



The Upper Class's Violence and Violations in Megha..... Dr. Rashad Mohammed Moqbel

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## The Upper Class's Violence and Violations in Megha Majumdar's A Burning(\*)

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مجلة العلوم التربوية والدراسات الإنسانية



## عنف الطبقة العليا وانتهاكاتها في رواية "الحريق" A Burning للروائية "ماجومدار"

د/ رشاد محمد مقبل العريقي

أستاذ مشارك - أدب إنجليزي جامعة الباحة  
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### ملخص الدراسة

تعتمد الصراعات الطبقيّة في الغالب على الأيديولوجيات التي تتبناها شرائح المجتمع المختلفة مهما كانت هذه القيم: دينية، اقتصادية، سياسية، اجتماعية... إلخ. تستكشف هذه الدراسة الصراعات الطبقيّة، والأيديولوجيات الكامنة وراء مثل هذا الصراع وكيف تتحكم هذه الأيديولوجيات في سلوك الطبقات المختلفة وتهيمن على شكل العلاقات فيما بينها. ومن خلال النظرية الأدبية الماركسية ومفاهيم الصراع الطبقي/الطائفي، والأيديولوجيا المختلفة، وهيمنة البنية الفوقية الاقتصادية وفرض مصالحها كواقع، تتعقب الدراسة جيفان، فتاة مسلمة فقيرة تعيش حياة بائسة في أحياء كولاباجان الفقيرة، كولكاتا، وهي متهمّة بالإرهاب بعد حرق القطار، لافلي (متحول جنسيًا)، وتطلق عليها الكاتب - هجرة من الذكور - لكنها تعيش كأثنى وتريد أن تكون ممثلة، و PT Sir، مدرس تربية بدنية - وتستكشف الدراسة حياتهم اليومية في ظل هذه الأيديولوجيات في الهند المعاصرة.

كشفت الدراسة أن الصراعات الطبقيّة نشأت أساسًا من الأيديولوجيات المختلفة التي تتبناها الطبقات المختلفة والمتجسدة في المعتقدات الاجتماعية والسياسية والدينية. كما تم الكشف عن النظام التمييزي للطبقة العليا في المجتمع السردّي وظلمه وفساده وكيف أن مثل هذا النظام من خلال السيطرة على وسائل الإعلام والجوانب المتنوعة للحياة: الاقتصاد والتعليم والسياسة يسير الأمور لصالحه وفي النهاية يدفع المؤسسات التعليمية والمدنية والمنظمات للاستجابة بشكل إيجابي لتوجهاتها التي تخدم مصالحها فقط.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الطبقة، الصراع، الأيديولوجيا، الماركسية، العنف، الانتهاكات، ماجومدار.



## The Upper Class's Violence and Violations in Megha Majumdar's A Burning

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### Abstract

Class conflicts are mostly based on competing ideologies embraced by different segments of a community. These values may be religious, economic, political, social, etc. in nature. This study explores the class conflicts, the ideologies behind these conflicts and investigates how these ideologies both control the different classes' behavior and dominate the form the relationships between them take. Using a Marxist approach and the concepts of class/sect conflicts, ideology, economic superstructure domination and hegemony, this study traces Jivan, a poor Muslim girl who lives a miserable life in the Kalabagan slums of Kolkata who is accused of terrorism in the aftermath a train burning; the transgender Lovely, a *hijra* who is a male but who lives as a female and wants to be an actor; and PT Sir, a physical education teacher. It does so to assess their progression in life as they negotiate the ideologies of contemporary India. The study finds that class conflicts emerge from the different ideologies adopted by the different classes, embodied in their social, political, and religious beliefs. It also reveals the discriminatory system of the upper class in the narrative community and its injustice and corruption. It shows how that discriminatory system, by dominating the mass media, economy, education and politics, eventually pushes the educational institutions and civil organizations to respond positively towards it, which serves its interests.

