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Failure of American Dream in Scoot Kalvert's Film *The Basketball Diaries*

Failure of American Dream in Scoot Kalvert's Film *The Basketball Diaries*– TikaThapa

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Abstract

Detrimental impact of culture industry on the youth of American society during 1960s' is the main issue of this research. The research examines *The Basketball Diaries* (1995) by taking theoretical support from Neo-Marxists mainly of Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer and George Lukacs. This research explores that the rise of culture industry in America has paradoxically annihilated the American youth by pushing them towards drug addiction and other deformities for the sake of making money. The protagonist, Jim and his friends Pedro and Mickey indulge in drug addiction and lose their way to success and lead their life in vain. They escape from reality in the search of happiness and drive their life to nightmare. Where they only experience pain, despair, agony and animosity. Society takes them as a social evil. But the society never can understand it is the result of culture industry. There is dichotomy between socio-economic and political scenario and reality of the common people. Researcher finds that the American Dream is slack ideals as it fails to fulfill its promises of life, liberty and pursuit of happiness. After being independent the USA practice culture industry to fulfill dream of individuals and there was emergence of capitalism and it is the capitalist's society which exploits human moral and ethical value and relation. Hence, the researcher has gone to underlying level of the then society in light of Neo-Marxism that postulates different speculation from that of given society.

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I:Exploration of the American Dream in*The Basketball Diaries*: A Critical Assessment

This thesis centers on *The Basketball Diaries*(1999), a film set in the New York City, directed by Scoot Kalvert, the film's script written by Bryan Goluboff. The film is an adaption of Jim Carroll's autobiography *The Basketball Diaries*(1978) most remarkable autobiography written by Jim Carroll. This film deals with the 1960s' American society's youth, the protagonist who falls into the harrowing world of drug addiction in the search of happiness in his life. The film shows the American teenagers' pathetic and painful journey in the search of happiness. The protagonist, a teenage boy, Jim Carroll (played by Leonardo DiCaprio) has a dream to become a star basketball player, he fails to achieve his goal after indulging in the drug addiction and he suffers a lot. The film exposes the detrimental impact of culture industry in the youth. Compounding his struggle and agonizing situation he faces up challenges in order to regain his normal life and to chase his dream, the researcher exposes the failure of the American dream in contrast to the promises it distributed. The project has explored into the slack ideals of the American Dream that promises success, life, liberty and happiness in the lives of individuals. Looking at the movie from the perspective of Neo-Marxism, the study argues that the film is a critique of cultural materialism as it invites issues like commodification of human body, disintegration of familial and societal peace and harmony and it also criticizes the American Dream and it exposes the inherent contradiction in the notion of American Dream as these issues are envisioned and advocated by Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer and Thomas Jefferson.

It seems impossible to formulate a precise definition of the American Dream and in all probability it can never be delineated adequately. The reason for this fact

lies in its vagueness and the subsequent interpretations that followed over the years. Traditionally, Americans have sought to realize the American Dream of success, fame and wealth through hard work. In every respect the American Dream evokes the impression of America being an ideal world and “God’s own country”, which can be explained by regarding certain historical developments. After the discovery of the “New World” the American continent became a place which old, traditional hopes and ideals characterizing the utopian schemes proclaimed by philosophers and poets were projected on. America seemed to impose no constraints on the fulfillment of these dreams and due to the fact that it was still unexplored it conjured up the impression of a country with unrestricted opportunities. Therefore, many Europeans turned their backs to their home countries and set sails towards the “New World” in the hope for a new beginning and a better life (Keller 49).

Although these were the common motives for those who emigrated from Europe, there were still individual hopes and expectations concerning this new, better life which varied among the settlers. The pilgrims who crossed the Atlantic aboard the “Mayflower” to escape religious prosecution hoping to be able to practice their religion freely in the “New World” exemplify this sense of hope and futurity (Keller 49). According, America seemed to promise uncurtail personal freedom and equality as different religious groups were offered the same rights for none of them was prominent above the other or prosecuted.

Apart from those with religious motives there were a great number of people migrating to America for more secular reasons: the newly discovered continent offered vast yet uncultivated areas of land to be purchased and abundant resources especially gold. This striving for material success and prosperity continued and became visible during the time of the frontier movement in the late eighteenth

century. The west of the frontier became an area of seemingly unlimited opportunities due to the presence of arable land and resources. Therefore, people were lured to begin a new life in hope of finding “the richest that fate had denied them in the past” (Keller 51). Although the individual dreams connected to the expectations concerning life in America may differ, nearly all contain one fundamental common aspiration: the pursuit of happiness- whether achieved by material success or by personal freedom and liberty. This notion is also embodied in “The Declaration of Independence” which postulates life, liberty and pursuit of happiness for everybody. As liberty, equality and the pursuit of happiness obviously are essential elements of the national identity of the USA- and thus of the American Dream- the movie, *The Basketball Diaries* questions such notions. As already mentioned the American Dream is too complex to be defined by in terms of notions. This study does not examine liberty and freedom of speech in detail, rather the thesis explores the elements such as culture industry and the pursuit of happiness.

Throughout the film money is the driving force to get happiness. It controls the social and family relation in the film. The protagonist engages in stealing, robbing, murdering and prostitution to make money through the money he wants to get happiness, he finds the happiness in the world of drug addiction. As a result he forgets his dream of becoming star basketball player. He pushes himself in the dark and harrowing world. This is the consequence of culture industry, as it gives unacceptable liberties to make choice for the people. There is a dichotomy between Kelvert character and 1960s American socio-economic and political scenario. However, after the World War II, the United States experienced phenomenal economic growth and consolidated its position as world richest country but in reality American society is going wrong because luxurious material status of Americans did not give them solace and

youths are going in wrong direction. They are violating the harmonious family and social relation which have been long in the then society.

This research assumes that the film director has focused on the negative impact of capitalism in his life since he chooses the *The Basketball Diaries* to depict consequences of capitalism on a particular society. So, the director shows Jim, the main character, a victim of capitalism. It distracts the human mind and there is no use of reason, money is everything for them. There is no space beyond the culture industry. We are always in its grip. Everywhere we are under the control of advertisement, film, literature, news and so on. Nothing is there without the consequence of culture industry. Adorno and Horkheimer reframe the Kantian phrase "Dare to think" into "Dare to consume" (Hazard Adams and Leroy Searle 241). He confirms that it is the capitalism that causes to ruin Jim's life goal. Due to the drug addiction Carroll fails to achieve his goal to become star player which is his dream of life. It is hypothesized that capitalism is responsible to make the protagonist failure.

The simple story of the film can be interpreted into two levels: on the surface level, there seem several responsible factors that directly destruct his career. He is continuously hunted by his best friend Bobby suffering from a disease leukemia who is dying soon. Jim is compelled to look at Bobby but can't do anything else. Swifty, a coach is another direct factor that distracts his goal since he is more sexually pervert and less coach from whom Jim constantly suffers. He also gives unacceptable liberties to the boys on his team. His involvement in teenage sexual activities and appetite for cocaine and heroin all begin to encroach on young Jim's dream of becoming a basketball star.

