values on the poor masses. Knowledge and information is also exploited in order to manipulate the

common masses. Secondly, those individuals from the lower classes who come to the realization of the fact that socioeconomic reality has much to do with the linguistic reality, may start resisting the discursively manipulative tactics by the social elites. Moreover, they may, and they do, themselves use these tactics, when or if they intend to raise their socioeconomic status.

So, the objective of the research paper is to find the extent to which power functions behind the discursive practices of the ruling elites in their maintenance of their socioeconomic status by manipulating and dominating over the lower strata of society. Additionally, the paper explores the function of the socially established identities. Lastly, it also seeks to look at the way the individuals of the lower classes adopt the discursive practises of the ruling elites, once they come to the realisation of the fact that it is basically language which can help them mount the career ladder in order to improve their social status or break the status-quo.

In order to achieve these objectives, Mohsin Hamid's novel *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* has been selected for this research. Mohsin Hamid is a prominent Pakistani novelist. His novels have not only been popular among the common readers, but have extracted the attention of the prominent critics as well. In this novel, *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia,* Hamid depicts a whole circle of human life, which is throughout concerned with economic and materialistic gains. The approach of the novelist is broad enough to encompass a complete span of life, not only starting from birth till death, but a journey through social classes as well. The researcher looks at this study of socioeconomic reality as linked with discursively manipulative strategies in Mohsin Hamid's *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia,* and in that it determines the context to which power works behind the discourse of the ruling classes, investigates how the socially established identities (such as constituted by caste and race) serve the vested interests of the ruling classes, and, finally, traces how the lower classes' reaction to the monopoly of the ruling classes leads to the materialistic evolution of the former. The study scrutinizes this notion in Mohsin Hamid's *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*. It reviews the available literature, and determines the scope for the research on the subject on the basis of the vacuum needed to be filled by applying the methodological theory of Dialectical Materialism and the concept of Discourse and Manipulation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Marx's philosophy of Dialectical Materialism is basically based upon Hegel's philosophy of Dialectics, though there is found a fundamental difference between the two. Hegel believes that mind is prior to matter in that it is the former that regulates the latter, whereas to Marx, it is the latter which basically influences the former (Russell, 750). When historically looked at, philosophy contains a web of concepts mutually related to one another. Whereas one concept functions as a thesis, the other works its antithesis. Then both require and, thus, receive a synthesis as well. This third concept carries the notion of both previous concepts; however, at the same time it criticises their flaws as well. The solution is termed as synthesis. It is also called *triad*. This is what Karl. R. Popper terms it so (Popper 404).

The philosophies of Hegel and Marx, Dialectics and Dialectical Materialism respectively, are connected with many contemporary and later philosophies also. Structuralism is one of them. Marx thinks that our mind has a natural structure and that it has to follow the social milieu around it. He believes that our mind per se cannot regulate our existence. In a way, it implies that our social existence works as a sort of structure for our brain. Structuralists also focus on this implication which says that our idea perceives through a readymade structure. They also assert that outside this readymade structure, the though finds nothing (Barry, *Beginning Theory*, p-77).

There lies another common fact between Dialectics and Structuralism. Very much like Dialectics, Structuralism also presents the flow in the sequence of flow in sequence of the thesis, antithesis and the synthesis, as Barry says that Saussure's model which tells how language functions can be 'transferable', and will also explain how all signifying system systems function (Barry, *Beginning Theory*, p-79).

Structuralism also shares certain common fact with Hegel's Dialectics. One of the laws Dialectics asserts is the binary oppositions of the tow opposites, which get recognition from each other. For example, day is recognisable through night and vice versa, etc. Structuralism also proposes this idea. It says that words find their meaning in their mutual connection to each or one another. This mutual relation can be synonymy or antinomy or any other semantic relationship (Barry, *Beginning Theory*, p-85).

Like structuralists, post-structuralists also believe that language determines the reality around us; however, their approach is different. Whereas structuralists believe on an objective approach which says that the reality around us is neutral, post-structualists insist upon the fact that the reality is textual (Barry, *Beginning Theory*, p-92).