**Keywords:** class, conflict, ideology, Marxism, violence, violations.  
Majumdar



## Introduction

The story of Majumdar's *A Burning* gives an insight into the contemporary India illustrated in the novel through three characters. Jivan is a poor Muslim who lives in the Kalabagan slums and who quits school to find a job to support her family, particularly after their eviction from their hut due to the family's poverty. Her ailing father becomes helpless, unable to move, and her dream to help her family and save some money for herself becomes an impossible task. After a hard journey to find a job, she starts work in a shop. With her first paycheck, she buys a mobile phone that subsequently gets her into trouble when she starts posting harsh criticism of the government on Facebook after they prove incapable of catching the terrorists who killed 100 people on a train. By doing so, she makes herself a prime suspect for this terrorist attack and later she is arrested.

The second character is Lovely, a transgender hijra, who provides spiritual rituals that provide blessings for newborn babies and newlyweds but who dreams of becoming a famous actor. Jivan has taught her English to prepare her for the world of acting.

PT Sir is Jivan's former teacher, a teacher of physical education, who finds his engagement with Bimala Pal's right-wing political party beneficial for his social and political status. He makes use of his position to fulfill his political endeavors.

The story is narrated from three perspectives, those of Jivan, Lovely and PT Sir. Having fulfilled their dreams, Lovely and PT Sir sacrifice Jivan and do not provide the court with accurate information about Jivan's life even though they understand it, being part of the same social class. They do so in order to protect their own interests. Magumdar's *A Burning* depicts the differences between the classes and the ideologies that control their lives, and shows how such ideologies change Lovely and PR Sir as they consider their futures and discard friends like Jivan. The novel traces the state system in the narrative community, depicting its inability to genuinely investigate or capture the real terrorists responsible for the train burning and instead blames a Muslim girl, Jivan, because it is easier to do so and because of her severe criticism of the government.

The novel addresses different types of violence and violation perpetrated by the upper class in its actions and attitudes towards the lower, poorer classes. It also examines the different sects and castes of the Indian community and the differences in their ideologies (whether religious or political) that ultimately lead to minority class oppression. It also reveals the failure of the national system to solve the problems that emerge between the different sects



and classes. Eventually, Jivan has to face her fate as a girl accused of a criminal act without having anyone to help her or even attempt to explore the reality of the criminal attack. Her appeal for mercy is denied and she faces the death penalty, while the two other main characters, Lovely and PT Sir, have fulfilled their dreams to enjoy better lives, having abandoned their morals and social obligations to defend a girl subsequently sentenced to death for a crime she has not committed.

This study examines the ideologies that ignite the flame of conflict between the controlling power, represented by the state system of the narrative community, and between the different classes, due to their different ideologies. The government system, instead of trying to resolve the clashes between different sects and classes, becomes part of them.

### **Upper Class Versus Lower Class and Marxist Framework**

Magha Majumdar was born and grew up in Kolkata, India, and her experience informs her novel. She moved to the United States to study at Harvard University, then pursued postgraduate study in Social Anthropology at John Hopkins University. She now lives in New York and works as an associate editor at Catapult. *A Burning* is her debut novel. Majumdar, like other writers who have left their country to live in America or Europe, focuses the concerns of her fiction on her home and its problems. Majumdar's *A Burning* shows the reality of poverty in India, life in the slums and the diversity of the people that can sometimes be a source of conflict between the different castes. She renders diversity through the three characters Jivan, Lovely and PT Sir, and the novel is narrated from their perspectives to show their reality whatever it is. Their social classes do not assist them to move on in life. Eventually, every one of them practices the life they see as leading to the path that will fulfill their ambitions and achieve the prosperous life they look forward to, regardless the sacrifices of moralities or values they may make.