But on the deeper level, it is the power network of capitalism that derailed the dream of protagonist. Hence, the failure of dream of American youths to achieve their

goal symbolizes the failure of American dream. The film portrays women as sex object as Wrinky, Blinky and Dinah are commodified as sell products. In consumer culture human beauty and body is commodified and reified that counts all value in money or capital. American society is rushed to be rich, they have very busy life which ultimately breaks familial and societal ties and invites disintegration, alienation, fragmentation, frustration on individual and breaks harmony of the society. When Jim indulges in heroin and cocaine his mother who is a single parent, has to live alone and undergo a lot of hardship.

The project furthermore focuses the unhealthy social relationship between women and men. Capitalistic social system is the main cause of women's domination in the society. Capitalism gives rise to economic inequality, dependency, political confusion and its way out is to abolish the capitalist social system. Moreover, the study posits that the culture industry makes human beings as machine that becomes self-centered, selfish, and cruel and lives life with spiritual madness. The movie presents Jim and his friends Mickey and Pedro as robber, thief, and prostitute to fulfill their personal desire. Capitalism gives human being more choices; it focuses on individualism, which can make youth derailed from their career by use of drug and involve in teenagers sexual activities.

The primary objective of the study is to prove the failure of capitalism, since the capitalism fails to fulfill its promise due to its mass deceptive nature. The dream of youth has been failed due to capitalism in contemporary American society. This research work tries to expose how people in the society unconsciously follow ideology of the capitalism that results in the disintegration, fragmentation and destruction of familial and societal harmony. Moreover, this study explores the unpleasant circumstances of drug addicted youth who are victimized by

capitalism. The research is based on some cinematographic techniques like interaction, sound, dialogue and aesthetic to intensify moods and tone. It also focuses on lightening to highlight gestures, particular focal point in a scene and emotional responses. It is confined within the periphery of neo-Marxism to prove the hypothesis.

Neo-Marxism as the name suggests is an extension or a sort of an amendment to the Marxist theory, which has gained prominence in the second half of the 20th century. The term does not refer to a single theory or approach, but rather is a colloquial reference to the combination of various 20th century school of thought and approaches that amend or extend Marxism and Marxist theory. The neo-Marxist school of thought adds elements of other intellectual traditions to the classical Marxist theory. It is a loose term with no fixed definition as per say and finds application in various fields. Neo-Marxism includes elements of “psychoanalysis” Weberian sociology and anarchism. Basically, the theories originally designated as neo-Marxist are “concerned in particular with culture and ideology, and with the role of capitalist states’ welfare institutions in relations in retarding rather than advancing socialism”

One of the most widely accepted and popular form of Neo-Marxism is the Frankfurt School. It emerged from the Institute of Social Research at the University of Frankfurt in Germany. This school follows the critical theory, which means a specific kind of social philosophy. The Frankfurt school maintains its position as one of the severest critics of capitalism, but they also steer themselves clear of the classic Marxist school of thought, saying that Marxism was starting to become very close to communism, because Marx’s followers had chosen to support only a narrow selection of his broad ideas. The neo-Marxist ideology states that changes and amendments need to be made to the classical Marxist theory in order to make it relevant and useful

to the current times. It incorporates those changes keeping in mind the changes in social conditions from Marx's time to ours.

Many people consider Neo-Marxist ideology as a sort of diametrical opposite to Marxism. However, the truth is that the two schools of thought are related to each other, almost as if they are from the same family of ideologies. As discussed earlier, neo-Marxist theories are like offsprings of the classical Marxist theory. But despite all their similarities, the two have a lot of differences and distinguishing features. First of all, Marxism aims at attaining a sort of equanimity with regard to the people especially between the rich and the poor. It has firm roots in history and is based on the history of society in the past Marxism lays its ideologies for the uplift of the society.

It is important to understand here that the Marxist theory strongly believes in the implementation of its theoretical interpretation and also expects practical applicability of those theories on their own accord. This actuality is the main difference between Marxism and neo-Marxism, or any other system of political thought for that matter. Many political pundits believe that Marxism is the foundation for the formation of several other political thoughts such as Leninism, Socialism and other economic system and thoughts including Neo-Marxism. Neo-Marxism on the other hand is said to incorporate several ideas and philosophies from Marxism including the concept of critical theory, psychoanalysis and other related ideologies. Some of the example of Neo-Marxist is Weberian sociology and Herbert Marcuse theories.

So, in a way the neo-Marxist critics did not dispel classical Marxism all together but in fact shed some light on the classical theories by considering new views and ideas. Most of these ideas were developed by Weber and focus more on the social

influences that perpetuate not just economic oppression but also social oppression. They argued that Marx saw the economic sector as preeminent, but he ignored the dialectical processes within it, such as politics, religion, mass-media, etc. The neo-Marxist argues that these processes cannot be reduced to something determined purely by the economy. Marx's scientifically oriented economic determinism the structures and processes of capitalism into taking a series of actions, which would ultimately lead to praxis. However, this postulation contradicted the dialectic by making individual thought and action totally insignificant. It actually raised a critical question among Neo-Marxists, as to why do individuals need to act in the first place if the capitalist system was bound to collapse on its own anyhow.

With regard to this the notable Hegelian Marxists, George Lukacs proposed a new adaptation of a number of Marx's theories. Marx's concept of the fetishism of commodities became the basis for his concept of reification. However, the fundamental difference between the two was that while Marx's concept was restricted to just the economic system; Lukacs broadened this concept so that it would include all systems of society viz. state, law and economic. Rather than adopting Marx's view that reification was exclusive to just the economy alone, Lukacs actually believed that all the social structures come to have a sort of an objective character, which is out of the control of individual. Lukacs also stated that the ability to achieve class consciousness is a trait particular to capitalistic societies and that a variety of factors prevent the development of a class consciousness. He firmly believed that the state was independent of the economy while still affecting society. According to him, status consciousness supersedes class consciousness. It is the ambiguity of social positions that tend to prevent the emergence of a class consciousness.

Another notable neo-Marxist was Antonio Gramsci who also helped the transition from classical Marxism's staunch economic determinism to a far more socially holistic view. Though Gramsci readily recognized the value of structural factors, particularly the economy, he did not believe that economy alone could lead to praxis. He proposed that in order for class-consciousness to occur and give rise to revolutions, one needed a revolutionary ideology, one that would emerge from collective ideas and not social structures. The social contradiction did not hold true in the concept that the intellectuals generated an ideology and consequently, extended it to the masses. In other words, it said that the masses could not become class-conscious on their own and required the help of the social elite. Gramsci argued that this hegemony was nothing but a cultural leadership that was exercised by the ruling class. Only they dictated that if the working class wanted to achieve class-consciousness they would require cultural leadership to guide them. This way, the economic and state apparatus alone cannot spontaneously build a culture through their shared experience alone.