According to Mills, language is itself material. He says that when we talk, we pour out our mind through language, and that the language in itself varies from individual to individual in terms of its meaning. As far as meanings are concerned, they are also constructed socially and culturally (cited in Mills, 1997, p.18). Quoting Foucault in this context, he says that every society or culture has its own different regime of truth.

The same truth is asserted by Critical Discourse Analysts as well. They state that the reality is made and imposed by language. Terry Locke's *Critical Discourse Analysis* also exhibits discourse a meaning-making phenomenon in a particular society. It says that the world appears meaningful through discourses and that we interpret meanings through social constructions in which these meanings are made (Locke 1,2).

Norman Fariclough, another prominent Critical Discourse Analyst, in his book on *Critical Discourse Analysis* writes that "Texts in the contemporary society are increasingly multi-semiotic, texts whose primary semiotic form is language increasingly combine language with other semiotic forms" (General Introduction4).

According to Vann Dijk, who is one of the theorists selected for the current research, CDS scholars are basically interested in the way discourse (re)produces social domination, that is, the power abuse of one group over others, and how dominated groups may discursively resist such abuse. To him, Critical Discourse Analysis, to which he terms as Critical Discourse Studies as well, should not be treated as other social sciences. It, unlike other social sciences, takes a stance against injustice as well by premising that language may be used, and of course it is, in a derogatory manner as well. He believes that Critical Discourse Studies helps us to explain, by exposing, and fight with such 'discursive injustice' as well. Vann Dijk associates with CDS following aims to perform:

1. They aim to analyse, and thus to contribute to the understanding and the solution of, serious social problems, especially those that are caused or exacerbated by public text and talk, such as various forms of social power abuse (domination) and their resulting social inequality.
2. This analysis is conducted within a normative perspective, defined in terms of international human rights, that allows a critical assessment of abusive, discursive practices as well as guidelines for practical intervention and resistance against illegitimate domination.
3. The analysis specifically takes into account the interests, the expertise and the resistance of those groups that are the victims of discursive injustice and its consequences (Dijk, *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*, pp. 98).

Marxist criticism has a significant role in literary criticism also, because it analyses a piece of literature under a special social and historical context. Terry Eagleton writes "The originality of Marxist criticism, then, lies not in its historical approach to literature but in its revolutionary understanding of history itself" (Eagleton 1). He also says that Marxist criticism makes it easy to catch a "social being" which is full of conflicts and thereby gives birth to a valuable consciousness that plays a key role in the development of society and also in the appreciation of truth and beauty in an art. Marx believes that consciousness functions as the "base structure" which involves human mind and the economic structure of society. It is this base structure on which the political and the legal super structure rest. Therefore, the aesthetic value concerning a text remains secondary. What is primary is

the social value of the text. Marx believes that the social value can be seen from economic point of view and by looking at class struggle. Even when man is not involved in economic activities, his works at least do end with an economic meaning.

DISCUSSION

The study is qualitative in nature, since it is basically concerned with the interpretation of human or social reality aforementioned. Moreover, it is based on qualitative content analysis, as it will go beyond just counting words or taking objective content from texts to examine its meanings, patterns and themes latent in those texts, leading to comprehend the social reality explored in the study in a subjective but scientific manner. Qualitative content analysis has been defined as:

"a research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns" (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p.1278),

"an approach of empirical, methodological controlled analysis of texts within their context of communication, following content analytic rules and step by step models, without rash quantification" (Mayring, 2000, p.2), and

"any qualitative data reduction and sense-making effort that takes a volume of qualitative material and attempts to identify core consistencies and meanings" (Patton, 2002, p.453).

For the achievement of the objectives of the study, the research applies Van Dijk's concept of Discourse and Manipulation as a model for the analysis of Mohsin Hamid's *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* that involves the conceptual framework of Dialectical Materialism and Discourse and Manipulation. This model offers the researcher a significant scope to discuss the social reality as proposed by Dialectical Materialism i.e. the dominance of the powerful social group over the weaker ones, the struggle of these suffering social classes, and finally their socio-economic emergence as a sequel to their continuous and consistent efforts to react to the powerful in society.

