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## Intersecting Oppressions: A Marxist-Feminist Critique of Class Struggle and Gender Subjugation in Shirley Jackson's *The Lottery*

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### Abstract

*This study presents a Marxist-Feminist critique of Shirley Jackson's *The Lottery*, exposing the intersections of class oppression and gender subjugation within a rigidly hierarchical society. Through the lens of Marxist theory, the research examines how economic power structures manipulate individuals into accepting systemic violence, reinforcing capitalist control through ideological conditioning. The tradition of *The Lottery* functions as an instrument of coercion, ensuring that the working class remains subservient to an exploitative order. Meanwhile, feminist theory particularly radical feminism reveals how patriarchal structures marginalize women, rendering them voiceless and complicit in their own oppression. The analysis underscores how the villagers, despite momentary glimpses of dissent, remain bound by inherited traditions that sustain both class and gender inequalities. Employing an integrated theoretical framework that synthesizes Marxist and feminist perspectives, this study unpacks how *The Lottery* serves as an allegory for the perpetuation of institutionalized violence under the guise of tradition.*

**Key Words:** Marxist-Feminist Criticism, Class Struggle, Gender Oppression, Ideological Control, Shirley Jackson, *The Lottery*

### Introduction

*The Lottery* by Shirley Jackson (2008) exhibits strong Marxist-Feminist ideologies, it also reflects the power structures within society, where economic and gender hierarchies dictate individual and collective existence. Marxist literary theory comes from the philosophical concept of Marxism, proposed by the German Philosopher Karl Marx (1883). Marx's notion of society is based on ideology; he argued that all

mental and ideological constructs are produced and developed by real social and economic existence. The material interests of the dominant social class determine how people perceive human existence on individual and collective levels. For example, the legal system "is not the pure manifestation of human or divine reason, but ultimately reflects the interest of the dominant class in particular historical

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periods." (Selden, 1997, p. 89). Marx's dialectical view of history proposes that larger political and economic forces shape and define an individual's social being. Hence, the worldview and ideology of an individual is determined by the social class in which he/she is born. Marx also criticized the system of production and considered it manipulative since economic prosperity is achieved by the efforts of the working class while reward is reaped by the rich industry owners. The middle class, for the most part, tends to support the capitalist ideology, at least in countries where capitalism is dominant. While Marxist theory criticizes economic inequalities, feminism highlights gender discrimination and oppression of women in patriarchal societies. Both these theories converge at common points such as societal power systems, oppression of the weak, and the marginalization of certain sociocultural and socioeconomic groups.

In particular, feminist literary theory talks about the equality and equity of both genders. In a patriarchal society, men are dominant and super-ordinates, while women are inferior and submissive. They are considered as 'other'. Their role is restricted to the home, husband, and children. They are deprived of their basic rights of education, freedom of speech, self-expression, and recreation. Feminists speak for equal rights of women in the society. Feminist criticism in literature analyzes the female characters, their representation, their condition, and the problems faced by them. Also, it looks at how they are treated by men. The lack of dominant female characters illustrates the arguable assumption in the story that women are often seen as inferior to men in societal groups, such as in the gathering before the

stoning. Through her portrayal and depiction of female characters, Jackson criticizes women's societal roles.

*The Lottery* narrates the horrors of a traditional ritual that is celebrated by the inhabitants of an American village. Historically, *The Lottery* was considered a kind of human sacrifice that promised a better life for all. *The Lottery* is headed by Mr. Summers, who has a prominent civic role contributing to various religious, cultural, and political activities and events. *The Lottery* event is held toward the end of June every year in which one of the villagers is chosen for the sacrifice and his/her fellow villagers gather in the center of the village to stone the unfortunate person. The name of each person is called to pick up one of the wooden chips, which are kept in a black box, and the person who picks up the chip with a black spot on it becomes the victim. According to the ritual, people of the village stone him/her till death. Feminist oppression combines with economic repression, and women face double persecution as they have to submit to the cruel rituals of society as well as the harassment of their patriarchs.

This study integrates Marxism with feminism to carry out a critical analysis of the selected story. Marxism in the realm of feminism seeks to explore the suppression, exploitation, and marginalization of women in a capitalist society for the sake of material gains. The first suppressive hand is a capitalist, and the second is the patriarch, as in the case of *The Lottery*. This study derives Marxist interpretations of ideology, society, and rebellion as well as aims at feminist understandings of patriarchy and discriminated women's character. *The Lottery* represents a

condition where the bourgeoisie exploits the proletariats in the name of irrational cultural rituals.