Clearly, Neo-Marxism began as a relaxation of the economic determinism and positivism prevalent in the classical Marxist theories. It used other sociological views developed after Marx in order to provide a more holistic view of social class structures and dynamics, keeping a focus more on society than the economic system alone. Both Lukacs and Gramsci actually offer views on the importance of both social and intellectual forces regarding the emergence of class-consciousness. Their individual approaches provide insight into the dialectical process explaining why capitalism remains so pervasive even in light of the people's awareness or in one case, unawareness of their oppression.

Neo-Marxists oppose the institutionalization of capitalism and culture industry. For them, societal hegemony, exploitation, conflict and domination are not only the consequences of unequal economic status but it is also the result of patriarchal social structure, colonialism, racism, and unequal process of global economy. The aim of neo-Marxist is to form genuine freedom and humanity since it focuses on stability of liberal democracy. It mainly criticizes the ideology of materialism that creates false consciousness and makes people hegemony. Luxurious car, expensive perfume, lovely chocolate, facial creams and all cosmetic goods are some of the example of false consciousness that has been directed by materialistic ideology. Consumerism is next aspect that neo-Marxism concerns about. In consumer culture human beauty and body is commodified like that of goods. False consciousness leads human being beyond from the real social and historical world. Commodification of human relation is one of the crimes of capitalism. Various ideologies and discourses are active in our society in the form of culture, religion, social custom and belief that creates false consciousness around the civilization.

After Second World War II, America entered into the world of capitalism or materialism. Everything is counted in money, but this project attempts to prove that American dream goes wrong. Major destructive potential of capitalism can be justified by the Vietnam War, antiwar movement, counter culture, cold war and civil right movement. Many movement of 1960s' were the resistance against capitalism, they found that the material satisfaction of their wealthy status did not produce satisfaction with their lives.

Failure of capitalism can be seen fairly in Vietnam War. The main causes of the Vietnam War are ideological tension between capitalism and communism. After World War II America wanted to prevent the spread of communism all over the world

at any cost. Vietnam is ideologically communist country, at first American played important role to divide the North and South Vietnam and it forced them to be in battle ground which is known as Viet Cong. In the war America supported South Anti-Communist Vietnam militarily and financially. The war continued two and half decades and took the lives of millions of civilians. By the reunification of South and North Vietnam in 1975 Vietnam War ended and USA fails to achieve its goal that is the failure of capitalism.

The Basketball Diaries is Kalvert's debut film based on Jim Carroll's remarkable autobiography of the same name, Carroll (1949-2009) is an American poet, musician, autobiographer and novelist. His actual name is James Dennis Carroll. He spends his childhood on Lower East Manhattan where he attended Roman Catholic School. In 1964 he won scholarship to the elite Trinity School, where he starred at basketball. There he found himself as writer and it is Trinity where he started experimenting with hard drug. Following graduation from Columbia University, he started to invent character names and wrote dialogue for play to Andy Warhol, shortly Carroll worked as co-manager of the theatre. He has published six books collection of poems, autobiographies, and novel and released seven music albums with his friends. In 1973 Jim Carroll left New York to escape from drug. He established in Bolinas, an artistic community in the north of San Francisco where he met and married Rosemary Klemfuss in 1978. The marriage ended in divorce. Later he used to live with his brother Tom.

In his teen age (17) Carroll published his first book of poems *Organic Train* (1964), with its success *4 Ups and 1 Down* (1970) he has been renowned for cult poet. *Living at the Movies* (1973) is his first major collection of poetry; it earned him a Pulitzer Prize nomination when he was 22 years old. On the book cover of *Living at*

The Movies Penguin Publication, traces: “In these poems, all written before the age of twenty-two, Carroll shows an uncanny virtuosity. His power and poisoned purity are reminiscent of Arther Rimbaud and, like the strongest poets of the New York School.” (*Living at The Movies* 1981). His other poetry collections are *The Book of Nods* (1986), *Fear of Dreaming* (1993), and *Void of Course: Poems 1994- 1997* (1998). In 1978 Carroll published *The Basketball Diaries* an autobiographical book concerning his life as a teenage in New York City’s hard drug culture. The book is a collection of his diaries he kept at the age of 12- 16 detailing his sexual experiences, high school basketball career and his addiction to heroin which started when he was 13. In 1995 Kalvert crafted a film based on his autobiography adapting the same name. The film became extremely popular especially on colleges and campuses. It is known as the decade of most remarkable original cult autobiographical film. The film narrates the truth, beauty, pain, pleasure and suffering that come along with heroin addiction.

In 1987 Carroll published another memoir, *Forced Entries: The Downtown Diaries 1971- 1973*, continuing his autobiography into his early adulthood in the New York City, music and art scene as well as his struggle to kick out his drug habit. Canadian film maker John L’euver adapted *Curtis Charm* (1995) a short story from Carroll’s 1993 book *Fear of Dreaming*. His dream novel book *The Petting Zoo* (2010) is his one novel that is published after his death. Alex William, in “Jim Carroll’s Long Way Home” mentions that “. . . Mr. Carroll did have a purpose. He was trying to finish his first novel tentatively titled “*The Petting Zoo*” an ambitious book about art world parody of 1980s’ . . . ” (CatholicBoy).

After overcoming his heroin addiction Carroll formed Jim Carroll Band, a new wave punk rock group. The band originally called Amsterdam; in his band musician were Steve Linsely (bass), Wayne Woods (drum), Brion Linley and Terrell Will

(guitars). They release many punk rock albums *Catholic Boy*, *Live Dreams*, *Dry Dreams*, *I Write your Name*, *A Word without Gravity: Best of the Jim Carroll Band*, *Pools of Mercury* and *Runaway Ep*. The song 'People who died from their debut album 'Catholic Boy' is renowned for last punk rock song. He is found dead in his apartment in 11th September 2009 at the age of 60. ("Remembering Jim Carroll").

Carroll celebrates beatific bebop vision in his work of art. Carroll's poetry is the transformation of the everyday city life into lyrical language. His language is amalgamation of delicate, hallucination and menacing. Carroll's literature and work have certain core theme i.e. childhood and adolescence, love, truth and beauty, death and survival, the exquisite pain and pleasure of drug. 1950s' Beat Generation mainly Frank O'Hara, Allen Ginsberg, John Ashbery and William S. Burroughs and Anne Waldman are inspiration for his artistic career. Beat Generation asserts, rampant capitalism is destructive to human spirit and antithetical to social equality. Furthermore, they resist the capitalists' concept of consumerism believing that it commodifies the human values. It opposes the mechanical life and search for the genuine freedom in the society.

Scott Kalvert (1964-2014), is an American film director best known for directorial debut film *The Basketball Diaries* starring Leonardo DiCaprio and Mark Wahlberg. He is also acknowledged for directing iconic videos such as DJ Jazzy and Will Smith's 'Parents Just Don't Understand', Salt-N-Pepa's 'Shop' and Marky Mark and the Funky Bunch's 'Good Vibration'. In 2002 he directed another feature film *Deuces Wild*, starring Stephen Dorff and Brad Renfro. *The Basketball Diaries* is the most important original cult film of 1990s. In the film director depicts contemporary society of 1960s'. At that time some people were glorifying the economic growth of American society. However, Kalvert brings the film as reference to confer the

audience to set out inside the real world of drug addiction, prostitution and crime of New York City. By exposing drug addiction, disintegration, spiritual crisis in the film Kalvert wants to project the certain problematic social trends of contemporary American youth which is the result of capitalism.

