

The Desire for Economic Power Enkindling Human Lives:

A Marxist Reading of H. R. Haggard's Novel 'Beatrice'

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Abstract:

For Marxism the sole motive behind all human activities is acquiring and retaining economic power and in doing so an individual's historical circumstances play a pivotal task. The present research takes into account Sir Henry Rider Haggard's novel 'Beatrice' to reinforce the aforementioned Marxist postulate. This study sets to validate the Marxist claim that money is greatest virtue, far greater than ethics and morality. It accentuates the role played by economic conditions in contouring an individual's character and shaping his personal relationships. It also intends to establish the Marxist stance that religion is an oppressive ideology.

***Keywords:* material resources, historical circumstances, economic power, Beatrice.**

Introduction

Sir Henry Rider Haggard was a prolific English author who lived and wrote during the last decades of nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century with works involving conventional Victorian attitudes to modern characteristics and ideas. His dynamic work list encompasses forty-eight romances and twelve novels. *Beatrice* is his beautifully written romance novel that follows a love story of a bewitching woman namely Beatrice Granger and a married man Geoffrey Bingham whom she rescues from drowning after a shipwreck and later falls in love with. Ill fate encounters their ethereal love and the conspirators play their significant role in subjecting their love to an unfortunate doom. The underpinning element of their rivals' conspiracy is their lust for getting and keeping economic power.

The present study intends to accentuate the Marxist perspective that economic factors play a decisive role in shaping human experiences, activities and behaviors (Tyson, 51). It also endeavors to show that human events and human productions cannot be understood without understanding their specific material circumstances (Tyson, 52).

Research Methodology:

The foundation of this study lies in the full-scale analysis of the text of the novel in the light of Marxist perspective by probing into its plot and by determining the activities of its characters and the historical circumstances in which they dwell. This study tends to propel the Marxist tenet that getting and keeping economic power is the ultimate determining motive behind a society's social and political activities. It tends to verify the proposition that the novel reinforces the Marxist stance that all human affairs, events and productions have specific material causes. Some research questions are designed to make the study most intent and rapt:

- I. Does the novel second the Marxist stance that religion is a repressive ideology?
- II. How does the novel support the Marxist stance that money is greatest virtue, much greater than ethics and morality?
- III. How does it propel that getting and keeping economic power is the motive behind all social and political activities?

Discussion and Analysis

Historical Circumstances: The Ultimate Determinant of Human Behavior

Beatrice's life is an unfortunate one due to the sufferings which she begins to experience from quite young an age. The early death of her younger brother following the death of her mother leaves her displeased with her own life in addition to despising religion and thus turning into an atheist. She is left under the guardianship of her father, Reverend Joseph Granger and elder sister Elizabeth Granger. Their household is shabby one with material resources quite scant, it is with a meager income of Beatrice that Grangers are provided food with and are capable to clothe themselves.

Mr. Granger is referred to as '*money-loving old father*' (Haggard, 103) as he is always interested in financial issues and he keeps complaining about their material circumstances. Money was '*the weak old man's sore point*' (Haggard, 74) and when Beatrice was brought back to shore unconscious, after sea storm has struck her canoe, her father was least worried about her survival however his mind kept pondering on the possibility of losing seventy pounds a year in case Beatrice dies. He always expressed his delight and gratification on the prospect of Owen Davies proposing for Beatrice's hand so that they may secure financial stability in the society, and ask no more for the tithes from his fellow men of Bryngelly, about which he complains most of the time. In accordance with his poverty stricken circumstances, '*he would move heaven and earth to bring about her marriage to this rich man. Her father never had been very scrupulous where money was concerned, and the pinch of want was not likely to make him more so*' (Haggard, 158).

It is religion which he seeks after and utilizes as a tool for fulfilling his financial needs; rather it is more a desirable activity for him to collect tithes as it comes for free under the tag of religion. Most of the dwellers of Bryngelly refuse to pay the tithes because for them it was an unnecessary burden imposed on them by the old clergy man. Old Jones was the most obstinate in paying tithes, he was ever headstrong in paying them thus according to Mr. Granger he owed three year's tithe-thirty-four pounds eleven and four pence. He was able enough to pay yet he sought an excuse for paying the amount that he is a Baptist thus he would not pay parson's dues. It is on this account that Mr. Granger sets to proceed against him lawfully. Thus he, fortified by a judgment duly obtained, announces his intention of seizing Jones's hay and cattle and an auctioneer of undoubted courage was retained by parson to arrive, supported by six policemen to carry out the sale.

However Jones's stubbornness amounted to such an extent that he shot the auctioneer and killed him dead. This was the outcome of Mr. Granger's oppression which he subjected towards people under the label of religion, however people tried to resist the brutal laws yet a life was wasted in the struggle. This whole incident propels the Marxist perspective that religion is an oppressive ideology as the question of God's existence is not the basic issue rather what human do in the name of God (Tyson, 59). Mr. Granger's own daughter turned herself into an atheist yet she was the one who wrote his sermons while Mr. Granger's interest towards religion was in correspondence to collecting tithes, such were his deeds in the name of religion. People of Bryngelly referred Parson to as '*the robber of the widow and the orphan*' because he even forced them to pay his tithes.

