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Appliances of Power: The Role of Objects, Tools, and Domestic Technologies in Constructing Class Consciousness in In Other Rooms, Other Wonders

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Abstract

This paper examines both symbolic and functional meanings of material objects, domestic technologies, and tools in the short story collection In Other Rooms, Other Wonders by Daniyal Mueenuddin as a way of developing and strengthening class consciousness. The stories take place within the social-economic background of postcolonial Pakistan and all the characters involved have their identity and their stations in society defined by much more than wealth and land ownership, but by their ties to material goods. Using a Marxist literary approach and material culture religious studies, this study refers to the manner in which seemingly inanimate objects e.g. electric gadgets, furniture, clothing, and domestic infrastructure, act as agile indicator of classes, permitting control and social stratification, as well as maintain it. Through analyzing the politics of power, which is inherent in their usage, access and placement of objects, the study unveils how the differences in classes are not only physically felt but are also sustained ideologically. Finally, the paper suggests that, objects in the narratives of Mueenuddin are not mere statuses they are tools used invoicing the class, empowerment, and rebellion among the domestic and sociopolitical arenas of modern-day Pakistan.

Keywords: Class Consciousness, Domestic Technologies, Material Culture, Power Dynamics, Socioeconomic Stratification

Introduction

Class division can be not only persistent but extremely deep-rooted in the culture and social life of post-colonial societies, where economic inequalities are commonly supported by (or even created in) the remnants of colonial system and feudal tradition. These divisions are not exposed to a simple land possession or income inequality, but in gentle indicators of material culture access to house technology, control of tool, and ownership of house appliances. Such situations make the availability or lack of the mundane items a powerful cultural representation of both the available social classes and the degree of authority. Material culture, in that way, does not operate independently but it is closely integrated with the ideological processes, and it shapes human conduct, interaction, and organizational processes.

The material realities are reflected in literature, especially literary works of post-colonial countries such as Pakistan through subtle patterns. Indeed, *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders* by Daniyal Mueenuddin furnishes the reader with a deep story landscape with which to explore the enfolding of objects with power and class. The eight stories that are tied in a collection depict characters of different classes including feudal landlords and elite bureaucrats to electricians, maids and servants. Although most of the critical discourse that the text has attracted has dwelled on issues to do with corruption, gender politics, and power equations, the contribution of material goods as instruments that interact in the building of classes has not received any significant attention. Not only is the idea of class purely social but in the Pakistan of Randa Mueenuddin, material and lived, it dictates the provision of power, pure water, furniture, appliances, clothing, and instruments to a small minority that rules them. These do not only serve as descriptive details in the story, they actually play a major role in the process of telling the story putting forward a representation of who is in power and who is not. The correlation between characters and objects of the stories usually defines their agency, mobility and their worth in the perception of others.

Theoretically, such association between humans and object can be interpreted using Marxist literary theory and those concerned with material culture. The Marxist theory draws detailed importance to Material conditions of existence through whose force the class struggle lies at the center of the socio-economic organization of society. In this context, material objects are no longer neutral ones; material objects are the result of the labor and the tool of the ideology. When used in literature, the views enable us to view material things not only as a mere background of the text but as agents that form meaning through activity.

In *Other Rooms Other Wonders*, material culture plays an important role mainly due to the specific context in which it takes place, that of a post feudal, patriarchal, bureaucratic, and postcolonial interplay as specific to Pakistan. The tales expose how home environments turn into one of the sites of contention in which class is made and reproduced. Technologies such as electric fans, refrigerators, sewing machines or even radios are not mere utilities, but they are part of a hierarchical power structure upon who works, who gives the orders and who desires. In the case of characters of lower classes, encounter with these objects tends to be a sign of aspiration, desire, or a taste of the privilege of moving up but these hopes are met again and again with the reality of systemic impediments and failure of the dream rising to the top highlighting the knottiness of the social boundary lines.