I will highlight some concepts of Marxism here so as to familiarize readers with some of the issues discussed in this study. I will also to show how the classes/characters consciously or unconsciously practice such Marxist concepts to dominate others in the hope of achieving their dreams. This study addresses the concepts of social classes, economic superstructures, ideology and hegemony, and explores how the upper class makes use of such approaches to dominate the lower class. Tyson (2015) pointed out that

For Marxism, getting and keeping economic power is the motive behind all social and political activities, including education, philosophy, religion, government, the arts, science, technology, the media, and so



on. Thus, economics is the base on which the superstructure of social/political/ ideological realities is built (p.54).

The theoretical framework used in this study shows the individual socioeconomic ambitions of the upper class and identifies how it pursues its concerns even if doing so comes at the cost of the other classes and sects. This sort of behavior may be manifested in the actions of the individual, the class or the economic power. The one who has economic power is the one who controls the fate of the people. The upper class with its various apparatuses dominates the superstructures built by the economy and the economy itself, which means it controls the educational institutions and its policies - which in turn serve the power of the upper class. Meanwhile, the base economy of the poor is dominated by the superstructural economy run by the upper class due to their vision and expectations of a future that serve their own sociopolitical interests. It also controls the different aspects of the mass media: press, TV, radio, social media and the official channels. In addition, religion, philosophy, technology and other sources of power are controlled to meet the demands of the dominating power. All such means are used to serve the upper class's policies and tendencies.

The upper class enforces the ideologies that prioritize its interests. Bressler (2011) discusses the purpose of the upper class's ideology thus:

Eventually, this upper class will articulate their beliefs, their values, and even their art consciously or unconsciously they will then force these ideas, or what Marx calls their ideology, upon the working class. In such a system, the rich become richer, while the poor becomes poorer and more and more oppressed. (p.116)

The upper class dominates the working class (lower class) and forces its ideologies on them. In this study, I examine how the upper class exploits the lower class to achieve its goals and burnish its image before the public through domination of the mass media or educational institutions that provide the upper class with the services and benefits they pursue.

The classes' conflicts are based on the ideologies that lead them. The clashes between classes turns to continuous conflict, with each class attempting to dominate and fulfill its ambitions. Therefore, the upper class, sometimes embodied in the state power, will force its values to be adopted and embraced by the lower class. This is what Marxism calls a hegemony. Bressler (2011) pointed out that "Indeed their system of values, and meanings by which they live, work, and play, their hegemony, is dictated by bourgeoisie" (p.120). The lower class (the working class, traditionally the oppressed one) practices the values forced upon them as they have no power



to reject such values. Ultimately, they become their values and they have to work under them. Using Marxist concepts, the study will probe deeply into the narrative and explore how the classes' conflict emerges to serve specific classes or achieve special interests for some characters working under their policies.

Marxism was attacked severely in George Orwell's *Animal Farm* (2004). Orwell criticizes the theory harshly because, in his opinion, it is only mottos and cannot provide the community with a genuine peace. Nor will it settle the conflicts between the upper class and the lower class. In other words, it is a kind of replacement and an exchange only for the roles between the dominating power members. When the oppressors reach the chair of ruling, they will practice the same kinds of injustice, inequality and oppression, and maintain the social and economic privileges of the political elite that controls the community. One corruption will be replaced with another and the political elite will ignore calls for justice and equality.

Orwell gives a voice to the animals in *Animal Farm* (2004), enabling them to express their rejection of the humans' domination and oppression. They have revolted against the human owner of the farm. The irony is that when they come to rule, the pigs control the political scene and put forth seven principles that will maintain their social and economic privileges. The most famous of these is "all animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others" (p.126). To Orwell, Marxism is only an absurd ideology and cannot establish justice between people.

