

# Politics of Resistance against Capitalism in Transcultural Adaptations of Brecht's *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* by Ajoka Theatre in Pakistan

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**ABSTRACT:** *Brecht's canonical literary work and its controversial indigenization in Pakistan can offer a valuable transcultural adaptation study because it was performed through a radical theatre with a distinct dramaturgy and political philosophy in two different cultural contexts and historical frame of references. As the foremost representative of Brecht's radical dramaturgy, philosophy and literary works in Pakistan since 1983, Ajoka theatre utilized these adaptations as socio-political spaces to challenge dominant discourses on the rise of dictatorship and capitalism in Pakistan. At present, previous researchers explored Ajoka's signature performance from formal criticism: visual and aural elements however, intellectual content: playwright's particular thesis in mind and use of play as a vehicle to prove a point are still unexamined. This contextual study endeavors to fill this gap by exploring and examining the political dimension of these theatrical adaptations of Brecht selected work in light of Hutcheon's theory of adaptation and new historicism. This article also investigates the political and cultural factors which necessitated the import and adaptation of Brecht's work in Pakistan.*

**Keywords:** Transcultural adaptation, Prescriptive critique of Capitalism, Ajoka Theatre, Brecht's dramaturgy, Hutcheon's Theory of Adaptation, New Historicism.

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## Introduction

According to Mills (1997) power and effect of discourse are dependent on the context in which the discourse is carried (13). In Pakistan's context, repressive Zia Martial Law in 1977 overthrew democratic socialist regime<sup>1</sup> and altered the socio-economic policies immediately. Pro-Capitalism discourse (private ownership individualism and perpetual economic growth)<sup>2</sup> engineered by military establishment gained the socio-economic space with full vigor. Unionism<sup>3</sup> was banned and denationalization process of industry started which meant massive layoffs. Consequently, working class lost both hope and representation of its rights. Meanwhile, Brecht's canonical literary work, *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* controversial indigenization in Pakistan by Ajoka theatre appeared on stage in a significant way and provided an alternative discourse (remodeling of the economic, revival of democracy) to challenge dominant perspective regarding capitalism. This dominant perspective asserts the need for free market economy and denationalization of industrial sector to improve the economy of Pakistan.

At present, previous researchers explored Ajoka's signature performance from formal criticism: visual and aural elements however, intellectual content: playwright's particular thesis in mind and use of play as a vehicle to prove a point are still unexamined. This contextual study through a particular focus on the history and political scenario of Pakistan in late 1970s, endeavors to fill this gap by exploring and examining the 'historical positioning<sup>4</sup>' of these theatrical adaptations of Brecht's selected work in the light of Hutcheon's theory of adaptation and new historicism. According to Dollimore (1994), "this [New Historicist] approach necessitates a radical contextualization of literature which eliminates the old divisions between literature and its 'background', text and context" (4). This article also investigates political and cultural factors which necessitated the import and adaptation of Brecht's work in Pakistan.

As a foremost representative of Brecht radical dramaturgy, philosophy and literary works in Pakistan since 1983, Ajoka utilized these adaptations as socio-political spaces to challenge the dominant discourse on the rise of dictatorship and capitalism in Pakistan through its "prescriptive<sup>5</sup>" critique of capitalism. In other words, Ajoka sees these transcultural adaptations of Brecht's selected work have the agency and potential to transform the cultural and social structure of the Pakistani society.

The article is significant for at least three reasons: First, unlike previous researches which in a 'new critical' manner consider Brecht's *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* as a 'timeless piece of literature' and 'autonomous text', the study argues that although the text presents distinctly glamour less world view and highly subversive in nature, yet it is still a static cultural product of the Nazi<sup>6</sup> Germany, highly influenced by the significant non-literary texts of its times.

Secondly, contrary to the current "old historicist" scholarship on Brecht's selected work which simply demonstrates how Brecht's work is reflective of its time (Sulieman 2011, Thomson 1993, Meech 1992), this "new historicist" study evaluates how Brecht's work is influenced by and influential on the time it was produced in 1944.

In addition, it examines multifold features of social public sphere in which Brecht moved; the psychological background of Brecht in America when he wrote *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, the books and theories that may have influenced him and any other factors influential on his work.

Thirdly, setting new directions in Brechtian scholarship in South Asian context, the study embarks on comparing and contrasting his selected work to its transcultural adaptations in Pakistan. It investigates and explores the transcultural adaptation process through which Ajoka theatre gave new political dimension to these 'historical contextualized'<sup>7</sup> texts in Pakistani context. At the article's center is the premise that due to the historic and geographical specification of the selected text, transcultural adaptation seems the appropriate literary vehicle which can drive this Brecht's 'canonical' play into the current century, in new geographical location and in a new language.

It covers two phases in the light of new historicism. In first phase "historicizing literature" it analyzes the various events and movements in Nazi Germany (1933-45) and Zia's Pakistan (1977-88) to arrive at better understanding of Brecht's *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* (1945) and Ajoka's adaptations, *Chalk Chakkar* (1985) and *Black is My Robe* (1997). Then in second equally important phase, which can be referred as "textualizing history" it examines the transcultural adaptations of Brecht's selected work to better comprehend the society and culture within which it was produced and received.

Primarily, the central axis of the article is the "Foucauldian bottom-up model"<sup>8</sup> which emphasizes the individual active role in relation to social institutions, because "power as a vibrant web

circulating in all directions". We observe this Foucauldian model is demonstrated explicitly in a *Chalk Chakar* (1985) and *Black is My Robe* (1997). Transcultural adaptations of this play, written by Nadeem and repeatedly performed by Ajoka theatre during the last thirty years also exhibit a similar function of power. Furthermore, these transcultural adaptations, though fifty years apart, seem intimately closer to Brecht's vision of 'alterable world<sup>9</sup>' by challenging the socio-temporal order for the emancipation of working class and present similar frame of references such as rise of dictatorship and capitalism as the thematic concerns.

