



## Deterioration from Humanity to Commodity: An Exploration of Class Struggle, Power Dynamics and Alienation in Tariq Rehman's Fiction

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p><b>Keywords:</b> Commodity, Alienation, False Consciousness, Revolution, Class Discrimination, Marxism, Exploitation</p> <p><b>Corresponding Author:</b> <b>Kanwal Yasmeen,</b> Lecturer, Government College of Technology (M), Sargodha, Email: <a href="mailto:kanwalyasmeen502@gmail.com">kanwalyasmeen502@gmail.com</a></p>	<p>This study aims to analyze the commodification of human lives in Rehman's short stories. This research investigates the ways in which feudal and capitalist systems transform essential human aspects into market commodities through the work of a Pakistani contemporary writer. The study of stories like <i>The Keepers</i>, <i>Eid Shopping</i> and <i>The Folly</i> (1991) reveals in different ways how individuals handle the intricate interactions between money-related stress, society's demands and the customs of their culture and how they are being exploited. The analysis of these stories has been done by implementing Marxist theory. This theory examines aspects of Rehman's work to gain a better understanding of society, characters and exploitation of these characters as commodities through Marx's concepts of class struggle, social injustice and alienation. The stories are analyzed using a qualitative approach through close reading of the texts. An extensive reading of the stories brings forth the outcomes which have been interpreted in the light of much celebrated Marxist concept. The analysis of these stories demonstrates the effectiveness of the Marxist approach to develop a classless society. The results vividly indicate that individuals are being treated as commodities in developing countries during the postcolonial era as depicted beautifully in Rehman's fictional expedition. The work can assist other researchers attempting to upgrade human lives, especially in developing countries, by eliminating social, political, institutional, religious and economic inequalities.</p>

### 1. Introduction

#### 1.1. Introduction of the writer

The literature acts as a social mirror, which reflects discrimination in social order, power dynamics, struggle and inequality. Authors tend to focus their writing to point out issues in society and social problems. In this aspect, famous Pakistani writer Tariq Rehman gained popularity due to his complex observations on how the marginalized groups dealt with

the repressive regime. He has authored numerous award-winning books, short stories and articles. He authored books on language, social sciences and literature history. Among his most popular books, there are *From Hindi to Urdu* (2011), *Language and Politics in Pakistan* (1996), *Language Education and Culture* (1999), *A History of Pakistani Literature in English* (1991), and *Linguistics for Beginners* (2010). Among such writings is Rehman's *Work and other short stories* (1991) that is mostly based on the injustice of the poor and the immense disparity that exists between the working class and their employers. He is sophisticated in presenting situations of the lower class in the country of his origin. As one of the finest Pakistani writers, he actually presents the Pakistani society in his works that reflect the Pakistani mentality. He is not affected by any foreign author; though, he finds his path by means of his works. His works are a reflection of his ideas and the processes occurring in Pakistan. He is very much concerned with social issues that occur in his surroundings. The struggle of the poor and the mountainous gap between the lower-class and the elites prove it since most of his writings are devoted to these topics.

### 1.2. Overview of stories

In *The Keepers*, the ruling class is represented as a human whereas the poor and working class are represented as an animal, a characteristic that reflects their dehumanization and inferiority in treatment. The keepers represent the bourgeoisie that owns wealth, power and authority whereas the animals represent the proletariat that has no choice but to follow instructions and cannot be an individual or a human being. They tried to change their masters in the hope of introducing some form of change, yet each time, they found themselves being treated in the same manner. Throughout their stay in the regions of all the keepers, they were ill-treated, exploited, isolated and even marginalized while the dominating powers kept their positions due to their ability to introduce the oppressed as inferior beings. In the end, the story echoes the concept of the struggle between classes, a concept in which the humanity of the poor is systematically denied to further serve the privilege of the elite.

This distinction of the two faces of the bourgeoisie and the proletariat is also made clear by depicting two families, a deputy secretary and a clerk, who have their salaries in advance and shop around to celebrate Eid in *Eid Shopping*. The privileged family goes shopping with ease and abundance whereas the working-class clerk can hardly afford to satisfy even the simplest desire of his child. The clerk family, the proletariat, becomes alienated socially as well as emotionally due to their low economic status.

