

## I. Introduction

The relation between Russian Orthodox version of Christianity and individual and national vitality is one of the most prominent themes of Fyodor Dostoevsky's novel *The Idiot*. And akin to it is another theme of western philosophy and death at both the individual and national level. This led to Dostoevsky's defense of God, moral free will, and the autonomy of art against the secularizing influence of money and materialism. Dostoevsky artfully discusses the narrowness of materialism, ultimately expressed in the form of capitalist values, and the encompassing and healing virtues of spiritualism as exemplified in Christian values.

The nineteenth century Russia was undergoing severe breakdown of moral and family values owing to the onset of materialist values. Immorality, selfishness and pettiness were seen as devastating to the society. The old system of belief in religion was giving way to the worshipping of material comfort and possession. At such times, writers with sense of social responsibility felt dark and wrote some fictions that speak solemn threat coming upon the heedless people. Some tried to present a sort of solution to this problem by showing why and how religious values should be preserved, or the price will be high. Dostoevsky also felt responsible and wrote novels on this theme. *The Idiot* shows the moral decay and its consequences for society, and thereby aims to restore the vitalizing belief and fear of God.

In the novel, the protagonists, Prince Myshkin and Nastasya Filippovna, embody the Christian ideals of purity and beauty of life. These ideals are the core of individual happiness. But in their struggle to preserve their ideals, they are destroyed by the corroding effects of material culture and are ultimately drowned in the social morass by the bourgeoisie who have succumbed to greed. By thus showing the failure

of both capitalist and socialist ideologies to appreciate what is noble in human personality, since both are materialist, Dostoevsky emphasizes that only Christian love and morality can save the doomed humanity.

To grasp the historical situatedness of the writer and the production, that is the novel, it is only relevant here that a brief glance is given to the biography of the writer as well as a general introduction to the novel. Perhaps the most dominating literary figure of the latter half of the nineteenth century Russia, Dostoevsky was born in 1821 in a hospital for the poor. Son of a resident surgeon, Dostoevsky comes from a lower-middle class family of Moscow. His upbringing was in narrow parochial discipline for his father was rigidly righteous orthodox Christian. Bored of dull drill of school education, Dostoevsky was an occasional truant. He devoted his childhood leisure reading omnivorously the classics of literature.

After his release from Siberia, however, his fiction became increasingly egocentric. One of the first instances is the same theme as that of *White Nights*: the theme which he had copied from his early short story into his life was copied back again into his first full-length novel, *The Insulted and Injured*, and recurs intermittently afterwards. But much more important examples soon eclipsed it. The theme of a man's thoughts in his way to execution occupies many pages of *The Idiot*. The arrest of Stepan Trofimovitch in *The Possessed* repeats Dostoevsky's own experience in 1849 even to the suggestion that one member of the family was arrested by mistake for another; the death-scene of Marmeladov's wife in *Crime and Punishment* is said by Dostoevsky's second wife to be based on the death of his first; the onset of epilepsy is repeatedly described from experience; and so on. The series of coincidences is so remarkable that episodes from the novels have even been extracted and ascribed to his own life without and independent evidence. One of these is the

notorious rape of an eleven-year-old girl from Stavrogin's Confession. It is easy enough to believe that this was attached to his name by mere association, and adopted deliberately by malicious detractors, when we read on Dostoevsky's own authority in *The Peasant Marey* that many people believed him to have been sent to Siberia for murdering his wife, merely because that is the crime he attributed to the imaginary narrator of *The House of the Dead*.

The relation between the writer's personal experience and his creation that is literary expression cannot be overlooked in a socio-political context. Every writer somehow or other seems to be engaged in coping with their personal problem while writing their deeply felt works. From his own youth came the recollection of his father hunting under his sisters' beds for concealed lovers, which reappears in *The Idiot*. A more macabre example from his childhood is the choice of an epitaph for his mother's tomb: the chosen phrase, "Lie here, beloved dust, until the joyful dawn," was later used not only in *The Idiot* but also in Book, on the tombstone of one of the corpses whose conversation makes up the short story. From the days of his first marriage comes the episode in *Crime and Punishment*, when Marmeladov's wife accepts three rubles as charity after his death, just as Maria Isayev was said to have done in Siberia after her first husband's death and before her marriage to Dostoevsky. From his gambling days comes the episode, to be found both in *The Gambler* and in *A Raw Youth*, of a roulette player accidentally provoking a quarrel by picking up another player's money, as Dostoevsky once did himself. From the period between marriages comes the scene in *The Idiot* in which Prince Myshkin interrupts a genteel tea-party with a violent denunciation of mothers who try to dispose of their daughters to the highest bidder, just as Dostoevsky once denounced Nne Korvin-Krukovskaya for having the same intentions at a time when he was interested in her daughter.

The novel begins with three strange characters in a train en route to Petersburg. A young man named Prince Myshkin is returning from a Swiss sanatorium where he has been treated for the past few years for some malady similar to epilepsy. He meets a roguish young man called Rogozhin, who has an unhealthy obsession with a beautiful young woman named Nastasya Filippovna, a nosy government official named Lebedyev, who figures prominently throughout the novel.

Arriving in Petersburg, Myshkin acquaints himself with many of the citizens and eventually meets, and is infatuated by, Nastasya. She is pushy, fickle, and impetuous, and bounces from fiancé to fiancé like a fortune hunter. Her irresistibility and psychological stronghold on the men in her life leads to her downfall.