In adaptation studies context, this research article also renders theoretical contribution to Hutcheon's theory of adaptation by engaging with the "historically conditioned reasons" that necessitated these adaptations. Hutcheon states:

Yet in literary studies, this dimension of response [Reasons behind adaptation] has been sidelined. However, adapter's deeply personal as well as culturally and historically conditioned reasons should be considered seriously by adaptation theory, even if this means rethinking the role of intentionality in our critical thinking about art in general." (95)

Particularly in Pakistani context, a detailed discussion on the emergence of martial law, rise of capitalism and dictatorship as the imperatives which played a pivotal role in producing these adaptations in a way is also a step towards enriching the political dimensions in theory of adaptation.

The remainder of this article is structured as follows. The first part explores and evaluates the definition of capitalism presented in the selected text of Brecht and examines how in resistance to this dominant discourse Brecht creatively crafts a new model of motherhood. The second part investigates the imperatives and the dynamic adaptation process through which Ajoka transformed a 1940s German cultural product into 1980s Pakistani cultural product in light of Hutcheon Theory of Adaptation (2006). The third part debates the extension of Brecht political philosophy and theatrical vision by Ajoka theatre which actually resulted in re-creating the discourse and transcultural adaptation model of Brecht in Asia.

In order to undertake this investigation which explores the intrinsic relationship between imaginative literature and political thought, at the very outset, it is highly pivotal to define the complex and

contentious term capitalism in the context of Brecht's selected work and its transcultural adaptations. It seems that capitalism is not a phenomenon able to be uniformly defined, because it is dependent on the context and historically-rooted definitions. After a keen study of selected work of Brecht, particularly *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* and its transcultural adaptations, *Chalk Chakkar and Black is My Robe*, I carry forward this synergized version of capitalism:

It is a dominant (i.e. bourgeois ) world view based on rationality, naturalness and inevitability that minority elite has the God given right to gain competitive and strategic advantage by exploiting both nation's human resources and state's material resources in pursuit of happiness, class hegemony and huge profits.

This definition seems to make it clear that the "defining properties of a class" are not subjective but in fact objective relations to the means of production. Brecht has the same line of argument in *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, TPO and in AU as these texts revolve around the class struggle in capitalist society. From re-examining the selected text from political and historical dimensions a political literary strategy comes to light. It can be argued that the text was actually involved in an effective propagation of Marxist political ideas by juxtaposing it against capitalist world view or their 'history specific' version of Capitalism against socialism. The play centers on the conflict between economic systems i.e. Capitalism and Socialism<sup>10</sup> in German society during early 1920s. It reflects a fierce battle of two political ideas in which Marxism wins. This continuous juxtaposition in *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* is exercised consistently through the powerful conversational narratives and catchy visual performances of the representative characters<sup>11</sup> from bourgeois and proletariat classes.

At this stage, it is also pertinent to present the dominant discourse against Marxism which is carried forward by the right wing conservative economists, politicians, and academicians around the world. *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* and its adaptations can be viewed as resistance against this kind of pro-capitalist discourse because [discourse] is a site of contestation, "point of resistance and starting point for an opposing strategy" (Mills, 1997). Eagleton (2013) in *Why Marx was Right* concisely sums up the pro-capitalist political bourgeois discourse in the following words:

Marxism is finished<sup>12</sup>. It might conceivably have had some relevance to a world of factories and food riots, coal miners and chimney sweeps, widespread misery and massed working classes. But it certainly has no bearing on the increasingly classless, socially mobile, post-industrial Western societies of present. It is the creed of those who are stubborn, fearful or deluded to accept that the world has change for good, in both senses of terms. (1)

Keeping this view of the pro-capitalist forces, I argue that through explicit critique of rising Capitalism in a particular Brechtian counter-discourse and suitable historical positioning (Zia regime 1977-88), Ajoka theatre developed an opposing strategy and point of resistance in 1985. Furthermore, adapting Brecht in a powerful indigenized theatrical form (Nutanki and Swang) in Foucauldian sense, gave the discourse of Ajoka theatre a cultural dimension.

Interestingly, performance history of transcultural adaptations of *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* in Pakistan also exhibits stunning different aspects from its original source such as distant cultural settings, historical and linguistic contexts. As Hutcheon predicts in *A Theory of Adaptation* (2006) that “transcultural adaptation can shift in unpredictable directions too” (148), the study carries forward a fresh line of argument that through the politics of transcultural adaptation Ajoka theatre has transported and transformed a radical German cultural artifact of 1940s into new Pakistan cultural artifact of 1980s. Hence the study also establishes the utility of transcultural adaptation as a literary vehicle.

Briefly, *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* strategically placed in Caucasia (Georgia) is a parable play. Brecht with the smart eye of political analyst uses the story as an extended metaphor for a political discourse to pose series of critical questions on social ownership. Who owns the baby; the one who gives birth and runs away and suddenly comes back to claim him for only monetary reasons or the one who raises him with care and ultimate sacrifices and ensures his safety and finally wills to surrender? Who owns the land; the one who has the deed or the one who tilts it? Who owns the factory, the one who puts up the capital investment or the one who gives his sweat and blood to keep it running? This thematic concern regarding ownership is echoed very loudly and visible in the transcultural adaptations produced by Ajoka theatre in Pakistan due to its historical positioning.

Coming back to Brecht's selected work, there is a lack of critical discussion on the imperative behind Brecht's use of "Marxist model" for desired motherhood role in *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*. Within this context of motherhood, it is also important to look at the pre-defined and fixed definitions of things and storytelling plays in their subversion, for it is a mode that "beguiles the dominant discourse in order to rework them" (Gilbertn 2004). It is pertinent to note that Brecht resists and re-defines the already capitalist and conservative right wing discourse generated by Nazi propaganda machine on motherhood, fatherhood, justice, and family and ownership in his Chalk Circle story. He recreates and reverses the old and dominant discourse and re-introduces them in the form of opposite and dynamic new models and thus endeavors to subvert the dominant discourse of his times. For instance, let's examine the discourse on motherhood and family values promoted during Nazi regime extended by the book titled *Motherhood and family in Nazi Germany* (1958):

In Nazi capitalist society motherhood was based on heredity and house wife and giving birth to children. The Third Reich promoted the traditional discourse on motherhood instead of allowing them to work in factories or doing jobs, they were emphasized to raise children, do house work and be a good caring wife for her husband. Gender roles and attitudes to women in Nazi Germany were largely shaped by the personal views of Adolf Hitler. (12)

Within this social context, it appears that motherhood model in the selected text was envisioned. Highly subversive in nature, it challenged the very foundation of this social order by providing new model through its re-creation of discourse on motherhood. Most importantly, in *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, motherhood and fatherhood on basis of social responsibility, instead of heredity, were promoted, justice based on bourgeoisie values was reversed by revolutionary justice and finally social ownership versus individual ownership was emphasized in Azdak's court. This reversal of pre-defined social roles and values established the radical social and political value of this play during its time.