In spite the density of Mueenuddin storytelling and the stratification of the use of material detail, little has been done towards analyzing how his narratives address an overall sense of how objects work in the development of a class consciousness in South Asian literature. This paper seeks to address this very important gap by examining the manner in which Mueenuddin has made use of objects, tools, and domestic technologies as narrative structure to express power, control, and resistance. It examines processes through which material objects serve as the instruments of power within a society that is characterized by drastic inequalities and discusses how these objects enable the mediation of the social relationship and help to strengthen the barriers between classes.

The research questions to be used in the study are based on the extent that material culture is symbolically and practically linked to social status and power relations, as well as identity construction as embraced in the narrative. In order to produce a solid conceptual background, the study will commence with an elaborated literature review in relation to the areas of Marxist literary theory, material culture studies, and postcolonial criticism. The theoretical approach will mainly borrow on Marxism based on class struggle, ideology and material determinism as propagated by philosophers like Karl Marx, Louis Althusser and Fredric Jameson. Also, the material culture theory and especially the work of Daniel Miller and Arjun Appadurai will be applied to inquire how objects present in everyday life are used in order to describe and interpret human experiences and social location.

The main part of the study is related to the detailed analysis of the chosen stories out of the collection, like Nawabdin Electrician, Saleema, Provide, Provide, and In Other Rooms, Other Wonders. In this discussion, the research will discover how certain items, namely electric fans, clothing, refrigerators, sewing machines and other equipment serve not only as a background effect but as a tool of class distinction and power mediation. Such objects will be discussed both in respect to their narrative meaning, symbolic meanings, as well as in the manner in which such objects help the author to organize the relationships between the characters with different socio-economic positions and thus show how a particular subordination of characters is created and accepted by the characters themselves. The knowledge obtained through these readings of texts will then be integrated with the purpose to answer the research focus, about the nature of correlation between materiality and social structure in a postcolonial Pakistani context. The study will make its conclusion by discussing how the narrative uses of objects by Mueenuddin help in understanding the concept of class, power and agency saying more, how the material culture can be used as a means to the end of either compliance or minuscule resistance in literature.

Study is an important piece of scholarship and sociocultural since it sheds light on a rather underexplored topic of connecting the concepts of material culture and class consciousness in South Asian postcolonial writing. Although the novel *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders* by Daniyal Mueenuddin has already attracted numerous reviews, criticizing how feudal power relationships, corruption, and gender disorder are depicted, little or no criticism has been paid to symbolic and functional aspects of the position of everyday objects and technologies in building class identity. The research brings to light how the material conditions shape and assert social hierarchies in literary texts, by paying attention to the role of tools, appliances, and domestic technologies as catalysts of power. It adds to the body of literary scholarship with its contribution to the theory of Marxist literature to the South Asian context that provides alternative perspectives on the question of the human representation of classes in the Pakistani fiction. Besides, the study does offer a fine-grained prism through which the readers, scholars and critics can be able to grasp how casual material significations whether a fan or refrigerator in the possession of a servant or a landlord determine the identity, agency and ambitions of the people living in a stratified society. Through this the research contributes not only to the widespread discussion of the role of transitioning between classes and the importance of literature but also the raised

consideration on what the experience of inequality is in day today life and how symbolic the power of objects is.

Research questions

- How are material objects, such as tools, appliances, and domestic technologies, represented in *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders* as symbols of class and power?
- In what ways do these objects influence the social relationships and power dynamics between characters of different socio-economic backgrounds?

Research objectives

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- To know the ways these objects influence the social relationships and power dynamics between characters of different socio-economic backgrounds.

Literature review

Although a substantial body of scholarship addresses the themes of feudalism, gender, and corruption in postcolonial South Asian literature, limited attention has been given to the symbolic and functional role of material objects in constructing class hierarchies. This literature review explores the theoretical and critical texts that foreground the relevance of material culture and class analysis in literary studies, positioning this research within that evolving discourse.