The basis of the novel is that Myshkin is not bright, has not had much education, and traverses society with a mentality of simplistic innocence. When speaking his opinion, he struggles to articulate himself with Charlie Brown-like stammering and wishy-washiness. For this reason, people consider him an idiot, but he is a good, honest, sympathetic, and gracious person. When he comes into a large inheritance he is blackmailed by a man who claims to be the illegitimate son of Myshkin's benefactor; but when the man's story is debunked, Myshkin befriends rather than chastises the culprit and his accomplices. Myshkin also falls in love with and becomes betrothed to a giddy girl named Aglaia, who uses his ingenuousness as a foil for her jokes and sarcasm, despite his undying devotion to her.

The novel seems to say that a saintly man, making his way in a society that is concerned with materialism and cutthroat avarice, will be considered a childish idiot for valuing honesty, kindness, and the simple things in life. As it is said, the sanatorium is the only place for a saint.

Certainly Dostoevsky's characters do not act, talk or think like typical Anglo-Saxons. This has led to the dangerous fallacy that they act, talk and think like typical Russians. The truth is that they are not typical anything, because they are not types. They are made up of human characteristics, and even of typical characteristics, but not by way of photographic reproduction. Some of them, it is true, such as General Epanchin and Gavril in *The Idiot*, or Raskolnikov's mother and sister in *Crime and Punishment*, are made up of perfectly normal aggregations of human characteristics; but others, and by far the most important, such as Rogozhin, Raskolnikov, Stavogin and Ivan Karamazov, are so constructed and visualized as to appear just as remote and inexplicable to the normal characters, among whom they move, as they do to ourselves.

It is perhaps possible even to see the mechanism at work in *The Idiot*, where Myshkin's love is divided between two aspects of the same feminine compound, Aglaia and Nastasya; and the compound is itself made up of Dostoevsky's dual experience of Anna Krukovskaya and Martha Brown, so that neither can be exclusively identified with either heroine in the novel.

First of all it is like missing the point of the book Dostoevsky said, that it is to portray the positively good man, there is nothing more difficult in the world nowadays. But the thing most people miss is the recurring mention of Rogozhin's painting – the one of Jesus depicted in a realistic way. This is perhaps a way of looking at Myshkin, especially because most people make the connection that he is depicted as a Christ-like figure, but they don't draw the connection between the painting that shows the bruises and suffering of Christ in a realistic to the portrait of Myshkin as the positively good man suffering realistically, or him as a new Christ suffering realistically, and as for the ending, it couldn't be better- Aglaya loved him,

yet she didn't know how to handle it and would give varying messages to Myshkin that he couldn't understand. But the beauty is that Myshkin chose compassion for Nastasya over his love for Aglaya, and anyone who goes into an attempt to understand Myshkin could think of no other decision for him to make.

The most important feature about *The Idiot* that strikes one is the amazing insight into the human nature and character that is omnipresent in this novel. The author expresses many of his views about the society and why a person behaves the way he does. The part where Myshkin describes the fake execution of a prisoner is especially striking. In the novel Dostoevsky attempts to portray the ideal man – a positively beautiful individual. Prince Myshkin represents all the qualities Dostoevsky deems the best aspects of a human being. First, he is frank and open; unlike other members of high society such as Ganya and General Yepanchin, Myshkin does speak what is there in his mind and outside around him.

The protagonists, Prince Myshkin and Nastasya Filippovna, profess the Christian ideals of beauty and purity of life which is the core of individual happiness. But in their struggle to preserve it, they are devastated by the corroding effects of material culture and, ultimately, are drowned in the social morass by the bourgeoisie who have succumbed to greed. By showing their downfall, the novel presents a critique of the materialist and selfish capitalist society. In doing so, he touched upon the virtues of honesty, love and charity as embodied in the Christian doctrine.

Since the publication of Dostoevsky's *The Idiot* in the period (1868-69), many critics have paid critical attention towards the work. Critics have interpreted the novel in different ways. This is interesting to note in the light of the Marxist claim that as soon as a literary work gets published, it becomes a thing of the world, not contained in the mind of the writer alone, and thus a worldly thing creates other consequences. It

starts expanding its influence by affecting the readers, their world view as well as their actions, it expands markets and creates opportunities of income for the writer, publisher and the readers too who capitalize on their knowledge. The material existence of literature is too important to go unnoticed. The same goes true for this novel under study here. Therefore, some pertinent critics are quoted and studies here.

Boris Bursov, a well-known Soviet literary Scholar, portrays the importance of money in bourgeois society for which Dostoevsky had a great hatred and contempt:

Dostoevsky condemned the vices of 19<sup>th</sup> century in which money became the measure of all things, as only a person ulcered with these vices and fully aware of their fatal nature could do it. Like Dostoevsky who was himself in the power of what he was bitterly warring against, his many of the characters are endowed with similar features, such as Lebedev; Kolya, the young brother of Ganyan; Ivolgin and to some extent Ganya himself in *The Idiot*. (73-74)

In the above lines, Bursov talks about 'Money and Inspiration' showing the attraction of people towards the Materialism. He shows the money as only the problem of human freedom, but doesn't talk about its probable evil effects which may destroy the innocent lives.

Boris Suchkov, a soviet writer, keeps his views about Dostoevsky's works in a little different way: "If one regards Dostoevsky as a whole, he is seen to be the greatest critic of Capitalism. No other writer in the world has criticized Capitalism as forcefully as Dostoevsky" (10-11).