Historical data also shows the hidden politics behind this dominant discourse which was actively promoted by Nazi regime in 30s. It exhibits 25 percent sharp decrease in the women labor strength occurred during the Nazi regime. It is significant to note that women were the key supporter of Marxist ideals before Nazi regime took the

power. The third Reich envisioned that getting them away from work place or laying them off would mean weakening the Marxist cause and ultimately would benefit them.

Contextual reading considers the artwork as the result of several forces and functions, including related materials as artist's biography and philosophy, prevailing social and political conditions and so forth (Sporre 1993). The most striking feature of *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* is the "festive mood" it reflects both in the prologue and in the epilogue which seems "highly unusual" in writings of the Brecht who usually ends the plays in an open ended manner (*Mother Courage and Her Children* (1939), *The Good Person of Szechwan* (1938), *TPO* (1928) and *Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui* (1941) can be cited as a clear evidence.

Contrary to all of his previous plays, in this play every representative character appears, participates and sings in jubilation this visionary song with the singer on the stage at the end:

Things should belong to those do well by them  
 Children to motherly women that they may thrive  
 Wagons to good drivers that may be well driven  
 And the valley to those who water it, that may bear fruit (65).

First, new insights can be established by investigating this unusual festive mode exhibited in these powerful lines at the end of the play through contextual study and locating in the particular biographical phase of Brecht's life, as suggested by new historicism. Importantly, this period of Brecht life (1940-45) is well documented in James K Lyon's book, *Bertolt Brecht in America* (1945). It depicts that the "high hopes" of Brecht and "phenomenal productivity" he felt at that time (23). *The Caucasian Chalk Circle's* performance history also exhibits in *Modern German Drama: A Study in Form* (1979) that it was written between 1941 to 1945 by Brecht when he was living in exile in America enjoying "every attention of making himself a good living in Hollywood and the prospects must have been fair" (Thomson 1994 in *The Cambridge Companion to Brecht*).

It seems Brecht anticipated that repressive dictatorship of Hitler which kept Germany hostage during 1933-45, would soon come to end. This optimistic socio-political outlook renewed his vision of utopian world. It appears natural and deserving as Brecht was living an exiled



life after the advent of Hitler regime. It can be argued that this 'upbeat outlook' reflected in *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, significantly which was his last play written and envisioned in America. Brecht seemed overjoyed and thrilled with the prospect of this utopian world which could be achievable under the new emerging historical circumstances sprang out after the end of the Second World War. He expected dismissal of Hitler's long and unbearable dictatorship and consequently the end of 'inhumane' capitalism arose drastically during his regime.

Subservient to the 'optimistic mood' of its author, the prologue of the play also presents the positive outlook as the play opens up with the rational argument between two "kolchos" in a struggle for a valley. Implicitly, Brecht suggested the same rational dialogue in the case of European expected division after Second World War. Let re-examine these dialogues within the frame work of new historicism:

The Old man right: Write in to the report that our kolchos plans to start a new stud farm

The Girl Tractor Driver: Comrades, the project was conceived during the days and night when we had to take over in the mountains and often was with ammunition for our new rifles. Even to get a pencil was difficult.

Applause from the both sides

The old man right: Our thanks to the comrades of Rosa Luxemburg, Kolchos and to those who defended our country

They shake hands and embrace....

The delegates embrace again amidst laughter

The Old Man left: long live the Galinsk Kolchos and good luck to your new stud farm (148).

The political dimension of this prologue reveals that Brecht implicitly wants to present Marxism as an ideal and functional economic system. According to discourse in prologue, it is based on justice, rationality and equality. This discourse is reflected in the spirit of the dialogue exchanged and language utilized in presentation of argument which seems both accommodating with the use of words like 'comrades', and gestures like 'embrace', 'shake hands' and '[applause' and based on the principle of collective goodness in decision making under communism.

In new historicism it is pertinent to examine the literary text in the context of events surrounding it and "perhaps the circumstances of its

creation” (Sporre 1993). Specifically, in *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* (1980), Greenblatt laid out a mode of reading literary texts that relied on contextualizing them within a context of other nonliterary texts. Similarly, this section utilizes different nonliterary texts written on the time period to unleash Brecht’s ‘political thesis’ on division of Europe represented in *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*.

Joll (1972), in his book, *Europe Since 1870: An International History* points out the post-war settlement and division of Europe planned after the defeat of Germany. “Talk of post war started between Churchill and Roosevelt as early as 1941 (same year Brecht started to write the selected text) when the Atlantic charter was drawn up outlining the principal on which a post war settle will be based” (425). It is noteworthy to state that by 1943, agreement was easily reached between Churchill, Roosevelt and Stalin at Tehran (which is the Caucasian region). In the light of Brecht’s acute awareness of events and debates in Europe it is appropriate to assume that he kept his ears to the ground (and to his radio) for information on Europe during exile in the United States, The Caucasian discourse on ownership and settlement on the basis of social responsibility instead of heredity seemed to be an answer to expected division of Europe.

Within this historical context, the play seems an ‘allegory’ on Europe of that particular period. The prologue directly addresses the socio-political condition emerging out after the end of second world war and demands the leaders of western world to take note of the rational and communist approach taken by the representatives of two kolchos in *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*.