The article written by Sahana analyzes how the objects of household in the short stories by Ismat Chughtai can be seen as the active agents of narrative in their processes of reflection and construction of power structures within the home. She argues that the dimensions of such objects bear ideological meanings that inform the subjectivity and action of women within the patriarchal environments. Her work shows how the material things can be instruments of subjection and even slight opposition channeling the ways of forming the social functions and social positions (Sahana, 2022). This analysis provides a theoretical model for interpreting similar functions of domestic tools in Mueenuddin's stories, where sofas, fans, and sewing machines mediate class distinctions and social control.

Khan investigates "affective materiality" by exploring how markets in conflict-affected South Asia function as emotional and social spaces infused with meaning through objects like baskets or fabrics. His key argument is that these material elements shape community formation, identity, and emotional experiences, particularly under duress (Khan, 2023). Though not focused on literature, Khan's framework is relevant: it shows that emotional attachments to everyday objects can be critical sites of identity and belonging, a concept transferable to China of domestic settings in Mueenuddin's narratives.

Sharify and Maleki's analysis of Jhumpa Lahiri's "Hema and Kaushik" explores how clothing acts as cultural semiotics, signaling identity, assimilation, and social status. They show that garments can encode personal and cultural histories, acting as signifiers of belonging or difference (Sharify & Maleki, 2020). Their methodology offers a template for analyzing how objects in Pakistani fiction such as branded shirts or fans signal class aspirations, cultural capital, and social disparity.

Appadurai's groundbreaking work introduces the concept of objects with "social lives," arguing that their value and meaning are socially constructed and dynamic, not static artifacts (Appadurai, 2014). He demonstrates how the context of exchange, ownership, and display transforms an object's symbolic meaning. For your thesis, this theory supports analyzing how items like refrigerators or electric pumps in Mueenuddin's stories move through different social contexts, acquiring meanings tied to power, wealth, or aspiration.

Building on Appadurai, Kopytoff focuses on the "cultural biography of things," suggesting that objects accumulate meaning over time and through changing contexts (Kopytoff, 2014). According to him, understanding an object's life story from production to disposal reveals its symbolic significance. Applying this to Mueenuddin's fiction can reveal how items like sewing machines or ceiling fans change meaning depending on who uses them, and how they symbolize mobility, control, or stagnation.

In *Materiality*, Miller argues that material objects actively participate in shaping social relations, self-understanding, and power (Miller, 2005). His collection highlights that even mundane items carry cultural symbolism and contribute to constructing identity. This theoretical gate frames the argument that in Mueenuddin's work, appliances and domestic objects aren't merely decorative they are essential to understanding class differentiation and individual subjectivity.

Marx and Engels' classic text, *The German Ideology*, underlines the role of material conditions and economic relations as the foundation of social consciousness and class relations (Marx & Engels, 1970). Their analysis is instrumental for interpreting literary texts, guiding the analysis to focus on how ownership of or access to material objects shapes characters' class-based identities. This Marxist base supports your exploration of objects as embedded within structures of domination and resistance.

Faiz and Asghar conduct a postcolonial textual analysis of Kamila Shamsie's *A God in Every Stone*, arguing that "varieties of object" such as artefacts, hybrid infrastructural elements, and cultural items mediate hybrid identities in Pakistan (Faiz & Asghar, 2024). Drawing on Bhabha's concept of third space and Hall's theories of cultural hybridity, they show that objects carry layered meanings, facilitating cultural negotiation and transformation in postcolonial narratives. Their methodology demonstrates how material items actively participate in constructing identity in transitional social spaces, offering a robust model for analyzing how domestic technologies in Mueenuddin's stories might similarly shape class identity.

In their study "Cultural Hybridity and the Politics of Identity in Pakistani Literature," Butt et al. explore how Pakistani authors like Mohsin Hamid and Kamila Shamsie navigate the fluid boundaries of cultural identity through literary form. Their emphasis on hybridity and ambivalence in narrative voices, influenced by Spivak and Bhabha, highlights how literary works reflect changing social contexts and identity formations. While their focus isn't on material objects per se, their theoretical engagement with hybridity offers valuable context for examining how physical artefacts in fiction symbolize dual or multiple class affiliations, particularly in characters straddling feudal tradition and modern aspiration.

