



RESEARCH PAPER

Exploring Relevance of the Proletariat-Bourgeoisie Interplay in the *Great Expectations* for Understanding Socio-Economic Challenges in Contemporary Pakistani Society

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ABSTRACT

The paper discusses socio-economic relations of the bourgeoisie and proletariat relating them to present-day contemporary Pakistani society. The paper is broken down into sections where class consciousness, struggle, and mobility are discussed in view of a Marxist framework and aligned with that of the Victorian English era and that of today's Pakistan. The present paper, therefore, employing qualitative research methods, including close reading, finds persistent class conflicts and socio-economic disparities, in unison with the struggles laid down by Dickens in his narrative. The implications of the findings strongly hint at the fact that these historical literary insights can be of substantial help in guiding socio-economic reforms within the domain of Pakistan. Future research recommendations are to point towards precise measures on how class disparities in Pakistani society could be alleviated.

KEYWORDS Bourgeoisie and Proletariat, Class Consciousness, Class Struggle, Pakistani Society, Victorian Society And Socio-Economic Relations

Introduction

This research focuses on the social and economic ideas depicted in Charles Dickens's novel *Great Expectations* (1861), such as class awareness, the conflict between social classes, the movement between classes, and the struggle between the working class and the upper class. The study examines how the lower class experiences inequality and hardship due to the actions of the bourgeoisie, represented by characters like Miss Havisham and Estella, who pose a persistent danger to the working class, embodied in the character of Pip. He is constantly at risk of losing his personal, social, and economic stability due to the indifference of the upper class.

The advancements in technology towards the end of the 18th century sparked the Industrial Revolution and a capitalist form of economic progress, which opened up economic and social opportunities to those previously denied such platforms. As a result, these individuals were able to rise in the social hierarchy and improve their social status. These opportunities inspired ambitions that were impossible in the pre-Industrial Revolution era when one's fortune was strictly determined by birth. In the Victorian era, British society was divided into the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, with a person's value and prestige closely tied to their social class. The lower class faced economic and educational deprivation and environmental hardships, while the upper class enjoyed the privileges of wealth, power, education, and social status. Dickens' novels represent different social strata in Victorian society, with education being a key determinant of class

significance in most of his works. Characters like Joe and Pip, who are ordinary blacksmiths in "*Great Expectations*," do not receive any education. This is not because they lack interest in education but because the only school available to them is owned by the lower class itself and does not provide the same level of education that the higher class received during Dickens' time.

According to Engels and Marx (2004), a clash between two social classes - the proletariat and bourgeoisie - arose with the emergence of a capitalist economy. They argue that religion, social structures, morality, and other related aspects are all based on profit and gain. This conflict is evident in Dickens' *Great Expectations* (1861), where the working class is marginalized while the bourgeoisie enjoys the benefits of capitalism. The two classes threaten each other's existence, both in terms of social status and economic stability.

Literature Review

Blau (1967), about Marx and Engels (1845), observing the social structure linked to classes and their conflict in social circles are discussed. According to him, having ownership gives a person the power to exclude others from a piece of property and use it for their own profit-making endeavors. As a result, society was split into three classes: the bourgeois, who controlled the means of production and relied on profit; the landowners, whose income came from renting out the land; and the working lower class, whose responsibility it was to do labour and create. The hegemonic domination of society results from this categorization.

He continues that Marx observed the increase of class struggle as capital interest increased. As a result, the gap between the proletariat and bourgeoisie's standard of living developed to the point where class consciousness emerged, and the social conflict evolved into political fights for greater power. According to the critic's perspective, the fundamental cause of class struggle can be traced back to the competition in the workplaces and production houses where capital is generated. As the accumulation of capital and its unequal distribution intensify, the gulf between social classes widens. In response to this growing disparity, the workers begin to engage in a struggle that ultimately leads to a heightened awareness of their class position and the launch of political campaigns aimed at improving the conditions of the labour class.