Strikingly, this above mentioned optimistic outlook and utopian world seemed to be ‘absent’ in the second story politically placed in ‘capitalist public sphere’ where everybody fights, and claims justice in the name of heredity. Brecht challenges this capitalist public sphere by empowering his female protagonist and other representatives of working class to reverse the capitalist model of ownership on the basis of social responsibility paradigm and to get the baby through revolutionary justice by the strange and so-called corrupt Judge, Azdak. He amicably resolves the dispute between two kinds of mothers; biological but with irresponsible nature and foster one with sense of responsibility. It is also pertinent to note that Brecht conveys the vision of that utopian world through a child. A child, Michael, surprisingly whispers to Grusha and changes her life and role of the servant girl through the vision of the utopian world in which nature, love and work are harmoniously

interwoven and not in conflict with each other as one can see in the capital public sphere, which constitutes intense competition and greed. We can pursue these issues by turning to scene 3:

The Singer:

As she was standing between courtyard and gate, she heard

Or thought she heard a low voice. The child

Called to her, not whining but calling quite sensibly

At least so it seemed to her: 'Woman' it said, 'Help me'

Went on calling not whining but calling quite sensibly

Don't you know woman, that she who doesn't listen to

A cry for help

But passes by shutting her ears, will never hear

The gentle call of a lover

Nor the blackbird at dawn, nor the happy

Sigh of the exhausted grape picker at the sound of the

Angelus

Hearing this

Grusha walks a few steps and bends over it. (63)

Discourse of "this" promising world uttered by Michael was presented and previously argued in *The Communist Manifesto* (1984) written in Germany by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. This document was highly popular and influential among radicals during Brecht's times. This document was based on the "change of social order" (Engles 1847) to bring justice and tranquility among the masses through the abolition of private property for the "creation of communal society" as the "happiness of individual is insuperable form the happiness of all, etc." (37)

Specifically, the communist manifesto is, at its heart, a critique of the corrosive moral changes brought about by the rapid industrialization of Europe. Marx and Engels were highly critical of the new wealthy class, the bourgeoisie due to the rise of capitalism. This emerging class made its wealth from the misery of the workers, the

proletariat, who for the bulk of their lives, worked up to eighteen hours a day in factories and mines.

The authors' revolutionary ideas came from their observations that workers should unite and educate themselves to better their conditions. Marx and Engels predicted a time when the bourgeoisie would become so corrupt due to capitalism that the workers would rise against them in a great revolution that would destroy the bourgeoisie and result in a worker's paradise (Suliman 2011). Brecht was highly influenced by this historical document. The critique on principle of private property seems to be the corner stone of this selected play. The document loudly speaks:

The modern bourgeois society has sprouted from the ruin of feudal society that has not done away with class antagonisms. It has established new classes, new condition of oppression, and new forms of struggle in place of old ones. Our epoch, the epoch of the bourgeoisie, possess however this distinct feature; it has simplified the class antagonisms : Society as a whole is more and more spiriting up into the two hostile camps, into two great classes, facing each other Bourgeoisie and Proletariat. (7)

It is interesting to note that in Azdak's court of "revolutionary justice" in capitalist public sphere, Brecht brings 'this statement' of the communist manifesto in a lively fashion. It seems he speaks directly to the audience when these two different camps with two different world views present two different discourses to own the child. If "Chalk Circle" represents the world metaphorically then one can observe that how these two different classes were fighting to get the child placed between the circles asking who its real owner is. On one hand, the child was the source of material as capitalists may suggest for so-called real mother because of the financial appeal associated with him while on the other hand the foster mother's inspiration of attachment and future hope of tranquility associated with it. So it is a matter of ideological association.

It also appears that Brecht's social and political philosophy is derived from this political manuscript. This shows that *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* was a "collective consciousness" of Marxists at that given time. It can be argued that the political and functional value of *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* lies in the division and stark dissimilarities between it presents between two economic systems envisioned by each class to situate their hopes, inspiration and interest. By placing these groups pole apart due to their different ideologies, Brecht distinguishes

its working class representative characters from the bourgeoisie class and re-energized two thousand year old Chinese plot to highlight his social and political philosophy.

In a new historicist reading of a literary text, it is significant to understand the culture and society that produced the text (Dali 2007). One of the prominent features of new historicist study under Greenblatt approach is to situate literary text in relation to other texts of the same period, and to construct a kind of dialogue between wide ranges of texts (Leitch 2001).

*Chalk Chakkar* (1985), the first transcultural adaptation of *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* during Martial law period (1977-88), focuses on issues of rising capitalism and dictatorship and its enormous effects on the society during martial law period (1977-88). Metaphorically, by re-contextualizing the source text the 'child' now becomes the 'Pakistani Nation' torn between two economic systems Capitalism and Marxism and two political systems dictatorship and democracy. The selected text seems deeply embedded in the social values and political debates of its time. This Historicist study selects three non-literary texts, *Culture, Class, and Development in Pakistan (1985)*, *The Class structure of Pakistan and Rise of Islamic Capitalism* which were written during the times of the repeated performances of the selected plays. These books discussed how Pakistani society was gradually transformed and torn apart by the capitalist designs of the ruling elite of Pakistan.

Rahman (2012) in his seminal work, *Class Structure of Pakistan* substantiates the accuracy of the turbulent conditions depicted in *Chalk Chakkar*, the transcultural adaptation of *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* (1985). Rahman like Ajoka theatre takes a positive view of the first elected socialist regime (1972-77) in which traditional power structure was challenged by the down trodden people under the leadership of Prime minister, Zulifaqar Ali Bhutto. He conversely portrays the Zia Martial Law (1977-88). He sees re-surgence of monopoly capitalistic on political landscape and transformation of Pakistan and its society towards never ending vicious circle of capitalism where state abandons its responsibilities and gives its blessing to traditional strong classes to make huge profits and exploit working class (167-199). He provides a difference between Bhutto democratic regime and Zia fundamentalist regime in historical framework as:

The 1970s represented a massive convulsion of various oppressed classes in society –not merely the industrial workers

and various sections of the peasantry but also the urban middle classes and oppressed nations within Pakistan. This upsurge challenged the traditional power of the bureaucracy, monopoly capitalist and large land lords. (214)

Bhutto socialist message of Musawat (Equality) and his 1970 election popular cry “Roti, Kapra and Makaan (food, clothing and shelter)” for subordinate classes echoed with the Brecht’s socialist message of ‘collective good’ in *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*. It also reflected the modern possibilities of conscientization.