Almond (2020) in his review argues that Majumdar's *A Burning* draws his attention to the preface of Victor Hugo's epic, *Les Miserables*, in which Hugo wrote

by reason of law and custom, a social condemnation, which, in the face of civilization, artificially creates hells on earth, and complicates a destiny that is divine with human fatality; so long as the three problems of the age the degradation of man by poverty, the ruin of women by starvation, and the dwarfing of childhood by physical and spiritual night are not solved; so long as, in certain regions, social asphyxia shall be possible; in other words, and from a yet more extended point of view, so long as ignorance and misery remain on earth, books like this cannot be useless. (p. 510)

*A Burning* comes to reflect the misery of the people that Hugo described in his preface. It reveals the upper class with its religious, social, political ideologies dominating the fate of the lower class, the people struggling to



move ahead to the middle class that may provide them with the urgent needs of life. Almond (2020) also argued that

In fact, *A Burning* offers a piercing vision of what happens to the individual in a nation where corruption is the coin of the realm, where violent bigotry and calculated deception are essential political tools, where social media become the apparatuses of foment and surveillance, where social justice is seen as sedition, and where the acquisition of fame and power make the conscience expendable. Sound familiar? (p. 511).

Through such meanings, I argue that the relationships between the upper and lower classes and the determinative insistence on the upper class's ideologies as being dominant disregard the suffering of the lower class. In other words, they may increase the misery of the lower class. The upper class use whatever means they can to dominate the lower class; perhaps they view mass media and social justice as 'a sedition'. Kidd (2020), in the interview she conducted with Majumdar, asked her about the themes of classism, corruption and injustice in *A Burning*. Majumdar explained that

I wanted to write a novel that would pay close attention to the rise of the right wing. People can get caught in different ways within such a dangerous turn, when a certain kind of fervor shows itself and ugly impulses are rewarded. At the same time, I wanted to explore how individuals live with big dreams and hopes, with humor and intelligence, with inventiveness and love, and hold all of those things close despite the ways in which their society and country might let them down.

Majumdar attempts to explore some problems of the community and how sometimes the circumstances and the extremist behavior of the state become an obstacle in the way of poor people fulfilling their ambitions. Gaining one's identity or dream may not be an easy task. Characters in the world of *A Burning* may yearn to reach their dreams, but they may not be able to pursue their path peacefully. Eventually, slum-escapee Jivan does not find justice and she becomes as scapegoat for the community. She receives no assistance even from her friends, whom she expects at least to testify honestly and support her case when it is presented to the public. Her friends, however, have their own priorities.

### **Lower Class Dreams—Life in Slums and Poverty**

Majumdar's *A Burning* renders lower class life in three characters: Jivan, Lovely and PT Sir. Jivan, the Muslim girl accused of aiding the terrorists to carry out their attack against the subway train, lives close to the train station.



Jivan's early life is full of pain and sorrow. She was forcibly evicted along with the rest of her family from the settlement near the Kurla mines. Jivan suffered greatly in her life and she was unable to find urgent support from the public sector, run by the upper class, as described in the novel

Her anger at the government is not recent, and has roots in a lifetime of neglect. From mistreatment of her father at a government hospital, leaving him with chronic debilitating pain as the result of a back injury, to her time living in government housing where an unreliable water supply made daily life difficult, close analysis of her story reveals animosity toward the government---" (p. 135)

She finds herself in a settlement that lacks the necessary services, while her father is not properly cared for in government hospitals. She attempts to find a replacement home in the slums of Kolkata, which is not the place in which she anticipated living. As a result, Jivan tries to find a job to assist her family. Eventually, she works for Pantaloons. She struggles to ascend to the middle class to improve the living conditions of her family. Jivan lives in extreme poverty in a community that does not pay attention to the poor. Majumdar gives Jivan a male name to show her strength and endurance, but at the same time, its meaning of 'death' serves as a clue to the miserable life she leads.

Jivan struggles to extract her family from the circle of poverty and the miserable life of the slums. Any person like Jivan, might fail to cross the boundaries to reach the upper class or the middle class, due to their lower class and minority identity. The community she lives in does not believe in individual freedom and cannot provide the person any space in which to express it, even in the form of social media-the hallmark of expressive freedom in the contemporary era. It is a forum in which the lower classes can express their concerns and their dreams to each other. However, even social media and mass media generally become tools of the upper class to propagate their ideologies, whether political or religious.