### Research Questions

1. How does economic power serve as a means of constructing the behavior of the working class in *The Lottery*?
2. How does the story reinforce submission to a social hierarchy and encourage the perception of stratified gender values?

### Literature Review

According to Marxist theory, literature both illustrates and manifests out of the societal organizations it originates from. Since literature exists as a social construct, it maintains various ideological purposes that either sustain or challenge dominant structures of power. Through its depiction of materialism, the literature demonstrates social-economic status connections by defining character behavior based on financial ambition. In the Marxist theoretical framework, literature surpasses static artistic forms because it functions as material that emerges from the fusion of its era's economic systems and belief structures (Abrams, 1980). Literature functions as a medium to understand class systems and economic structures of society thereby establishing how social theories connect with literary works.

Basic Marxist ideas show reality develops due to material factors while social systems mold collectivism and economic and social elements influence collective spiritual values and social principles. Bressler (1999) explains how Marxism shows that society will evolve through class conflict removal into an

environment with equal accessibility to wealth, opportunity, and education for everyone (p. 211). Marxist literary critics use ideological analysis as their core method to study literature because it helps understand society through its social structures yet presents potential structure transformations for future communities (Wellek & Warren 1963). According to Marxist criticism, literature must exist within political structures alongside social elements and economic frameworks despite the isolationistic analysis of post-structuralist and structuralist methods.

Kosenko (1985) maintains that *The Lottery* by Shirley Jackson showcases Marxist elements that confront both capitalist dogma and class divisions impeded within society. Through its allegorical form, the story warns about capitalist systems by showing how oppressive systems uphold economic and political control. According to Marxist interpretation, the black dot on *The Lottery* paper symbolizes how capitalism contains destructive elements. For example, Mr. Summers owns a coal business, belongs to the village ruling elite, and has considerable political and economic power (Kosenko, 1985). In a somewhat similar vein, Tyson (2020) argues that Marxism provides critical consciousness of how people are conditioned by material and historical circumstances and by oppressive ideologies intended to maintain compliance with the dictates of dominant power structures.

Boseovska (2022) notes that the connection between gender oppression and socioeconomic conditions existed throughout history in various forms. With reference to Jane Austin's *Emma*, the researcher states that gender discrimination among socioeconomic classes was considered

one of the main conflicts in the 18th and early 19th centuries. It seems that men's rights were much more important than women's rights, and men enjoyed higher power positions as compared to women more powerful than women. Boseovska points out the Marxist-feminist elements in *Emma* because it deals with moral equality for both genders and also depicts how economic situations can determine women's social status in their society.

The interplay between Marxism, feminism, power, and cultural factors is a complex phenomenon that leads to the exploitation of the weak and marginalized. Proletariats and women have always been the victims of societal violence and religious manipulation, as has been observed throughout history. Human sacrifice has been a longstanding tradition in history and in different religions. For example, Bremmer (2007), while studying the history of religions, reports, "In ancient India, we can follow the traditions of human sacrifice from the earliest tests up to modern times, where especially in eastern India goddesses, such as Kali, were long worshipped with human victims". (p. 7). He also refers to a Tantric text-'Kalika Purana', that explains the process of human sacrifice to please the goddess Kali; the same relates to the villagers in *The Lottery*, who never question the worth of this tradition. *The Lottery* is only conducted as a matter of traditional heritage; no one knows its purpose and essential meaning. Likewise, Ali (2008) argues, "Driven by their blind faith in reason, they interpret the problem in a way that is familiar to them in order to find a solution that fits within their doctrine of reason" (10). When people blindly follow a tradition, they have no wit to find a logic for it. The villagers kill one of their fellow or family members by throwing

stones and never think about why they are taking an innocent life who has committed no sin. Hence, Marxist ideology presents cruelty as obligation and patriarchy as commitment, as can be seen through literature.