Hermann Hesse, a German critic, also relates *The Idiot* with materialism: "For the idiot too, material concerns matter; he (Prince Myshkin) invariably recognizes the

significance of such things even though he doesn't consider them of the prime importance" (57). Hesse here tries to establish the difference between Myshkin's and the other people's thinking. He says that Myshkin doesn't give prime importance to Material World like others who are dying after it; and he further clarifies that Myshkin sees the people's reality as a shadow which creates his enmity with them. But he doesn't illustrate what ill effects the people of Material World have caused upon his life.

Susan McReynolds analyzes the writing of Dostoevsky differently:

The defense of God, moral free will and the autonomy of art against the secularizing influence of money and materialism became intertwined for Dostoevsky during the period. 'Man accepts beauty without conditions', he wrote in *Time*, 'not asking why it is useful and what one can buy with it'. (29-30)

In the above lines, McReynolds talks about Dostoevsky's writing in which he gets the aggregate of the defense of God, moral free will and the autonomy of art which ultimately stands against money and materialism. But he doesn't discuss how his writing illustrates the ill effects resulted from the materialism.

So, this thesis tries to show how materialism has been at the root of the destruction of human relationship and happiness in the modern world. as the novel suggest, the only antidote to the corrupting and cancerous effect of materialism as expanded by capitalism is to cultivate genuine humanitarian virtues of love, compassion, and forgiveness and equality of all, as it is also emphasized in the Christian doctrine.



For this purpose this thesis will be intensively text based. The hypothesis will be examined through the perspective of Marxists Critics of Capitalism. Theoretical terminologies, tools and perspectives will be obtained through library consultations and internet websites. This thesis is divided into four main chapters. The first chapter introduces the novel, novelist, the background of the work and a general direction this thesis takes in course of the study. The second chapter introduces and elaborates the critical concepts from Marxism. The same tool will be used in the third chapter to analyze the novel from a Marxist standpoint. Mainly, it is shown that the writers condition of life affected his writing, and that he saw in Christian theological underpinnings the solution to the problems created by the capitalist values so much rampant and upheld in the late nineteenth century Russian society. Insights from Christian theology, as it is enshrined in the author's world view in depicting his characters, will be utilized there. The fourth chapter is the concluding section, rounding up the thesis by showing that the hypothesis set at the beginning was correct and that the novel is a critique of capitalist values. The findings and suggestions of the thesis are also included in this chapter.

## II. Marxism, Christianity and Capitalistic Values on *The Idiot*

### Marxists Criticism and Religion

The socio-political world view called Marxism that became the single most influential doctrine in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was propounded by the German thinker Karl Marx and his colleague Frederic Engels in the mid nineteenth century. Their principle is explained in the 1848 publication *The Communist Manifesto* which makes a survey of the social and economic development of human society, and the historical context of the origin of capitalism, and its consequential epoch called communism wherein humanity will be free of the injustices and inequalities created by the capitalist, class-based social order.

Although Marx and Engels did not propound any systematic theory as regard art and literature and their relation with the society, they did indicate that such creative realisms are not free of the political realities around them. This suggestion is now-a-days understood in terms of base and superstructures. According to Marxism, base affects the superstructure, and, as the base change, the superstructure also gets changed in time. to be explicit, the change in the base, that is the socio-economic relations, brings change in the ideology, religion, art and politics of the society.

The tradition of Marxist thought has provided the most powerful critique of capitalist institutions and ethics ever conducted. it is a set of theories or rather a system of thought and analysis developed by the German philosopher Karl Heinrich Marx in the nineteenth century in response to the western industrial revolution and the rise of industrial capitalism as the predominant economic mode. Marx himself was extremely well-read in the classical and contemporary literature and literary allusions and references abounded in his writing. Marxism is a theory directed at social change.

The change is hoped to bring a new order, by eliminating the gross injustices and inequalities created by the capitalist mode of economic relations. The new order of society will be based on social justice reflected in economic equality and respect for labor as it has never been in human history to date.

Marxist literary criticism has had two periods of significant influence: in the 1930s and in the 1960s. In both periods this influence has been related to a more general interest in and commitment to Marxist ideas. Undoubtedly the most influential and important Marxist literary critic of the 1930s was Lukacs, associated in particular with a strong defense of the realism to which he believed his Marxism committed him, alongside a concomitant hostility on the artistic and political level to all forms of modernism. Lukacs's relationship to Stalinism is complex: on the one hand his realism and modernism was in tune with the line of Stalin and Socialist Realism, although this line tended to be played down as the period of the Popular Front developed. But Lukacs's own position was a lot more sophisticated than that of Stalin or of Zhdanov, his henchman, and Lukacs, as a very positive view of the high art of the bourgeoisie was not really equitable with Zhdanov's belief that the greatest literature in the world was then being written in the Soviet Union. In Lukacs's defense it has to be pointed out that his criticism, although generating in many ways, attempts to grapple with particularities of individual works of literature in a way that was not common at this time amongst Marxist critics.

