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RESEARCH ARTICLE

EDUARDO MENDOZA'S *LA VERDAD SOBRE EL CASO SAVOLTA*: AN EXPERIENCIAL JOURNEY THROUGH BARCELONA.

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Abstract

Spanish novelist Eduardo Mendoza has recently won the 2016 Cervantes Prize for *La verdad sobre el caso Savolta*. It is the Spanish-speaking world's highest literary honour. He has been awarded for bringing a new narrative style to Spanish fiction. The novel is about the industrial, social and economic changes the city of Barcelona saw during the 19th and 20th centuries. Since this fiction appeared to me as a classical text, this work proposes to see this novel from a Marxist perspective. Examining these novels in the light of Marxist theory facilitates a greater comprehension of the texts and enhances the understanding of Barcelona.

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Introduction:-

After the decline of feudalism in Spain and other European countries, a new class had emerged. This new class was of merchants and industrialists. They were called the Bourgeoisie class. The twentieth century Barcelona witnessed the development of the bourgeoisie that built and managed the factories and considerably increased the population of the working class. Capitalism became the dominant mode of production in Barcelona and has maintained its eminence since then. Along with industrialization, the process of urbanization was also very fast and influenced the lives of the people of Barcelona. The urban experience under capitalism was forming a different consciousness among the people and I would like to quote Marx here who said that "It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness." (Parkin, 1979, p.27)

La verdad sobre el caso Savolta is about the development of Barcelona in the 20th century. This work reflects exactly what was happening in the cities of Spain with urbanization and modernization. *La verdad sobre el caso Savolta* deals with Barcelona and Javier Miranda, the protagonist of the novel who is also the main witness in a New York court case concerned with the life insurance of his former boss, Paul-André Lepprince, who died in an incident in the Savolta factory. The proofs of the court and memories of Miranda give us detail about the life of Barcelona between the years 1917 and 1919. They were full of social tensions, anarchist rebellions marked by class conflicts. After Miranda moved to Barcelona from Valladolid, he met Paul-André Lepprince, a French businessman who after arriving in Barcelona in 1914 becomes rich and ranks among the upper class of Barcelona acquiring authority of the arms factory. He does this by marrying Maria Rosa Savolta, the daughter of the main shareholder of the Savolta factory. Miranda unknowingly becomes Lepprince's puppet and marries Maria Coral, Lepprince's another girlfriend so that he can continue his relationship with her despite his marriage with Maria Rosa Savolta. After the other shareholders of the Savolta plant are killed, Lepprince gains almost exclusive control over the business, which

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brings him huge wealth due to the First World War and the secret sale of arms on both sides of the conflict. However, anarchist rebellions, general work strikes and the end of the war caused the demise of the plant Savolta and Lepprince. Before Lepprince could be declared bankruptcy, an anarchist agitation ended his life, burning the factory along with him.

Analysis:-

This novel deals with a long history of Barcelona's industrial development. The city has also witnessed the development of both the bourgeoisie and workers socialist movements. In order to understand exactly how this historical novel deals with the questions of Spanish society, I intend to see the content of the novel from the perspective of Marx.

According to the article of 6th October 1917 that was published on the newspaper *La voz de la justicia* of Barcelona, the writer clearly shows two pictures of Spain. On one hand he is very happy to mention that there is freedom of press, constitutional guarantees, universal adult franchise and the nation is civilized. On the other hand he says that his land has entered into dark ages as there is exploitation of worker by the powerful. The workers who are illiterate, who are not able to understand the present situation are the victims of the capitalism which has started expanding in the city. The capitalist society does not address the problems of the workers. It does not work to create awareness among workers so that they know their rights. The custody of social justice is held by the ruling class which exploits the workers in factories like that of Savolta factory in order to earn profit. According to Marx, the worker is not free since he is forced to work for the capitalist in order to survive. All he can do is exchange one form of 'wage slavery' for another. Marx refers to the dominant ideas of each epoch as 'ruling class ideology'. Such ideology is a distortion of reality, a false picture of society. It binds members of society to the contradictions and conflict of interest which are built into their relationships. As a result they tend to accept their situation as normal and natural, right and proper. In this way a 'false consciousness' of reality is produced which helps to maintain the system. Marx says that

