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## **Female Economic Exploitation: A Marxist Feminist Analysis of Woolf's 'The Duchess and the Jeweller'**

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### **Abstract**

This study aims to demystify the underneath realities of the social structure in the context of Marxist feminism. Although world has gone modern, and one observes the modernization in the almost every field of life yet when we observe through our experiential actualities around in the existing world, we realize that women have always been a victim of capital under the control of men. Ehrenreich (1976) relates that we find Marxist feminism as a kind of theory which emerges out as a reunion of Marxism and Feminism. These two theories Marxism and Feminism particularly focus on all the possible forms and types of structured and well-planned inequalities which lead one to the episodic happening of ordeals of disadvantaged and disempowered individuals. In this research, the writer has tried to unravel woman's exploitation through class stratification; a social and emotional oppression using Marxist feminism as literary vista. This research takes Woolf's short story 'The Duchess and the Jeweller' in the context of Engel's book (1902). The study of the selected short story concludes that Marxist feminism states that capitalism is the only reason of the woman's oppression and subjugation and second-class status in society which can only be possible by bringing change in social structure.

**Keywords:** Marxist feminism, women's subjugation, experiential actualities, episodic ordeals, change in social structure

### **Introduction**

One observes Marxist feminism as philosophical alternative form of Feminism which subsumes and expands Marxist theory. Holmstrom (2002) delineates that Marxist feminism is liberating, critical framework that strives for comprehension and elucidation of gender oppression in a structured way. Hossain (2013) expounds that one finds exercise of discrimination as well as inequity visible in every sphere of day-to-day life like in families, workplaces, schools, media as well as religions. This prejudice, inequality as well as cruelty against women caused a movement as Marxist feminism. Hartmann (1981) elucidates that almost thirty years ago the tension which is found between Marxism and feminism indicates and foretells either more developing unification or separation.



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The Marxist feminism investigates and scrutinizes all possible aspects in which women can be exploited by means of capitalism as well as the individual's possessions in form of private property. Although Marxist feminism is an off shoot of feminism which takes its theoretical bearing from Marxism yet it distinguishes itself from all possible modes of feminism by focusing primarily on the economic organizations of society. Sikka (2013) expounds that Marxist feminism is a theory which declares that contemporary capitalistic means of production have been one of the major reasons of second class rank of the woman in society and this is the same reason for the survival of capitalism. The framework of this research verifies the basic idea of the Marxist Feminist theory which is from Engel's (1902) *The origin of the family, private property and the state*, innovative study in which he delineates, "with the pairing family, therefore the abduction and barter of women began-widespread symptoms, and nothing but that, of a new and much more profound change" (p. 59).

Engels relates that in the history, female oppression is the most universal acutely rooted form of the social oppression which is the true characteristic of capitalistic society like racial oppression which significantly predates capitalism. Smith (2005) relates that Engels flourishes the analysis of the history that discovers the origin of oppression of women. Plez (1998) in *Friedrich Engels: A critical centenary appreciation* acknowledges the thoughts of Engels and relates that Engels is one of the very first people who seems realizing the gravity and significance of gender in the history of human beings. He noted that in the history societies based chiefly on hunting or gathering where work and property were divided communally. There was no distinction between men and women. McHugh (2007) further notes that Engel's *The origin of the family* is the basic work on Marxist feminism which declares subordination as well as oppression of women emerge with the development of distinction of social classes based on the private property's transfer from matriarchy towards patriarchy.

We find the same point of view in luxton and Bezanson (2006) as well as Coontz and Henderson (1986) that there have been adequate anthropological proofs that it is not the gender division which has been a cause of inequality rather one finds the reasons of emergence of oppression of women in particular kinds of social arrangements.