Since 1960 Marxist literary criticism has reflected the diversities of Marxism in the modern world, and in certain usages today a point is made of dropping the capital 'M' so as to indicate less dependence upon the particular historical individual whose name is borrowed for the term. As a generalization we can say that the less contentious it has become to see literary works in the context of their emergence and

subsequent life, the more Marxist ideas have penetrated literary criticism in general. Committed modern Marxist critics are more likely than their predecessors to be engaged in the study of mediating process: ideology, the 'political unconscious' of the American Marxist Frederic Jameson, the literary modes of production of the British Marxist Terry Eagleton, and the structure of feeling of the Welsh cultural theorist and novelist Raymond Williams. They are also less likely to be happy with a straight forward relegation of literature to the realm of the superstructure. The influential French Marxist Pierre Macherey, for instance, by seeing the writing of literature as a form of production necessarily sees it as more than the simple reflection of economic facts that vulgar Marxism attributed to literature.

as vehicle for non-literary ideas.

Marxist literary criticism analyses literature in terms of the historical conditions which produced it; and it needs, similarly, to be aware of its own historical situations outside it. As a matter of fact, it was quite safe and rather conventional to treat literary works as something referring to a reality outside them. For Marx, the external reality is prior to ideas in the mind and the material word is reflected in the mind and translated into forms of thought.

Lukacs, the best known Marxist literary theoretician, believes that an artist is he who successfully depicts social and historical reality objectively in his literary works as they are inseparable phenomenon. Reflection of the outer reality is the central idea of Lukacs's literary must reflect the dialect of history. But the reality in literary works and the reality in the actual world need not have one to one correspondence. Artistic representation is not photographic as the artist is not a machine. A photographic machine presents everything indifferent as it can't react, whereas, an artist is a sensitive creature, he feels and reacts. So a picture presented in the literary works like

novels, dramas, poems etc. Ultimately passes through the active and sensitive mind of the author. The previous experience and his own liking and disliking influence his interpretation of the world. For Lukacs, the world is chaos from where an artist picks up the required materials. In *The Historical Novel*, Lukacs demands artist to portray reality as it exists. According to Lukacs:

Since reality as a whole is always richer and more varied than even the richest work of art, no episode etc. However exactly copied, however biographically authentic, however factual, can possibly compete with reality. If one wishes to recreate the richness of reality the whole content of life must be refashioned one's composition must take on an entirely new structures. (306)

He argues that an artist, however, should endeavour to portray an all round and comprehensive picture of his time. The universality of such picture depends upon the variety of the characters depicted in a work.

Lukacs also arrays his notions of realism against the ideology and literary forms of modernism.

It is easy to see what ideological inhibitions work against epic biographic portrayal in modern writers. The development of capitalism inevitably alienates writers from popular life, they find it more and more difficult to see into the inner active forces of capitalist society and as a result the same tendency comes to dominate their outlook as dominates the general philosophic development of the imperialist epoch. This tendency may be briefly stated: of all the factors which determine the complex context of life only the

immediate causal connection between two related spatial-temporal phenomena is recognized. (311-2)

Thus, he views the inability of modern writers to talk about the inner active forces of capitalist society by which, ultimately, their outlook is dominated. In his view, the ontological image of the human being as offered by modernists was asocial, alienated and pathologically inept as a political agent: Lukacs reject the power of this image to cast a critique of capitalism not only because it is a historical, but also because it elevates alienation to a seemingly eternal condition of human beings.

Lucien Goldman, the Rumanian critic and George Lukacs's chief disciple, is closer to Georg Lukacs chief disciple, is closer to George Lukacs in his views who is concerned to examine the structure of a literary text for the degree to which it embodies the structure of thought and world vision of the social class or group to which the writer belongs. According to him the social group may be both revolutionary and reactionary. However Goldman tries to co-relate literary works not with the ideology of an individual author but with the 'mental structure of the author's social group' which marks the originality of his theory. By mental structure he means the patterns of ideas and concepts possessed by certain social group. In *Marxism Ideology and Literature*, Cliff Slaughter states that in Goldman's opinion:

(. . .) the structure of the world vision of a social group was postulated as homologues with the structure of the universe of given literary works. The social groups whose life-situation and historical role necessitated a comprehensive vision would normally be found to be social classes. The form of the literary work would be structured in a manner congruent with the relations between whole and part, history and function etc; in the world vision of the class. However, the

structures of the world vision of classes were not conceived as fixed but rather in a constant process of destruction and restructuration as the social group founding it necessary to confront and adopt to or overcome the new problems constantly thrown up by social life. (154)

In Goldmann's view, the creator of a work of art is social class itself. Unlike Russian Formalism, in Goldman's theory, the language is simply the medium of expressing world view of his class which already exists. The success of a work of art depends on how much it expresses the world view of author's class in the same way the greatness of the writer depends on his ability to manifest the worldview of his class coherently which for ordinary is chaotic. Thus the creator of a work of art is not an individual writer but a representative of his class.

What Goldmann is seeking, then, is a set of structural relations between literary text, world vision and history itself. He wants to show how the historical situation of a social group or class is transposed into the structure of a literary work. To do this, it is not enough to begin with the text and work outwards to history, or vice versa; what is required is a dialectical method of criticism which moves constantly between text world vision and history, adjusting each of the others.

Goldman doesn't go more dogmatically regarding the fundamental problems of modern capitalistic bourgeois society. Karl Marx and Frederich Engels opine that the economic discrimination i.e. centralization of means of production in the hands of tiny minority capitalists and destruction of majority of people is the principal question to be solved in the modern capitalist world whereas Goldamann thinks that the fundamental "problematic of modern capitalist societies is no longer located at the level of poverty although poverty remains even in the most advanced industrial countries or even at the level of freedom directly limited by law or external

constraint” (151). thus his concept of social consciousness is Hegelian, idealistic, rather than Marxist: he sees it as the direct expression of a social class, just as the literary work then becomes the direct expression of his consciousness.