In order to make the model convenient for the analysis of the selected novel under the theory of Dialectical Materialism, the points of Van Dijk's model of Discourse and Manipulation are reduced to the following:

a) Social Manipulation

b) Cognitive Manipulation

c) Positive self-presentation

d) Negative other-presentation

e) Give many/few details; Be general/specific etc.

f) Lexical Selection

Moreover, these points from Van Dijk's model are placed in form of headings in the analysis. The research analyses the text of Mohsin Hamid's novel under these points accordingly.

SOCIAL MANIPULATION

Social manipulation is a manipulation that takes place when any group in society manages to manipulate the other. This manipulation is intended in order to dominate the other group or groups in order to exercise socioeconomic hegemony on them. These groups, both, the manipulator and the manipulated, can be broader classes as well as the small groups such as found within a sub-class, a particular caste, a tribe, or even within a family as well. Within a family, these groups may be in form of husband and wife. Even such rivalry may take place between an authoritative woman and a submissive woman in the family.

In the novel under research, almost all sorts of groups, including manipulators and the manipulated can be seen. At domestic level, the mother of the protagonist, which is *you* as the author addresses the second person in the story, is a socioeconomically submissive woman who is manipulated and dominated by an elderly woman in the family, who is the former's mother-in-law. The senior lady exercise her power, which is basically economic power, on the junior lady, simply because the latter is still not settled in her new home. However, this socioeconomic power is shifted from the old lady to the young one soon with course of time when the latter starts getting more and more settled.

Now, the relationship between the manipulator and the manipulated can be the one found between husband and wife as well; and this is more common. A husband may manipulate his wife economically in order to dominate her by allowing her as little freedom as possible and exercising as maximum power as possible by himself. However, the dominance may not always be exercised through the act of threatening explicitly and obviously. The target may be achieved diplomatically as well. At least in one example in the novel, the husband is found to manipulate his wife very tactfully in order to achieve his goal. The father of the protagonist comes home from the city and prepares his wife for the satisfaction of his physical need. He prepares a mentally unprepared wife by pleasing her by promising to take her to the city as well. This diplomatic way based on socioeconomic through economic terms.

Then, even more obviously, the social manipulation can be viewed between major social classes. This manipulation is done on the part of the social elite who, in order to maintain their high social prestige, maintain their dominance on the poor masses of the society. In order to dominate of course they have to manipulate as well.

COGNITIVE MANIPULATION

Manipulation actually involves a cognitive process. First, the mind is controlled and then the actions accordingly. Mind is controlled through many ways. It can be manipulated through reward or attraction as well. It could be manipulated through threat as well. If a woman has to serve silently, she has been manipulated and exploited for that through a threat. In the novel under research, the mother, the mother of the addressee, is a typical submissive woman living and serving in a family based on a typical patriarchal system. The mother has to perform her duties. And look at the type of service she does. The author calls it solitary as well. It seems as if she has been ostracised already. Her is always same vulnerable already. A socioeconomic threat has been given to her. This threat controls her mind. It is because of this threat that she is working.

Similarly, when this woman comes to have power and authority, she exercises this power through mental manipulation itself. She directly or indirectly threatens the young woman, who has replaced her previous role, that if she does not do, she will face the music, as her husband will punish her. She exploits her vulnerability.

In the same way, the author seems to convey that the women are manipulated by their husbands through economic terms, when the latter want to use them for their biological necessity or for the satisfaction of their sexual desires. He says that "your" father comes back to home with his desire to mate "your" mother, and in order to prepare her for the bed, he entices her with the dreams of the city. He tells her that he will take her to the city where she will live with him as long as he is there. Moreover, the author says, "they seal the deal with sex" (p-14). The tone of the author suggests that, though the husband may take her to the city in the real sense, however, these are basically the tactics played by him to enjoy her more and more on bed. In other words this is cognitive manipulation, as the mind of the woman is being controlled in a tactful manner and then she is make to act accordingly or the action is performed over her.

