

The theme of Power Dynamics in the novel “*The Lives of Others*” by Neel Mukherjee with reference to the theory of Marxism

K. Rajyalakshmi¹, Research Scholar at Anurag University and Assistant Professor of English, MLRIT, Hyderabad, India

Dr V.S.V. Laxmi Ramana², Dr V.S.V. Laxmi Ramana, Professor of English, Anurag University, Hyderabad, India

K. Rajyalakshmi, Block 30, Flat 5, Rama Rajnagar, Suchitra junction, Jeedimetla-500067

DOI: 10.47311/IJOES.2023.6.10

Article Received: 14/05/2023

Article Revised: 03/06/2023

Article Accepted: 04/06/2023

Published Online: 05/06/2023

Abstract

The concept of power dynamics is a recurring theme in the writing of Neel Mukherjee. Through his novels, he examines the ways in which power is exerted, manipulated, and resisted in various relationships and societal structures. Marxist literary theory is based on the ideas of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, which focus on the relationship between economic and social structures and cultural production, including literature. According to Marxist theory, literature reflects the prevailing economic and political conditions and the struggles of the oppressed classes for freedom and equality. The research paper attempts to study the novel "The Lives of Others" by Neel Mukherjee and how it can be interpreted from a Marxist perspective as it deals with themes of class struggle and the oppression of the lower classes by the ruling class in Bengal during the British colonial period. The novel portrays the exploitative nature of colonialism and the capitalist system, highlighting the ways in which they perpetuated poverty and inequality. Through its portrayal of the lives of different characters, the novel illustrates the ways in which class, power, and economic conditions shape individuals and their relationships. The novel offers a critique of the capitalist system and the power dynamics that underlie it. The novel highlights the ongoing struggle between the ruling class and the oppressed and how individuals can resist the forces of oppression through collective action and resistance.

Keywords: social structures, class struggle, power dynamics, poverty, resistance.

Marxist Theory: It is a framework that analyses works of literature through the lens of Marxist philosophy, which emphasizes the role of economic and political power in society. In Marxist theory, literature is seen as a reflection of the dominant class ideologies and social relations. In Marxist theory, power dynamics are a central theme that is closely tied to the issue of class struggle. According to Marxism, society is characterized by a struggle between different

classes over access to and control of resources and power. The ruling class (the bourgeoisie) possesses the means of production and exercises its power to exploit the working class (the proletariat), thereby maintaining its own power and wealth.

Marxism asserts that this exploitation leads to the concentration of power and wealth in the hands of a few, while the majority of the population is left struggling for survival. The theme of power dynamics in Marxist theory highlights the ways in which economic power is transformed into political and cultural power, perpetuating the cycle of oppression and exploitation.

Furthermore, Marxist theory critiques the notion of "false consciousness," which posits that the ruling class uses ideology to manipulate the working class and maintain their power. By examining the power dynamics at play in society, Marxist theory aims to shed light on the mechanisms of oppression and pave the way for revolutionary change.

The theme of Power Dynamics: The theme of power dynamics is a common theme in the writing of many Indian authors, and there are similarities in the ways that this theme is explored in their works. One of the earliest Indian English writers to explore the theme of power dynamics was Raja Rao, who wrote about the impact of colonialism on Indian society and the power dynamics between the colonizers and the colonized in works such as "The Serpent and the Rope". In the later part of the 20th century, writers like Salman Rushdie, Arundhati Roy, and Amitav Ghosh continued to explore the theme of power dynamics in their works, examining the aftermath of colonialism and the power imbalances in contemporary Indian society which has been shaping the country.

Introduction of the author:

Neel Mukherjee is an Indian author, widely recognized for his notable contributions to contemporary Indian literature. Born in Calcutta, India, in 1970, Mukherjee initially trained as a computer engineer before pursuing a career in writing. He is known for his unique writing style, which often explores the complexities of family dynamics, class struggles, and political issues in modern-day India.

Mukherjee's writing is marked by a deep sensitivity to the nuances of human relationships and a keen eye for the subtleties of social and cultural life in India. He has written several books, including the critically acclaimed novel "The Lives of Others," which was shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize in 2014. This novel delves into the lives of a wealthy Calcutta family and the poor workers who work for them, offering a powerful critique of modern-day India's social, economic, and political realities.