*The Folly* is about Talib Hussain and Dr. Aslam Bhatti, where the latter narrates the tragic story of Mrs. Baig, a capitalist who is full of greed and materialism. The insane desire to construct an impressive house is the wish of a capitalist to accumulate even against human relations and morality. She sells her children, pitting her daughter Shaista into an arranged loveless marriage and dreaming of doing the same with her son Ikram, as commodities to be used as profit but not treated as individuals with dignity. Ikram opposes this exploitation, which serves as revolutionary retaliation, by burning down the house (symbolizing greed by capitalists). Shaista also experiences neglect, becoming the victim of disease and alienation that eventually leads her to death, and Mrs. Baig ends up dying under the same half-finished building she had attempted to glorify so much.

### 1.3. Background of theory

"Marxism is a tradition of thought which includes numerous interpretations, developments and modifications of the insights of Marx himself, some of which constitute necessary amendments to the inherent limitations of those insights whilst others result from attempts to be consistent to them in historically changed circumstances" (Alderson, 2004).

Marxism was inaugurated into the world by the ideas of the radical economist Karl Marx, and the major input of Fredrich Engels, the chief partner of Marx, Marxism was initially written in the works of the two philosophers *Communist Manifesto* in 1848. Where they projected the

bones of their historical materialism theory in the anticipation of the downfall of capitalism by the lower classes. Later on, Engels saw it as his responsibility to provide subsequent volumes of the analysis of Marx on capitalism, *Das Kapital* (1867), and published them after the demise of the German social activist. Scientific approach to the development of society is founded, as all science, on the experience and on facts of the historical world. The development of Marxism is everlasting as man acquires more experience, and today it is being applied to the new facts which have emerged (Burns, 1939).

#### 1.4. Research Questions

The following research questions are designed to facilitate further examination of the story based on the concepts of Marxism.

1. How the individuals are treated as commodities in developing countries?
2. What are the reasons that lead towards the commodification of characters?
3. How does this commodification shape the lives of individuals?

#### 1.5. Aims and Objectives

The main purpose of this study is:

- To analyze the treatment of individuals as commodities in developing countries.
- To find the reasons that lead towards the commodification of characters.
- To explore the impacts of this commodification in shaping the lives of individuals.

#### 2. Literature review

Though the Marxist approach covers all the boundaries and is valid for all the regions yet developing countries are particularly marked as the victim of continuous oppression and control that has been set as a societal norm. It is vividly portrayed by different writers and is examined by different investigators.

Samuel (2024) reveals with the help of Marxist theory that Ishiguro's protagonists are governed and oppressed by the oppressive system. He explores that Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day* (1989), *Never Let Me Go*, and *Klara and the Sun* (2021) clearly expose the alienation of marginalized groups and class hierarchies. The protagonist of *The Remains of the Day*, Stevens, remains in false consciousness where he propagates his oppression as his loyalty. The analysis of the next two novels further demonstrates that capitalism even has the capability of commodifying human life.

Nasrullah et al. (2024) trace the functioning of false consciousness in capitalistic social systems by comparing a Marxist analysis of chosen short stories in *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders* (2009) by Mueenuddin. They examine the theme of narratives like *Nawabdin Electrician*, *Saleema*, *A Spoiled Man*, *Provide*, *About a Burning Girl* and *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders* and investigate how the ruling class is keeping ideological control over the proletariat through inculcating false beliefs which distort material realities. Their results demonstrate that false consciousness is one of the main capitalist modes of domination that lead to the annihilation of marginalized existence and the strengthening of the established class relations in the fictional reality of Mueenuddin.

Zafar et al. (2023) analyses *In the Company of Strangers* (2020) by Awais Khan to inspect exploitation and class disparities in Pakistan through the lens of Marxism. This research demonstrates hidden corruption and unethical practices of elite focusing on the ways how working class is exploited by the upper class. The main characters of the novel, Mona and Ali, have been focussed in this study to reveal the class conflict, elite mind-set and exploitation of proletariat by the bourgeoisie. This study also highlights the class structures and social inequalities in developing countries in postcolonial era through Marxism.