However, Janet Maslin, in “*The Basketball Diaries (1995) Film Review; Looking for Poetry in all the Wrong Places*”, writes:

The Basketball Diaries first appeared in book form, the author had also taken on a downtownpunk cachet. Yet on film, as directed by Scott Kalvert with a hollow flashiness that reflects his rock-video background, this story loses its temporal mooring and has no special voice or style. (The Basketball)

This statement of Maslin clarifies that the film has no any special feature and technique. Similarly another film critic Hal Hilson, in ‘Basketball Diaries’ states:

Because writing is such an interior activity, movies about writers are notoriously hard to pull off, but Kelvert has done a beautiful job of creating a visual equivalent for Carroll metaphors. Ultimately, “Basketball Diaries” is not a movie about sports or dope of youth; its about the birth of a writer. And yet we can see that writer’s struggles to emerge in everything he does-in the panicked writing of withdrawal and the subtle mastery of a no-look pass. (Basketball Diaries)

As mentioned above, the film has not based socio-political and economic of the then society rather it is merely about the birth of the writer and his struggle to become genuine author. Similarly another film critic Joe Brown, in ‘Basketball Diaries’ mentions:

Just wait till the Catholic Church gets a load of this one: The movie's grotesque parade of corrupted catholic schoolboys, sadistic priests and sexually predatory basketball coach just might throw off the scent of the currently controversial "Priest". (Basketball Diaries).

According to Brown this movie is the representation of the corrupted so-called priest who cannot guide the children properly.

It shows that none of the research has been carried out on this film applying the issue of failure of capitalism. In order to justify the claim of the researcher the researcher mobilizes the theoretical insights of Neo-Marxism, especially the ideas of Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, Terry Eagleton, and Fredric Jameson, Antonio Gramsci. Hence, the researcher explores that the great part of literature about this movie concerns with the 1960s' American youths' life issues like the drug addiction, sexual angst, familial and societal fragmentation. Neo-Marxism attempts to explore failure of capitalism in American society.

Hence, the film is one of the mediums of representation and the aim of the researcher is to excavate what are the hidden forces to destroy the Carroll's dream through what is presence. *The Basketball Diaries* represents terrible consequences of capitalism that take place past to present situation. In 1960s the youth of America was lured by drug addiction which was their way to show the dissatisfaction with capitalism.

II: A Critique on the American Dream: A Neo- Marxist Approach

The film *The Basketball Diaries*, set in New York City of USA that lasts for 103 minutes, is the first punk movie in the Hollywood history and widely watched in America especially by teenagers. The bitter reality of capitalism has been presented through the eyes of Kalvert. General audiences get moved along with fluid images and with different sorts of punk rock music composed by Graeme Revell and almost all songs are written by Jim Carroll himself. Though music is supplement element for great filmmaker it has been presented very beautifully in background. While watching the film, audiences realize that the film is less creative and more imitative direction since it is supposed to be a documentary of actual life of Jim Carroll. Kalvert represents lovely as well as ugly and brutal scene. Forest hills, snow falling, raining, High School, New York City are beautiful scenes and rustic scene of subway which is nexus of smuggling, robbing and prostitution and shelter for many drug addicts, polluted Harlem river are the hidden picture of the American society using high and low, long and medium, close-up shots, deep focus photography.

At the very beginning of the film, one can see the scene of wide roads, skyscrapers and beautiful New York City. By using this as the first scene in the film Kalvert foreshadows what the film will be about. The very beginning scene emphasized the financial prosperity is the part of the American Dream.



Figure 1: Picture of developed New York City. Source: Researcher's Photo

In the movie each scene is based upon more sense. Scene is used more than dialogue to convey meaning for audience. Kalvert uses numbers of themes, would be significant in the capitalism. Capitalism tries to restrict the man by making rules and restriction, standing many mechanisms to control the people. But, through counter culture- a trend to disobey the authority by opposing the rules and restrictions made by capitalism, they show their dissatisfaction towards the materialistic world particularly of America. The director uses many day and night scenes in the film which symbolically compared with dark side of capitalism and future of the American youth which is destroyed by the drug culture. Jim says, “We jump off cliff into the Harlem River, which is literally shitty, because half a million toilets flush into it everyday”(25:46-28:24). It shows the capitalism's exploitation over natural resource. The Carroll’s High School is compared with strict institution where students are disobeying the rules and regulations of school. Their disobedient towards school and

father is their resistance against capitalism. Jim confirms that while he was getting punishment from school's father and says "Too bad, father I'm starting enjoying myself". In scene 22:25 the skyscrapers behind Jim emphasized in the film, symbolizes the financial prosperity of the America.

Kelvar tries to depict the 1960s American society in black and white term with good coverage of capitalist bitter truth, people of the USA which follows Jim Carroll played by Leonardo DiCaprio, Pedro played by James Madio, Micky played by Mark Wahlberg, Sweety by Bruno Kirby who is a characterless coach. The film is rated R (Under 17 requires accompanying parents or adult guidance). It includes considerably profanity, sexual situations, drug use, prostitution and violence.

Set in 1960s' of the New York, the film can be seen as the chronicle of American culture industry. We can analyze the film as consequence of capitalism. The film provides the sense of economic prosperity of the nation that affected the youth, especially the middle class people. The movie also approves the real battle line between school headmaster and students. The headmaster of the school symbolizes the bourgeoisie society- those who control the world's economic, political and social aspects. The headmaster of the school doesn't want to solve the problem but only uses his power to punish and expel the students from school.



Figure 2: The teacher threatening the Jim and his friends to expel them for using heroin at school. Source: Researcher's Photo

The film assesses the American dream through its unflattering characterization of those on the of the economic ladder and its trenchant examination of the ways in which the American dream not only fails to fulfill its promise but also contributions to the declining of personal values. Film stands as a strongcritique of American capitalist culture and the ideology that promises it.

Every family wants to its own home, its own land is a capitalist ideology that sells itself as natural by pointing, for example to the fact that almost all Americans want to their own prosperity, without acknowledges that this desire is created in them by the capitalist culture in which they live. Similarly, the Jim's mother encourages Jim to do part time job to make their familial atmosphere standard.

Mother: Hey, get your own job and if you get it this summer, you're coming to work with me at the hotel.

Jim: Mom, please why are you so worried about this? Do I even ask
you for money? (21: 50-22:20)

It is the ideology of culture industry that blinds the youth of American society. In long part, the people are blinded by the belief in the economic prosperity, which tells them that financial success is simply the product of initiative and hard working. Therefore, if some people are poor it is because are shiftless and lazy. People believe that it is natural to want to “get ahead” to want to own better life. The family in the film comes from the middle class of the social ladder. Jim’s mother is in an attempt to prosper her family life style. Another character Reggie, who saves Jim’s life, has extremely busy life style so that he doesn’t have time to take care and spend time with mentally and physically ill friend Jim and has to leave him alone. It shows mechanical life style of capitalism.