The critic believes that the competition for resources and power within the economic sphere is the driving force behind class struggle. This competition is perpetuated by the capitalist system, which seeks to maximize profits by exploiting the working class's labour. As the gap between the rich and poor widens, the working class becomes increasingly aware of their exploitation and the injustices they face. This awareness leads to a collective consciousness among the workers, fueling their struggle for better wages, benefits, and working conditions.

In addition to the economic factors that contribute to class struggle, the critic also acknowledges the role of politics in shaping the labour movement. Political campaigns aimed at securing the rights and protections of the working class have been instrumental in improving workers' lives throughout history. By organizing and mobilizing around political causes, the labour movement has secured important victories such as the right to unionize, minimum wage laws, and workplace safety regulations.

Overall, the critic's perspective on class struggle is grounded in understanding the economic and political forces that shape the lives of working people. By recognizing the

root causes of class conflict, the critic seeks to empower the working class and promote a more just and equitable society.

Class conflict arises from the inherent antagonism between different social classes that own particular property, share common interests, and occupy different positions in the social hierarchy. The struggle for political power between these classes leads to changes in the social structure. The working class, which forms the majority of society, has limited control over the mode of economic production since the landowners and factory owners primarily determine it. As a result, the working class finds it challenging to fulfil their basic needs, leading to a change in the existing societal structure (Andrey, 1970).

The concept of Class Consciousness refers to people's beliefs and attitudes regarding their economic position in a given society. This awareness is crucial in triggering a revolution, as it creates a sense of solidarity and collective action among those who share a similar economic status. The notion of class conflict has existed since the dawn of civilization but has evolved over time. In medieval feudal societies, it was between the lords and their servants, while in Victorian society, it manifested as a conflict between the working class and the upper class. As societies change and progress, so too does the nature of the class conflict (Leavis, 2011).

Stewart (2000) notes that marginalization is an idea that ratifies the political, racial and economic control of the lower class of society by the elite class; the proletariat face social and economic discrimination or mistreatment by the bourgeoisie. When a group is marginalized, the group is underprivileged and kept at a distance from mainstream resources. It is further understood in terms of social, economic, political, educational, and psychological marginalization. Marginalization may occur due to birth or being a part of a marginalized social group and sideline from the other groups. Such marginalization can last for life-long in case of birth impairment (Bunch, 2015). Social marginalization is depriving opportunities both at societal and national levels. Kagan and Burton (2005) put that the socially marginalized have weak social status because they constitute a class which is specified for labour; they lag behind in access to social capital, making them vulnerable to economic, educational and cultural sidelining. They further note that economic marginalization lessens participation in the production of capital or income; they own less property. When a class is deprived of such participation in the political progress of their nation, they are thrust upon by political marginalization. Kagan (2005) adds that marginalization of political rights are prohibited to them (Kagan & Burton, 2005).

McMahan et al. (2017) add that marginalization occurs as a result of unfair and irregular educational policies that provide the proletariat less opportunities. The class that is in power often designs and oversees education and the policies for the development of education. The policies are created in such situations so as to better suit their interests. For example, they don't include topics that might be harmful or contradict their thesis. Therefore, the upper class maintains its dominance through educational institutions. By relegating their entitlement to education, they fail to provide the lower class with sufficient opportunities to maintain some of the state's higher housing.

Crossick and Kaszynska (2016) relate psychological marginalization with discriminatory violence at the social level. They add that when someone is falsely represented or misrepresented, it may lead to psychological marginalization. In other words, such conditions lead to psychological discrimination when one is characterized as inferior. The such treatment creates a gap at the psychological level as one class needs to be adequately acknowledged by the other, which is in power.