The study of commodification as subject matter in literary fiction is significant as it helps to understand that the economic system determines human identities, relationships and moral values. Commodification is broadly defined as "the social process whereby a person or thing

becomes understood as a 'mere thing,' entirely separate from people and relations that give it meaning" (Brown, 2010).

Suhel and Sathikulameen (2025) focus on how the commodified human existence is manifested in the novel *The Corrections* (2001) by Franzen and locate this text in the context of consumerist capitalism in American society. Their work follows the trajectory of the impact of capitalistic forces on the life of the Lambert family showing how consumer culture heavily penetrates personal relationships, family life and personal identities. According to the researchers, *The Corrections* reveals the way in which individuals are turned into market-based subjects whose dreams and disappointments are built upon the pressures of the economy instead of human principles.

Many researchers explore that Tariq Rehman, a Pakistani writer, brilliantly uses literature as a tool to depict the colours of society in a developing country. The thematic and structural analysis of Rehman's fiction demonstrates that his writings vividly discovers the gloomy aspects of society in a very subtle way.

Shah et al. (2025) provide a comprehensive linguistic analysis of the conflict of classes in Rehman's short stories, *Charity and The Moustache* (1980), by using qualitative research pattern based on the principles of interpretative research design. The results indicate that the language of Rehman consciously anticipates difference on the basis of classification where vivid and contrasted descriptions are used to highlight social distance between the elite (the bourgeoisie) and the working class (the proletariat). According to the scholars, these linguistic rules not only reveal the sense of deprivation and exploitation but also provide the readers with an opportunity to sympathize with marginalized characters. It is concluded that the short stories by Rahman are based on certain discursive strategies to shape and maintain the element of class conflict and explain that language itself is a tool, with the help of which inequality and domination are normalized.

Bakhtawar et al. (2024) present a Marxist approach to the short story *The Sweepress* (1991) by Rehman based on the elements of inequality and the struggle of classes. In their research, they point to the way in which the story uncovers how the working population is still exploited by the ruling elite, which is entrenched in the inequality of power structures. Using some major Marxist ideas of social inequality and alienation, the researchers show that the sweepress as an embodiment of the proletariat is often marginalized and deprived of dignity systematically. The narrative exposes how economic dependency and unavailability of resources keep the working masses in the demeaning social roles whereas the bourgeoisie continue living in the world of prosperity, power and institutional domination. The examiners believe that such imbalance does not lead to material deprivation alone but also to a state of psychological alienation because the characters of the working classes internalize their oppression and are not included in any serious social life.

### **3. Theoretical Framework**

Eagleton (1976/2013) states that Marxism is "essential for the fullest explanation of any work of literature," highlights that Marxism is a relevant and useful theoretical framework to analyze any piece of literature. Marxism was introduced in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century after Marx and Engels condemned capitalism and introduced the principles of communism. It consists of both theoretical concepts and practical experience, originating from key findings of Marx (Suvin, 2013).

#### **3.1. The Core Principles of Marxism**

The Marxist theory is based on set of a few main principles: Dialectical Materialism, Historical Materialism, Class Struggle, Alienation, false consciousness and Revolution.

##### **3.1.1. Dialectical Materialism**

A philosophy called dialectical materialism grew out of works by Marx and Engels and was mainly developed in Russia and the USSR. Existential changes are seen as happening

naturally as living organisms evolve in new stages. According to dialectical materialism, political and historical changes happen due to clashes between different social forces that have to be resolved. They are started by the way individuals live and the resources they use. As Fokkema and Kunne-Ibsch (1998) state that, through dialectical materialism, social issues can be changed. From this perspective, they believed the progress of humanity would be pushed forward through the struggle between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat in society.

### **3.1.2. Historical Materialism**

“Marx believed that the history of people is directly based on the production of goods and the social relationships that develop from that situation” (Bressler, 1999). It provides a strategy to look at society, economics and history from the perspective of material development over time. Marx claimed that changes in the means of production and technology mainly determine the features of society and the economy. Selden (1985) argued that historical materialism outlines the practice of human beings creating their material circumstances. The setup of superior and subordinate roles in a society’s economy and governance, characteristic of an era, forms the basis of its entire culture. Marxist criticism inspires readers “to see the unhappy truths about material/historical reality, for whether or not authors intend it they are bound to represent socioeconomic inequities and ideological contradictions” (Tyson, 2006).