More importantly, this also indicates that the prime reason why Brecht’s message was easily comprehended by the audience at that time was that the audience already had listened to same kind of message through Bhutto’s public meetings just few years ago. Ajoka by enacting the Brecht’s play actually re-kindled the Bhutto’s memory inside them who was hanged by the military regime in 1979. The scene two echoes the turbulent historic event took place in 1977 in Pakistan. The “horizon of expectations” of audience matched with the performance and contributed towards its “unprecedented reception” (Khan 2005). Here, it also seems that the socio-political conditions such as emergence of fundamentalist martial law regime, rise of capitalism with nexus between it and religion actually necessitated the import and adaptations of Brecht’s work in Pakistan. With capitalism on a rise, socialists like Nadeem in Ajoka theatre saw its ideological implications and brought Brecht work to strengthen their political standing on the economic system they envisioned was appropriate for their country. Hutcheon (2006) views this as a trend in postcolonial dramatists. Specifically, in Pakistani theatrical context, the appropriate timing of this adaptation also played a key role in establishing Ajoka “which would deliver” as a popular resistance theatre. Boga (2011) points out the significance of this historical positioning of Ajoka’s anti-capitalist productions in mid 1980s specially *Chalk Chakkar* in her article, “From Street to Theatre” and states:

Time was right. The commercial theatre, through lack of official support and no faults of its own had sunk low ebb; other theatre groups presenting serious theatre were only able to perform sporadically. Organizations, such as the Goethe institute and Norwegian Embassy, began sponsoring Ajoka plays and provided venues and Backup facilities. From being unorthodox street theatre, Ajoka gained the status of a parallel theatre could deliver (49).

In *The Rise of Islamic Capitalism*, on the other hand, Nasr (2009) carries forward an entirely different discourse on history and capitalism in Pakistan which seems to very close to military establishment's official discourse on privatization of industries. Interestingly, Nasr declares the capitalist elite of Muslim world in general and in Pakistan particularly as "prophets of change" (188) and dedicates the whole chapter to them in appreciation. Nasr also challenges the democratic credentials of Bhutto as the first elected leader and claims that Bhutto regime actually rigged the elections in 1977. He gives him a devil definition:

He was a venerable aristocrat but his politics had a leftist slant. He stood as a populist who crushed capitalism and showered government favors to the poor. He also nationalized numerous businesses and put Pakistani economy in state's hand, weakening the fledging private sector and the middle class. Pakistan started to look like many other third world authoritarian socialist states of its time, where politics reduced to the cult of personality of the ruler. The thuggish brutality of Bhutto's monopolization of power alienated many in Pakistan (212).

Here words like 'thuggish brutality', 'monopolization' and 'alienated' seem not only harsh and subjective but also has a political dimension. Nasr wants to cut short the influence of Bhutto's popular Marxist personae. It can be argued here Nasr views are ideologically motivated. Keeping in view of divergent and conflicting opinion of historians about Bhutto regime, it seems the fourth postulate of Stephen Greenblatt in *Genre*(1985) seems valid which states that "caught in his own historicity, a historian cannot escape the social or ideological constraints of his own formation. And therefore, he cannot fully understand the past objectively on its own terms" (11) Nasr as pro-capitalist historian couldn't resist the temptation of demonizing Bhutto because of his socialist credentials and anti-capitalist ideals.

### **Success Factors: Ajoka Innovations in Adapting *The Caucasian Chalk Circle***

Coming back to the transcultural adaptation process, it appears that the politics of adaptation is further extended by the linguistic strategy and dramaturgy. I argue that these elements beside the relevant socio-political context of these adaptations played a significant role in matching the audience "horizon of expectations" to the transcultural adaptation of Brecht's *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* at its premier performance in 1985. Close to Brecht's concept of Epic theatre, various

techniques were applied such detached acting style, the indigenous stage setting, use of simple local language. These elements made Ajoka's adaptation of *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* lively but also thought provoking. The festive atmosphere of the play was enhanced by live singing, dancing and use of multiple narrators borrowed from Punjabi folk theatre. It must be noted that in *Chalk Chakkar*, Ajoka utilized Maach form of folk tradition which is musical theatre distinguished by the strong singing voices of its actors (Khalid 2006). Chalk Chakkar came from this tradition. Khatoon (2011) presents the performance in 'maach' electrifying in her article titled as Brecht in Pakistan:

The entire cast was passed through the spectator and acting the arena while they sang a song by Agha Hasr (Known as Pakistani Shakespeare). The beginning was slightly different from the source text as all the actors left the arena except the narrator who began the old legend called "The Chalk Circle". The performance turned the entire avenue into the stage as they freely moved among the audience. The incorporation of eastern elements of theatre made performance of this play in Pakistan a real treat to watch. The performance was hailed as a breath of fresh air in an otherwise juggat – rayage theatre milieu of commercial theatre. (32)

Here, one also notes the 'closeness' between Brechtian theatre and traditional Asian theatre which indicates towards the potential of adaptability of Brechtian theatre in Asian landscape. Therefore it can be argued that Brecht work has the potential to be easily adapted in other Asian countries such as Malaysia and Indonesia.

Another prominent feature of Chalk Chakkar production is the extensive use of bright and contrasting colours such as red and black on stage. According to Boga (2011), in *History of Ajoka Theatre*, use of colour was given special attention in dressing and stage setting in order to create dramatic effect:

"Costumes were timeless, handmade or roughly tailored; otherwise they were clothes of simple, daily wear. Attention, however, was given to colours in order to create a dramatic effect. There was striking red, orange or black thrown in for contrast with neutral khaddar or cotton colours. Black, especially and white were effectively used (48).

Beyond dramatic effect, one cannot ignore the 'political dimension' in using bright colours such as red, which is a symbol of change through



revolutionary consciousness. Interestingly, if one combines these particular bright colours one observes that the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) flag emerges signaling that socialist ideas of that particular party are still alive even in brutal political and economic repression. Khan (2011) reveals in *Critical Stage* that majority of the actors and staff in Ajoka theatre during these times has strong affiliation with PPP and its socialist ideology (27).

### **Politics behind the Absence of the Prologue: “Struggle for the Valley” in *Chalk Chakkar* (1985)**

It is quite astonishing at the very out set to note the ‘absence’ of the famous prologue, “struggle for the valley” (discussed at the beginning of the article) in the adaptation of *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*. It is also noteworthy to mention that no newspaper or research work mentioned its absence. Therefore, there is a need to investigate the social and political dimensions of its absence in the transcultural adaptation. At one level, it seems for Ajoka theatre omitting the prologue of the source text was political decision rather than a literary one. A detailed study of the socio-historical context during the premier performance presents many thought three possibilities, which can be enlisted as:

1-Prologue seemed highly ‘communist<sup>13</sup>’ in nature in which former Soviet Union was highly praised by Brecht. Significantly, Soviet Union was at that particular time engaged in a war against a Muslim neighboring country, Afghanistan therefore, appreciating it would have send wrong political message in an environment which had already developed a discourse (fatwa) of “ vital Jihad against the infidels”- which ironically means former soviet union.