But Theodore Adorno, another prominent Marxist philosopher who belongs to the Frankfurt School of Marxism, sees literature as alienation from reality. he regards literature as negative knowledge of the real world, and gives definite value to the works of the modern writers. interior monologue or the stream of consciousness as literary technique was much criticized by Lukacs. Adorno, however, emphasizes the interior monologue, far from cutting the literary work off from reality, can expose the way reality actually is. But for Adorno, this reality is not photographic as for Lukacs and at the same time the duty of the writer is not to give shape to the objective reality preexisting in the society. in this connection, David Forgacs in his essay “Marxist Literary Theories” observes that, “Adorno by negative knowledge doesn’t mean non-knowledge, it means knowledge which can undermine and negate a false or reified condition” (189).

### **Christianity and Its Basic Tenets**

Christianity is a monotheistic system of belief and practice based on the teachings and the life of Jesus of Nazareth as it is recorded in the second section of the Holy Bible called the New Testament. Christians believe Jesus Christ to be the anointed one, the a Messiah sent by God the Father for absolving humanity of the original sin that has come down bringing death and separation from God ever since the primeval fall of Adam and Eve. Originated in Middle East Asia, in Israel two millenniums back, today Christianity boasts the largest number of followers. It is the predominant system of belief in Americas, Europe, and half of Africa. In Asia it is mostly followed in South Korea, Philippines, Thailand, and Singapore. Though it has



made its presence in all the countries of the world in one way or another, in the Middle eastern countries and south Asian countries its followers are still in insignificant number. But considering the burden wholehearted Christians have been taking for taking the words of God to the utmost corner of the earth, as it has been outlined in the last sermon by Jesus Christ before he ascended onto heaven to sit on the right hand side of the Father from whence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead. The last commandment by Jesus was to preach his teachings to all the nations, discipling and baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Christianity gives emphasis on the worthiness of human life only when it is directed by the words of God, so succinctly summarized in the Decalogue or the Ten Commandments delivered to Moses on Mount Sinai written on two slates of stone. The ten laws are the supreme embodiment of spiritual, moral and practical codes of conduct anywhere in the world, except the fact that many unbelievers or non-Christians it is difficult to believe in single God. Some portion of the Ten Commandments, as recorded in the second book of Bible called Exodus, are as follows:

Honour your father and mother.

You shall not kill.

You shall not commit adultery.

You shall not steal.

You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour.

You shall not covet your neighbour's house. . . (20:3-17)

The high moral standard put forth by God himself is irrefutable for any nation and age. Any attempt to build a life for human beings in disregard of God cannot

succeed. In Christianity, God is not indifferent to man's quest for Him. In Genesis of the Bible, it is said of Noah that he walked with God. It shows a deep relation between the superhuman and human. Sin and suffering in Christianity, which are inseparable parts of human beings, are closely relate to each other. The origin of those sins lies in Biblical characters Adam and Eve. However, Christians hold optimistic notion Christ, the father, has already incurred the penalty for all human sins. Such faith in Christianity demonstrates an interesting kinship between God and human.

Faith, hope, charity, peace, order, justice, love, longsuffering, patience, forgiveness are the virtues as preached in the Bible. Lord Jesus says, "My peace I give you, my peace I leave you" (John 3: 28-30). This shows that Jesus bridges the gulf between man and God, and that he does by shedding his holy blood on the cross at the hill of Calvary. He is both the son of God and the son of man who has paid for the mortal sins of all humanity who accept his redeeming name. He is, therefore, called the Saviour, the Redeemer, the Messiah. He loved his fellow beings so much that he sacrificed his life for them. What could be a more moving show of love than the fact that he willingly died for us even while we were sinful, and did not know our fallen nature? His teaching of tolerance, justice, peace and bearing each other are also pivotal to the development of the western societies we see today.

In Titus 3:4, Jesus Christ is spoken of as our savior who is kind and loving: God the father cares for us so much that he sent Jesus to reconcile us to the father and to reveal him to us, so that we can learn to live eternally with heavenly father some day. For God did not send his son into the world to be its judge, but to be its savior" (John 3:16-21). Through his stay on earth Christ kept on making ceaseless effort to alleviate the suffering of the poor and the needy like a father. This implies the qualities of God's character and the nature of his purpose are fully seen in him. The

great and noble terms such as righteousness, kindness, grace, longsuffering, compassion, holiness, etc take on a deeper significance when they are read and understood in the light of Christ as God's living embodiment on earth. God is, therefore, not only the source of creation but also the guiding force in the history of humanity.

Christianity is set of faith. A Christian believes in things unseen and invisible now; because God has said so, it is so. So, Christians are called believers too. But then, the faith of Christians is seen or proved in their acts, because belief without deeds is a dead belief. They do good works not to earn salvation; that is not something human activity can buy. But they do good because God has been so good to them, and wants them to do good to their fellow beings.

Considering these positive and inspiring tenets of Christianity, one can doubtless conclude that it has solutions and antidote to the sins, evils and shortcomings caused by the fallen human nature. It can provide answer to the world suffering from intolerance and division and unrest in all its spheres. It can restore peace, order, justice, integrity among the human beings over the world. It can revitalize human spirit with the sense of meaning, fulfillment and salvation.

