

Original Research Paper

Locating the Politicoethical Positions in the Scrutiny of the Indian Capitalist Order Via the Realm of the Black Sheep

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Abstract: The paper is a comparative analysis between Italo Calvino's *The Black Sheep* and Arundhati Roy's *Capitalism: A Ghost Story*. Both the texts are critical evaluations of the capitalist economic system, the former being an allegorical short story while the latter a political non-fiction. The authors in either text attempt to bring into the light the political, economic, ethical and sometimes even religious order from which they wish the masses to be freed. However, in both the works the authors are not free from their own political, philosophical and ethical presumptions and to locate them is the primary objective of the paper.

Keywords: Ethics, Indian Capitalism, Philosophy of Honesty.



1. Introduction

The 'black sheep' as a concept in itself has broad connotations, usually tilting towards the wrong, bad and a sort of misdoing. It also refers in interactions of varying degree a certain racial group, again with the sense of being in the wrong in actions or thought. These multiple perspectives of the 'black sheep' are sidetracked to form a starkly different category with a single parable from Italo Calvino, *The Black Sheep*. This Italian writer's story portrays a very specific order of society that is taken up for scrutiny, not overtly by the writer himself who engages in fictional representation but rather the reader whose faculties are presumed to be of a particular moral inclination, one that fits like a glove to the hand of the plot. The society, engaged in a cycle of theft that perpetuates a certain accepted baseline for survival, is broken by an anomaly, a non-normative individual (that could be thought of as a group as well) who refuses to take part in the machination of the structure. This crack in the foundation results in a linear push of monetary gain towards the few people who by accident end up with more economic privilege than others. Eventually the now new built hierarchy of economic power has the high stratum group of individuals funding others below them on a fixed salary and making the ones in the lowest levels steal off of the one above and so on. This system generates a disproportionate amount of income for the ones already at the top and keeps the ones below on the fringes of the pecuniary form.

2. Literature Review

"One day, how we don't know, it so happened that an honest man came to live in the place" [1]. The thesis behind the 'black sheep' in the story can either point to the anomaly of 'honesty' in terms that is relative to the normative or as an essential essence. Interestingly, the story till the point of introducing this new player in the game of the society goes over the traits of "stealing" and the cyclic nature of it. It builds up to honesty from this narration of theft and perjury. If one is to take for granted the correspondence theory of truth, "...that what we believe or say is true if it corresponds to the way things actually are..." [2], then to verbalise via misconstruing or misrepresenting this truth would account for the falsehood of the narration, a dishonesty.

The action of theft is rooted with contrast in the depths against the idea of truthfulness and honesty; actions that align with the consortium of thieves of that society. The writer's conjecture comes from the narration pitting the 'honest' against the 'thieves' as opposites of the system that is supposed to represent the state of affairs of the general economic order. However, the thieves actually in their actions are no different to the 'honest' man from the point of simply stating the truth if honesty is understood as speaking the truth, the honest man here is simply unaware of the honesty which then he eventually procures; "The honest man could hardly object to such reasoning" [1]. The shift in positions come if we accommodate the pragmatics of the individual who is dishonest for, he does not abide by the rules (of this particular society) like an honest person is supposed to do in one understanding of the concept; "He was honest [emphasis added], there was nothing you could do about it" [1]. If we were to add to the understanding "...and not likely to steal, cheat or lie" [3] then the unlikeness of the man's 'honesty' would come from only being devoid of the first action as the other two are just as inappropriate to the masses of the country.

This then relies on the standing of certain legal procurements and or politico-philosophical principles that intend on a particular way of 'wellbeing' (in the Harrisian sense of *The Moral Landscape*). Another perspective lies in the idea of virtue ethics, of "...the disposition to face the other by making explicit all those details that are relevant to the conversation at issue" [4]. Upon this metric the complexity arises from trying to understand where the 'relevant' parts are and when they are to be deployed, the situation of the 'honest' man therein becomes, from a third-person view, of an arbitrary agent. From being unaware of the corresponding truth of the state of affairs of the society that he brought himself into, he remains ignorant; from its obtaining he becomes 'dishonest' and his disobedient temperament thereby catalyses the development of the bourgeoisie-proletariat order. For his 'disposition' as an 'honest man' however he remains opaque, his understated actions and inactions accord him into a system outside of normative that is rendered to have a near neutral essence, as simply the is; "...there was nothing you could do about it. He went as far as the bridge and watched the water flow by beneath" [1]. His relative 'honesty' and 'dishonesty' relegates him outside of the order that he chooses to remain indifferent to and lets it function on its own, narrated by the writer as a self-devouring mechanism of not only himself as himself but of him being in the society "... the problem was that his behaviour upset everything else" [1].