Research Gap

Most importantly, no such studies are dedicated to *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders* by Daniyal Mueenuddin, the text that is lavish with the descriptions of class differences where such objects as electric fans, pumps, refrigerators, and sewing machines are key to defining a character and the mobility of a character. Although the themes of migration, identity and gender have been treated extensively in postcolonial literary studies, one cannot find much research on how ordinary material objects serve as micro-means of class maintenance and desire in postcolonial society of Pakistan, its socio-economy. Such neglect is especially important because the stories by Mueenuddin clearly show the interconnection between material access and social hierarchy where objects are positioned not only as simple narrative props but rather as the so-called appliances of power.

This paper fills this disconnect by providing a Marxist-materialist interpretation of home technologies and objects in *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders*, with the analysis of how these shape, support or deconstructed class identity and systems of power in the postcolonial Pakistani environment.

Textual Analysis

The short stories collected into the book *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders* by Daniyal Mueenuddin shed a sharp light on the topic of socio-economic representations in Pakistan by using a narrative as a kind of lens that is as much focused on the characters and their stories as it is on a material world that characters live in. Throughout the collection, items like electric fans, refrigerators, sewing machine, motorcycles and cosmetics are not just objects that are decorative or practical but they act as agents which contribute to the establishment of classes, access to power and an understanding of the clear demarcation between classes.

The slightly elevated social status in the story *Nawabdin Electrician* is illustrated through contact of the main character with electrical tools and a motorbike. The motorbike specially is a measure of economic usefulness and class representation. The fact that Nawab could do electrical work makes him feel locally important and proud. But his mobility, both literal and figurative, is abruptly interrupted violently because the upward social mobility of poor people is extremely unstable and depends on many conditions. The motorbike, a furniture-like piece of machinery, turns out to be something quite ambitious and, at the end, something frail.

In "Provide, Provide," the domestic refrigerator comes out a symbolic combat zone. Rozina, once a servant and now a mistress has access to the refrigerator, not only to put food but to remind of the domestic control and belonging. This appliance she uses and to which she has access is a result of across of class boundaries. However, her interaction with the object is also interpreted as overstep by other people, and there is a quick social adjustment to clarify the strict segregation between the employer and servant. This scene makes us understand that even in a close setting, ownership of items and their usage are controlled by rigid societal rules designed to perpetuate fixed orders of things.

Another tale, *Saleema* represents the effort of a young servant girl trying to change her social position by her attitude to clothes, make-up, and accessories. Saleema enjoys dressing up and using cheap cosmetics which indicate that she wishes to move above her class status. A problem with these materials is their superficiality and their perceived falseness, however, which seems

to work against her. The things that she buys are never sufficient to fit her in the world of admiration. They, rather, highlight her Otherness, making her attempts of assimilation circumstanced as performative failures. They are objects, which will further alienate her instead of making her powerful. Through Lily, whose world is full of money and all the comfort that modernity offers, the abundance in the material sphere does not carry over into the emotional and social well-being. The life of Lily full of the Western-style furniture, kitchen items, and rooms smartly painted seems to be empty and deprived of connection. Her property stresses not emancipation but exclusion. In contrast to the poor characters who want to obtain such things, the world of Lily explains why material well-being, when deprived of the importance of human interaction, leads to nothing. Their items in her life do not represent the progress, they are the gates which inhibit her relations with people, multiplying her isolation.

In the story, *About a Burning Girl*, the use of technology at home is a violation tool kerosene. In this case, domestic object is not used to bring comfort or guarantee survival but the means to punish and cause fear. The physical ground in the burning of the girl, who has presumably been victimized based on gender and social status is a highlight on the grim consequences of domesticity. The home is not always the venue of protections as well as empowerment of marginalized women; instead, it becomes the venue of exerting social control.