### **3.1.3. Class Struggle**

According to Marx (1972), “The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles.... into two great classes directly facing each other: Bourgeoisie and Proletariat”. As Choudhury (2002) said, “Karl Marx talked about class struggle and incorporated it into his theories of society. Class struggle can be defined as social divisions among people where each class of people struggles and fights to gain a superior position in society and the maximum areas and means of production”.

### **3.1.4. Alienation**

Alienation is the result of living in a society with social stratification as individuals end up functioning only as parts of their social group and losing touch with their essential human qualities. According to Hartisekar (2001), alienation comes from individuals’ sense that the world is not natural to them. In the world, humans see nature as something distinct and separate from themselves, although humans made it.

### **3.1.5. False consciousness**

False consciousness refers to groups or individuals holding wrong beliefs about dominant values, society and about themselves which hide the particular realities from them. This concept was first introduced by Engels rather than Marx and was developed as a theory by Lukács in *History and Class Consciousness* (1972). He used this term to describe a special belief that tries to cover the true essence of human conditions as if the situation and history are something normal, true and have always existed (Hamati, 2015).

### **3.1.6. Revolution**

Eagleton (2002) states, “Marxism is scientific hypothesis of human social orders and is the act of changing them; and what implies rather more solidly is that the narrative Marxism needs to convey is the narrative of the battles of men and ladies to free themselves from specific types of abuse and persecution”. Revolution inevitably develops from the clash between classes. Marx holds that progress in all societies occurs as either a revolution or as a reaction to previous forms of progress (Blessler, 1999).

## **4. Data Analysis and Discussion**

### **4.1. Analysis**

Analysis refers to the systematic examination and interpretation of data gathered in qualitative research, focusing on understanding the information and extracting meaningful insights. Consequently, this chapter aims to deliver a deeper understanding of the research findings and to develop key conclusions by exploring interpretations of statements that reveal

the core elements of Marxism—particularly social injustices, class struggle and alienation—as depicted in Rehman’s short stories.

#### **4.1.1. Class struggle**

In Marxist ideologies, the class struggle is the main process that defines social organization as well as historical process. In the stories of Rehman, class struggle is a central element of interest, particularly as perceived through the prism of the developing countries. These stories explain the tension between the poor and the rich and how the day-by-day life of the masses is shaped by the will and decisions of the rich.

Class struggle in *The Keepers* is portrayed by the fact that the working class, the animals, make numerous efforts to change their keepers thinking that it can improve their situation but they are constantly suppressed. It brings out the concept of Marx that the real change will not be achieved through replacing the rulers but breaking down the exploitation systems.

The narrative of the story shows this class struggle in the tyranny of the SAD KEEPER as, “The animals soon learned to live with the gospel of work” (p. 138). The ruling class employs ideology to make exploitation normal as seen in the sentence. ‘The gospel of work’, in Marxist terms, is a manifestation of false consciousness, i.e., an ideology that teaches the oppressed to embrace hard work as their righteousness when the excess value of their work will only go to the elite. The animals are not questioning their oppression; they internalize it and this is how the working classes are conditioned to tolerate their exploitation instead of opposing it to perpetuate the inequality among classes. It is shown in the story that Snails and birds were not liked because “they did not work” (p. 138) and that is why they were disrespected. This is also an indication of how ideology is used as an instrument of control by ensuring that the workers accept that their misery is normal and that they cannot change it. The Mad Keeper also treated them in the same way. As this sentence represents, “The Keeper made them work all day....that which had been free was no longer free” (p. 144). In this text, the concept of power and control in the Marxist theory exists in various forms of class struggle. Though the new keeper does not seem to be as cruel as the old one, by not punishing the animals directly, he continues to dominate the animals by making them economically dependent, i.e. he associates survival with shells, which are a representation of wages. In this way, no reforms are applied to the system of power, it is simply replaced by economic power. In the same way, when the animals entered in the sovereignty of Bad Keeper, he informed them, “They were there to work” (p. 147). The Marxist concept of commodification, where the workers are appreciated as commodities of labour, and not as human beings, is best reflected through this sentence. It is the way the ruling classes reduce the individuals of oppression to the means of production and deprive them of their identity, freedom and individuality. This brings out the dehumanizing aspect of the class struggle where survival is involved in the endless work.