In fact, Jivan suffers for two reasons: first, she is a Muslim girl living in a community dominated by the upper class's ideologies, while those of the lower class are disregarded. The second reason is that as a member of the lower class, the people of the slums, she is part of a group struggling in life and attempting to distance themselves from politics in order to live in peace. Jivan finds herself accused of a terrorist attack for no reason other than her Facebook comments, which the upper class sees as fanning a flame of sedition against the state system.



The second character is Lovely, a transgender woman who dreams of becoming a famous actor. She suffers in a community that gives no attention to transgender individuals because of their identity. She earns her living via the spiritual power she claims and uses to bless the newly born babies and newlyweds. Jivan has taught her English that may help her in her future career as a movie star. Her identity as a transgender woman and as *a hijra* makes her live as a social outcast. She is ready to do whatever is necessary to fulfill her dream to become a famous actor. Summers (2017) discussed the significant role of Indian woman in communities to reveal her participation in the development of the community.

In India women comprise half of its total population. With the advent of 21<sup>st</sup> Century and its development in various scientific and technological era the status of woman are also changing at a fast pace but we cannot ignore the very existence of a world where woman are discriminated, marginalized and oppressed because of various gender divide issues. Women are vital human resources in improving the quality of life. (p.80)

The community needs to empower woman both to progress and become instruments of change for the better, but if women don't take roles in the community, something important is lacking.

PT Sir, Jivan's former physical education teacher, was very kind to her and provided her with some assistance, but he viewed her disappearance as representing a kind of ungratefulness for his assistance. He appreciates her talents and seriousness as a student and he finds her a promising athlete as well. Jivan, Lovely and PT Sir all yearn for better lives, but in the way they envision. All represent the lower class whose great dreams for their future may conflict with the upper class's interests. They do not stop struggling to live an honorable life, even if potential prosperity leads them to sacrifice their morals and friends.

### **Mass Media as A Means of Domination**

Mass media, particularly social media, plays a significant role in the lives of the people. It reshapes their conceptions and attitudes towards serious issues and towards the issues of community in general. It unveils the transgressions of the upper class and reveals the gap between the powerful and the powerless, and between the upper and lower classes. It is an easy tool for communication and a means to recognize the public's interests. It is the fastest and also the easiest means both to publish and obtain the news. It may be used for delusion or delineation; to express the one's views or refute those of others; or to stand for or stand against public political issues. It gives the



public a free space in which to express their views, but sometimes it brings harm and destruction to many people, particularly the helpless poor. Motion and et al. (2016) point out how organizations and institutions may use social media to serve their ideologies and issues and empower them to achieve their goals:

The large social media networks that surround many organizations enable them to extend their capacity and capabilities. When organizations need to communicate with their publics, the social media networks in which they have previously invested resources and within which they have built up social capital, provide ideal communication vehicles. (p. 42)

Jivan, in *A Burning*, finds social media an outlet for her views, particularly those she has about the terrorist attack on the train. She does not recognize that her comments may lead her to prison and then to death. She expresses her opinion on Facebook, thinking it is the only channel open for discussion and the free expression of views. She shows her disdain for the police's late reaction: "Policemen paid by the government watched and did nothing while this innocent woman lost everything, I wrote" (p.9). "Forgive me, Ma. If the police didn't help ordinary people like you and me, if the police watched them die, doesn't that mean, I wrote on Facebook, that the government is also a terrorist?" (p.10). Jivan's comments are taken seriously by the police and her accusations of police ineptitude push them to arrest and jail her.