But now in the present time, Christianity has been going through a deep crisis from within and an onslaught from without, from the predominantly materialist world. Problems have arisen from birth control through clerical celibacy to high theology veering to ritualism. The traditional concepts of a personalized God, and even serious belief in an afterlife, have given way in whole areas of organized Christianity to something very much like a general pious agnosticism. Even many nominal Christians remain believers only in the sense that the uncleared debris continues to clutter their minds as a means of fantastic imaginations on angels, wish-fulfilling dreams and

some abstract sort of deity who is present when required in trouble and absent when one wants to obey what one's desires dictate one to do.

Furthermore, there are many interpretations as regards the origin of religion whether it is as world influencing as Christianity or some local Nepali or African one. The primitive humanity was overwhelmed by the intricacies and mysteries of nature which it could not rationally explain and understand. Therefore, to make sense of life and the world a system of explanations was needed. Thus the many religions were born among people of different places with different stories of creation, creator and human relationship with the creator. Religion was necessary to the primitive human beings to make a foundation for the metaphysics of human life. That is, if there were no supreme, controlling and awful power as a God, then there would be no controlling bind the vagaries of human heart and mind. Therefore, to give sense and shape to life and behaviour, religions were invented and God or gods created.

Today many believe that Christianity also is one such religion which has come to be universal only because it sets high moral and spiritual standards and laws which irrefutable anywhere in the world, and also because the countries where it was taken earlier happened to be the world powers. So, if any religion is man-made, then it cannot be the way to salvation of human being whether in this world or in the other. The reason is that all God or gods are non-existent notions. So a new system of salvation, or rather freedom and justice is to be propagated. Many people started believing that the path to the salvation in this life can be the political system of equality and justice as proposed in the socialist and ultimately communist theories of thinkers like Karl Marx and Frederic Engels.

The material realities and conditions are in control of human life and they determine the happiness or sorrows of life. Now no longer God/gods who bless life; it

is money and material comfort that comes with possession. At such times, the opportunities for a materialist, realist-seeming Marxist way on interpreting history and social relation in terms of economic factors have a very high stake of winning the trust of the masses deprived of their basic human rights, dignity and the dreams.

### **Christian versus Capitalistic Values**

One would do better to recall what Christ preached about strife and the desire to be rich and the highest here on earth. He preached to go two miles with one if he was called to go a mile, and to give away the shirt too if one is required to give the pantaloons. Further, he taught one must be the humblest, and a servant if one wants to be the greatest in the kingdom of God. Those who are rich here would find it impossible to enter the Kingdom of heave; it could be easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter heaven. Likewise, those who seek the admiration and glory from men will not be accepted by God. Bribery, deception and lechery are deserving sins for hellfire. The strictness of moral rigor and obligation is high in Christianity.

But, in contrast, capitalisms is such a social and economic mode of existence wherein only those who are able to give the impressions of being the best, most circulated and fashionable will survive. It is only with God that checks the heart of the people and decides accordingly. But people judge by appearances, by riches and influence. In a materialistic capitalist society, one is taught from early on to be competitive, throat cutting and cunning, lets he/she should be trampled back due to lack of resources, big names as relations and acquaintances.

A brief look into the historiography of the rise of capitalist order of society is incumbent here. In the primitive phase of social evolution, the epoch of barbarians,

people lived in small kinship groups working together for their common necessities. There was no class division, no exploitation and no need of state. Later the production in all branches increased and a tendency to produce more than to be consumed grew. There was nothing like state, class, and exploitation in the primitive society. That stage of society is often referred to as a sort of primitive communism.

But with the increase of production in all areas of life, human labor produced more than they consumed and this led to necessity of new labor forces for which slaves were kept at their disposal. So the earliest known class-society can be seen in this master-slave economic relationship which developed into owner and employer relationship in the modern times.

By the division of society into classes of exploiters and exploited, the society has engaged into an insoluble contradiction within itself, that it has split into irreconcilable opposite which is powerless to exorcise. Slave-owners and slave was the first important class division. The former group not only owned all means of production, the land and the implements, but also owned people who worked with the means of production. State had to play the role to manage and maintain the affairs and hold class antagonism in check, thereby keeping the poor class downtrodden in the name of law and order. Thus, ironically, state became an apparatus for them to manipulate the production mechanism and to help coerce the exploited class.

With the change in form, the society continued to be more and more conspicuously divided into exploiter and exploited. In the place of slave-owners the feudal lords began to exploit the overwhelming majority of peasant serfs. Later, with the development of trade the world market and money circulation, a new class arose out of the debris of feudal society, that is, the capitalist class. As Vladimir Ulyanov

Lenin, the Russian revolutionary leader and influential writer too, maintains in his noted book *The State and Revolution*:

The owners of capital, the owners of land, the owners of the mills and factories in all capitalist countries constituted and still constitute an insignificant minority of the population who have complete command over the labor of the whole people, and consequently command, oppress and exploit the whole mass of laborers, the majority of whom are proletarian wage workers who procure their livelihood in the process of production only by the sale of their own workers' hand, their labor power. (9)

Thus, capitalism started to flourish. A small aristocratic population of landlords, factory owners and tycoons are continuing with the hated legacy of medieval feudal lords in the existing social system of today. They determine the workers wage, affect the judiciary of nation, interfere in the policy of government and sit pretty on the carefully manipulated situation. We can notice different scales of capitalism maneuver from local to global level.