Figure 3: Jim's shelter dark subway of New York.

One of the effective ways the film criticizes the capitalist economy is by showing the poor and homeless people. There are many people who have to live in the

street, garbage and subway. Subway of New York City is the shelter of homeless people and nexus of the smuggler. In the film the dark street of subway becomes a refugee camp for Jim after his mother mounting concern. There are many homeless people who use the street as shelter. It shows the hierarchical and unequal structure of the then society. This aspect of American society shows the only the powerful people are growing rich day by day and poor people become poor and poorer. There is huge gap between two statuses. One of the character of movie, Reggie, who has done hard work but his house is in dark, unhealthy corner.



Figure 4: Jim and Pedro are buying illegal drug from smuggler for hallucination

Another one of the most notable facts about the American dream the film suggests is that it celebrates the individualistic efforts to mark one's own success. It relates itself with the rugged individualism. It believes on in that a human being is capable of pursuing an efficient and economically sound life. It is principle of being somebody (Tyson 57 and 59). According to this principle, if someone remains

shiftless and lazy cannot uplift him, he is simply an egoless person. In the film Jim's friend Neutron who gets success regarded as hard working child and protagonist and his other friends regarded as worthless child.

Right from the beginning the blind and poor woman who lives next to the Jim house shouts and scolds to the God with rough language in the morning, "'Give us this day our daily bread as we forgive those who trespass against us. The lord is myshepherd Jesus, the NazarineMarry the whore [. . .] go to hell [. . .]!" (00:41). Here, God has symbolical meaning. In the film god is compared with capitalism. It shows that though the America is economically developed country but people are not happy. The woman seems distracted from society and culture. There is not harmony, peace and solace in civilians' mind. For the general audience protagonist Jim and the Woman are idle, worthless, and characterless who have no meaning in life. They don't have any pity with these characters. But, for particular audience take these circumstances as consequences of capitalism. They can understand the hidden politics of capitalism.

The film indirectly criticizes capitalist culture by showing the debilitating effects of capitalist ideology even on those who are its most successful products. It does so through its representation of commodification. As we may recall, a commodity, by definition, has value not in terms of what it can do (use value) but in terms of the money or other commodities for which it can be traded or in terms of social status its ownership confers. An object becomes a commodity only when it has exchange value or sign value. And neither form of value is inherent in any object. Both are forms of social value: they are assigned to objects by human beings in a given social context. Commodification then, is the act of relating to persons or things in terms of their exchange value or sign-exchange value to the exclusion of other

considerations. Of course, commodification is a necessary function of buying and selling, and thus it is a necessary function of capitalism, which depends for its survival on buying and selling. However, as the film illustrates commodification especially in form of sign-exchange value. “Commodification is the act of relating to objects or person in terms of their exchange value of sign-exchange value.” Tyson (62). Nowhere, in *The Basketball Diaries* commodification is so clearly embodied as in the character of Jim, Dinah, Jim, Rinky, Blinky and a girl in the bar. They all exchange their young body and pretty face to the money: they market their body.

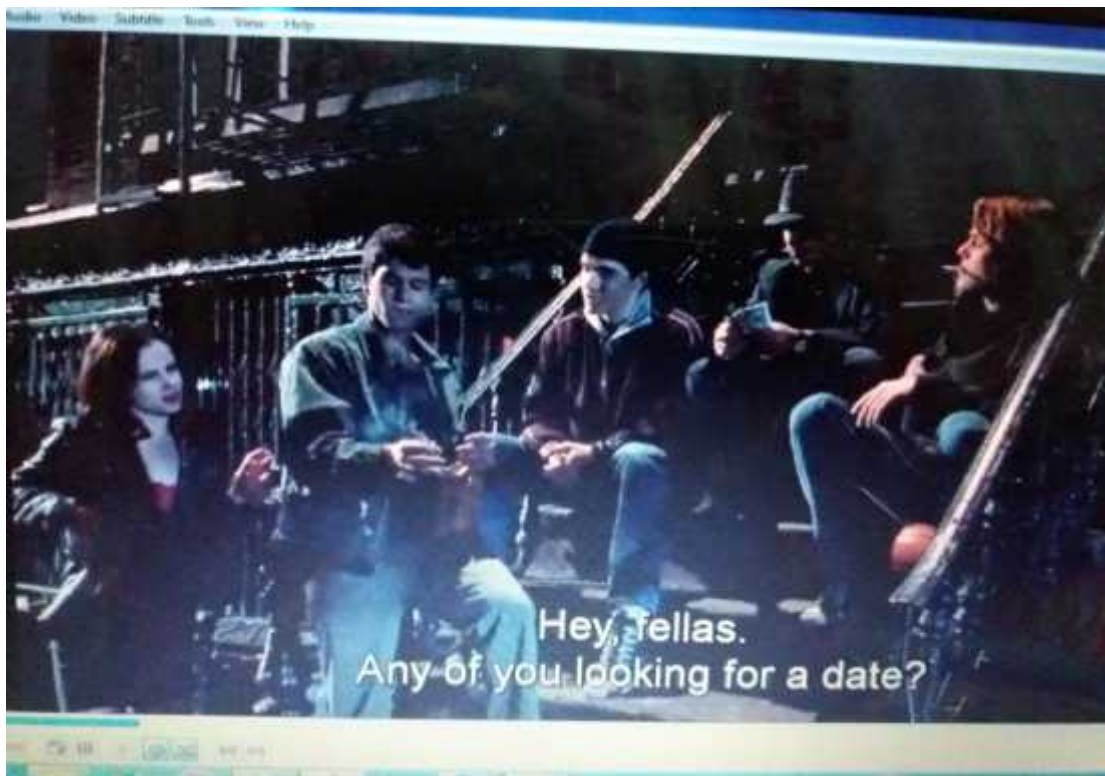


Figure 5: Dinah is offering the boys to go date for money

Source: Researcher's Photo



Figure 6: Jim is being prostituting for money. Source: Researcher's Photo

Kelvart film is a voice of rebellion against the corrupted materialist world of American capitalistic culture. It depicts the real face of the capitalist society in which its citizens are controlled by means of power and personal feelings and desires of an individual are suppressed by means of state institutions. Kelvart directs this film in the time when many young Americans questioned America's materialism and cultural norms guided by the capitalist notion.