Mass media are in the hands of the upper class, the dominating power, and they carry out the ideologies of the powerful, whether it is the upper class or the state system. The upper classes use the mass media in its different aspects to enhance their public image. Jivan's vulnerable identity as a Muslim girl and her lower class do not help her. "Social media offers an open space for alternative voices to challenge hegemonic discourses and contest organizational power" (Metion and et all, p.122), and so Jivan attempts to challenge the hegemonic discourse of the upper class, but she fails. Accordingly, Jivan is accused of aiding the terrorists who carried out the terrible attack against the train. Jivan then discovers that she cannot find any help when she expresses her political views on social media. The powerful class sees in Jivan's views on the police a good opportunity to make a scapegoat; she is an easy target, whom it is straightforward to make a primary suspect, "How did the terrorists make contact with you?" "When did you start planning the attack?" I find my voice and shout, a brief cry which dies down like a rooster's: "I am innocent! I don't know anything about-" (p. 20). To the upper class, Jivan is disloyal to her nation and her Facebook posts arouse sedition among the people: "Crime against the nations, he says, sedition" (p.22).



The upper class, represented by the state power or the ruling political party, makes use of the media to propagandize their interests. They control the different forms of mass media to mediate their concern with public issues. The only hope for Jivan lies with her acquaintances: Lovely and PT Sir. She needs them to testify for her benefit as they know her well; however, Lovely sees in the media a tool to achieve her dream. She posts a video of her acting to gain many 'likes' that revive her hope to be a distinguished movie actor. Lovely does not hesitate to sacrifice her friendship with Jivan to reach her dreams, "Now the sky is holding more light than the ground. There is a half-moon, with gray spots on it that I was never noticing before... Alone inside, my tears are coming like a fountain. Poor Jivan. My testimony was proving as useful as a shoe is to a snake" (p.150). Lovely is in pursuit of her own goals, paying no attention to her friend, Jivan; when "sky is holding more light than the ground", it is her world and her distant dreams that have become close to her.

Lovely uses the progressive tense to unveil her dealing with the reality of the situation, she is looking at the reality of her situation that pushes her to behave according to such a reality. Such a reality will lead her to a brilliant future; if she does not pay attention to her passion, she may jeopardize her future and its rewards. She is determined to go ahead whatever hardships may be in her way. What Lovely sees ahead of her is only a potentially brilliant future: she is not ready to risk that future by offering testimony that may save Jivan from death but which may equally be "as useful as a shoe is to a snake".

Although Jivan teaches Lovely to help her to move on to achieve her dreams, Lovely is cares little for the fate of Jivan; Jivan's destiny is one she has to face alone. At the same time, PT sir treats Jivan kindly as a teacher, but he deems her ungrateful for his sympathy. He joins Bimala Pal's right-wing political party, which is known for its extremist actions towards the lower class. Instead of exploiting his connection with the political party to defend Jivan, he becomes a member of this political party to propagate his extremist policies. He uses the educational institutions to play with public passions and nationalist spirit, and offers the public the promises to seek justice for them, "praise to the motherland" (p. 36).

Jivan finds neither help nor hope to get out of the prison. All mass media channels work in favor of the state system and for the benefit of the upper class. She does not find a free space in which to tell her story. When she tries to bring a journalist to the prison to tell him her story, he fabricates a different one that serves the upper class and harms Jivan further. He exploits the upper class's domination of the media to respond to their demands, even if their interests are detrimental to an innocent person like Jivan. The upper class



misuses the media to arouse the anger of the public against Jivan. At the same time, the political party and the upper class win political returns in the election. The upper class uses the media to serve their objectives, and drives the public to adopt their views as per the concept of hegemony. The public act according to what they read or hear in the media, and consciously or unconsciously relate to the reports and the political situations. The public becomes a tool to disseminate the news that serves the upper class: "On another channel, a soft-spoken news host says: "On top of throwing torches at the train, dear viewers, let me tell you all, she was also sharing antigovernment views on Facebook, and who knows where else, for years-" (p.54).