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This research draws attention towards Marxist feminism which takes oppression of women from Engels' perspective. Donovan (2000) verifies and explains that Marxist feminism condemns the capitalistic means of production for being the central causes for domination of men as well as women's oppression. Marx and Engels keep locating material as fundamental causes for the subjugation of women. They keep finding relationship of capitalism as means of production as a central force for determining the status of women in society that is to say an association between the worlds of production along with reproduction.

In the history we find that women had a unique capability of child bearing and nursing which gave rise to division of work in the primitive set up. However, the distinction did not define any inferiority on any level of the society. Only with the rise of class society gradually women were prohibited from full participation in larger political and economic activity and confined to the household. Gimenez (1991) explains that there has not been any production in general because it remains production on some specific point of society's development. Similarly, there has not been any general kind of gender inequality rather it has specific reasons as well as support from the structure of society which is related to social means of production fundamentally connected to the rest of the kinds of inequality in history. Donovan (2000) elucidates that after extensive and profound investigation one finds in history that one of the major changes in the means of production is the art of taming animals with the help of which men emerge as economically powerful. Hunting came up as great source of provision of food along with all possible animal products which remained a main source for the exchange of every possible need. Thus, we find that cattle became privately owned commodity by men of that time for bartering all required needs.

Donovan (2000) relates that Marx and Engels strongly believe that actually it is the very method of production that is the main reason of the present condition of the women in society. Wood (1995) seems justified in recommending that capital is pretty unconcerned about the social identities of all the persons it exploits. Snell (1985) proposes that gendered splitting seems as a tool of male workers' defensive move. In an effort of saving their personal income they plan to exclude all female labourers who can be a competition in agriculture particularly from those works which are more remunerative types like harvesting. Then again industrial revolution affected family life of the people. Women remained at home to maintain the family. Vogel (1983) and



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Hurst (2010) elucidate this phenomenon that it is the requirement of the capitalist society to create gender division for the achievement of production as well reproduction. That is why, a gender wise division of labour is needed.

In recent times Marxist feminist analysis aims at showing the dispersal of class power in every level of society. In this study we will try to have a brief assessment of disadvantages of class domination as a sociological study of power. In this study the researcher is going to make an effort to show Marxist feminism through literature. Woolf will unmask in the short story *The duchess and the jeweller* the concealed economic social domination. The writer aptly describes the continuous problem of economic theory's manipulation particularly in it's relevance to the economic relations within the frame of super structure.

The story tackles the problem of women oppression in many dimensions. Women oppression has many modes political, social and cultural. The research also pinpoints how does economic power politicize the exploitation into normal practices accepted by the society and victims itself. We find Diana playing as obedient servant. She does not have any concept of rejecting her capitalists. Her behavior shows the capitalist's conspiracy which is true depiction of Gramsci's thoughts (2000) when he relates it as capitalist's politics which he plays in camouflaged form rather than direct way and consequently create manufacture of consent. It is the class which is spreading successfully it's ideological views as a result of which the subordinated class unconsciously and willingly accept and participate in it's own oppression. We observe in the context of Marxist feminism that our selected story verifies Engels' conclusion which becomes the fact of the history as male supremacy with the help of his empowerment on means of production has characterized all human civilizations. Lokaneeta (1406) explains that in varying forms as it is not history which excludes the most of females rather forces of patriarchy as well as social structures that actually eliminate female's participation in various wide ranging process of social set up.

### **Research Objectives**

This study tries to aim for opening new windows for future researchers in Marxist feminist studies in literature. Furthermore, Deckoster (2018) elucidates that literature as well as propaganda are very important for unravelling and demystifying the evils caused by capitalism. This research



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will remain within the paradigm of Marxist feminism and explain the condition of women in different phases of historical development in general and in the context of the selected story in particular. Future researcher may find it a little helpful for investigating the condition of women at homes, where they remain exploited due to being dependent economically as Diana. The researcher has made an effort to highlight Marxist feminist concern of Woolf in selected short story. Woolf explains in the selected story how is the female character exploited through capitalists of social relations. Marxist feminist perspective highlights the subjugation of Diana by Oliver and her mother.