"the ideas of the ruling class are, in every age, the ruling ideas; i.e. the class which is the dominant material force in society is at the same time its dominant intellectual force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that in consequence the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are, in general, subject to it." (Bottomore, 1971, p.51)

As there is exploitation in the society the words like equality and freedom are illusions. The employer-employee relationship is not equal. It is an exploitive relationship. Pajarito de Soto also believes that freedom and equality exists only upto a certain limit. The workers have to protest for getting these rights. Their working condition is deplorable, the salaries are not adequate. So, Pajarito de Soto says that "la misión de todos y cada uno de nosotros no es luchar por la libertad o el progreso, en abstracto, que son palabras huecas, sino contribuir a crear unas condiciones futuras que permitan a la humanidad una vida mejor en un mundo de horizontes amplios y claros." ("the mission of each and every one of us is not to fight for freedom or progress, in summary, these are hollow words, but to contribute to create future conditions in the world that will enable humanity to live a better life of broad and clear horizon"; Mendoza, 1975, p.124). However, the real democracy lies from the fact that there is political freedom, equality and the rule of law. These principles must be reflected in all the citizens of country so that they live a dignified life.

The class division was clearly visible from the fact that in order to maintain their privileged position in the society, the state machinery would do any kind of injustice or suffering to others. For example by inflation the poorest would suffer the most as their salaries remain constant. As also mentioned in the novel "Y así ocurrió lo que viene aconteciendo desde tiempo inmemorial: que los ricos fueron cada vez más ricos, y los pobres, más pobres y miserables cada vez." ("And so it has happened since immemorial time that the rich were getting richer, and the poor were getting poorer and miserable every time"; Mendoza, 1975, p.45). According to Karl Marx, in all stratified societies, there are two major social groups, a ruling class and a subject class. The power of the ruling class derives from its ownership and control of the forces of production. "Alienation occurs because capitalism has evolved into a two class system in which a few capitalists own the production process, the products, and the labor time of those who work on them." (Ritzer, 1988, p.22)

The ruling class who are also rich exploits and oppresses the subject class who are in most of the cases are poor. As a result, there is a basic conflict of interest between the two classes. The various institutions of society such as the legal and political systems are instruments of ruling class domination and serve to further its interests.

From a Marxian perspective, systems of stratification derive from the relationships of social groups to the forces of production. From a Marxian view, a class is a social group whose members share the same relationship to the forces of production. Thus during the feudal epoch, there are two main classes distinguished by their relationship to land, the major force of production. They are the feudal nobility who own the land and the landless serfs who work the land. Similarly, in the capitalist era, there are two main classes, the bourgeoisie or capitalist class which owns the forces of production and the proletariat or working class whose members own only their labour which they hire to the bourgeoisie in return for wages. This situation can be seen from the following sentences.

Cortabanyes tenía razón cuando me desengañaba: los ricos sólo se preocupan de sí mismos. Su amabilidad, su cariño y sus muestras de interés son espejismos. Hay que ser un necio para confiar en la perdurabilidad de su afecto. Y eso sucede porque los vínculos que pueden existir entre un rico y un pobre no son recíprocos. El rico no necesita al pobre siempre que quiera lo sustituirá. ("Cortabanyes was right when I was disillusioned, the rich only care about themselves. Their kindness, affection and signs of interest are mirages. You have to be a fool to trust in the endurance of your affection. And that happens because the links that can exist between a rich and a poor are not reciprocal. The rich does not need the poor whenever he wants to replace him"; Mendoza, 1975, p.160)

Nemesio Cabra gomez criticizes the working conditions in a very different way and says that the conduct of people is the cause of the poverty which harms and makes the wives and children ill and unhappy. The misery, the famine, the illiteracy and the pain that the people receive is actually not because of them but because of the ruling class ideology. It is this group which oppress you, exploit you, betray you and if necessary, they kill you. Nemesio says that he knows the names of illustrious persons who have the red hands of blood of the workpeople but one cannot see them, because white suede gloves cover them. Gloves brought from Paris and paid with your money. You think that they pay you for the work that you do in these factories, it's a lie. They pay you so that you do not die of famine and could keep on working from sunrise to sunset. The money or the profit they will not give it to you as this is the true nature of a capitalist society. The author expresses this situation through a Greek statue in the novel which says "El hombre pobre y trabajador se halla oprimido por el que es rico y no trabaja." ("The poor and hardworking man is oppressed by the one who is rich and does not work"; Mendoza, 1975, p.397). Here the working class is oppressed by the powerful but there is also another kind of oppression, which is like passing on the oppression that the man has suffered, oppressing in turn the female. This female has no relief as she suffers from famine, the cold and the misery that causes the bourgeois development. In the earliest form of human society, the land and its products were communally owned.