### **Upper Class Violence towards and Violation of the Lower Class**

The upper class forces Jivan and her family to leave their settlement close to the Kurla mines and move to another settlement where the necessary services are not available, such as clean water, electricity, health care, etc. Her sick father cannot find appropriate health care in the government hospital. Jivan lacks access to the necessities of daily life. And because the slum she lives in is very close to the subway station, Jivan is accused of aiding the terrorist attack on the train: "They say the recruiter offered me money, plenty of money, to help them navigate the unmarked lanes of the slum, to bring supplies of kerosene to the train" (p.32). The lower class is deprived of their simple human rights.

Bimala Pal's political party, assisted by PT Sir, arouses feelings against Muslim families by claiming that they "don't have any respect for our nation. They don't have any respect for mother cow, and they attack her for beef, for leather, all sorts of disgusting things" (p.62). The right-wing political party believes only in their ideology and force the public to embrace their values. Muslims in their eyes are members of a minority religion who violate their traditions and attack their holy mother cow. Levin (2021) illustrated how the parties in America use the potential of the state to empower themselves, as is demonstrated by their attempted use of potential state power to advance their interests: "Moreover, it is using the instrumentalities of the government for its politic empowerment and purposes" (p.7). In fact, here the upper class tends toward violence and violation to protect the ideologies that they feel Muslims abuse. The zealots of the political party practice their prejudice against the lower class, particularly Muslims, and work on fanning the flames of hate and hatred against Muslims: "KILL HIM BECAUSE HE ate beef, that Muslim" (p.165). They practice all kinds of violation against Muslims, killing, raping, tarnishing their sacred places, etc.:



In the room behind the door, three daughters, too young to be of any use. We cut them like their father cut our holy mother cow. Our people, the true people of this nation, are a flood of cleansing water, our arms and legs full of muscles which grab and swing, our grip never more certain than when it closes around the resistant throat of the man's wife. Never more certain than when it stretches open her legs. (p. 165-66).

They show no respect for the places of prayer: "Rolled up in the corner, a carpet for praying on, so we piss on it, and laugh" (166). They reveal their hatred and discrimination in the way they kill a Muslim: "we stomp on his skull so that the cream of his brain splatters on the floor. Teach him to have ideas about killing our holy mother cow, whom we love and respect" (p.166). Such acts expose their hatred for other minorities and their desire to terminate any ideology that does not accord with their own. The hate campaign led by Bimala Pal and her assistant PT Sir partly encourages the fanatics from other religions and cultures among the upper class to target the Muslim minority and commit murder and rape against them.

Lovely betrays her friendship with Jivan and subjugates her morals, like PT Sir, to achieve her dreams as a movie star. The upper class and their representatives in the different institutions and organizations adhere to their ideology and look only for the interests and benefits they may gain from their works. They push Lovely to abandon her friend, Jivan, if she wants to fulfill her dream. The upper class let Lovely know that if she adheres to Jivan case, she will harm her brilliant future.

Let her go from your life. You may be fond of that girl, but you must choose: Are you wanting to rise in the film world? Or are you wanting the public to see you as a person who is defending a terrorist? Don't let that case drag you down, Lovely. That is my only advice for you. (p.156).

Lovely favors sacrificing her friend, Jivan, to achieve her goal. The dominating power may not provide the lower class with the free space that would allow them to choose a path free of their intervention: "some people are calling the star of the show, Lovely, a 'terrorist sympathizer,'" (p.155). Simultaneously, PT Sir makes use of his position in the political party for his personal interest, even though doing so comes at the expense of the others' safety and ideology. In addition, he exploits his position in the education sector to propagandize for his party. He drives the public and the students to vote for Bimala Pal, offering them "scholarship programs for girl children. In the coming election remember to cast your vote for Bimala Pal and Jana Kalyan Party." (p.176). "The public do not need to see the lower class to teach



their religion in the public school, “Will there be Muslims teaching their religion at this school? Then we will not send our children!” (p.163). Bimala Pal and her assistant, PT Sir, encourage the public to stand against the interests of the minority. Baran and Davis (2012) discuss the role of propaganda in changing the beliefs of the public, saying