With reference to the distribution of the social tasks, the author that "you", even with a poor academic record, are sent for the employment as a painter's assistant, whereas "your" sister, despite her brilliant academic record, is ignored. As goes the social norm, she has to wait at home to be taken by someone unknown to his home. This social norm is also a type of knowledge which is exploited for the

exploitation of girls like "your" sister. This type of knowledge is projected into their minds, and this is how they are made docile and, thus, content with whatever the society decides and choses for them.

An example of cognitive manipulation has been given in the student-teacher dialectical relationship as well. The author narrates an event from "your" school life. He says that in the classroom, "your" teacher takes your through multiplication tables, and chants, "Ten tens, a hundred"(p-24). The whole class follows him. When he reaches 'twelve twelve', and chants, "twelve twelve thirty four", and your voice interrupts saying "forty four", the teacher gets furious. He, despite knowing that he himself is mistaken and instead of correcting himself, bursts at you, "What did you say?... You think I'm an idiot?" (p-25). The cognitive manipulation is clear. "You" are being manipulated with certain information or knowledge, which is wrong, and this manipulation is being done when you are passing through a very delicate and critical time period of your life, when your brain is developing. The author also explains the reason behind this manipulation. The teacher actually had never wanted to become a teacher. He had always aspired becoming a metre reader, as this metre reading profession had offered him much scope for making illegal money and, thus, becoming rich in a very short time period. His manipulation of his students is natural sequel to his frustrations.

The author also brings to the limelight the difference between the efforts of those belonging to the upper classes and those to the lower, the classes being determined basically by the financial status. He says that the one, as "you", has to do much for becoming rich in a sense that one has to be concerned basically with the question of choice as well. Here luck matters a lot. It is also a luck that "you" have been born in a low status family where all siblings are, or cannot be, treated alike, as some, especially those younger, may have better chances to become rich, while others may have to shoulder domestic responsibilities. On the other hands, those who belong to rich classes are not bothered with these basic choices, rights and wrongs.

An instance of cognitive manipulation by using knowledge is found in the incident involving the protagonist "you" try to woo a pretty girl. "You" try to impress her with your little knowledge of the movies. "You" pretend to be much more knowledgeable than "you" actually are. The author reveals the fact how *you* exploit a little knowledge you have to manipulate and control others. The author writes that *you* feel like a professor who has a complete grip on his subject. The movies *you* have given to the pretty girl *you* have *yourself "*partly seen" (p-50).

The pretty girl belongs to financially a very low class. In a materialistic society, she knows how to make her way through. She applies the same tactics in order to get the *filthy rich* as are used by the financially upper classes. She exploits them. At her workplace, she uses her boss, the marketing manager. She allows him to have a limited sex with her, and as a compensation she receives materialistic benefits. Now, here she comes across the social norms as well. She has to follow the social norms about preserving her virginity as well. Now she kills two birds with one stone. She keeps him confined initially only to kisses and fondling her body, and then the limit was up to the oral sex. However, soon she challenges the social values and traditions and becomes bold enough to allow her boss the vaginal sex as well. The author says that soon with the passage of time, she comes "to doubt this logic" (p-53). The author also says that her intention is purely to "bridge a significant cultural and class divide to enter even the lower realms of the world of fashion" (p-53).

Realizing the mechanism of social exploitation, which is cognitive manipulation, she not only keeps resisting this manipulation, but applies the same method to progress as well. So, her tactics of manipulation are not limited to her first boss only, she has a series of victims ahead, among whom *you* are one as well. Now, at times *you* get sincere as far as your love-related emotions are concerned. *You* believe that she only belongs to *you* and to none else. And *you* believe that she will also be thinking same. But *you* do not know how *you* are being cognitively manipulated. "You think that the first woman you make love to should also be the last… she thinks of her second man as the one between her first and her third" (p-56).