### **Research Questions**

1. How does Woolf unravel political play of the economic social structure with the help of her characters?
2. Why does the female character not raise her voice against her exploitation on economic grounds?
3. How is Marxist feminist theory helpful to unfold covert layers of economic exploitation in the selected story?

### **Significance of the Study**

It is hopefully expected that this research will be of little help in understanding Marxist feminism in relation to literature. The focus of this research is to find out its relevance with the selected story in the context of Marxist feminism. The reader will be in a better position to understand the social and relational class domination, resulting into woman's exploitation in the stories. Marxist feminism springs out of Feminism. It has its connection with Marxism. Marxism condemns capitalism while Marxist feminism blames capitalism for woman's oppression as well as inferior position in society. For Marxist feminism, the only of coming out of this grave situation is the end of capitalist system. It wants to achieve woman's equality by its commitment to overthrow of capitalism. Woolf exposes the exploitation of the women and the dependents by the bourgeoisie, the ones who control the means of production. We find the writer is using Marxist feministic lens to unmask the hegemonic politics which train people's mentality in a way that they willingly accept their oppression through social class domination.

### **Literature Review**



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Marxism and Feminism have a common idea of tackling the problems of powerful as well as oppressed and selected story represents of the oppressed ones. In this study researcher will try to find out how do economic forces and bourgeoisie play their politics and entangle the women in the invisible chains of oppression. Marxism shows the confrontation of classes whereas Feminism deals the problems of gender. Vogel (1995) explains that one finds the very first pattern which Marx suggests to engulf women along with the family forms clearly indicate that one can find easily the sexual oppression of the females leads towards the class pattern of society which emerges in the result of productive labour's division. McLellan (1974) relates that one observes Marxists also have tried to reconcile and accept the emergence of new movements, especially which are inspired from ecological as well as feminist perspective.

We observe that male dominance has been a part of history. Ladurie (1974) explains that one observes in Languedoc in almost fifteenth century a shift of substituting expanded patriarchal style to nuclear unit which seems to be reconstitution of great household of obsolete pastoral societies. They used to live, eat, and drink together. They have one single money box and patriarch has the key to it. The married son does not have the permission of taking anything more than five sous. The only authentic and real master of the dowry of newly wed is her husband's father. He is the only one to receive the dowry and has the right to dispose it. It is the institution of marriage through which they ally with one another and thus dowries pass from one father to the other.

Donavan (2000) expounds that it is the exchange in the means of production which actually helps men to hoard a lot of wealth and on the other hand they keep making the woman's work of domestic type gradually less valuable. This transfer of the means of production caused the increases of wealth for men and they did not only get dominance outside but inside the family as well. Since the domestic work done by women could not produce notable profit so gradually, they were ignored and their whole domestic activity was limited to their basic duties as females, and they just remained house maids as well as a tool to give children.

Ferguson (1999) elucidates that if one has to replace structuralism then the understanding of actual consolidative as well as historical comprehension of the process of social reproduction are possible merely by shifting the attention towards the decisive and significant role of capital. One has to focus the accumulation of capital's hidden role which it plays to capture the entire



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phenomenon of social life including making class structure, it's consciousness as well as the living experience under it. Marx (2002) relates that character of an individual is based on the conditions the man gets birth and brought up. In society we find bourgeoisie and proletariat. The capitalists have money power which are in hands of men and thus women remain unprivileged. Marx holds a view that these forces of production form the social phenomena.

This story has been previously explained in different perspectives other than the selected one. The researcher Rodriguez (2001) explains that the story seemed to go for publication when Nazi's terror has been on the peak in Europe and in such situation Woolf goes for such anti-Semitic piece of writing. Her American publisher requests her to change the name which previously is '*The duchess and the Jew*'. Woolf depicts Oliver and Duchess of Lambourne and through these characters she shows her personal dislikes for class and race. The researcher somehow ignores these points and focuses on the imagery of the jewels explained in the story for describing 'art for art' sake.