Likewise, Rehman’s character Allah Dad represents this element of Marxism, class struggle, in *Eid Shopping*. Allah Dad, the main character of the story, represents the class struggle since he is attempting to live with the burden of poverty on his shoulders. Since his childhood, he has been struggling for his life and even for the basic needs like food and shelter. “He thought his flesh would shrink into wrinkles and his stomach would become a concave hollow” (p. 150). This sentence vividly indicates the state of poor Allah Dad in his need to quench his hunger which is one of the basic human needs that was made a luxury in the oppression of the classes. In the context of the class struggle, it depicts how the labour of the working class puts the latter on the brink of survival though it enriches the elite.

In the same way, the narrative of *The Folly* also illustrates the devastating effect of greed and exploitation under a capitalist mind-set which further highlights the struggles of the working class. “Labourers worked night and day” (p. 194). It depicts the labourers with their weary and hard work as they laboured all day and all night, which is a sign of the ever-lasting

struggle of the working classes to survive. This is also a reflection of the cruelty of class struggle in the person of Mrs. Baig. Her insatiable appetite and capitalistic nature compelled other characters to exploitation and sacrifice in the name of her castle-like house to be constructed. At the same time, the workers lost their reality and dignity to build her dream.

Ikram also became a casualty of his mother and her insatiable ambitions, striving to satisfy her, yet, having nothing in the result. His hard work, sacrifices and even his identity were devoured by the quest of Begum Baig to acquire wealth and status, and he was left with nothing in his hands. "He was always running....But the mother knew no satisfaction" (p. 196). This scenario brings out the aspect of struggle between classes since Ikram represents the oppressed worker who was tirelessly working to satisfy the never-ending needs of the mother. His role is minimized to an employee, who is running behind the contractors and materials, whereas Begum Baig is the bourgeoisie, who is using his energy for her own interests. His labour versus her unquenchable lusts echoes the Marxist struggle between the producers and the consumers, as the working class is emptied and the ruling class is never satisfied or content with what is received.

#### **4.1.2. Social/ Class inequality**

According to Marxism, social inequality is a consequence of the unequal sharing of the economic power of a society structured by a system of classes. In this section, the short stories of Rehman are analyzed to explore the functioning of social inequality in economic, social and institutional life. By critically examining the narrative structures, characters and their relationships, the analysis explains the way that unequal power systems control human experiences and define social value. Through foregrounding divisions and material reliance in classes, all these stories depict that inequality is normalized and persistent in developing societies.

Social inequality is not limited to a single individual but extends to critique at institutional level in Rehman's fiction. This extended, unequal structure is highlighted in *The Keepers* by the clear distinction between the keepers who are full of power, privilege and the animals that exist to serve. The keepers live in comfort by the work of animals who are deprived and powerless. This is an expression of unfair allocation of power and resources that characterizes the classes in Marxist concepts.

In the story, the elders taught the juniors, who were fond of running about, to walk in silence with sorrowful and melancholic faces. "For the Keeper could have broken....as if we were our own masters" (pg. 139). This quote is a profound indication of the extent of social inequality by demonstrating the way the oppressed can be made to believe they have no power and that they are left at the mercy of their masters. The line brings out the fact that the poor class lives in fear of violence and exploitation. Their bodies can be broken, their lives can be ruined and still they have to be thankful that they can live to see another day. This ironic thankfulness is an indication of the non-recognition of equality: as the elites are free, dignified and powerful, the poor are deprived even of the most fundamental right to live without fear. The fact that they are not their 'own masters' is ironic and serves to drive the point that they are under the control of others and the fact that the society is not only devoid of equality but actually thrives on the fact that the poor are under control.

The narrative "The animals forgot their nature.... the lion was like the mouse" (pg. 149) is a symbolic description of the loss of dignity, the natural strength and freedom of the oppressed by social inequality. The animals who were strong and free are made subdued until they lose their identity. Even the cubs that are born in captivity are subject to this form of weakness and fear and this demonstrates how inequality is passed down to another generation. The lion, which used to be the image of courage, reduced to a mouse also shows how dehumanized individuals are: the poor, who have the ability to do anything, are rendered powerless by the system.