The author brings to the limelight the fact how *you* evolve through using the similar tactics as used by the powerful of the society. Once *you* realize that the law that prevails in *your* society "might is right", *you* very tactfully join the corrupt side. *You* plunge in the game by supporting the agenda of the

powerful political parties and helping them the way they want in order to make your position secure. In fact, *you* have no other option; you have to join one or the other political party. In reward, *you* get, "a monthly cash stipend, food and clothing, and a bed at the hostel" (p-62). Additionally, "you are also given protection" (p-62). Once *you* have associated *yourself* with that powerful political side, now you have become "something righteous", "utterly ferocious" (p-62).

DISCURSIVE MANIPULATION

Discursive manipulation is a manipulation that is exercised through the linguistic items, such as highlighting certain things and de-highlighting others, making some things prominent and others unnoticeable, specifying certain things and generalising others, etc. Moreover, lexical selection is also made in order to suit the hidden motives behind. There are various instance of discursive manipulation to be found in the novel under research. Following are some of them.

a. Give many/few details; Be general/specific; Be vague/precise; Be explicit/implicit

In order to impress the girl *you* pretend to be much more knowledgeable than *you* actually are. *You* try to control her mind by presenting your knowledge to her in such a way as if "you" have not only authentic knowledge but complete knowledge as well. Highly impressed, the pretty girl asks *you*, "You know a lot about movies", and *you*, in a proud manner, promptly reply, "I know everything about movies" (p-44).

b. Lexical Selection: the word "utterly ferocious", as used by the author in the context of power when he says that in *your* university *you* become "utterly ferocious" by joining a politically powerful and manipulative party, shows the intensity of the power the powerful groups enjoy and exercise to oppress the poor masses.

c. Self and other presentation

The desired reality can be achieved by presenting the self as positive and the other as negative. This over general sort of tactic can be applied in various ways. One instance of this tactful method can be viewed in the strategy used by the protagonist, *you*, by presenting himself to the elite circle as one belonging to them in order to raise his social status. He has been able to marry in a socially "noble" family also through this tactics. In fact, he has two selves: one that is a successful entrepreneur and, thus, a person seemingly belong to an elite class; and the other is that he has evolved from a family that belonged to the lowest class of society, as far as economic status is concerned. He presents himself as a socially high-status figure; however, at the same time, he fears because of his low background as well. In one example, when he has to move to his village, a very backward area, in order to attend the funeral of his sister, he does not take his "noble" wife with him simply because to keep his background concealed.

CONCLUSION

Mohsin Hamid's novel *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* gives clear evidence as to what extent power functions behind the discursive practices of the ruling elites to construct their socioeconomic control on the poor majority in the society. Secondly, the research exhibits that the socially established identities are either made or at least exploited in order to serve the agenda of the socially powerful people. Thirdly, research also shows the fact that the lower classes, which are the oppressed classes of the society, also react to the monopoly of the ruling few, and, through this reaction, these oppressed classes also succeed in raising their materialistic status.

In order to achieve the objectives of the research that is how the discursive power functions in the background for the socioeconomic monopoly of the ruling classes, various discursive tactics, as found in the novel under study, have been analysed under the concepts of Discourse and Manipulation. Manipulation, as seen in the selected novel, has also been looked upon as social, cognitive and discursive realities. The structural source of class conflict that lies in authoritative domination and

subjugation on the basis of economic reality has been analyzed under the theory of Dialectical Materialism. It has been discussed with reference to the selected novel that the object of such conflict is the status quo, and the consequence is to change social structure.

The social structure gets broken when individuals from the socioeconomically oppressed class realize their manipulation by the powerful class of the society, and, then, not only resist the manipulative tactics used by the latter but learn to apply the same tactics by themselves as well in order to improve their socioeconomic status. Some such individuals have been analysed in the critical discussion of the novel under research. One such individual is *you*, who is the addressee and, thus, also the protagonist of the novel. These individuals have the calibre enough to transcend beyond their socioeconomic status as specified to them by their society.

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