Appropriation of the value of working people is the sole supporting base for capitalism to thrive. The value of labor power is determined by the amount of labor necessary for its production or, in another word, by the amount needed for the workers to subsist. But on they hand of the capitalist, the labor power employed in the course of the day produces more than they require for sustenance.

The bourgeoisie and the proletariat are the basic classes in capitalist society bourgeoisie in quest of profit exploit the proletariat and this exploitation is identified as capitalism develops. The workers labor is increasingly speeded up and he is

reduced to a mere appendage of the machine. The proletariat especially suffers from such intrinsic features of capitalism as economic crises, unemployment and predatory wars.

The working class naturally cannot reconcile itself to all this. The nature of capitalism which robs the workers of the fruits of their labor and the workers' position in society impel them to take up arms or pens to fight the bourgeoisie. The history of capitalist society is therefore the history of struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. This struggle is law-governed and is the primary source of capitalist development. The struggle of the working class against the bourgeoisie grows especially keen in the epoch of imperialism when the economic and political contradictions of capitalism become extremely acute. With the growth of the proletariat, the economic struggle of the workers in individual factories and districts merges into a common struggle of the working class against the capitalist class as a whole. Ultimately, the class struggle enters its higher political form.

The development of capitalism inevitably leads to solidarity and organization of the proletariat. But to abolish the capitalist system, the proletariat must not only organize as a class, but also become conscious of its class interests, of its great historic mission. For this, revolutionary theory created by Marx, Engels and Lenin.

The tradition of Marxist thought has provided the most powerful critique of capitalist institutions and ethics ever conducted. But the problem with many today is that in a communist or Marxist order of the universe, there is no hope and place for the supernatural, or the divine intervention to upgrade the human condition. In Marxist world view, religion and religious outlooks are man made illusions to soothe the oppressed classes lest they should start demanding equal rights and facilities. In contrast to this Christianity preaches universal brotherhood and sisterhood on the



basis of the claim that God made all human beings and gave them his life sustaining spirit. Therefore, all are equal in his eyes, irrespective of their caste, class and geographical affiliations.

In the novel *The Idiot*, Dostoevsky presents ample critique of the materialist, selfish capitalist social order, but he does not do so in a concerted, organized political theoretical way. Rather, his arguments are based on the Christian moral and theological precepts. Any way, both Christianity and Marxism are opposed to the narrow, money-minded philosophy of capitalist society, but in their own different ways. The novel, ultimately, espouse the selfless, forgiving, and pious Christian principle as the true anodyne to the festering wounds of an increasingly materialist and self-centered society any where in the world. Thus, as the possible cure to the damage done to the majority of the world population by the capitalist way of economic relationship is hoped to be cured only by recourse to a materialist but ethical communist system; or by a spiritual and theological way of Christianity.

### **III: War of Extermination Among Christian and Material Cultures**

#### **The Novel as a Critique of Capitalist Society**

In his hatred of the laws of capitalist society, Dostoevsky achieves remarkable generalizations placing his finger at the very essence of the power of money. Money in a bourgeois society provides originality, intelligence, beauty and love; indeed, it substitutes all human qualities that are not to be bought for money. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that there are moments of scathing criticism made upon characters and attitudes controlled and guided by the worship of the Mammon, the false deity Baal that requires the sacrifice of virtues to gain the material benefits. The novel abounds in instances of such direct critique of the corrupt power and influence of money on people who are ready to worship the moneyed people irrespective of their character and virtue.

Marking the disparity between appearance of nobility and respectability, and the reality of lust, avarice and meanness is what provides power to a work of social criticism and satire. Since *The Idiot* is a novel of social satire and critique, it teems with the motive of this same disparity, providing ample occasion and space for the writer to vent his human but uncontrollable anger upon the internal corruption of the majority of the nineteenth century Russian society in particular and of humanity in general irrespective of any age or geographical boundary. When Jesus said where one's wealth is there their mind is too, he was not speaking of or to his disciple, the Jews, only but to the humanity as a whole. Similarly, when Dostoevsky makes a comment upon the character of his characters, it is not confined to them merely; it can be and has been taken as an observation of the general human condition and nature.

The novel revolves around one principal character, the beautiful and agonized Nastasya Filippovna. Therefore, her story and fate is replete with a profound social significance, creating occasion for the author to breath the truth of life and a lofty art of reflection and representation of human nature. Principally, the persons involved in the intrigue to get possession of the beautiful body and of the accruing wealth of Nastasya Filippovna are representative of social type together. They provide remarkably accurate picture of the aristocratic-bourgeois society that emerged or seen from a historical standpoint after the peasant reform in Russia in 1861. This reform was necessitated by the unbearably miserable condition of the peasant and working classes so much so that they were not in a position even to survive with the minimum health to be able to work and sustain themselves, and more importantly, the landed gentry, the landlord, rich businessmen, and the aristocrats.