This form of social injustice is also evident in *Eid Shopping* as it captures the life contrast of a clerk, Allah Dad, and a deputy secretary who speaks more to the lower and higher classes in society. When Allah Dad entered the house, “He lifted the sack cloth which served as the curtain of his two-room house” (p. 150). The selected line from the text describes social injustice faced by the working class. ‘The Sack cloth’, which is used as a curtain, is an indication of a stark deprivation of basic comforts and dignity in the life of the poor. It sharply opposes the comfort and luxury lived by privileged individuals, the family of the deputy secretary, as they have well-furnished houses with appropriate facilities. While the family of Allah Dad is suffering and sacrificing the basic necessities, the family of the deputy secretary is enjoying all the comforts and privileges. “Then, having decided that it was too much hot not to put the air conditioner on, she switched it on” (p. 152). This sentence highlights social inequality as it demonstrates the careless comfort and class of the high society. When Allah Dad is struggling to survive, Mr. and Mrs. Aftab can afford to use luxuries like air conditioning without any second thoughts. It also indicates that the social inequality is not only apparent in terms of wealth but also in the quality of life and the living conditions.

Despite the fact they both earn salaries in advance, their salaries and experiences are completely different. Allah Dad spent every coin to buy shoes for his son, so they ended up with nothing. Now they could not even afford the fare of a bus because ‘there was no money for the bus’, so they ‘started walking home on foot’ (p.156), and it is not only the baggage that they carried but poverty as well. On the contrary, the Deputy Secretary, Mr. Aftab and his family enjoys the benefits without worries. “Mr. and Mrs. Aftab got into the car with Addy” (p. 154). The sentence is representative of class privilege, comfort and social ascendancy. The car symbolizes wealth, status and access in a Marxist situation, which are accessible not to everyone but only to the bourgeoisie (upper class). The fact that Mr. and Mrs. Aftab can easily get a private car indicates the privileged status of this family in society. It is a stark contrast to other characters such as Allah Dad and his family who has to walk home because the family is poor. In these selected sentences, the researcher has analysed that the comfortable and convenient lives of the upper class are contrasted with the deprived lives of the working class, revealing a difference in equality on the basis of classes.

This aspect of social injustice in *The Folly* is revealed in the inequality of the situation in which the poor work continuously, and yet the capitalist only reaps the rewards and benefits, as the labourers and the efforts of Shaista and Ikram just keep inflicting pain on them and Mrs. Baig is the only one to look forward to pleasure and fulfill her desires. This contrast exposes the inhumanity of a system that is based on greed and injustice.

Mrs. Baig, Shaista and Ikram are presented in a very powerful way so as to reflect social inequality. Mrs. Baig is a bourgeois mindset, who is trying to usurp all resources to satisfy her materialistic goals at the expense of the desires and lives of her children. “Her son was not to be sent to England for higher studies” (p. 194). The analysis of this textual line unmasks the fact that Mrs. Baig does not want to take her son to England to continue his studies. When she invests all the resources in building her dream house, orchards, selling books, horses, and even the car, Ikram is denied his basic right to education. She would like to spend money on building library walls instead of using money to treat her daughter. “Begum Baig didn’t want to spare the money for the sanatorium” (p. 201). This is an expression of social inequality because Begum Baig though a rich woman refuses to spend on the treatment of her daughter that depicts that the allocation of resources is not uniform. As she is busy with creating material needs in her life, her children are deprived even of the right to live and breathe. This indicates how the ruling classes waste wealth in vain and materialism, and the younger generation of the oppressed is not even allowed the fundamental rights of education, development, and self- realization. According to the Marxist



approach, this is a sadistic description of the harsh truth of social injustice, in which the greed of the ruling elite feeds off the exclusion and distress of the powerless.

#### **4.1.3. Alienation**

Alienation in Marxism implies that laborers are not connected with their labor as well as with themselves. In a simple expression, alienation is the sense of being out of touch with your own effort, your creativity and your -self due to the fact that the system treats workers like a tool and not as human beings. The concept of alienation in the stories by Rehman can be observed in the characters who are too far out of touch with their job, their environment, their personal emotions and even themselves.