Bowen, (2014), talking about the Great Expectations, expresses that it occurred in a world where fortunes might be made and lost in a matter of seconds. In this socioeconomic environment, the novel's protagonist negotiates and enacts class. Class and social mobility serve as the story's foundational aspects. The social structure of the Victorians is generally portrayed as being extremely stratified, yet Dickens' books diverge greatly from that. He was conscious of the pain that frequently accompanied poverty and low social standing, and he made significant efforts in his own life to combat this. The world is a very dynamic place where money can be won and lost in an instant. However, the nineteenth century saw great turbulence in Britain as new social and urban organisations were established. People often have fixed ideas about Victorian society, with clearly defined social strata, yet Dickens' works tell a very different story. Characters in Dickens' works commonly go from prosperity to poverty and vice versa, much like the author did. He only gave his approval to two novels in the first person. First, *David Copperfield* in 1848-1850 depicts a moment of social mobility victory by describing David's journey from destitution to success, wealth, and happiness via hard work and skill. Second, this novel offers a more distressing and in-depth portrayal of such a social upheaval (Bowen, 2014).

Lateef (2019) adds that in this novel, Dickens explores the complex interplay between social status, financial wealth, and their impact on Victorian society. He portrays diverse life experiences, including social position, personal identity, moral standards, wealth, suffering, marginalization, retaliation, gain, loss, and the challenges of growing up.

Pip, the protagonist of the story, faces a constant struggle with destiny, morality, remorse, desire, and money. His initial infatuation with Estella is due to a sense of fate, and their differing social classes create a need for Pip to become a gentleman to match Estella's higher social status. However, this leads to misery and disappointment as he tries to win her over.

Despite the challenges, Pip's fate and his own efforts lead him to become wealthy. His irrational hopes and expectations make him conceited as a teenager, but he ultimately learns valuable lessons about individuality, learning, and tenderness. His fantastical ideas are tied to his unattainable desire for Estella.

As the story unfolds, Pip discovers that Miss Havisham and Magwitch are the source of his newfound fortune and realizes that he followed them because of this. Through Pip's journey, Dickens highlights the ways in which social status and financial wealth can shape individuals' experiences and decisions in Victorian society (Lateef, 2019).

In his writings, the rigid social order of the early nineteenth century and the English society of the day are portrayed. The fact that these representations usually lead to fraud, dishonesty, or destruction highlights the reality that there are issues with how society is run as a result of limitations on social ties, mobility, and viewpoints held by the ruling elite. The last scene at the Satis House, which marks the end of the narrative, contrasts the two opposing class structures through the events that occur at Miss Havisham's home with upper-class residents (Lateef, 2019). He goes on to say that guilt plays a major role in the narrative. Due to the fact that Pip's fortune in the book not only begins with guilt but also ends in guilt, Pip has experienced guilt. Being an orphan, he was adopted by his sister and her husband, where he felt bad and learned about remorse. He was so instructed to express gratitude for his upbringing and continued survival.

He also had trauma when faced by the inmate known as Magwitch, and that encounter made him feel bad even though he had no choice but to act in this way. Although he experienced pain, he conquered it. In the end, though, he felt bad for getting all of this

through a shady deal with the criminal because Magwitch had been helping him acquire a fortune in secret. As a result of a number of diseases that manifested as hallucinations, Pip was unwell and frequently made unclear statements regarding his own identity.

Great Expectations tells the story of a boy who strives for a better future, hoping to be accepted by a higher class and win a girl's heart from that social class. Initially, he is kind and gentle as a boy while living with his sister. However, as he grows older and becomes wealthy, he develops a misogynistic attitude and becomes harsher in his treatment of women. He is torn between the traditional expectations of a gentleman's behaviour and his belief that his wealth gives him the freedom to do as he pleases.

Throughout the story, the boy is influenced by various women characters that shape his morals and actions. These women demonstrate how an individual's company can shape their character from childhood to adolescence. The feminist lens reveals that Dickens portrays women as prizes for men to win after achieving gentleman status and as creatures who can trap and deceive a man. As a result, the women in Pip's life change his views on life and his role in Victorian society (Hake, 1863).