From a Marxian perspective, the relationship between the major social classes is one of mutual dependence and conflict. Thus in capitalist society, the bourgeoisie and proletariat are dependent upon each other. The wage labourer must sell his labour power in order to survive since he does not own a part of the forces of production and lacks the means to produce goods independently. However, the mutual dependency of the two classes is not a relationship of equal or symmetrical reciprocity. Instead, it is a relationship of exploiter and exploited, oppressor and oppressed. In particular, the ruling class gains at the expense of the subject class and there is therefore a conflict of interest between them.

One crucial characteristic of capitalism, according to Marx, is that it exploits individual workers. Following Ricardo, Marx adopted a labour theory of value. This theory held that the value of any good depended upon the amount of labour spent producing it. Marx provided a second, and similar, perspective on surplus value. He noted that the essence of capitalism was to take money and use this money to buy things (labour and machines). Marx held that the appropriation of surplus value by the owners of the capital constitutes exploitation. (Chaudhary, 2006, p.557)

In the Savolta factory, which was privately owned we could see that as Lepprince belonged to the ruling class, his privileged position inside the company was allowing him to carry out the thefts with a minimum risk as he had ownership of the equipments. On the other hand as the business was doing well, the problems related to the working condition were witnessed.

Los obreros estaban quejosos: se veían obligados a trabajar en ínfimas condiciones un número muy elevado de horas a fin de producir el ingente volumen de armamento que los acuerdos secretos de Lepprince exigían sin que sus emolumentos experimentaran el alza correspondiente. ("The workers were complaining: they were forced to work in deplorable conditions with high number of hours in order to produce the enormous volume of armament that Lepprince had agreed to provide without increasing their emoluments"; Mendoza, 1975 p.415)

The whole idea was to pay the workers less and make them work more. There were attempts of strike and “El Hombre de la Mano de Hierro”, knew how to settle similar situations but Lepprince did not want anyone to intervene as the investigation would reveal his illegal activities. Marx says that capital, as such, produces nothing. Only labour produces wealth. Yet the wages paid to the workers for their labour are well below the value of the goods they produce. Since they are non-producers, the bourgeoisie are therefore exploiting the proletariat, the real producers of wealth. Marx maintained that in all class societies, the ruling class exploits and oppresses the subject class.

In the industrial capitalist society there is dehumanization of worker and his living conditions become deplorable. The productive labour is the primary, most vital human activity. According to Marx, man is essentially a creative being who realizes his essence and affirms himself in labour or production, a creative activity carried out in cooperation with other and by which the external world is transformed. The process of production involves transformation of human power into material objects or ‘objectification’ of human creative power. In other words, in the production of objects man ‘objectifies’ himself, he expresses and externalizes his being. However, if the objects of man’s creation come to control his being, then man loses himself in the object. The act of production then results in man’s alienation. This occurs when man regards the products of his labour as commodities, as articles for sale in the market place. The objects of his creation are then seen to control his existence. They are seen to be subject to impersonal forces, such as the law of supply and demand, over which man has little or no control. In Marx’s words, ‘the object that labour produces, its product, confronts it as an alien being, as a power independent of the producer’. In this way man is estranged from the object he produces, he becomes alienated from the most vital human activity, productive labour. “In the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, Karl Marx identified four types of alienation that occur to the worker labouring under a capitalist system of industrial production.” (Flew, 1984, p.10) According to Marx, alienation manifests itself in four ways: Firstly, the worker is alienated from the product of his labour, since what he produces is appropriated by the capitalist and the worker has no control over it. Secondly, the worker is alienated from the act of production itself because all decisions as to how production is to be organized are taken by the capitalist. In fact, work becomes a commodity to be sold and its only value to the worker is its saleability. The labour therefore is not voluntary but forced, it is *forced* labour. Thirdly, in addition to the fact that wage labour alienates man from his product and his productive activity, which distinguishes him from animals, he also becomes alienated from his people. The capitalist system stratifies man, destroys the human qualities and renders man to a state worse than animal. No animal has to work for its survival at other’s bidding while man has to do that in a capitalist system. Fourthly, the form of wage labour prevalent in the capitalist society also leads to social alienation. Consequently, man ultimately becomes alienated from that which is a product of his actions i.e the society. In other words, the worker in a capitalist system is also socially alienated, because social relations became market relations, in which each man is judged by his position in the market, rather than his human qualities. In the novel we can observe similar case when Mendoza writes “En modo alguno. El campesino vive en contacto directo con la naturaleza. El obrero industrial ha perdido de vista el sol, las estrellas, las montañas y la vegetación.” (“In any way. The peasant lives in direct contact with nature. The industrial worker has lost sight of the sun, the stars, the mountains and the vegetation”; Mendoza, 1975, p.34). Alienation is therefore the result of human activity rather than external forces with an existence independent of man.