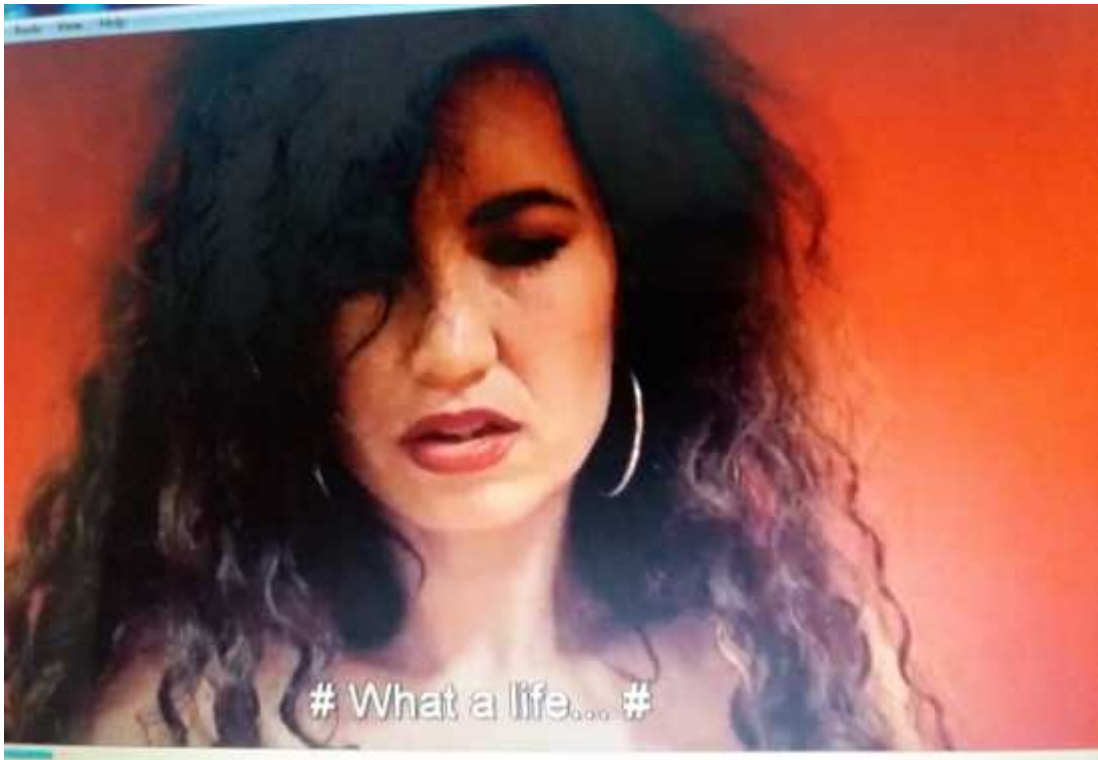


Figure 7: The woman of the bar shows her naked dance for money

Source: Researcher's Photo

In the 1960s in America there was new movement claim on the nation's consciousness. Just as the postwar economic boom was taking hold students in universities were beginning to question the rampant materialism of their society. The Beat Generation was a product of this questioning. They saw runaway capitalism as destructive to the human spirit and antithetical to social equality. This film also represents that hippie culture. Love, peace and harmony, spirituality, naturalness, using drugs and jazz music is main characteristics of this culture. After World War II, the United States exercised power-mechanisms. The young generation of the then time, initially lured but later when they came to the reality, found it very difficult to discard it, Carroll is the representative voice of these youth. Consequences of drug that protagonist and his friends have to suffer from lots of hardship that lead them towards painful and pathetic life with no future.



Figure 8: Jim and Pedro smoking cigarette at subway of New York City after expelled from school.

Importantly, this is a story of lucky person from one aspect because protagonist has not to lose his life in the drug. He has such a kind and nice older neighbourhood Reggie played by Ernie Hudson who helped him to overcome his drug habits. Now and then, he is able to begin the long journey back to sanity, which ultimately ends with Jim's incarnation in Ricker's Island. After six months in prison, he leaves and later does talk show about his drug life. He leaves behind his dream of became successful basketball player and became a successful writer, musician and poet. But it is sad to Pedro and Micky; they have to live in painful and miserable life. Pedro is going to lose his life due to drug and Micky is kept in jail for 15 years for assaulting murder case.



Figure 9: Jim is asking money to her mother.

Neo-Marxist criticism prescribes the broad picture of social reality and analyses literature in terms of the historical conditions which produces it. According to George Lukacs, a well-known Marxist critic of 20th century, an artist is he who successfully depicts social and historical reality objectively his literary works as they are inseparable phenomenon. A true artist, in Lukacs view, is the one who is successful in depicting the social and historical reality objectively through his literary works. This principle of artistic creation applies not only in the case of Lukacs, but also for every Marxist literary theoretician all artist creation are inseparable from the socio-historical phenomenon. Art, therefore, is a special form of reflecting reality which is the sum total of socio-historical phenomenon. He argues that scientific thought as well as our everyday thinking possesses reality but art differs from them because the impression of reality in art is mixed with individual reaction. Thus, he strongly rejects the emotive theory of art, and argues that, “the creation and

appreciation of art is not unique and mysterious kind of knowledge” (232). It is neither created in vacuum nor received so.

Lukacs is known for his ‘Reflection Model of Art’. In this model, he advocates that art should contact with reality, directly. For Lukacs nineteenth century novels are the perfect art and literature having the dialectical totality whereas modernist writing lead to decadence of literature. He thinks that modernism knowingly or unknowingly betrays the evils of capitalism in his essay, “The Ideology of Modernism”. He states;

Art should expose socio-historical realities. [...] But bourgeoisie ideology forgets its previous revolutionary ideas, and engages itself on dehistoricising reality and accepts society as a natural fact. As with materialism, the dialectic unity between inner and outer world is destroyed. Thereby the value of material determines its content. (37)

Lukacs idea of reflection has judged art from Marxist realistic perspective in radical manner. He rejects principle that “The material poetry can be found in every subject which can interest the human mind” (Daiches 817). He opines that every interesting thing cannot be the subject of art. Literature must be straight forward in its imitation of immediate truth along with literary characteristics.

Literature as art belongs to superstructure as history, politics, religion and philosophy, which are based on socio-economic reality. Hence, there should be a formal correspondence between the literary work and dialectical totality. Therefore, in Marxist point of view, an art has to have social significance, as it is organized in the society.