The second prominent study of the same story is by Gill and Haider (2018). They explain theory of Lacanian Psychoanalysis along with the effects of the language choice. The research focuses on the use of Woolf's language in the story. They explain that writer uses both techniques to express her views about the demoralization of the Victorian age. She represents the whole scenario of the capitalist's corruption like Oliver and social demoralization with the help of the Duchess of Lambourne with the help of stream of consciousness

This short story of Woolf has been under discussion in Marxist's background. Madden (2006) focuses on Woolf's consideration towards class and it's impacts on society. The research mentions Woolf's description of the whole procedures which highlight all possible ambiguities inherited in class system. The paper explains that for Woolf class has internal differentiation by gender as well as race. The early works of Woolf are proof that she keeps interrogating the imbrications of race as well as gender in the politics of class. The researcher expresses that Woolf takes class difference as a great point of satire. She seems subjecting her personal class position under scrutiny with satire. The researcher shows Woolf's streaks of reaffirmation of her class position while normally she dislikes it and preaches Egalitarian views.



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When we try to understand life in general, we have to look into the base of the society and its relevance to Marxist feminism and literature. However, this research will try to have different analysis comparing with those of predecessors. Within this research, I will try to apply Marxist feminism with a focus on the concept of an impact of oppression of woman, both in gender and capitalist society. A Marxist feminism's framework allows us to understand the complex social relations. We find literature exposing the mechanisms through which women's labour power is commodified. In agreement with the previous sayings we find how does Woolf portray the social classes of her age in the selected short story. She exposes the exploitation of the women, the dependents by the bourgeoisie, the ones who control the means of production. We find writer using Marxist feministic lens to unmask the hegemonic politics which train people's mentality in a way that they willingly accept their oppression through social class domination.

### **Textual Analysis**

Eagleton (1976) explicates that one can easily find the exploitation as well as oppression of the people of that age from literature and the art of that era. Marx and Engels (2010) verify that one observes that the descriptions given as history are the ones which exist already. This research is trying to have qualitative study which is going to opt for Marxist Feminism for understanding the connection of the story with the selected theory. The true understanding of Marxist feminism's relational social impacts fills the gaps between the story and real life. Furthermore, we find class struggle as a pillar to describe our social relations' economic exploitation. A careful investigation has been done through reading of the story in order to compliment the essence of research in finding out all possible evidence of woman's exploitation. The short story is chosen as the theme of Marxist feminism and economic class struggle is tried to make evident in the text.

Marxist feminism's critic finds that the economic base of the society determines the interest and style of its literature. Eisenstein (1978) explicates that Marxist feminism is a theory which critiques deeply embedded distinction between man and woman while mostly focusing on patriarchy as well as power sowed in the variance between capitalist and proletariat which actually has it's central point as capitalism. Marxist theory proves through historical materialism the political play of the capitalists who take the help of ideology as well as cultural hegemony to utilise the whole social phenomena under their control. They seep into social life in a way that their





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dependents or victims do not only accept the life devised by them rather accept their own exploitation willingly. Marxist feminism highlights the social subjugation of economically dependent females. This philosophical theory call attention towards the existence of the women in a world which is designed by patriarchy and capitalism.

Woolf has been among the literary genius who has deep insight into the life and nature of human beings. She has shown her expertise by depicting the invisible chains of the capitalistic social relations where things done repeatedly penetrate and are taken as natural and normal. Raman et al (2005) clarifies that one can observe from *The German ideology* that Marx believes it the superstructure on which the base of society rests and this is how the whole phenomenon of life is shaped. Thus, we find oppression and exploitation of woman in the form of sacrifices and compromises for the family becomes woman's duty as Federici (1975) relates that it is an authentic fact that laborer is exploited as well as manipulated in capitalism while it's relativity to the capital remains mystified. The writer unfolds the Marxist feminism through economic relations and the class stratification. She depicts the situation of economically dependent woman as a thing to be encashed and used while our male dominated super structure has trained woman in a way as portrayed by Fedrici one finds it as certain to perform some of activities so gradually all females are expected to behave in the same way rather they start liking them also.