When there is exploitation of workers by the ruling class, there is an increase in solidarity among their own social group. The workers go on strike and at this stage its members have class consciousness and class solidarity. Members of the working class are class in itself as they share the same relationship to the forces of production. Marx argues that a social group only fully becomes a class when it becomes a class for itself. At this stage its members have class consciousness and class solidarity. Class consciousness means that false class consciousness has been replaced by a full awareness of the true situation, by a realization of the nature of exploitation. Members of a class develop a common identity, recognize their shared interests and unite, so producing class solidarity. The final stage of class consciousness and class solidarity is reached when members realize that only by collective action can they overthrow the ruling class and when they take positive steps to do so. This positive step is reflected in the novel as the workers always go on strike. “Los obreros sólo saben hacer huelgas y poner petardos, ¡y todavía pretenden que se les dé la razón! La huelga es un atentado contra el trabajo, función primordial del hombre sobre la tierra; y un perjuicio a la sociedad. Sin embargo, muchos la consideran un medio de lucha por el progreso.” (“The workers only know strikes and firecrackers, and they still claim to be right! The strike is an attack on work, the main function of man on earth, and a prejudice to society. However, many consider it a means of struggle for progress”; Mendoza, 1975, p.99).

To tell the truth, the situation of the country in the year 1919 was the worst anyone had ever faced. The Factories were closed, unemployment had increased and the people left their fields and started moving towards the City in order to feed their children. People came through the streets with hunger and thirst, by dragging their poor belongings demanding work, asylum, food and tobacco. The condition of children and women of all ages were pathetic. The trade unions and civil societies had started protesting along with strikes and attacks, the rallies took place in cinemas, theatres, squares and streets, the masses were raiding the bakeries. With several movements, either the life of people was going to change or become worst. Nobody could predict what would be the future of the nation. The writer mentions in the novel that “En las paredes aparecían signos nuevos y el nombre de Lenin se repetía con frecuencia obsesiva.” (“New signs appeared on the walls, and Lenin's name was often obsessively repeated.”; Mendoza, 1975, p. 185) Marx believed he could observe the process of polarization in nineteenth-century Britain when he wrote, “Society as a whole is more and more splitting into two great hostile camps bourgeoisie and proletariat”. (Marx, 1888, p. 7). Now the battle lines were clearly drawn, Marx hoped that the proletarian revolution would shortly follow and the communist utopia of his dreams would finally become a reality. But it did not happen.