2-Directors of Ajoka theatre as a true Marxist believed that Marxism was an international movement<sup>14</sup> and not only confined to a particular country such as former Soviet Union therefore they felt no need to highlight a specific country.

3- Marxism was out of fashion in mid-eighties. Eagleton writes in *Why Marx was right* “that in 1976, good many people in the West thought that Marxism had a reasonable case to argue. By 1986, many of them no longer considered it had” (3). There is a possibility that Ajoka theatre found it inappropriate to include such an open appreciation of Communism and former Soviet Union in their transcultural adaptation of the source text.

## Performance History and Changes in the ‘Horizon of Expectation’ of Audience

Hutcheon (2006) in indigenization, points out the “adapter works in one context, but the meaning he or she establishes within that frames of reference can change over time” (148). Jauss, similarly, also concerned with the reception history and uses methodology and termed it horizon of expectation “by which he means the range of vision associated with a particular vantage point in history” (Regan 1998). It is also thought provoking to note significant changes in the audiences, horizon of expectations during the three decades of repeated performances (1985-2010) of *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* by Ajoka theatre. In 1985 the audience visualize it in the context of third Martial law and “judicial assignation” of their political leader, Zulifaqar Ali Bhutto but when it was performed in 1993 it was viewed in light of “democracy under military control” (Talbot 2012) in which parliament power was clipped by eighth amendment through which President can dissolve parliament any given time thus people power concept became meaningless.

Historically speaking, Pakistan lost two parliaments due to this amendment which put Pakistan through a phase of great environmental uncertainty and chaos (Talbot 2012; Ayaz 2013). Meanwhile, Khatoon (2011) hints at the change in audiences’ horizon of expectations when she describes the experience of audience in 1993:

Brecht’s *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* was written at a time when the world was still reeling under the devastation caused by the World War II. However, it appears to have been specially written for the post – 8<sup>th</sup> Amendments, post dissolution Pakistan in 1993. In the first half of the play, the intrigues, the total lack of any moral and ethics among the warring ruling faction, and the economic, political and moral chaos will seem very familiar to Pakistani audience. In the second half, we saw the law literary standing on his head. The rogue judge Ajab Khan (Azdak) may appear to be corrupt, rude and unpredictable but he is, in fact, mocking the prevalent norms of justice in society without justice and chief justice. (24)

As the above-quoted statement indicates the change in the meaning of selected Brecht’s text for Pakistani audience within ten years, which new historicists assert that text is a dynamic object since it is a product of several contexts. Texts do not have a universal significance and fixed

meaning in themselves, same performance text meanings changed through time and different contexts (Hutcheon 2006).

### **Contingent Transcultural Adaptation Model in *Black is My Robe***

Conscious to the changes in the political landscape with the restoration of democracy, in yet another transcultural adaptation of *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, *Black is My Robe* (1996), Ajoka again vigorously debates the political issue of the social ownership and socio-economic injustice<sup>15</sup>. Ajoka re-created the discourse with new plot and local representative characters, this time the metaphor<sup>16</sup> of 'child' is replaced by the 'well' of a village.

From the perspective of reception as Hutcheon suggests "adaptation is form of inter-textually ... an extended inter- textual engagement with the adapted work" (8). Therefore, an adaptation is a derivation that is not derivative- a work that is second without being secondary (9) Hence one can see Grusha transforms into Sundari with same qualities of soft heart, smart mind and strong hard working hands and both belong to same down trodden and marginalized class. Both are socially responsible and bold enough to challenge the traditional dominant discourse and discursive practices. Similarly, Opra of a sub-continental border land, who here plays a central role and becomes "agent provocateur" establishes a kinship with the dynamic Azdak of Central Asian origins, a companion not least reflected in the characters, shared folkloric and faintly vanishing acts.

Like Brecht, Nadeem wanted to raise series of critical and thought provoking questions on capitalism which promoted the wealth in the hands of few and sacrifice and suffering in the hands of many in Pakistan context. He writes in the author's note:

The questions which intrigue me were: are women in our society accorded the same status as cattle? Can poor people in dessert village in Umerkot, afford to have morality? In a land where drinking water is scarce, and the resources are controlled by a small feudal elite, is survival is more important than morality? Can water, air and natural resources be owned by a selected group of men and denied to the rest? (147)

Strikingly, it also seems that the prologue, "Struggle for the valley" which was omitted in the first adaptation has been brought back to present Pakistan's context of 1990s. However, here unlike in Brecht's prologue, the world is not rational and peaceful due to capitalism. It is

interesting to observe that majority of the representative characters are again from the poor working class which rarely represented in other commercial plays and the end 'well' was given to the hard working and intelligent Sundari, the poorest and weakest of all. And again we witness the same 'festive mood' with the removal of injustice augmented with the philosophy of 'collective good'. In the epilogue, one can observe Umerkot became a new and different kind of village. The stimulus for *Black is My Robe* came from the real incident for the writer which clearly exhibits that literary work is influenced by the socio-economic environment prevailing around the author as suggested by Greenblatt approach to new historicism. It also justifies the political and historical intentionality suggested by Hucheson in her theory of adaptation. Nadeem depicts:

It was very small piece of news in an Urdu paper: in the remote village of Umerkot, in Sindh, water-carrier, who has two wives, but no ox, had battered his spare wife for an Ox belonging to a peasant, who was in possession of two oxen, but no wife. A local defender of morality then found himself questioning whether or not such exchange is permitted in Shariat. After reading about it. Madeeha had remarked to me, 'A subject for your next play' and how *Black is My Robe* was conceived. (147)

Importantly, the issue of water scarcity and its social ownership was also highlighted by leading historian, Ian Talbot in his recent book, *Pakistan: A New History* (2012) also pinpoints the emerging water issue and its devastating consequences for poor class:

Drought, however, could also be caused by the climate change. Indeed there may already be anything between 10 and 15 percent decrease in annual rainfall amounts in the country coastal belt and plains. Issue of water management and disputes over water both between Sindh and Punjab, and between India and Pakistan are likely to become increasingly important. Disease arising from inadequate water supply and sanitation according to some estimates already bring along with human cost, economic cost over Rs.100 billion a year. Around 600 children die each day from waterborne disease. (21)

This statement exhibits that Ajoka' plays are issue based and socially and politically relevant like Brecht's literary texts in their historical positioning. In setting *Black is My Robe* in the historical context, we have observed that Ajoka created characters representing the political

views of the time. Since they are issue based, therefore their plays' life cycle and political value is dependent on the relevancy of issue at a given point. Therefore one adaptation of Brecht selected work is transformed into another adaptation due to the change in perceived 'social and political' relevance of the issue. Hutcheon (2006) in *A Theory of Adaptation* sees this transformation of adaptation as an intriguing and researchable issue as social and political environment can give birth to specific period beside the intent of the adapter (126)

### **Social Imperative: Revival of Cultural Heritage**

Close to its cultural environment, the other distinguishing features of this adaptation are location, indigenous stage setting, and its folk presentation mode. All these features are centered towards the re-birth of 'long dead' indigenous Swang theatre by the colonial subjection and military regimes (Mirza 1991, Qureshi 1987, Khan 2006, Khalid 2011). One of the key imperatives to adapt Brecht play for Ajoka was to come closer to own theatrical heritage which as the literature review indicated that Brecht's Epic theatre was very close to Asian dramaturgy. *Black is My Robe* exhibits how Brecht's work can be converted into local Asian form of theatre thus can serve as a model for adapting Brecht work in Asia.

There are also many striking similarities in the key framework of Epic theatre and Swang theatre. Stage setting is 'suggestive' as Brecht envisioned – sometimes even non-existence. If the play is out door a tree, as we see in this adaptation, might serve as a backdrop or Centre piece. Manjis (string beds) and Piris (string chairs or stools) reflect the common day and natural setting which is rarely used in commercial theatre in Pakistan. The play is located in Cholistan dessert, finds an unexpected creative affinity with a Kolchos in Caucasia, and in *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* as an equitable and fulfilling rendering of reality takes shapes (Sirajudin 2009).

Where water scarcity is a huge problem and where fertile land and resources are controlled by powerful feudal lords<sup>17</sup> and Sajjada Nashin<sup>18</sup>. The play was premiered in April 1996 on the open air mud stage the Ajoka built at the Goethe institute, Lahore. The stage has a real mango tree in the middle. The regional language is Seriaki, which is a sister language of Punjabi. I first wrote the play in Punjabi, and grammar adjustment were made few typically Seraki expressions were added. It gave authenticity to a play as water and economic exploitation by power full pirs are the major problems in the Seriaki belt<sup>19</sup> in Punjab, Pakistan.

It also enabled us to use captivating Seraki folk music, and colorful, exotic costumes in the play. (148)

It is pertinent to note that in the English version of the play all these distinguishing features were remained intact when it was presented to an international audience to maintain the play's indigenous look. An English version of the play was also given a dramatic reading at the Lark theatre, New York, in October 2002 (Nadeem 2009).

### **Politics of Resistance in *Black is My Robe***

Keeping the subversive spirit alive, like in *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, there are many instances in the play which show how the characters try to break free from the confines of the narrative, through the technique of reversal. There comes a time in the play when the characters announce that they are not going to accept the prevalent condition any more that they are going to change their stories. Their act of resilience is depicted in their pronouncing "No" to injustices which is also close to Brecht's social and political philosophy. Opera<sup>20</sup>, the leading character of the Play asserts him and says:

People! There is limit to oppression and cruelty and that limit has been crossed by this Pir. Ditta had to sacrifice his life to expose this Pir. You must rise now. Do it for Ditta sake. Do it for you sake. Otherwise you will remain slave forever. (183)

Hence, the revolutionary and subversive potential of these transcultural adaptations lies in the fact that the oppressed one begins to protest by questioning at each moment they receive an unfair treatment from their oppressors. According to Foucauldian discourse theory, "position of lesser status nevertheless shape the way that interaction take place" (Thornborrow 2002). From Grusha to Rano and Rano to Sundari, these valiant representative characters of these plays demonstrate resilience at the time of challenge from the dominant discourse and discursive practices of the powerful.

Following the Foucauldian concept of resistance, subversion of the dominant discourse entails the idea of shifting power to one previously shown as powerless, through reversal. Brecht shows this shifting power in Azdak court when Grusha stands up against the previous dominant representative character, Natalia and Azdak's visible corrupt practices. In this sense as Greenblatt suggests in *Genre* (1985) subversion is itself a tool of power (23). Likewise in scene 3, it seems that the whole village is about to stand up against the nexus between

dictatorial forces and pro-capitalist tendencies gathered in Pir representative character from the bourgeoisie class of the play. We can examine one of the most striking scenes of the adaptation in detail:

Narrator 1: A major source of the Pir's power was his control drinking water. The sole well in the village was situated in the shrine and the Pir's agents sold this water at a high price and punished those who disobeyed by stopping the sale of the water to them.

Narrator 2: Wasaya's growing business was causing concern for the Pir because it loosened his grip over people. Each new customer for Wasaya meant one less for the Pir. Wasaya's water was cheaper and more accessible. So more and more people were turning up at Wasaya's water stall.

*Wasaya distributes water with the help of Sohni and Sundari and people flock to buy water. Everyone is happy and singing.*

Song:

Allah wasya brings water for us  
The thirsty land in yearning for water  
The water sacks are a gift of God  
For us he is angel from heaven  
His ox works very hard.  
He is fortunate to have one.  
The water is plenty and rate is low.