Although Marxist and feminist critical lenses have been extensively employed by researchers to analyze the literary texts a review of the existing scholarship reveals that there is a lack of scholarly investigation on the story *The Lottery*. To date, the researcher has found only two scholarly studies that directly analyze *The Lottery* from Marxist and feminist perspectives. For example, Suwardi (2009) argues that the story shows how wealthy elite characters, Mr. Summers and Mr. Graves, use belief systems to keep the villagers under their economic and authoritarian control. Through his analysis, he demonstrates that *The Lottery* serves an oppressive role that strengthens social class divisions while forcing workers to endure an exploitative system by falsely portraying it as a traditional practice. According to Robinson (2019), *The Lottery* functions within patriarchal violence as he demonstrates how scapegoating in narrative history parallels ritualized persecution. The author notes that the story demonstrates how every member of the community continues patriarchal oppression by supporting an order that disregards women because they exist only for male control. The research presented in both studies offers convincing insight yet operates independently from each other when examining class-based and gender-centered oppression. Therefore, the present study takes onto this perspective and connects Marxist and radical feminist theory to study how capitalist social structures, together

with patriarchal ideologies, maintain harmful traditions in *The Lottery*.

### Theoretical Framework

Marxist literary criticism is based on Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels's theories and studies how economic systems control both beliefs and social divisions and power relationships within society. Marx and Engels (1967) say "Accumulation of wealth at one pole is, therefore, at the same time accumulation of misery, agony of toil, slavery, ignorance, brutality at the opposite pole" (p. 91). Wealth is tied with power, the bourgeoisie are powerful because their capital earns them a higher socioeconomic status which in turn gives them the upper hand in politics. In *Das Kapital*, Marx (1996) argues "Differences of age and sex have no longer any distinctive social validity for the working class. All are instruments of labor, more or less expensive to use, according to their age and sex" (p. 87). This theoretical framework is valuable to examine how the capitalistic system creates social hierarchies that lead to oppression. The current study uses a Marxist perspective to study class conflicts and economic mistreatment, along with how material factors affect the freedom and limitations of characters in the selected short story. The study also analyzes how dominant ideologies spread using cultural narratives that sustain economic inequalities, structural oppression, and, specifically, women's marginalization.

The violence against women in the story has been analyzed through the lens of Radical Feminism proposed by Kate Millett (1970) in her feminist theoretical work *Sexual Politics*, which calls patriarchal systems the core force

that subjugates women. The core principle of Millett's theory demonstrates how various cultural establishments, including literature, create systems that maintain gender power differences between men and women. She argues "Sex is also related to the question of social and economic status. Where sex is a factor in upward mobility, as in patriarchal society, it becomes a form of social and economic oppression" (Millett, 1970, p. 31). Marxist and feminist analytical approaches have been integrated to study the combined effects of social class and gender hierarchies as depicted in *The Lottery*. The analysis aims to examine how economic power systems intersect with gender oppression because they work together to suppress female characters. This synthesis of critical perspectives gives a comprehensive evaluation of the text because it reveals how economic systems and gender power structures unite to create the narrative's display of oppression and resistance.

This study proposes an Integrated Socioeconomic-Gender Oppression Framework, which posits that capitalist economic structures and patriarchal gender hierarchies function as intersecting systems of control that sustain oppression by consolidating power among the privileged, marginalizing women as both economic dependents and social subordinates and perpetuating systemic violence through cultural narratives that normalize both class exploitation and gender subjugation.

### Analysis and Discussion

The title of *The Lottery*, presented by Shirley Jackson, makes explicit connections to the theories of Marxist ideology through the illustration of social class conflicts. The story

depicts society through two distinct social groups: the bourgeois ruling class and the proletarian working class. Contemporary intellectual power reflects material supremacy because “the ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e., the class which is the ruling material force in society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force” (Marx and Engels 1967 p. 16). The black box in *The Lottery* controls the lottery system, which determines who will live and who will die in this unnamed village from a Marxist point of view. Beyond its unpredictable viciousness, the tradition endures, revealing how the dominant societal class continues to control the lower working class. The population of people who accept the ceremony without question creates an allegory showing how robust dominant social systems implement ideological control to uphold their authority.

Through its yearly lottery, the community demonstrates that tradition functions as an instrument of oppression. Williams (2007) explains the complex concept of tradition by stating that “a tradition is not just ‘a tradition’ but a selective version of a shaping past and a pre-shaped present, which is then powerfully operative in the process of social and cultural definition and identification” (p. 1280). Throughout the story, Jackson demonstrates that the citizens have eliminated various components from their tradition while keeping the lottery selection process intact. The practice of stoning continues to take place in the community even though the purposeful actions — ceremonial chant — and ritual salutes have changed to obsolete customs. The methodical protection of selected traditions confirms that

ideological learning helps keep the power structure alive in the village ecosystem.