The ultimate goal of propagandists is to change the way people act and to leave them believing that those actions are voluntary, that the newly adopted behaviors-and the opinions underlying them-are their own (Pratkanis and Aronson, 1992, p. 9). To accomplish this, though, propagandists must first change the way people conceive of themselves and their social world. A variety of communication techniques is used to guide and transform those beliefs. (p. 76)

PT Sir knows well how to arouse public passion to spread the political party's ideology and have them adopt the ideology of the party as theirs through hegemony. “With all respect, we have to take care of the people before taking care of the ideology. Through people is how we will spread ideology, not by neglecting them” (p.178). As a result, PT Sir manages to make the public vote for his party and win the election by using public places for his party propaganda: “These films are played on LED billboards at intersections, and on mobile screens carried by small trucks through villages. On Facebook, the films gather tens of thousands of views” (p.179). The upper class claims to be concerned about the public but actually their focus is on pursuing their goals, whether political or social. It is ironic to find that while PT Sir declines a fully-funded offer from a private university to spend his vacation outside the country- “Nobody can say that PT Sir is not an ethical man” (p. 200)-he does not move to save Jivan's life despite his contention that she is innocent. On the contrary, he uses her case for propaganda for his party, promising the public with justice. “PT Sir, in the government office's special elevator, moves upward” (p. 202), symbolizing PT Sir's (and Lovely's) attainment of their social goals, even if they have compromised their morals to attain them.



## Conclusion

Majumdar's *A Burning* reveals the violence of the upper class, embodied in the power of the state in the community of the narrative, against the lower class. The upper class exploits the mass media, educational institutions and political parties to enforce their ideologies and practice prejudice against minorities such as Muslims. They propagandize the civil services to push the public to vote for them in elections. *A Burning* renders contemporary India and life in the slums through the characters Jivan, Lovely and PT Sir. They all have their hopes and expectations for their futures.

Jivan used social media, Facebook, to share her ideas, thinking it was a free space in which to do so and to discuss significant issues, such as the train terrorist attack. Eventually she found herself scapegoated and accused of terrorism; she was arrested and then imprisoned on the basis of her Facebook posts and the claim that they represented disloyalty to her nation. In prison, she was not free to tell her own story. She managed to arrange an interview with a journalist, Purnendu Sarkar, and she was eager to tell him of her suffering in a community that paid no attention to the poor or the dwellers of the slums. However, Purnendu fabricated a different story that increased the anger of the public.

Lovely and PT Sir had the ability to clear Jivan's name of terrorism, but they did not because to do so would impair their own social mobility and curb their ambitions to be a movie star (in Lovely's case) or a politician (in PT Sir's). As I have shown, in Majumdar's novel the upper class cares only for its own interests, even at the expense of others'. They force their ideologies on the populace, but do so in such a way that the public adopt and then spread them among the people for the upper class's benefit. They exploited the power and their domination of mass media, educational institutions and public organizations to fulfill their political goals. Furthermore, the upper class provide their services to the public only when elections are imminent, to encourage them to vote for their party. I revealed the conflicting interests between the classes, based on the ideologies each class embraced. The upper portrayed themselves as the voice of the people and the looked at other minorities as disloyal, aggressive and unworthy of sharing the privileges of the state with them.

Further analyses of the novel could focus on stereotypes of terrorism, tracing the accusation of a poor Muslim of terrorism, while a postcolonial approach could be used to further explore minority and oppression in the text. A psychoanalytic reading of the novel could illuminate its handling of the traumas of minority existence, discussing particularly the killing and raping of minority individuals in a community controlled by the power of the state.



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