A Marxian Analysis of Charles Dickens’ Christmas Carol

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*An* *Christmas Carol* written by Charles Dickens represents the notions of proletariats, bourgeois and the capitalist tendencies of nineteenth century Victorian England. The novel vividly portrays the class distinction which existed between the poor and rich. It was a huge success owing to the political and social circumstances of the Victorian era. It has been greatly influenced by the industrial revolution which happened in nineteenth century. It was an eye opener to a capitalists like that of Scrooge who often neglected the plight of his labourers and often a life for himself. He is visited by three spirits. They are the Ghosts of the Christmas past, the Christmas present and Christmas yet to come. With each one of them he makes a journey through his life as a little child growing to an avaricious man. The spirits took him to a journey making him realise his mistakes of his times. It was a revelation for him. The title A Christmas Carol is a reminder of the role religion played in the lives of Victorian England which continues even today. Nineteenth century witnessed the emergence of Christianity in England. Liberal Christianity got wider acceptance in England. It was also century which saw the emergence of new working classes in England, it gave rise to of number of factories, goods and the emergence of a new social class and a different hierarchical order. It was a criticism of the industrial bourgeoisie class who exploited the working class and gave them only minimum wages.
Ebenezer Scrooge lived his life as a miser. He was a personification of the capitalism which existed in 19th century. He was a workaholic working in the office and was not concerned about the problems of those who were working under him. He lived a mechanical life detached from the pleasures of the ordinary life. His friend Jacob Marley who was a proprietor of the company died seven years before. On the day of the Christmas this man went to his office. He was a greedy man and mocked at people who celebrated Christmas. He never lived a life beyond his office. When his nephew came to invite him for dinner in Christmas eve he rejected it. He was annoyed about those people who took leave on the Christmas day. He believed that they were making a fool of themselves by enjoying their life without devoting their time in clearing the debts. He was outraged as soon as he heard about the love marriage of his nephew. All through his life he lived alone without a female companion. The factory had insinuated his thoughts and he forgot to enter in a marital relationship. When people came asking for contributions he roared at them that anyone who don’t have money can either go to jail or workhouse or die. They were send away without giving any donations. He even refused to donate money to those who was assisting the poor. He separated himself from all these sorts of celebration and believed that it will not bring out any social progress. The only good thing he did on that day was to sanction a half pay leave to his clerk Bob Cratchit, that too with a pinch of conscience as if his money have been robbed of him. Then he went to his lonely abode surrounded by offices around. Here he was welcomed by a ghost of Joseph Marley, his companion.Because of his evil deeds he had done when he was alive he was compelled to roam around the world. Here both of them portray the character traits of those owners of production who use their means, to suppress the working class population. So he visits Scrooge and warns him that he would be visited by three ghosts.
which will help him to lead a good life. A Christmas Carol was written in the year 1843. It was a phase where industrialisation brought about drastic changes in the life of people and also the Church and religion. The story being told in a Christian context and the fact that it speaks about industrial revolution points towards my reading, which involves the influence of Church and industrial revolution in nineteenth century Victorian England.

Then he takes us a journey through three ghosts. The first ghost who visit him was Christmas Past who takes him to his childhood. He was a naughty boy from his childhood and was often neglected. He experienced solitude as a child being detached from his parents. His sister Fan was kind enough to take him back. In his youth he worked as an apprentice of Fezziwig. He was introduced into capitalism from his early days of youth. It slowly began to insinuate him and got moulded to greed for money. His fiancée Belle left him due to his extreme love towards wealth. His looking back at past made him sob. It also depicts the pathetic fate of bourgeoisie capitalists who waste their lives in search of money and wealth. It also shows how the innocence of childhood gets slowly faded reminding us of the ‘Immortality Ode’ by WordsWorth. It also shows how economic means of productions can define life relationships. It also reinforces the fact that in capitalist modes of production individual will become dependent on capital and even his consciousness will undergo mechanization creating a detachment from human bonds.

Then the ghost of Christmas of Present came to visit him. He was taken to visit the Britain. It is described as being filled with smoke and dust making it dark. *The sky was doomed with dark clouds as the chimneys of Britain produced dark fumes of smoke to air.* The people belonging to various small scale sectors of occupation celebrated Christmas with
much vigour and angst. They bought fruits, meat and were happily celebrating Christmas. Though they suffered from financial problems, they forgot their pains and enjoyed the festival. During that day people bought dress and exchanged them. Scrooge was taken to a slum of mining workers who were leading a miserable life and was also taken to a group of people who was celebrating Christmas on board. He became happy on seeing the Christmas feast and the merry making of Fred family at the time of Christmas eve. There was a regret inside him of rejecting the invitation of Fred. When he was about to leave two small starving children came in front of him and they were named as Ignorance and Want. On seeing those thin living skeletons he became very sympathetic and enquired ghost about ways of helping them. Ghost satirically asked him whether there are no prisons nor any workhouses to save them from poverty. When Scrooge felt sorry for Tiny Tim of being crippled and feared that he may lose his life by next Christmas. Ghost echoed his words by adding that death of Tiny Tim is good as it would reduce the surplus population. People suffered from abject poverty. They did not possess sufficient clothes nor shoes or food. He was astonished by the fact that people were glad and they celebrated Christmas even in midst of these adversities. The children ignorance and want tells us about the starvation which have come to the society as a part of Industrial revolution. It reminds us of the economic condition of Victorian England. The children represents psychological divide between the working class population and that of the ruling class. The ignorance of Proletariats are exploited by the bourgeois out of their want for capital. This greed had doomed the ruling class leading to capitalism.
“His wealth is of no use to him. He don’t do any good with it. He don’t makehimself comfortable with it. He hasn’t the satisfaction of thinking’- Scrooge nephew about Scrooge