Two influential representatives of the village elite appear in the story, Mr. Summers and Mr. Graves. They belong to the elite position in the village, which allows them to maintain control over *The Lottery* system and guide both economic and social system elements in the community. Mr. Summers, described as having ample “time and energy to devote to civic activities,” is positioned as a benevolent leader. Yet, his power stems from his wealth and influence rather than any democratic mandate. Jackson’s characterization indicates that physical work has never touched Mr. Gravity and hence he remains distant from working-class life. Wealth and influence grant him total governance to control what happens in the village while keeping its social and cultural operations in his hands. Mr. The caretaking role performed by Graves enables him to be the foundation of *The Lottery's* dominant social system. The position as postmaster allows him to control all village communications, which extends his power over ideological control. The execution of fear by dominant social groups maintains their position of power, ultimately producing submission from beneath.

Those belonging to the working class face persistent oppression because they are exhausted and brainwashed to accept the current situation. Their fear of *The Lottery* is palpable: “A sudden hush fell through the crowd as Mr. Summers cleared his throat and looked at the list.” The working class shows consciousness of lottery brutality through their actions, although they do not directly address it because they lack the ability to fight back. Year after year, Mr. Summers proposes to replace the black box,

but the community always rejects the suggestion, showing unwillingness to find change. The villagers display a parallel unwillingness to change, which mirrors their inability to demolish oppressive social systems. Hundreds of years of servitude have made the population accept their present condition without opposition. Tessie Hutchinson makes a reaction that demonstrates how controlling forces operate in the community. Tessie Hutchinson expressed her protest by saying, "You didn't give him time enough to take any paper he wanted. I saw you." I saw you. This statement reveals that Hutchinson is just starting to grasp the unfair nature of the system. However, her outcry is futile. The workers submissively accept *The Lottery* as an unchangeable ritual, so they refuse to rally around Hutchins, which shows how their economic situation and political beliefs restrict them from forming resistance.

*The Lottery's* connection to labor and economic exploitation is evident in Mr. Summers's remark: "Guess we better get started, get this over with, so we can go back to work." As per capitalist ideology, labor requires more attention than human life because Mr. Summers possesses no obligation to work following the lottery act. Old Man Warner describes the strong relationship between *The Lottery* and work when he says, "Lottery in June, corn be heavy soon... There's always been a lottery." Through his statement, the speaker uses traditional imagery to show destructive exploitation, which requires suffering as a prerequisite to economic success. Through his symbolism, the old man illustrates those individuals who desire to preserve current conditions because they

maintain power, which results in continued advantage over working-class people.

The way the town is arranged through its physical spaces supports the power distribution system. *The Lottery* event occurs in the town square where it faces the post office followed by the bank as institutions that symbolize authority. The ruling class solidifies its power through this arrangement because the common people never fully reside within the range of these powerful institutions. Jackson attacks a society that depends on traditional customs for upholding both social and economic inequalities. At the same time, the story unveils how patriarchal social systems subdue women through a feminist perspective. Tessie Hutchinson's tragic end demonstrates the societal erasure of women because she fails to obtain freedom from the deadly lottery even though she argues for it. Inside the village, only male household members hold permission to choose lottery drawings, which displays their dominant position. Women have no authority within the social system because when a male family member is absent the eldest son inherits his role regardless of his generation. Women in capitalist and patriarchal societies have minimal power that bars them from speaking out against systemic injustices.

Arriving late to *The Lottery* ceremony is noteworthy for Tessie because she informs the crowd that she missed the starting time to finish cleaning dishes. The simple comment serves as an example of how women at this time must stay bound to household responsibilities that uphold male dominance. Even in death, Tessie is denied individuality—she is the only female character referred to by her first name, not as "Mrs. Hutchinson," suggesting that her identity is only

acknowledged when she becomes a spectacle of communal violence. During *The Lottery* process, additional evidence shows how men and women experience differential treatment. When the men draw their slips, the crowd reacts with encouragement: "Several voices in the crowd said things like 'Good fellow, Jack,' and 'Glad to see your mother's got a man to do it.'" Conversely, when Janey Dunbar must draw in her husband's absence, she does so "regretfully," reinforcing the notion that women's participation in public affairs is an aberration. The power system shows identical gender discrimination models as those found in patriarchal societies, which construct barriers that limit female independence. With such weak resistance against oppression in the village the authorities quickly silence all attempts at defiance. Later in the story, Steve Adams demonstrates complete betrayal of his initial acceptance of transformation when he stands united with Mr. Graves to enforce the existing order in society.