Throughout history, individuals have faced bias and unfair treatment due to their social class, often due to the upper and elite classes' beliefs, attitudes, and policies that benefit their economic production and safeguard their wealth from the lower class. During the Victorian era, one's social status was determined by their conduct, with the upper class being viewed as noble due to their behaviour, while the working class was seen as impoverished, unrefined, and lacking in morals. In a novel, a young man from the proletariat class is content with his life until he visits a house owned by the bourgeoisie of that time. While there, he experiences prejudice based on his social standing and behaviour, leading him to aspire to become a gentleman and a man of means. This desire prompts him to travel to London, where he attains a better lifestyle but loses his sense of self. The author incorporates themes of elitist snobbery and social Darwinism, emphasizing the notion of class conflict and discrimination in the narrative (Mildan, 2020).

Kurrik (1979) writes that the novel suggests that Pip's early romantic illusions contribute to his problems, but his own perspective on life is shaped by the circumstances in which he lives. These circumstances are presented frighteningly, and Pip's temperament and the upper class influence him to become a good person with good luck. At the end of the novel, Pip's unrealistic romantic ideals may have developed due to his own selfishness or the influence of those he met at Satis House. Although the novel's overall coherence may be lacking, the ending is appropriate as it portrays both classes in Victorian society and aims to be happy. This demonstrates Dickens' awareness of the conflict between classes. While Pip recognizes that his upbringing came too late, he still manages to avoid a life of insignificance. However, there is an intuition that Dickens never explicitly endorses.

In brief, *Great Expectations* is a remarkable fictional piece that has undergone critical evaluation by numerous scholars since its publication. Despite these analyses, further exploration is still possible using Marx's theories of class conflict, social mobility, and class consciousness to examine how the novel depicts British complacency/contentment. The researcher has carefully reviewed various opinions on the novel and the conceptual framework for this research and has identified a gap that can be addressed through this study. While some critics have evaluated the novel's portrayal of the class system of that time, others have approached it from an existential viewpoint. The researcher intends to examine the dispersed British complacency that poses a proletarian threat/danger to the social and economic stability of Victorian society. This investigation will fulfil its objectives and contribute to the current literature and knowledge domain.

Material and Methods

This study employs a qualitative approach to thoroughly examine the novel, analyzing concepts such as class, consciousness, struggle, and British complacency in the text. The investigation utilizes a subjective approach to connect these findings to current issues of class disparity within society. Primary data is gathered from the novel, while secondary sources, including theses, research articles, essays, documentaries, and movies, are also explored.

In this study, an interpretive approach is used to analyze selected passages from a text using the conceptual framework of Marxism. The researcher utilizes the technique of close reading, where the text is seen as a stimulus that triggers the researcher's understanding. To thoroughly examine the text and clarify the argument, the researcher employs a collective method of close reading, which combines the methods of Pugh and Johnson (2014), Barnet and Cain (2004), and Mullan (2006).

Results and Discussion

Engels and Marx (1848) write that the history of all societies is the history of class struggles. The division of the classes into proletariat and bourgeoisie began at the advent of capitalism after the end of feudalism. It all started with the start of private ownership, which led to social mobility. As far as Pip is concerned, he is a classic example of social mobility, where he transformed his social status through the money he earned. He covers a journey from alienation to realization. Marx (1848) asserts that modern bourgeois society has developed new forms of struggle. An individual can move between the classes, but this happens at a price either by monetary gains or social favours. This movement is evident in Pip; he goes from a proletariat background to the bourgeoisie getting an education in London.

Awareness of one's social class can lead to upward mobility, creating specific aspirations reflected in the title of the novel "*Great Expectations*." Dickens believed that Pip's transformation was crucial because he needed to become aware of his ignorance and take responsibility for his life. By breaking free from the constraints imposed by the upper class of his time, Pip achieved this.

Drawing a parallel connection between British capitalist society and the trends of feudalism and capitalism in Pakistan, the major problem in Pakistan's economic system is the unequal distribution and frequency of income among consumers of capital. The primary issue is the unfair distribution of capital among producers and owners, particularly the proletariat who contributes the most to income but receive only a tiny share. The plebs are responsible for capital gains but deprived of their rightful share. A specific class controls all means of ownership, resulting in a capitalist and feudal form of rule in Pakistan. As the inequality of wealth distribution worsens, the income-based division of the population widens, leading to conflict between classes. Essentially, the conflict arises from disparities in income, social status, wage rates, job opportunities, and other logical and rational reasons between rural and urban areas. This class conflict is caused by the higher class constantly exploiting the lower class for labour. According to Marx and as portrayed in Dickens' novel, the proletariat's only source of income is through selling their labour. This gap in capital earnings leads to conflicts at both national and local levels, as described in the passages above from the novel.