This research lays its foundation upon the exploitation in social relations on the grounds of economy as Tyson (2006) relates that in a capitalist culture the human as well as human relationships are given the treatment of things. While we find Marx (1999) writes that in the end it is always the capitalist who is the actual beneficiary. The basic intention behind this study is to unfold the hidden and ambiguous roles of social structure to shape the ideas of the common people according to the will of capitalists who are actually men. Marxism is particularly a theory which tries to find contradictions and tensions because of those contradictions. Marxism's spirit of tantalization takes under consideration the novel ways of searching for the better understanding of the relationship of not only between economy and literature but every possible cultural practice and production. The study represents the clear picture of the exploitation of the proletariat in general and women in particular. The Marxists believe that it is the superstructure which shapes the life and all of it's trends. Thus social consciousness in form of literature, religion, and politics



is the product of superstructure. The role of literature in a society is not just to present the life of that time rather it keeps questioning the exploitation and emancipation done on the marginalized individuals. The present study selected the story which is a true reflection of it's age.

Oliver is a true bourgeoisie who is in very much love for his life and money. He has the capitalistic attitude as his own life is the most important one for him which is shown from his life style as, "Oliver Bacon lived at the top of a house." The trends of the society and the importance of wealth is described by attitude of the people towards him as they envy him, "Look at him-- young Oliver, the young jeweler" (p.1). Oliver is a capitalist and knows the fact illuminated by Fredrici that one needs to remember one thing that before any accusation one needs to know that money is actually capital which is the power to dictate labour. He did every possible theft to be rich from stealing dogs to fake diamonds, gradually, and now Woolf paints him in bright colours that he was famous in whole Europe as well as "all over America" (p. 2).

Woolf being a great writer goes gradually and delves deep into the Marxist feminism in her story. The character of the duchess of Lambourne is described in the same way as Marx (2002) explains it that capitalist has torn away all the emotional as well as sentimental relations from his family members and the left one is just money relation only. She paints that how does the power of money make you the servant of the bourgeoisie. "The Duchess of Lambourne waited his pleasure; the Duchess of Lambourne, daughter of a hundred Earls". The writer depicts that capitalist exploits and shows his power to gain his objectives. They are both set for their gains and, "They were friends, yet enemies; he was master, she was mistress; each cheated the other, each needed the other." (p. 3). The meeting of two capitalists, both are exploiters and manipulating each other, one for getting respectable place in elites and the best available woman of high society while other for money. Both know each other as when she says, "Dear Mr. Bacon, a bit of bad luck. . .", he knows, "Been gambling again, had she?(p. 3-4)".

She is the villain of social relations she has played foul already and knowing his weakness plays the same card again for selling fake pearls with an incentive of offering the names of three daughters, "But it was Diana he loved". The moment he is going to call for the authenticity of the pearls she plays the last card, "You have all my secrets". She invites him for tomorrow by seducing him with the name of Diana and Prime Minister. Firestone (1970) relates that women are those



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slaves who sustain their specie for the purpose of liberating the other half in order to keep the business of the world keep going.