Geoffrey Bingham is a non practicing barrister he starts practicing it only after losing his prospects. His uncle, Sir Robert Bingham forced him to marry Lady Honoria who was merely interested in acquiring Bingham's socioeconomic power. With as attractive a prospect as two thousand a year to start with and a baronetcy and eight thousand a year in the near future, Lady Honoria was overwhelmed to marry Geoffrey. However despite his older age, Sir Robert married himself and was blessed with a son and therefore an heir. Thus Geoffrey lost his prospect of inheriting all this from his uncle and it turned Lady Honoria quite displeased from her matrimonial state and she kept on accusing him for their material circumstances for what she feared and hated was poverty. Geoffrey often exclaimed this to Lady Honoria that he often wonders whether she possess a heart and that she looked upon her husband merely as a stepping stone to luxury for she never loved anyone except herself. Later when he acquires the success, it does not bring him happiness however it '*relieved him from money cares*' (Haggard, 154). Thus economics is basis for human life as it is a source of great relief and provides an escape from all the possible anxieties of life.

Owen Davies is a low witted hermit Esquire of Bryngelly Castle and an absolute owner of largest and most prosperous slate quarries in Wales with a worth between seven to ten thousand a year that devolved onto him from his deceased relation. He is head over heels in love with Beatrice and he always thought of winning her heart through his wealth. '*To win her he would have given all his wealth, ay, thrice over, if that were possible*' (Haggard, 91).

It was his opulence that attracted Elizabeth Granger towards him and she began despising her sister because Davies expressed his profound love for Beatrice. This was none other than Elizabeth who

plotted against her very own sister and brought misery to her life and love affair as her '*jealousy was as bitter as the grave*' (Haggard, 129).

Human Activities and their Material Interests

Beatrice and Elizabeth were the only two siblings and former was younger than Elizabeth, yet despite being youngest family member she was the bread winner of the family and provided for all their needs. However her father and sister have no regard for her sacrifices for the family rather they were ever eager to cash her or to set her as a standard to compete with respectively to get and keep economical power.

Mr. Granger was fond of Elizabeth more because she was the one with practical mind and was ever helpful to him in financial matters by bringing him his tithes from fellow villagers; he was a tool in Elizabeth's able hands (Haggard, 160). Therefore there were economical reasons for a father to love a child more.

The way Elizabeth treated Beatrice is worth mentioning, she was ever ready to revolt and plot against her own sister: '*Impossible that sister should so treat sister*' (Haggard, 159). The reason behind treating her sister so was none other than economical one: '*Human nature can rise to strange heights, and it can also fall to depths beyond your fathoming*' (Haggard, 159). It was Elizabeth who wrote to Lady Honoria about her husband's extra marital affair with Beatrice and it was again her who put into Owen's notice about it. Thus Owen proposed to Beatrice's father for her to marry him and situation gets out of control for Beatrice and finding no other solution she thus commits the suicide and brings a miserable doom to her life and to her beloved for he suffers unduly.

The odd behavior of Lady Honoria towards her husband was also an outcome of her lust for getting and keeping economical power and to attain material resources.

Survival of the Fittest in Socioeconomic Culture and Society

It was Beatrice who exclaimed this to Geoffrey that: '*Existence is not worth having unless one is struggling with something to overcome it*' (Haggard, 15). However she was the very one who denied struggling and contrary to her, Elizabeth struggled and therefore succeeded. She kept

fighting till the end for getting and keeping economic power and she succeeded and emerged as fittest to survive in the socioeconomic culture and society.

Beatrice is referred by the narrator as an *'ill-regulated young woman, born to bring trouble on herself and all connected with her. Had she been otherwise, she would have taken her good fortune and married Owen Davies'*.

This was seen in an article *Gender Role* (Wikipedia encyclopedia, 2014) that Londa Schiebinger (2001) exclaims in her *Has Feminism Changed Science* that feminine and masculine characteristics, behaviors, concerns and values are not innate neither are they capricious rather they are formulated by historical circumstances.

Conclusion

The study supports the Marxist postulate that there are none other than economic conditions that shape and structure the society as well as individual characters and personal relationships. Human events in the political or personal domain can never be understood without historical circumstances in which they occur. This study reveals and reinforces the Marxist stance that money is greatest virtue, far greater than morals and ethics. Elizabeth and Lady Honoria justify this very postulate through their deeds. Getting and keeping economic power is above all amongst the efforts of human society and therefore Freud was justified in exclaiming that *'The motive of human society in the last resort is an economic one'* (as cited in Eagleton, 131). The novel is critique of getting and attaining economic power because in doing so one does not stay committed to his moral and ethical obligations that are absolute necessity for a society to prosper and gain stability.

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