Furthermore, class conflict in our society can be attributed to the feudal structure, where landlords have widened the socio-economic gap for the working class through their

monopolistic control over the ruling class. Income distribution is uneven, and the capitalists are living a luxurious lifestyle similar to that of the Victorian era. The landlords are demonstrating the same complacency as the Victorians did in the mid-eighteenth century. In recent years, this conflict has escalated, and the disparity between the social classes has increased. People are becoming more vulnerable to economic and social discrimination, as the rich are getting richer while the poor are falling below the poverty line.

Throughout the world, it is common for people who belong to the same group to socialize together and form a similar status in society. However, as this division widens, the beliefs and values of the people also change, often leading to conflicts. Pakistani society has a marked class division, which has resulted in the sense of class consciousness among individuals. Pip, for example, was driven by this class consciousness to achieve self-determination and financial success. Unfortunately, in our case, the corrupt political leadership and economic system offer no opportunities for the population to flourish. The leaders who control us are themselves landowners, constantly threatening our social and economic stability. Many factors, such as a low number of taxpayers, corruption by officials, limited foreign investment, terrorism, poor security conditions, being on the FATF watchlist, unemployment, and unequal application of the rule of law, are contributing to a chaotic situation for the working class in Pakistan. Dickens' *Great Expectations* presented a similar situation when the industrial revolution led to class divisions and capitalism.

During the Victorian era, British society developed a new social hierarchy consisting of two main classes: the proletariat, which refers to the lower or working class, and the bourgeoisie, which refers to the upper or owner class. A person's worth and social status were closely tied to the social class they belonged to. Those belonging to the lower class were mistreated and viewed as less valuable, while those from the upper class were treated with deference and considered more prestigious. The lower class suffered from a lack of wealth, resources, and education and faced many difficulties in their environment. Conversely, the upper class enjoyed numerous privileges, such as money, power, education, and social status.

In Victorian society, one's social status was determined and represented by their level of education. An individual's literacy is used to manipulate and divide social classes, making the relationship between education and social class significant in this story. Education is also seen as a determining factor in the significance of one's social class in most of Dickens's novels. Pip, who comes from a family of ordinary blacksmiths, did not receive any education at all, and characters like Joe were also deprived of education, although Joe did receive some education at the primary level. This was not due to a lack of interest in education but because the lower class owned the schools available to them and provided a different quality of education than those available to the higher class. As a result, Pip learns that wealth is more important than education, and he falls far behind in the race for education compared to the higher class.

In the early 19th century, technological innovations sparked the Industrial Revolution, which introduced a capitalist economy and created social and financial opportunities for individuals who previously did not have access to them. As a result, people in lower social classes were able to climb the social hierarchy, something that was not possible in pre-Industrial Revolution England and other parts of Europe. Charles Dickens uses the character of Pip in his novel *Great Expectations* as an example of this social mobility, as he struggles throughout the story to move from a lower social class to a higher one. The novel was written at the end of the Industrial Revolution, a time of technological advancement in England and other parts of Europe that created new

opportunities for individuals to earn capital income and move up the social ladder. This resulted in a break from the rigid class hierarchy of Victorian England. Dickens characterizes Pip's journey through class struggle and consciousness as he strives to improve his social worth and win affection of Estella. Through Pip's story, Dickens challenges the ideals of the higher class and shows that social mobility is possible with determination and hard work.