Like Brecht, Nadeem wants to juxtapose the spirit of collective good versus individual greed in order to highlight and prove his argument for socialism in *Black is My Robe*. Search for Collective good<sup>21</sup> brings happiness, joy and fun as we see in this scene. Specifically speaking, we can see a progression in the themes prevalent in Nadeem's works and perspective which seem logical in light of Jauss's 'horizon of expectations'. After adapting Brecht's *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* in his previous adaptation in 1985 in Mughal times (17<sup>th</sup> century), Nadeem apparently felt the need to bring "contemporary times" rather than the "historical distance" to engage the new emerging new horizon of expectations of Pakistani audience after the restoration of democracy. Here we also observe a diversion from Brecht's dramaturgical principle of detachment through historical distancing, however with use of

multiple narrators and songs, Ajoka achieves the distancing effect required by Brecht's Epic theatre.

Ajoka through this second adaptation captured the spirit of the source text by re-creating the discourse. It made it stand out. While in the first adaptation, *Chalk Chakkar* (1985), it seems Ajoka faithfully reproduced the plot of the source text in Pakistani context. In *Black is My Robe*, Ajoka seeks Grusha's story to be the story of the whole village. It wants to portray the consequences when like Grusha whole village stands up. By re-creating the discourse creatively, Ajoka asserts that Sundari like Grusha is the owner because of social responsibility. As a result, then everything changes and village becomes a different village altogether" in the Epilogue.

Narrator 1: And so the village becomes a different village altogether. Ditta's well becomes the shrine of the people, where there was no Pir. Sundari distributed free water on the ox to all corner of the village. Sohni now served the well

Narrator 2: Opra was never seen again. Some say he had gone back to his village and presented him for arrest. Other says he had gone after the Pir to the next village but as he is no longer a stranger, so one can recognize him as an Opra, the stranger.

One could find a variant harmony between Kolchos in Caucasia and Sundari's village in Cholistan. Both achieve the socialist transformation which was aspired by the Communist Manifesto's in 1880's. Importantly, through this transcultural adaptation, Ajoka theatre extends the Brecht's social and political philosophy and the theme of social responsibility to the distant deserts of Pakistan.

### **Conclusion**

Contrary to existing research which appreciates selected works, *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* (1945) as "a timeless piece of literature", this article has demonstrated these works as a distinct 'cultural product' or 'historical document' of Nazi Germany. With socio-political and historical evidence gained by the parallel study of the non-literary text produced during these times as suggested by New Historicism, it is argued that selected text is a subversive "historically contextualized product". It was politically created to challenge the Nazi German society's discourse, which was obsessed with the creation of wealth and



individual status due to the advent of pro-capitalist policies during the Third Reich.

By comparing Brecht's selected play, the research paper asserts that Brecht's source texts were revived and re-vitalized in South Asian context through the dynamic process of transcultural adaptation, as suggested by Hutcheon's theory of adaptation. The study also justifies the significance of the 'political historical intentionality' assumption suggested by Hutcheon as one of the key reasons in adapting Brecht's work in the context of Pakistan. However, it challenges the Hutcheon's assumption that adaptation across different media is more successful than of same media (150). The successful performance history of the transcultural adaptations of the selected text in the same media nullifies this claim of the theory.

In adapting Brecht's selected texts Ajoka used traditional folk theatre techniques and forms to revive cultural heritage lost due to British colonization. In *Chalk Chakkar* we see the utilization of musical theatre, *Maach*, while in *Black is My Robe* we observe the engagement of *Swaang* theatre which encompasses multiple narrators with modern improvisation to pass forward folk fables and stories.

Through new historicist study, it was also discovered that the source text and its trans-cultural adaptation are highly subversive to the power structure in nature as they represented the disfranchised, voiceless and marginalized segments – working class, women and peasants of the society during the Nazi Germany and Zia regime in Pakistan. This element made them 'distinguished' in comparison with the literary and non-literary works produced in the same period.

### Notes

1. These three distinguish characteristics of capitalism are highlighted in the *Economics: The Science of Common Sense* by E.V Bowden (1986).
2. These three distinguish characteristics of capitalism are highlighted in the *Economics: The science of Common Sense* by E.V Bowden (1986).
3. Unionism means the right of workers under 1973 constitution of Pakistan to assemble and to negotiate their terms and conditions regarding employment. Zia regime suspended the constitution of Pakistan thus consequently unionism was banned in 1977. For history of Unionism in Pakistan read, *Class Structure of Pakistan (2013)* by Rehman
4. Historical positioning means the clear link between historical context and the play's content.
5. Perspective critique means to provide solutions regarding the problems created by Capitalism. Detailed discussion of different kinds of critique on capitalism read *Socialist Thoughts in Imaginative Literature* by Ingle (1979).
6. Fascist regime headed by Hitler ruled at the time Brecht was writing his plays. The regime killed 6 million Jews and transform Germany into a Warrior state.
7. Means literary texts which respond directly to the specific sociopolitical conditions of their times. Brecht plays can be considered as "Historical Documents" of his period.
8. For detailed discussion of this model see Michel Foucault's *History of Sexuality* (1978).
9. World can be changed through constant struggle and implementation of socialist policies.
10. Socialism means that the state owns and control sum of the industries and it also provide welfare programs for the people (402) in the *Economics: The science of Common Sense* by E.V Bowden (1986).
11. Characters that represents certain class, race or group.
12. This argument is also supported by Drucker, renowned management Guru, in his book, *Post-Capitalist society* (1994). In which he argues that Marxism is dead because "Instead of creating wealth, it created misery" (12).
13. The economic system of communism is an extreme form of socialism. All factories and mines are government owned and operated.
14. In *Why Marx was Right*, Terry Eagleton argues that Marxism is an international phenomenon rather than a national one. Therefore it is wrong to see the results of specific nation as results of Marxist ideology as a whole.

15. Same issues are highlighted by Mirza in *Social Change through Social Politics* (1995). He outlines the factors holds up socioeconomic development of Pakistan. He state that sociopolitical structure of the society facilitated placement of big landlords, holders of illegitimate wealth and the military Junta in power. These forces maintain the status quo with the support of their foreign patrons (72).
16. According to Hilton (1983) in *New Direction in Theater* "Brecht like Shakespeare treats theatre as a metaphor of the world" (47).
17. Large land holders responsible for paying land revenue to state.
18. Custodian of a Sufi Shrine.
19. A less developed area. It is the area deliberately neglected by power elite resides in Central Punjab. For details read Rehman's *Class Structure of Pakistan* (2013).
20. Means strange fellow in Punjabi language.
21. One of the basic principles of Marxist ideology

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