In *The Keepers*, alienation is illustrated by the deprivation of joy, freedom and identity of the animals which are reduced to nothing more than working to survive in the hands of their masters. They were not allowed to laugh or be in good spirits, and were constantly reminded that whatever they had done previously was wrong. They were forbidden to enjoy anything and for them any kind of “Pleasure was Bad” (pg. 137). The fact that pleasure is termed bad is a result of the alienation of the oppressed not only to freedom but also to the human instincts and feelings. The animals, which represent the poor, are not given any joy and life in the story; they are compelled to remain silent, submissive and to work continuously. This repression of natural desires demonstrates the mechanism of alienation: buried and excluded, the marginalized person becomes deprived of his or her life and turns into a machine serving the will of the Keeper instead of functioning as a free subject.

The segregation of the animals also supports alienation as they were not allowed to be united and strong together. The scene of animals being driven into different cages with ‘kicks and whips’ symbolizes the way the oppressed are intentionally split and separated. Alienation here is depicted by depriving animals of their freedom and from each other just like the poor do not have community, dignity and their real identity. They are not united; rather they are made lonely and submissive so that they will be helpless in the hands of the Keeper. “And they all retired to separate corners....so they remain separate” (pg. 149). These lines demonstrate that the animals are even in isolation though technically ‘free’ since they cannot create any relationships with each other. The expansive plain is the symbol of the distance set among themselves by their surroundings and their natural tendency to keep to themselves emphasizes the way they are oppressed and have adapted to it. Real freedom is not granted, as loneliness and fear do not allow any serious relationships and solidarity.

The characters were confined so long in solitude that they cannot trust each other, thus ‘they stayed alone’, and this brings out the extent of alienation that the Keeper inflicts on them. Their seclusion demonstrates how the instincts and relations are twisted by long-term control and oppression and bring them to the state of loneliness. This demonstrates how extended domination and oppression can end up doing more than restricting freedom; in fact, it can isolate individuals, making them fearful, divided and weakened even when there is no longer direct control. This isolation from self-identity, emotions and society reflects the Marxist framework of alienation in an authoritative and capitalist system.

The Marxist idea of alienation is represented in *Eid Shopping* through the setting of the poor class being deprived of social pleasure and social festivities, due to poverty. Allah Dad is alienated by the fact that during his childhood, he had no home to call his own and he was rejected by society to such an extent that no one would marry their daughter to him due to his poverty. From the beginning, he was treated as a commodity because he had no money and “he had nowhere to go” (p. 150). This social isolation made him lonely, unwelcome and deprived of the relationships of belonging so natural to other individuals. “And then there were long years when one relative after the other threw him out of the house” (p. 150). The sample text reveals that every single instance of being cast out not only deprived him of shelter but also strengthened his isolation as he was left to fight alone, with no one to help

him as he deserved to be helped. This repeated refusal brings out the emptiness and loneliness that characterized his childhood.

Even the family of Allah Dad is deprived of the joyful mood of Eid which underlines how poverty divides the poor population and deprives them of an opportunity to play a significant role in society. Emotional attachments are negated by the need to survive, which makes the family members feel isolated, even amongst themselves. “So unfamiliar were their emotions that they were embarrassed” (p. 154). The line explains the isolation of the family of Allah Dad on emotional terms. Their poverty and their constant struggle to survive had alienated them from the simple joys and affections others feel without any constraint. These feelings were awkward when faced with rare instances of joy or intimacy, as deprivation had left these individuals unable to relate to each other in a natural way. The fact that they avoided eye contact shows that they are not able to communicate freely since every one of them was bearing the burden of shame, frustration and helplessness. This alienation shows how material suffering became emotional loneliness and they were disconnected even when they lived in the same house.

The element of alienation in *The Folly* is portrayed in the severe isolation of those who do everything without anything in return. The art of Shaista and the resistance of Ikram no longer make sense in the world of greed and thus both are alienated to the world, to their art and their efforts as well as to the warmth of humanity. With this alienation, we see the way in which capitalism is a drain on labour as well as on love and self.