Another notable work by Mukherjee is his novel "A State of Freedom," which explores the lives of ordinary people struggling to survive in contemporary India. Through this novel, Mukherjee highlights the complexities of modern-day India and the challenges facing the country's marginalized communities.

Mukherjee's writing is characterized by his mastery of language and his ability to bring the reader into the world he creates. He is known for his ability to seamlessly blend political commentary with compelling storytelling, creating thought-provoking and emotionally resonant works.

Overall, Neel Mukherjee is an important voice in contemporary Indian literature, offering insightful perspectives on the complexities of modern-day India and the people who face its

challenges. He has written several books, including the critically acclaimed novel "The Lives of Others," which was shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize in 2014. This novel delves into the lives of a wealthy Calcutta family and the poor workers who work for them, offering a powerful critique of modern-day India's social, economic, and political realities. Through his writing, he invites readers to explore the complexities of human relationships, the realities of class struggles, and the political issues India faces.

A State of Freedom: In "A State of Freedom", Mukherjee explores the power dynamics between the rich and the poor, decision making and how these dynamics shape the experiences of individuals from different socio-economic backgrounds. He highlights how colonialism and the caste system in India perpetuate power imbalances and the ways in which wealth, status, and privilege can be used to exert power, and how marginalized communities are often forced to resist and challenge these power imbalances. the inequalities of the Indian class and caste system, and the impact these have on individual lives. In the novel "The Lives of Others" by Neel Mukherjee, the protagonists express themselves in a variety of ways when they are encountered power dynamics. Here are a few examples:

Supratik, a young Marxist intellectual, rebels against the power dynamics of Indian society through his political activism and writing. Despite facing censorship and persecution, Supratik continues to express his dissent and critique the status quo by publishing his works. He joins the Marxist group and involves in protests against the government. He also is noted for rejecting the norms of class and caste and embracing his own beliefs and values.

Mukherjee also highlights the relationship between wealthy landowners and their tenant labourers. The landowners hold almost complete power over the lives of their tenants, dictating their working conditions, pay, and housing arrangements, and exploiting and oppressing them. Supratik's older brother, Udayan, also expresses his dissent against the power dynamics of Indian society but does so through different means. Udayan becomes involved in Maoist guerrilla activities and embarks on a violent revolution against the state.

The connection between the wealthy landowners and their tenant labourers. The landowners hold almost complete power over the lives of their tenants, dictating their working conditions, pay, and housing arrangements, and exploiting and oppressing them.

One clear example of power dynamics in "The Lives of Others" is the relationship between wealthy landowners and their tenant labourers. The landowners hold almost complete power over the lives of their tenants, dictating their working conditions, pay, and housing arrangements. They also have the power to physically abuse or exploit their tenants with little consequence and use their influence to keep the local authorities from intervening.

For example, one of the landowners in the novel, Jyoti-kaka, routinely beats his tenants for not working hard enough or for failing to pay their rent on time. The tenants are afraid to resist or complain, as they fear losing their jobs and homes. This dynamic demonstrates how power imbalances can lead to exploitation and oppression and show how those in positions of power can use their influence to maintain their dominance.

The relationship between the rural tenants and the police. The police are complicit in the exploitation of the tenants by the landowners and often use their authority to enforce the wishes of the landowners. For instance, when the tenants organize a protest against the oppressive conditions on the estate, the police are sent to break up the demonstration and arrest the leaders.

The tenants are powerless to resist the police, who use their power to maintain the status quo and protect the interests of the landowners.

The character Gouri explores the power dynamics between the wealthy and the poor in India. Gouri is a maidservant who works for a wealthy family in Calcutta and is representative of the marginalized and oppressed working class in India. Throughout the novel, Mukherjee highlights the power imbalance between Gouri and her employers, exposing the exploitation and abuse that often occurs in such relationships.

Gouri's relationship with her employers reflects the larger societal power dynamics that exist between the wealthy and the poor in India. Through her experiences, Mukherjee shows how the working class is often subjected to exploitation and abuse, with little recourse for justice. The power dynamic between Gouri and her employers is further complicated by the cultural and social norms that dictate the way in which they interact with each other, which often serve to reinforce the power imbalance.