It is often argued that Marx's view of history is based on the idea of the dialectic. From this viewpoint any process of change involves tension between incompatible forces. Dialectical movement therefore represents a struggle of opposites, a conflict of contradictions. Conflict provides the dynamic principle, the source of change. The struggle between incompatible forces grows in intensity until there is a final collision. The result is a sudden leap forward which creates a new set of forces on a higher level of development. The dialectical process then begins again as the contradictions between this new set of forces interact and conflict, and propel change. However Marx rejects this priority that Hegel gives to thoughts and ideas. He argues that the source of change lies in contradictions in the economic system in particular and in society in general. As a result of the priority he gives to economic factors, to ‘material life’, Marx's view of history is often referred to as ‘dialectical materialism’. Since men's ideas are primarily a reflection of the social relationships of economic production, they do not provide the main source of change. It is in contradictions and conflict in the economic system that the major dynamic for social change lies. Class conflict forms the basis of the dialectic of social change. Social change is not a smooth, orderly progression which gradually unfolds in harmonious evolution. Instead it proceeds from contradictions built into society which are a source of tension and ultimately the source of open conflict and radical change. In Marx's view, “The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of the class struggle”. (Adoratsky, 1938, p. 76) The conflict presented a violent picture of Barcelona as men armed with bars of iron, hardware and forceful objects moved around the city. The Telegraph stopped working. The strikers cut electricity and there was a chaos in the city. Most of the people were unemployed during this time and therefore their participation was obvious, at least few of them could raise flags in order to prove their commitment towards the struggle. In the plaza de pueblo one could see the image of Lenin painted on the walls.

Los obreros se reunían a diario y pasaban la jornada tomando el sol a la puerta de la taberna, discutiendo y filosofando y haciendo circular bulos sobre los acontecimientos revolucionarios acaecidos en otras localidades. A la caída de la tarde se organizaban mítines en los cuales los socialistas y los anarquistas se insultaban recíprocamente. Al término de los mítines, los oradores y sus oyentes se congregaban ante la iglesia y apostrofaban al cura, acusándole de usurero, corruptor de menores y soplón. (“The workers gathered daily and spent the day sunbathing at the door of the tavern, discussing philosophizing and circulating pamphlets about the revolutionary events that took place in other locations. In the evening, meetings were organized in which the Socialists and the Anarchists debated with each other. At the end of the meeting, the speakers and their listeners congregated before the church and apostrophized the priest, accusing him of usurer and corrupt practices.”; Mendoza, 1975, p. 393)

Conclusion:-

After analyzing *La verdad sobre el caso Savolta* we can say that Mendoza portrays different types of images in his novel, images that a capitalist society can offer such as corruption, class hierarchy, alienation, anomie, social divisions, inequalities and on the other side solidarity. Through his work, Mendoza has reflected some of the results of urbanization and capitalism. It can be said that under capitalism the world is moving towards an unequal and unjust society.

In today's democratic societies, the relationship between the capitalist and the worker is defined as an equal exchange. Emphasis on words such as freedom and equality in capitalist society, illustrated by phrases such as 'free market', 'free democratic societies' and 'the free world'. All these are illusions. The ideology of the ruling class produces 'false class consciousness', a false image of the nature of the relationship between social classes. Members

of both classes tend to accept the status quo as normal and natural and are unaware of the true character of exploitation and oppression. In other words, the members of both social classes are largely unaware of their true situation.

Now we can say that capitalism dictates the world today. The growth of Barcelona brings changes only in a few individuals while others suffer because capitalism only favours some people. Only a few contractors, capitalists have benefited from this trend. Thus, industrialization is the false opportunity, saying that industrialization will bring new opportunity and will transform every individual is a trap. It only brings more corruption that benefits the rich and exploits the poor, which is the true nature of capitalism.

Any activity, without broad avenues of transparency, accountability and good governance, actually leads to inequality and corruption, resulting in the misery of the people. If a capitalist is not able to control and balance the mechanism and competition in the market, it may lead to concentration of wealth in a few powerful hands. Barcelona, like other big cities of India, did not have any regulatory mechanism, transparency, and accountability. The intention to win more and more without the transparency of the system only leads to an unfair society. The free market system has a natural tendency to increase the concentration of wealth, because the rate of return on property and investment has been consistently higher than the rate of economic growth. The world is moving towards an unequal and unjust society with the effects of capitalism on every corner. There is very little chance that capitalism would reverse the increase in inequality. Governments can initiate changes now, by adopting a global tax on wealth, to prevent inequality and poverty contribute to economic or political instability around the world. Eduardo Mendoza tries to reach us through his different visions of Barcelona. In the novel, he has shown us the complex nature of the city and its social implications but the most important question that comes up here is the following. For whom is the city? The experience under capitalism and industrialization is definitely an ongoing process in which some may win and some may lose.

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