Nonetheless the writer makes an absolute judgement to conclude the matter, thereby also laying open his rules that are to be played in so as to be able to affirm the position mentioned; “The only honest man had been the one at the beginning, and he died in very short order, of hunger” [1].

3. Methodology

Comparative literature was used for fixed the research.

4. Finding and Discussion

In contemporary times one of the critiques of the Indian socio-economic order, *Capitalism: A Ghost Story* by Arundhati Roy will be taken up in context of being the ‘black sheep(s)’ in a society of ‘thieves’. Roy’s critique of the system Indian economic and social order has produced is initiated by the residence Antilla of Mukesh Ambani, which can be seen as the metaphor of the linearity of the accumulation of wealth in the upcoming super power that is India, akin to the wealthy that take over the system in Calvino’s story, for which Roy uses “Gush-Up”. “As Gush-Up concentrates wealth onto the tip of a shining pin on which our billionaire’s pirouette, tidal waves of money crash through the institutions of democracy...” [5].

Roy’s book duly probes into the system that runs and ruins the Indian society, but even the ‘duly’ is preceded by a certain foundational presumption of change in society by which the duty is located and then the gap here is filled by Roy. The ‘black sheep’ is the agent of chaos, in the sense of a) ‘birth place of things’ [6] good or bad and b) ‘formless potential’ [7], which make it the breeding ground for change. These characteristics are inextricably linked to the already formed order of a space of existence to then be producing a deemed change, balance of which requires a continual exchange between the two. The foundation of chaos would have to thereby occur outside of the system if it is the order that it is seeking to alter, for similarity would simply overlap the two initiatives. For Roy in her surgical exposition of the way systems (or order) of change function is of an order unwanted by the ones being imposed upon e.g. Adivasis against the corporations, sees the coming of the new ‘order’ as chaotic, the latter sees it as a necessary unlocking of potential, in nation’s interest.

The actions to create the surface for potential actualisation are termed “Creating a Good Investment Climate” [5] and the order against it is termed as “Single Largest Security Challenge in India” [5]. This play between order and chaos, that hold the other as lacking in its value of existence alongside the other does provide enough material to investigate either’s base, however in the text of Roy she shifts her opacity of transparency of foundations to her liking when strategically necessary for her order (or chaos) to come to fruition in readers’ minds. The most visible of the incidents is her evaluation of the Jaipur Literary Festival where her foundations are laid bare. The terms deployed; “Islamists”, “outrageously”, “Islamist Fundamentalism” towards the protests that happened against the expression of her ordered-chaos via ‘Free Speech’ in the reading of the book *The Satanic Verses*. Here she lays her boundaries with UAPA and AFSPA towards the clearing of forests, the regulatory framework of her ‘honesty’ lies somewhere between the two; the supported and the opposed notions, as she also speaks against the ‘safe distance’ of the “official” feminists from the *Krantikari Adivasi Mahila Sanghatan*. One of the pillars of her foundation seems to arise from the ownership of body, as she states “Coercing a woman out of her burka is as bad as coercing her into one.” [5] Continually she puts threads of her thesis onto the scene of stitching of the Indian socio-political environment as per her liking.

The ‘black sheep’ value for Arundhati Roy resides in the amalgam of what could be broadly described as but not limited to socialism; a chaotic system (for the ordered one) outside of the capital order of the Indian polity that is “...neither socialist nor capitalist in a whole, but has the nature of both” [8]. The inaction and action of the ‘black sheep’ is only in part embodied by Roy, for she states, “But which of us sinners was going to cast the first stone? Not me, who lives off royalties from corporate publishing houses” [5] – creating the is as observed in *The Black Sheep*. This detachment from the worthiness of change to be brought on the system of Indian society is then shifted onto the downtrodden and underprivileged, “If the sledgehammer of moral purity is to be the criteria for stone throwing, then the only people who qualify are those who have been silenced already. Those who live outside the system...” [5]. With this hint of rhetoric Roy slides into the position to voice the unseen of the media from her privileged position, while at the same time classifies herself as the part of the system that creates the order undesired as per her, playing again with the opacity dial; where her Black(ness) would serve the inquiry and where it would not. Her text, in a language probably unlikely to be read by those “outside the system” bears the reader – that is in all likelihood in the system – to

also then absolve oneself of the initiative of change, she becomes thereby the anointer of black sheep [9] - [18].

5. Conclusion

The creation of a new order from a chaotic (relative) intrusion of the outside becomes the central paradigm, both by Calvino and Roy. The difference however lies in the conspicuousness of their prescription, where the former relies on the hope of the readers taking the desired initiative that entails from the axiomatic narrations and moral directions of the story, the latter creates an environment of haze that cultivates an exoneration from responsibility as well as a pressure to transition into her foundational premises, while simultaneously clearing the conscience from the guilt of inaction to bringing change.

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