The relationship between the women and men in the rural community also serves as another example. Women are often subjected to gender-based violence and discrimination and have limited agency and autonomy in their personal and professional lives. For instance, one of the female characters in the novel, Doyal, is forcibly married off as a child bride, and then subjected to physical and emotional abuse by her husband. This example highlights the intersection of gender and power and shows how patriarchal norms and values reinforce existing power imbalances and restrict the agency of women.

The relationship between the rural community and the city-dwellers. The city-dwellers view the rural community as backward and uncivilized, and hold a condescending attitude towards them, reinforcing the power imbalance between the city and the countryside.

The relationship between the marginalized rural tenants and the political and economic elite. The tenants are oppressed by the powerful and wealthy landowners and politicians, who use their influence and resources to maintain their dominance and control over the rural community.

Overall, the characters in the novel express themselves in a range of ways, from political activism to quiet rebellion, in their encounters with power dynamics. They struggle to find their own voice and agency in a society marked by oppression and inequality. All the above examples highlight the interplay between political and economic power, as well as the role of state institutions in perpetuating power imbalances. It also shows how those who are oppressed can be further marginalized and suppressed by those in positions of authority, and how the state can play a key role in reinforcing existing power dynamics. However, by examining the ways in which power is exerted, manipulated, and resisted, Mukherjee, sheds light on the impact of power imbalances on individual lives and communities.

Conclusion:

Through his writing, Mukherjee aims to encourage a critical examination of the ways in which power operates in our societies and to raise awareness about the importance of resistance and challenge to power imbalances. This is a theme that continues to be relevant in many parts of the world, including in India, where inequality remains a significant issue. He also highlights the importance of examining the sources and consequences of power and the ways in which power can be used to shape societal norms and cultural narratives. Ultimately, by exploring the theme of power dynamics, Mukherjee seeks to educate the world about the power's complexities

and realities of power and to encourage a more just and equitable world.

References:

Isaac, J.C. (1987) *Power and Marxist Theory: A Realist Approach*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Neel Mukherjee *The Lives of Others* Random House India, London, 2014.

Payeng, D.(2019). *Power Dynamics and Predicaments of The Marginalized in A Fine Balance*. SMART MOVES JOURNAL IJELLH, 7(9), 54.

http://www.mpow.org/elisheva_sadan_empowerment.pdf

<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Marxism>

<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/definition/marxism>

<https://pediaa.com/how-to-apply-marxist-theory-to-literature/>

https://www.webpages.uidaho.edu/engl_258/Lecture%20Notes/marxism_in_modern_literature.htm

<https://egyankosh.ac.in/bitstream/123456789/22646/1/Unit-1.pdf>

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/may/14/lives-of-others-neel-mukherjee-review>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2014/12/28/books/review/the-lives-of-others-by-neel-mukherjee.html>

Biographies

MS K. Rajya Lakshmi is qualified with a Master of Arts in English Literature from Andhra University. Phil in Social Exclusion Studies from English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad, Post-Graduation Diploma in English Language Teaching from Osmania University, Hyderabad, Industry Certified Trainer, currently pursuing her PhD in English Literature at Anurag University. She is an Assistant Professor of English at Marri Laxman Reddy Institute of Technology. She has fourteen years of experience teaching in various Schools, Degree Colleges, and Engineering Colleges.

Dr V.S.V Laxmi Ramana is a Professor of English with an accomplished track record of imparting quality-based education for more than 30 plus years. Assimilated a proven track record and leverage of working abroad with a different cross-cultural section of students. Two best teacher awards were conferred by (MU KSA). A Review Member in IJCRT, Editorial Board Member for Linguist: Sino-US English Teaching, ISSN1539-8072, USA, US-China Foreign Language, ISSN1539-8080, USA and Editorial Board Member for Global Education Review, ISSN 2220-1599, Hong Kong. she had Written books like *Book Teaching Large Classes: Problems and Prospects*: ISBN-978-1-5457-0298-7, *A Handbook on "Introduction to Phonetics & Phonology for Arabic Students"* ISBN: 978-1-947752-81-8.

Her Research Interests include Content -Based English Language Teaching, Project-Based Language Teaching, Applied Linguistics and Discourse Analysis. Her Teaching interests include English Language Teaching, Linguistics, Language Projects, Outcome-based Education in Language Proficiency, and Designing a Need-based Curriculum.