Here the artistic skill of Woolf is evident as both are capitalists but the victim is the woman in multiple perspective, first as economically dependent, the duchess and then the ultimately misused twice being economically dependent and black mailed on behalf of social emotional relations, Diana, Kollantai (1977) writes that one finds the sale of females' body approximately and indivisibly associated with sale of woman's body. This seems a horrifying situation that it comes as a result of the exploitation of the capital. One observes that capitalist's hypocritical social set up encourages the prostitution with the help of exploitative structure as well as economy. He knew that the pearls are fake, "But how could he test it, in the light of the river, in the light of the eyes of Diana?". The deal is finalized. "You'll come for a long weekend?". "Alone in the woods with Diana"... the Prime Minister; and himself too, in white waistcoat." (p.4) and, "a cheque for twenty thousand pounds" (p.5). Bozzoli (1983) expounds it that women are used as a reserve labour. They are used as well as rejected as per capitalist's need. Thus inferiority of women economically suits capitalist mode of production.

This study has made an effort to demystify the social construction and the condition of women in patriarchal world where they have the status as second class persons. The writer aptly elucidates capitalist class and it's politics and presents the socio economic situations of her era. According to Marxist theory it is superstructure which determines the whole web of society and represents the ideas, values and viewpoints of capitalists who have full control over it. The same notion is depicted by Woolf in the story. She describes that how people of that era and their behaviours have been shaped by their social trends. Woolf's depiction of the scrupulousness of elite class, their artificiality, superficial concerns and subjugation of women on economic grounds is obvious throughout the whole story. This study is expected to be an addition to observe Woolf's story from a new angle and an effort to show the inter connection as well as relevance of literature to the human life.

We find direct and clear relevance of Marxist feminism with the theme of the story. We observe the exploitation of the capitalist in social relations and find how are people turned into commodities for personal satisfactions and needs. Woolf portrays Marxist feminism as no one is



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concerned with the will and approval of Diana. She is represented as an article bought and sold. Woolf gives the true depiction of her society and the condition of woman as oppressed and exploited one on behalf of economic grounds.

### Conclusion

Brecht et al (1964) expounds that one finds any piece of art uncovers the social realities as well as logical laws of motion of the whole mechanism. The very revelation of the whole process makes it easy to understand the fate of the humanity. The discussed explanation verifies the inter relation of Marxist feminism and story which can be properly understood under the respective framework. Vogel (1983) Donovan (2000) and Hurst (2010) the Marxists feminists believe that capitalism actually is the major cause of female's subjugation, exploitation as well as inferior social status. The selected short story is one true example as Woolf has shown Marxist feministic exploitation of Diana. She exposes in an artistic way that how does super structure play the politics step by step with the help of hegemony and ideology in the society? The bourgeoisie of the social class keeps full control over the proletariats and make women as the dependent class.

Although one observes that in previous years women tried hard to move out and became a part of the work force, yet one can observe the same old subjugation, exploitation as well as inferior social status at workplaces as well. The Marxists feminists believe that it is only capitalist means of production which is the main reason of it. Marx (1999) further explains that worker has to sell all of his labour for earning money for his survival. He further states that because the worker finds that money as a source of his living so naturally, he becomes the servant. We find Diana going through the condition of slaves to become commodity for her capitalists.

When we try to conclude the Marxist feminist Firestone (1970) relates that it does not matter how deep we go into mind to search root cause one finds that problem even goes deeper. We find the foundation of woman's oppression as economy as Chang et al (2018) expound that Marxism develops as well as enriches the establishment of the ideologies and hypothesis of society which are related to the human's thoughts, law as well as nature. How does Marxism affect woman and make it invisible and natural is explained by Gramsci (2000) Gramsci that it is the political play of the cultural hegemony and super structure that they create the manufacture of consent by which the oppressed willingly get exploited. Marxist feministic theory shows how does the story



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explain the political game of ideology and hegemony in the social system. The writer mirrors her society through her writing. She shows the relations and situations of class domination by socially entangled, exploited and ultimately killed emotionally by the owners of means of productions as Diana is a servant of her economic lords. Their situations are explained by Shakespeare (1998) that we are just like the way flies are to the naughty boys so we are to the gods who kill us for their sport only. The only way to improve the condition and situation of the woman is to free her from economic dependences and give her equal rights and opportunities to flourish economically.



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