Then there appears another Ghost, who is the Ghost of Christmas yet to come. It did not speak anything and took him to those gatherings where people were speaking about the death of a man who exploited them and so they talked about him with a sigh of relief. The Business tycoons of London discussed the death of a rich business man. Then he was taken to a shabby place where a group of vagabonds were discussing about the things stolen from the corpse of a rich man. All the people were discussing about the death of this man and they were relieved of not having to return the debts to a pawnbroker. He was an avaricious person and seldom forgive people. He was a nightmare to all the people ,who he had associated with. By the end Scrooge pleads the ghost to reveal the name of that conspicuous dead man. He points to a tomb in which it is enshrined Ebenezer Scrooge. On seeing it he trembled with fear , sobbed and begged before the phantom. He was forgiven and given a new life. The rest of his life he lived as if to redeem himself from the past sins. It indicates the bourgeois socialism which mainly focused on pleasing the working class without elevating their position.

In the last chapter Scrooge behaves like a man who got bail from being hanged. He roams around and helps as many people he meets on his way. He sends a Turkey to Bob Cratchit, promises to pay the donations to those whom he was reluctant to give in the beginning, goes to dinner in Fred’s house and even hikes the salary of Bob Cratchit. He was thus able to save Tiny Tim from the fringes of death. He was transformed to a good human being. The novella portrays the class struggle which came as a result of capitalism. We can
see that Marley and Scrooge are representatives of the modern bourgeois, they supported capitalist means of production and always tried to oppress their labourers like Bob. The clerks who donot have money for their livelihood are compelled to sell their labour. But as mentioned in the story, they were given minimum wages, which was no even sufficient to feed the entire family. Due to shortage of money the working class population were compelled to borrow money from the bourgeoisie like Scrooge, which ultimately put many of them to life long deters. It eventually created wrath against the capitalist owners of production. The story also revolves around how towns became a small market where people lived their lived to earn capital to meet their increasing demands. The children ignorance and want are representatives of a capitalist society. The effects of industrialisation is vehemently portrayed in the story. The description of black smoke coming from the chimneys of Britain is also reminds us of the polluted cities which came as an aftermath of industrial revolution. Peaceful villages soon gave way to bustling cities. When one side of Britain progressed the other side of Britain remained barbaric where people even stole clothes of the corpse. There were many children like Tiny Tim who were crippled and were undergoing malnourishment. This divide between haves and have-nots are seen with respect to the relation between Scrooge and his labourers. The socialist tendencies which the Scrooge exhibits at the end is suggestive of petty bourgeois socialism where he tries to please the proletariats by giving them perks in the form of food, wage increase but still reminding that they are his working class. In the process he was admired by the workers and they would be able to increase their economic production without any kind of protest. It is similar to the ‘willing suspension of disbelief’. The title of this novella is also significant owing to its historical context. It is published during Victorian era which gave a lot of importance to Anglican Church and
considered that people should live obeying the orders of the Church. Owing to industrial revolution there emerged a group among the working class population who questioned the priorities given by Church to the upper middle class population. It gave rise to many groups such as Quakers, Methods and Presbyterians. They tried to bring out an individual perspective to Christian faith, which stressed on salvation and resurrection. It supported the idea of redemption. The period also saw the mushrooming of Catholic Church. Though there were difference in opinion regarding the rule of Church, the people of Britain irrespective of their difference in economic strata believed in Christianity. So the title A Christmas Carol caught hold the attraction of the ruling and the ruled. It is also a reminder of Walter Benjamin essay on ‘Theologico- Political fragment’ where he speaks about the coming of Messiah to bring happiness and redemption. The ghosts in the story performs the role of Messiah by trying to bridge the gap between the political disparities in a religious way. The appearance of ghosts also gives us a warning of the arrival of the Messiah at any point in present. It also reminds us of our mortality. The fear of death has triggered the transformation of Scrooge. He is haunted by his evil deeds of the past and he wanted to seek redemption and spread happiness. Benjamin also says that it is the weak Messianic power in man which helps in redemption in the present from the deeds of our ancestors. So the Ghosts can be interpreted as a manifestation of that Messianic power which was inside Scrooge itself. This novella also reminds us of an idealist arraignment of age which speaks about the destruction and exploitation of nature by the industrial revolution. Here the slums where the mining workers live and the air is filled with black and thick globules of smoke. To sum up, Christmas Carol gave us a Marxian understanding of the class difference by the portrayal of Scrooge and his clerk Bob and it also helps in understanding how the economic
modes of production controls mode of life in the age of capitalism. It gave us an insight of how religion was used an important medium to advocate the social turmoil of the nineteenth century Victorian England.

WORKS CITED