Through social involvement in rituals, *The Lottery* demonstrates how harmful ideologies maintain their grip by making violent acts seem natural. The residents ignore their concerns about participating in the ritual because social structures drive their self-preservation mechanisms. The narrative shows how domination finds its home within those whose freedom it suppresses instead of manifesting through representatives of power. The patriarchal system makes women suffer at its hands yet makes them continue its practice. Mrs. Delacroix presents a friendly demeanor at first yet reveals his direct participation in Tessie Hutchinson's execution because societal norms create pressures for people to uphold destructive

customs. Collective participation proves that systemic violence survives because cultural conventions resist any form of resistance. The people in the village remain unwilling to see their common subjugation because they are controlled both by fear and traditional beliefs, which allows oppression to spread without restraint throughout multiple generations.

In the ending sequence, the author conveys patriarchal authority combined with ideological governance. Mrs. Delacroix, initially friendly toward Tessie, selects "a stone so large she had to pick it up with both hands," urging Mrs. Dunbar to join in the execution. Through this act of the story, social conditioning forces people, including women, to support systems that hurt them. The ending reveals how oppressive systems continue through the combined efforts of those who rule with power and those who follow without resistance due to unconditional submission to authority. The North Village has started considering nullifying *The Lottery*, according to Mr. Steve Adams and his wife (p. 266). Old Man Warner displays his strong opposition to change by proclaiming with frustration, "There's always been a lottery,' he added petulantly" (p. 266). Mrs. Without Success, Adams presses the point that "some places have already quit lotteries" (p. 266), but the authority of patriarchy continues without hindrance. At the moment of stoning, Steve Adams finds himself in the lead position next to Mr. Graves while participating in the ritual. Mrs. The story does not describe Adams's attendance at the execution because it illustrates how women remain voiceless when men assert their dominance. The society seems to require everybody to follow established customs. Mrs. Delacroix's hostile attitude toward Tessie once

from the past Mrs. Delacroix selects a massive stone requiring two-handed effort and persuades Mrs. Dunbar to participate (268). The collective power of cultural tradition leads everyone who expresses doubt eventually to give in.

The story functions as an analysis of traditional male-controlled societies together with their dedication to ancient practices. Through its narrative style, the story enables readers to analyze community traditions from a scientific perspective yet does not aim for them to adopt the researcher's distant perspective. The village continues to observe their ritual customs through minor modernizations of using paper slips instead of wood chips because oppressive systems endure through cosmetic alterations. The system shows women's power through their clothing and speech and their restricted influence in the community. Fragmented signs indicating discontent emerge during *The Lottery* but lead to no substance changes in the community. The patriarchal system continues its dominion while Tessie's final shouts of "It isn't fair, it isn't right" (269) represent the complete suppression of women.

### Conclusion

*The Lottery* presents a strong condemnation of oppressive social systems as patriarchy joins class conflicts to enable continuous systemic violence, according to the Marxist-Feminist

analysis. According to Marxist theory, capitalist ideology drives working-class people to preserve an unjust system, which overlaps with feminism by demonstrating women's status as victims of patriarchal oppression, although they sometimes fight back against their subjugation. *The Lottery* functions as a disciplinary tool that activates fear to control people's submissive behavior to the established system. Through gender role portrayals, Jackson establishes that patriarchal hierarchy cannot be avoided in his story world. Women experience total voicelessness since their complete identity depends on men who determine their every action based on traditional expectations. Tessie Hutchinson earns the status of being the single female who attempted defiance yet received no attention before being sacrificed during the ritual, even though she shouted in protest. Both men and women join forces to perpetuate this violence despite their own misgivings because they submit themselves to traditional conventions. Through its exposure to economic oppression and gender-based oppression as interconnected control mechanisms, *The Lottery* makes readers face the risks of disposing of blind loyalty and systematic injustice maintenance. The story ends with an ominous message that reveals oppressive systems like economics and politics, and patriarchy survive through traditional cover-ups which force people to embrace brutal practices as an unavoidable necessity.

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