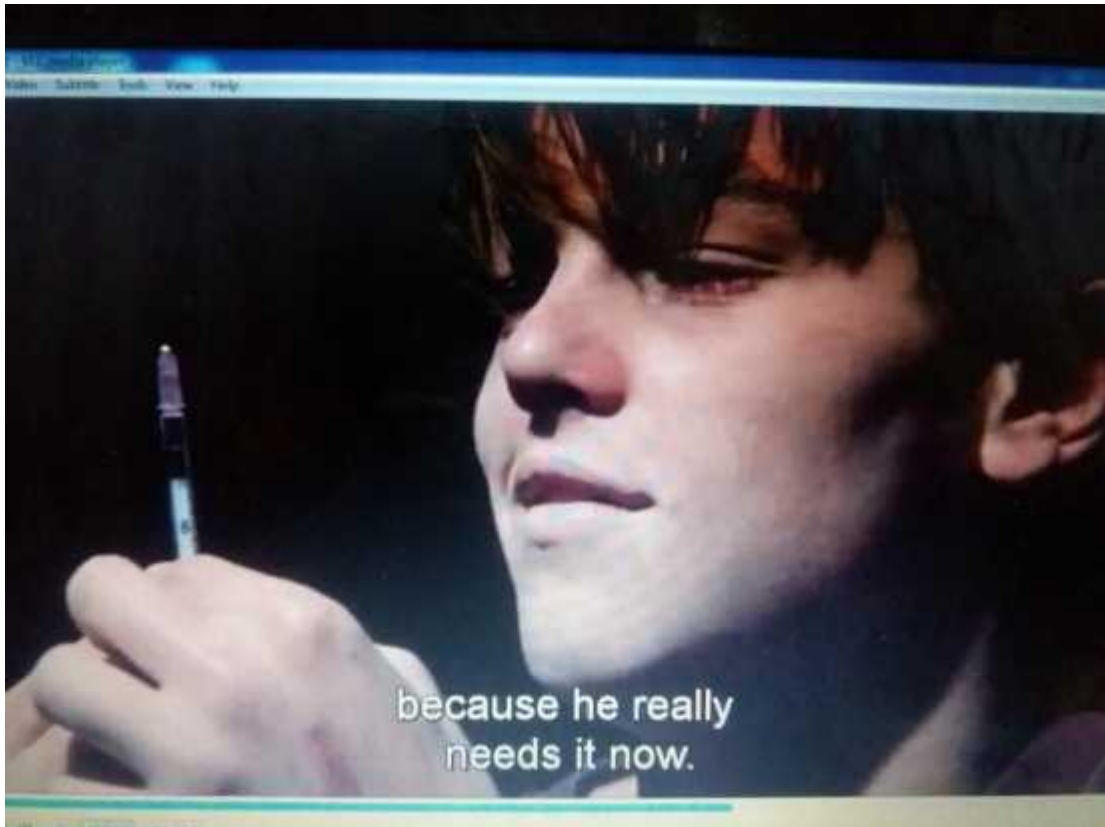


Figure 10: Jim is taking drug using syringe

Theodor Adorno (1903-69) is a leading figure of the Frankfurt School of German Marxists. His principal philosophical works are: *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, written with Max Horkheimer (1944; trans. 1972); *Negative Dialectics* (1966; trans. 1973); and *Aesthetic Theory* (1970; trans. 1984). He is a defender of art against mass culture; Adorno's conception of the culture industry saw this split as an irreconcilable antagonism within the commodity fetishism of capitalism. According, he was critical of both Advent- grade art and the product of the culture industry, while attempting to critical space for the social promise of cognitive and aesthetic negativity.

Theodor Adorno and Marx Horkheimer openly denounced the realist theories like Lukacs's which take literature as reflection of outside reality. They lauded modernist writers such as James Joyce, Samuel Beckett, and Kafka, proposing that their formal experiments by the very fact that they fragment and disrupt the life they reflect, establish a distance and effect a detachment which serve as an implicit critique

or yield a negative knowledge of the dehumanizing institutions and processes of society under capitalism. Adorno's theory of literature is markedly different from others as it openly criticizes them in favour of modernism. Frankfurt school which he belongs to criticize the formal laws of literature and argues that the reality in the real world is formless. Unlike Lukacs and Macherey, Adorno sees literature as alienation from reality. Adorno, regarding literature observes that it is the negative knowledge of the real world that gives definite value to the works of the modernist writers. Interior monologue or the stream of consciousness as literary technique was much criticized by Lukacs.

Adorno, however, emphasizes that “the interior monologue, far from cutting the literary work off from reality, can expose the way reality actually is” (Forgacs 188). But for Adorno, this reality is not photographic as for Lukacs and at the same time the duty of an author is not to give shape to the objective reality pre-existing in the society. Adorno, clearly states that, “art is the negative knowledge of the actual world” (Forgacs 189). However, according to David Forgacs, Adorno by negative knowledge “doesn't mean non-knowledge. It means knowledge which can undermine and negate a false or reified condition” (Forgacs 189).

Thus, Adorno emphasizes the negative and critical role played by the works of modernist writers as Proust, Kafka, Beckett, Joyce etc. As stated by Forgacs, Adorno “opens up modernist writing to Marxist theory by showing that different kind of relationship between the text and reality is possible” (Forgacs 190).

Ramon Selden observing the theory of Adorno in *Contemporary Literary Theory* states that for Adorno, “literature unlike the mind doesn't have a direct contract with reality” (Selden34). Adorno's opinion is that art and reality are not alike. Inverting the reflection theory of Lukacs he claims that art is set apart from

reality; its detachment gives it its special significance and power. Selden observes that in contrary to the Soviet Socialist Realists, or Lukacs who totally rejects the modernist writings, and refuses to recognize the writers like Proust, Kafka, Joice, Beckett etc. as writers and their work as literary works. Adorno gives implicit value to the works of these writers and approaches near to Bretch than Lukacs.

One of the main sins of capitalism, according to Marx, was that it reduces all human relations into commercial relation. Even the family cannot escape such commodification: Marx states that, to the bourgeois man, the wife is reduced to a mere instrument of production. Commodification is the act of relating to objects or person in terms of their exchange value or sign-exchange value (Tyson 62).

Banxandall in *Marxism in The Postmodern Age* mentions:

Women are presented as commodities under capitalism. As sex objects women have been violated and used to sell products. An important part of Marxist- feminist project must be for women to reclaim their sexuality and see themselves as desiring subjects in the full sense of the word-not only as victims of men's sexuality, but as active seekers of their own pleasure. (243)

Capitalism used to see women as passive objects but Marxists sees them as active subjects. They should not be commodified. But, the film presents women as sellable goods and pleasure for men. So, it reflects the contemporary American bourgeois society. Lukacs, argues, literature should reflect the reality. The movie also reflects the reality of the contemporary America and Kalvert is successful in portraying sexual perversion which the Americans faced during that period.

Marxist thinkers and philosophers tend to view that society is not constituted by a monolithic whole, but it is formed by a diversity of ideological state apparatuses

including religion, family, educational institution, mass media, politics, multinational company, trade union etc. each of these is dovetailed with the other in extricate ways, all regulated by the group of capitalism. Louis Althusser a prominent Marxist critic opines that the ideology of capitalism is determined by its material base. Althusser coins, ideology to define capitalism Blackburn's *Dictionary of Philosophy* quotes, Althusser opinion as;

Althusser firmly concedes that ideology represents the imaginary relations of individual to their material existence and hence to the capitalist concept. It means that ideology distorts our view of our true condition of existence. (312)

Althusser connects ideology with its social practices. For him ideology functions through ideological state apparatuses, which, although they seem to be creating their sub-ideology, all are subject to the dominant ideology. Ideological state apparatuses in compass all the institution through which we are socialized. They include organized religion, the law, the trade union, the political system, art and literature, and so on. Ideology, then, has a material existence in the sense that it is exhibited in all sorts of material practices.