Throughout the collection, Mueenuddin shows us how the material objects act as mute, but furious teller of the class system. These items define belonging and not belonging, who can aspire and who should never change. They spell out the dreams of the proletariat, the fear of the aristocracy, and the sometimes brutal guarding of the edges of the social net. Be it a fan that brings reprieve in the event of a power breakdown, a sewing machine that brings income to a lady, a branded shirt that indicates upward mobility, all these items are infected with meanings that are far more than what can practically be used. They are the signs of hope, status symbols and the sources of control.

Noteworthy, the tales show that the notion of class consciousness is not experienced brought about solely in an external form but is viewed inwards strengthened by going through the material world. The main characters start to change their way of self-perception when they either have or lose the access to some objects. A servant will be proud and feels proud to receive a fan as a present or a dress and she will feel ashamed and feels ashamed or lost when that fan is withdrawn. It is these emotive set of attachments to things that become one of the main processes through which a class identity is constructed and recreated internally. The relationship of women, especially, with material goods is revealed as a special and ambivalent one. Domestic implements and decorations in the case of female characters such as Saleema, Rozina and even Lily are knotted together with the concepts of value, recognition and survival. They are trying to change their shape in working with the mass world, but keeps getting told that the change is conditional. They are often introduced to the objects through male patrons, or employers, and all their agency is hindered by the moral and spatial boundaries put in the way.

Finally, the world of things in *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders* serves as the reflection of the fixed classes in the postcolonial Pakistan. Meanings of objects cover a long way beyond the surface. They facilitate the preservation of social order, control the relations between people and establish the identities. In so much, they are not only prerequisites but also actually happen to

be the appliances of power, which perpetuate an illusion of the existence of upward mobility but upholds actualities of inequality.

Conclusions

The novel *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders* by Daniyal Mueenuddin offers a vivid image of the modern Pakistani society in which the markers of classes are not only traced but also secured with the help of meaning and manifesting material objects. This paper has shown how in the fictional world of Mueenuddin, kitchen technologies and household items; fridges, sewing machines, fans, clothes, motorbikes, to name a few, have become much more than plot devices. These products are used as indicators of class affiliation, a usable means of control, and as miners of desire and exclusion. They represent the ideological forms upholding social hierarchies and at the sametime providing an illusion of upward social mobility.

Analyzing the text in details, these objects actually determine not only the place of the characters in social structure but also in inner understanding of their self-esteem and self-identification. In the case of working-class figures, the accessibility of such items is usually conditional, subject to scrutiny, and mediated through relying on more affluent ones. The temporary access that is given to them, as a gift or in some relationships or even in jobs, although it becomes some sort of empowerment, it is never empowering; even then it spells what is beyond their reach in terms of social mobility. In the case of elite characters, abundance of materials has a way of causing spiritual apartheid and alienation, to show that not even material privilege is synonymous with personal fulfillment. The material culture, in turn, is regarded by the female characters of the collection, specifically, as empowering and alienating. Their efforts to repackage themselves or their ability to dominate household issues by using clothing and makeup, machines or appliances are often discussed by the patriarchal standards and codes of classes. In such representations, the domestic arena of living turns out to be a realm of prospect and retribution, and of material possessions getting heavily mixed with the discourse of gendered vulnerability.

Finally, the narratives prove that the object is always biased in the world that thrives on profound disparities. They are overloaded with social signification and work as power relations enforcers in silence. The stories of Mueenuddin remind us that material world which often goes unnoticed in literary critics is the main focus of living, feeling, and creating power in everyday life. In making visible the symbolic and ideological labor of the domestic technologies, this study adds to the insight about how fiction can help in exposing the material ground of class awareness in postcolonial societies. The present work creates a room to conduct a further investigation on the concept of materiality in other South Asian texts, especially the relevance of the ordinary items to bear the burden of the past, social order, and a vision. It is also asking us to begin a larger debate on the way we conceptualize power in literature, no longer as something political or violent but as the muffled, personal energies of the objects which envelop us.

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