Regarding Marx's concept of class conflict, there is an ongoing conflict between the two classes where the bourgeoisie is pressuring the proletariat to their limits. Characters like Miss Havisham constantly pose threats to the social and economic security of the lower class, such as Pip. Consequently, the proletariat is psychologically, politically, educationally, and socially marginalized. Additionally, the researcher highlights Marx's notion that class conflict can lead to economic progress. This idea is exemplified in work through Pip's experience, who, having faced social and racial discrimination, achieved a breakthrough by miraculously improving his social status and position. This resulted from his class consciousness, and he amassed a fortune for himself.

The problems of Victorian England, such as social and economic issues, have led to a similar situation in Pakistan, where class conflict and unequal distribution of wealth are prevalent. This conflict arises due to various social and economic factors, including problems in the education system, social and racial discrimination, inadequate healthcare facilities, and more. Some of these issues will be discussed below.

The lower class in Pakistan, specifically the proletariat, does not have access to adequate educational opportunities. They are even denied primary education due to the feudal system that exists in Sindh, Baluchistan, and some areas of Punjab, which prevents upward mobility for those in the lower class. The upper class experiences comfort and privilege similar to the British during the Victorian era, while the lower class is mistreated and treated as outsiders who do not belong in society. This ultimately leads to class conflict and consciousness. According to international reports, such as Transparency International Surveys, Pakistan has one of the most corrupt healthcare systems, with a lack of basic health facilities in rural areas. Women give birth on the streets while on their way to local hospitals, and children are dying from preventable diseases. People, especially those in the lower class, are not provided with health insurance, while the upper class enjoys access to modern facilities provided by the government or through their own financial means.

The upper class shows little regard for the lower class and rarely interacts with them. They demean and belittle the working class, seeing them as weak and insignificant, and choose not to associate with them. Consequently, there is a lack of social cohesion and groupings. This is a significant issue in our society and is caused by class conflict and inequality in Pakistani society. The situation perpetuates a lack of upward mobility, where the rich remain rich, and the poor remain poor. People experiencing poverty are considered underprivileged and of lesser value, which exacerbates the problem.

Gender inequality is a major issue in our society that involves discrimination against women from lower social classes. This problem runs deep and has become a serious threat, as men have turned into monsters for women. Women are not given equal education opportunities compared to men and are often confined to household duties. They also face domestic violence, which can escalate to a point where their human rights are violated. Women are considered inferior to men and are excluded from participating in the mainstream of social progress.

To sum up, based on the arguments presented above, characters such as Pip from *Great Expectations* experience significant discrimination due to their social class. This conflict leads to an awareness of class differences and ultimately to upward social mobility, as in Pip's case, where he gains a fortune to improve his social status. The working-class characters in the novel constantly face social and economic insecurity due to the biased control of the bourgeois, represented by characters such as Miss Havisham.

Conclusion

Dickens portrays the strict social hierarchy of the Victorian era in his novel, with the proletarians and bourgeoisie representing the two main classes. *Great Expectations* (1861) is an example of this system and highlights concepts such as class conflict, awareness of social class, the contentment of the Victorian era, and the rise and fall of the proletarians and bourgeoisie. The researcher has conducted a thorough examination of the novel and has discovered parallels to class struggles in Pakistani society by using various scenes from the text to provide an in-depth analysis of socio-economic issues.

In his concluding remarks on the novel, the researcher argues that Charles Dickens sought to liberate readers from the dangers of materialism by advocating for humility, loyalty, and compassion in various aspects of life. By doing so, he aims to guide us towards a meaningful and fulfilling life. The story of Pip not only highlights the impact of social class but also emphasizes the importance of being loyal and passionate in relationships.

In our society, it is common to associate happiness with wealth and money. However, Dickens challenges this notion by demonstrating that money cannot buy love, compassion, or humility. While it may bring happiness in some cases, excessive focus on wealth accumulation can adversely affect our overall well-being. Pip's journey teaches us to prioritize meaningful relationships and personal values over financial gain.

Despite being written over a century ago, the messages of "*Great Expectations*" remain relevant in our contemporary post-modern society. Dickens' warning against the dangers of materialism is as important today as it was then. In a world where the pursuit of wealth and power often takes precedence over personal connections and values, this novel serves as a reminder of what truly matters in life.

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