Alienation is analysed by the researcher through the narration which expresses Shaista’s condition, “Shaista was at home but not to be seen anywhere. She was buried somewhere” (pp. 194-195). This line describes the profound feeling of alienation that she experiences. She is physically present in the house but socially erased and inaccessible because of her inability to have any meaning in her existence. Her dreams, her voice, and even her tormented existence are covered with the greed and the ambitions of her mother. This invisibility is an echo of Marxist alienation where individuals are deprived of identity and affiliation and are reduced to mere shadows in a system that values money above human life. This estrangement is further tragic when she passes away from T.B. in ‘a desolate house’ where she has not been taken care of. No one was there to console her in her affliction. She is commodified, suppressed to silence and loneliness to the very end.

Mrs. Baig, as an embodiment of the bourgeoisie, also finds herself in a tragic situation of alienation due to her insatiable lust for accumulating money and splendour. “She was alone and the house was dark at night” (p. 202). She loses everything; after giving up her children and using up her life trying blindly to get money, she has nothing left but silence and emptiness. The darkness of the unfinished house reflects the emptiness of her soul as the preoccupation with material wealth alienated her human relationships and doomed her to death in total loneliness as ‘she was found dead’ under the debris. This is a clear indication of the fact that even the bourgeoisie suffer from alienation due to their insane lust for power, money and control in the capitalist structure where the exploited as well as the exploiters become socially and emotionally isolated in a dehumanizing social set-up.

#### **4.2. Discussion**

The analysis of the above data has revealed that these stories constantly echo the structural realities of societies that are based on classes and predetermine the lived experiences of economically and socially disadvantaged individuals in developing countries. This concluding discussion sums up findings and aligns them with other existing Marxist studies to illustrate how the fiction of Rehman both supports and expands the current critical discourse.

Class struggle is one of the central findings of this research as it is an underlying and constant force in Rehman’s stories. This analysis consistently portrays a distinct line between those

who possess the economic and social power and those who only depend on their work to survive. The division is not shown with outright conflict but is incorporated even in the day-to-day interactions and it is an aspect in which inequality is accepted in society. Similarly, Shah et al. (2025) provide a comprehensive linguistic analysis of the conflict of classes in Rehman's short stories, *Charity and The Moustache* (1980). The results of this study also indicate that the language of Rehman highlights the social distance between the elite (the bourgeoisie) and the working class (the proletariat) which further highlights the struggle of the proletariat class.

The other significant finding of this paper is that the social injustice within these short stories is an internalized form of social reality and not an abnormal or outrageous state. The characters in these stories are commodified and placed in invisible positions due to their unequal status as it has been analyzed. On the same note, Bakhtawar et al. (2024) present a Marxist approach to the short story *The Sweepress* (1991) by Rehman based on the elements of inequality and the struggle of classes. In their research, they also point to the way in which the story uncovers how the working population is still exploited by the ruling elite, which is entrenched in the inequality of power structures.

Alienation is one of the strongest aspects that has been analyzed and found. The characters in Rehman's stories demonstrate that they experience the problem of psychological displacement, lack of emotions and gradual loss of identity. This element of alienation is also supported by the work of Samuel (2024), which depicts alienated characters and shows how exclusion plays an economic role by driving individuals into invisibility. This study further elaborates that such alienation results in the commodification of individuals whereby characters are not viewed as human beings but as objects of economic value, which is also the case in both the developing and the developed societies.

## 5. Conclusion

To sum up, the analysis of the short stories by Rehman shows that the problem of class struggle and social inequality are the key forces that shape the lives of the characters. The discussion indicates that the unequal distribution of power between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat dehumanizes human beings in a systematic manner since they are appreciated by their labor, obedience and economic value. This commodification deprives characters of dignity and agency and makes exploitation a natural state of things instead of treating it like a special case. The aftermath of such a system covers more than material deprivation as the discussion further demonstrates and leads to the deepest form of alienation where the individuals lose track of their work, their social world and themselves. Such fiction by Rehman therefore unveils the ethical and social expenses of capitalistic set-ups in the developing societies, which shows that commodification does not only perpetuate class lines but also increases emotional isolation and human suffering. To illustrate, a combination of postcolonial theory and Marxist analysis can give a better understanding of how colonial legacies contribute to the presence of economic exploitation and class oppression in developing nations, especially in cultures that are still affected by neo-colonial power dynamics and imperial histories.

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