Eagleton views literature in terms of form, political ideology, and consciousness. But all this overlooks a simple fact which is obvious to every-one, and not least to a Marxist. He further says literature may be an artifact, a product of social consciousness, a world vision; but it is also an industry. In *Marxism and Literary Criticism*, Eagleton observes:

Books are not just structure of meaning. They are also commodities product by producers and sold on the market at a profit. Drama is not just a collection of literary tests; it is a capitalist business which

employs certain men (authors, directors, actors, stage hands) to produce, a commodity to be consumed by an audience at a profit. Critics are not just analysts of text; they are also (usually) academics hired by the state to prepare students ideologically for their functions within capitalist society. (55)

Eagleton's view is that art and literature is commodified by capitalists. Writers are not just transposes of trans-individual mental structures they are also workers hired by publishing houses to produce commodities which will sell.

Eagleton's opinion towards modernist as well as post-modernist developments in art and culture is that it brackets off all political and socio-economic relevance. Eagleton attacks post-modernist art and culture as hollow, devoid of its political content. He observes that "the depthless, style less, dehistoricized, decathected, surfaces of post-modernist culture are not meant to signify an alienation, for the very concept of alienation must secretly posit a dream of authenticity which post-modernist find quit unintelligible" (Eagleton, *Capitalism* 386). He argues that such attempts to disengage art and culture from socio-economic determinants lead them to unprivileged humble position. Art becomes nothing more than production of any other commodity.

In *Dialectic of Enlightenment* Horkheimer and Adorno talks about enlightenment which leads towards mass deception. Enlightenment use of 'reason' is used by culture industry for their benefits. Their view about culture industry is:

The culture industry perpetually cheats its consumers of what it perpetually promises. The promissory note which, with its plots and staging, it draws on pleasure is endlessly prolonged; the promise, which is actually all the spectacle consists of, is illusory: all it actually

confirms is that the real point will never be reached, that the dinner must be satisfied with the menu. (213)

Their view is that art, culture and beauty is commodity under capitalism. They defend art against mass culture. Capitalism on the institution called culture industry that “...refutes objection made against made it just as well as that against the world which is impartially duplicates. Only choice [the individuals have] is either to join or to be left behind” (Adorno and Horkheimer 145). That is to say, capitalism holds the individual life in such a way that the individuals have choices but no objection.

Within these parameters, Marxist approaches to literature are surprisingly varied, and there is no programmatic way of applying Marxist ideas. Of course, Marxist critics will continue to discuss such issues as class struggle, commodification, hegemony and alienation and so on, but their shared concerns have not entailed that Marxist reading are always identical in approach, or even that their conclusions will be the same.

Thus, Neo-Marxist literary theoreticians straight forward acknowledge the literature’s relevance to the socio-economic situation of a society despite lots of diversities among themselves.

Theodor Adorno puts emphasis on culture as a way of finding the expression of the human condition in history. He relates psychology in Marxists thought and its tribulations in society. Unlike the classical Marxists his ideas are not strictly based on one aspect but to the whole society like other Frankfurt School of social critics.

According to Adorno, society is full of contradiction. It is the sum of different dialects at different levels like- economic, political and social etc. So, art should depict the contradiction of society and dialectical totality. He argues that modernist writer makes use of the interior monologue to expose the way reality is. For him the

modernists' emphasis on the subject is only an appearance since in reality the social totality exists before the individual. A great work of literature is that which manage to present the contradiction between reality and appearance.

He is not in the favour of cultural critics of criticism because cultural criticism is bourgeoisie in nature. It does not advocate in the favour of proletariats, social transformation. To compete in the market and to gain popularity, they give excessive emphasis on the organs of female in their art. Adorno says, "Artists in bourgeoisie society becomes being for something else."(1033), in this context 'something else' refers to money. This film also depicts the huge gap between reality and appearance. The USA was celebrating their economic success and the youths are leading their moral declines. For capitalism human being knowledge and understanding are not important in comparison to money.



Figure 11: Jim and his friends robbing old lady's bag.

Source: Researcher's Photo

Adorno developed the negative knowledge model in Marxist theories in opposition to what he called Lukacs' dogmatism and vulgar materialist view of literature (as the reflection of objective reality). He penetrates the space between actuality and reality and human consciousness, Adorno sees art and reality standing at a distance from one another. It is by dint of this distance that art can criticize reality. For him, even the modernists' emphasis on the subject is only an appearance since in reality the social reality exists before the individuals. A great work of literature is that which present the contradiction between reality and appearance.

The director is very intelligent at showing the individual subject as alienated and escapist and at the same time he places the subject in a social context. He makes clear that the individual is no more than a part of the totality. Art for Lukacs, had to reflect the dialectical shape of society whereas Adorno insists on the work's formal laws and the distance between reality and art. Neo-Marxists believe that the literary work does not give us a neatly shaped reflection and knowledge of reality but acts within reality to expose its contradictions. And hence, art is the negative knowledge of reality, a knowledge which can undermine and negate a false or reified condition. In this way, the film shows a different kind of relationship between the text and reality in Marxist theories: one of critical distance and negative knowledge rather than reflection.

III: Consequences of Capitalism in Kalvert's *The Basketball Diaries*

After the discussion and analysis of Kalvert's *The Basketball Diaries*, the researcher has come to a conclusion that the film depicts the consequence of the capitalism, in the fascinating and effect manner. It does not only dismantle the notion of capitalism, but also invokes the feeling of victim of capitalism to its audiences.

The film asserts that the protagonist's quest for American Dream or happiness. And it is the critiques on capitalism and strongly argues that the dream of the youth is devastated by culture industry. He commodifies his body, breaks familial relation and engage in murdering and robbery for the sake of money. Jim is the representative character of the American society. This movie merely projects the failure of American Dream as it fails to commit what it promises, it fails to fulfill the solace, peace and happiness. Hence, failure of youth dream also symbolizes the failure of USA dream. During the 1960s the USA was full flourished capitalism. As a result USA achieved phenomenal economic success. But the youth of America were indulging in the drug. They revolt the cultural system of country through many movements one of them is beat generation. That movement misguided the many youth of the society, especially who are young and immature; teenagers. They escape from reality to search for temporary happiness which results the robbery, prostitution and drug addiction etc.

Kalvert's *The Basketball Diaries* depicts the pathetic scenario of the youth of American society. Protagonist and his friends forget their goals and indulge in drug and heroin. They all escape from reality. The school uses its authority and the students expelled from school as punishment. But the school principal and other stakeholder never realize that the main cause of the youth problem. The pathetic youths' misguided behaviour who become robber, murderer and indulge in drug are the consequence of capitalism. The decade of 1960s' as in the movie it is an irony

towards the American society, because after World War II America was celebrating its golden era economically but its society was corrupted morally. Youth were escaping from reality and searching the imaginary world because then existing society was unfit for them. All the characters like Jim and his friends Pedro, Mickey and Diane are victimized by capitalism and ran away from reality in the search of happiness.

The whole analysis is devoted to serve up the ways in which youth under the capitalist society go through the hardship and difficulties. Thus, it is not only the victimized characters who have been brought under the investigation and through them the director, Kalvert has simply unearthed the dark nature of capitalism.

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