First, to look closely, how women are made objects quenching of sexual passion as well as, in some cases, of acquiring social standing that comes by possessing a wife who brings with her marriage a handsome dowry. It is appropriate here to study the four personalities who aspire for the hand of the beautiful but apparently open Nastasya Filippovna. An admirer and connoisseur of beauty, the rich landlord Afanasy Ivanovich Totsky, every inch a gentleman of breeding, judging from the yardstick of the then bourgeois moral values,, is respectability incarnate. People take it for granted that he is a respectable gentleman owing to his some well polished mannerism and the decency of his attires. During a brief visit to one of his estates, he once noticed that a pin-up to-be was being raised in one of his estates. The novelist provides rather elaborate details of this all:

[. . .] he in the family of his German steward a charming child, a girl about twelve, playful, sweet, clever and promising to become

extremely beautiful. On that subject Afanasy Ivanovich was an unerring connoisseur. He only spent a few days on his estate, but he made arrangements for a great change in the girl's education. . . . just four years later this education was over; the governess left, and a lady who lived near another estate of Totsky's in another remote province came by his instructions, and took Nastasy away. On this estate there was also a small recently built wooden house. It was very elegantly furnished, and the place was appropriately called 'The Pleasance.' In the house she found musical instruments, a choice library for a young girl, pictures, engravings, pencils, paints and brushes, a thoroughbred lap-dog, and within a fortnight Afanasy Ivanovich himself made his appearance. . . . Since then he had been particularly fond of that remote property in the steppes and had spent two or three months there every summer. So passed a fairly long time – four years, calmly and happily in tasteful and elegant surroundings. (35)

Here we see plotting and cunning lustful fellow who not at all from any humanitarian or guardian sensibility but from a calculative sexual adventure, gets a girl educated and raises up in most suitable fashion so as to exploit her sexually when she becomes ripe. And he does so for four years, he visits that remote estate of his, exclusively for taking pleasure from the young and succulent physique of Nastasya Filippovna. This is the character of a bourgeois man outwardly every inch a gentleman.

Years later, after he has left visiting her since he has had enough of her bodily juice, Totsky is confronted by the same young woman, but not a submissive and weak one. The moment he is ready to be engaged to a young lady, a rich heiress of a good family. The girl he had exploited has come to the capital at such juncture in search of

vengeance to prevent the respectable marriage and to make his life as troubled as she can. This is a great shock to the formal and correct Totsky. But now he sees that the girl is in no position to be intimidated or pacified, not the least to be bought for money nor by the prospect of a good marriage. Therefore, he has to give this matter his most serious consideration.

As the novel reports, Afansy Ivanovich Totsky had already reached fifty and that he was a man with established habits and tastes, and had achieved a certain position and reputation in society. He loved his person, his peace of mind and his comfort more than anything in the world. Moreover, he could have got rid of the trifle problem of this girl with a sleight of hand at villainy; and she was not in any position to harm him legally. Anyway, he refrains from the marriage because he is something of a coward and also because she has grown so dazzlingly beautiful. "Fascinated by her novelty," the novel tells, "he imagined that he might again make use of this woman." What a comment! As if women were some thing used and reused whenever fit and required. This mercantile, possessive and utilitarian viewpoint towards women is held by the representative personality of Totsky.

This is what the bourgeois society thinks of women. This is the critique Dostoevsky makes out of her upon the same society that values utilitarian consideration over all other in human and social relationship. He has a whole-hearted loathing for the self-lover Totsky, with his respectability and imperturbable decorum.

Dostoevsky enjoys depicting any discomfiture that outwardly gentleman suffers, and has the greatest sympathy for Nastasya Filippovna's feeling of irrevocable contempt and hatred for the dastardly fellow. The nineteenth century Russian society was limited in its perception of the value and humanity of women. Another participant in the web of intrigue woven around Nastasya Filippovna is

Yepanchin, a general of the post-reform type who personifies the vulgarity and commonplace mediocrity. Another person involved in struggle to acquire Nastasya for her wealth is Ivolgin, Yepanchin's private secretary whose ambition is to achieve wealth and influence at any cost. He is so much trebled by his wounded vanity, and lust for money that Nastasya calls him an "importunate beggar" (47) for he literally begs her to marry him.

It is noteworthy to remark that Ivolgin is the key to an understanding of several important features of Dostoevsky's works. This character is the embodiment of the power of money over mankind in a diabolical bourgeois society, and also the power of mediocrity. The indissoluble nexus between the omnipotence of money and the power of ineptitude is reflected by Ivolgin himself in a frank talk with Prince Myshkin. His plans and ambitions are characteristic of a man climbing the ladder in a country that has but recently embarked on the course of capitalistic development. The dowry of 75,000 rubles that Totsky has settled upon Nastasya has prompted this lackey of nobilities to get that sum through marriage with her. Though he declares to Myshkin that it is not through mercenary motives that he is seeking the marriage but rather because he is following his inclinations and passions, he is as much of a money-grubber by hook or by crook as every one else around him are.

He knows the power of money in an extremely materialist society. Therefore he wants to be a moneyed person at any cost, and does not hide his intention of being one. His desire for money is expressed in the following line he utters in his conversation with his acquaintance, Prince Myshkin:

You offend me more than Epanchin, who, without discussion, without having tried to tempt me, in the simplicity of his heart, note that, he believes me capable of selling my wife. That has made me savage for a

long time, and I want money. When I have money, I shall become a highly original man. What's most low and hateful about money is that even talent can be bought with it, and will be, till the end of the world.

(115)

This money-worshipping tendency is a bit deeply expressed by Rogozhin, the merchant obsessed with the passion of getting Nastasya Filippovna for himself. His father's craze for money has become in the son a passion for women, but both feelings are marked by the morose possessiveness, his character symbolized by his gloomy and sinister house, his world of warehouses with their massive padlocks, his bleak world of buying and selling. Only a great writer like Dostoyevsky could have the reader aware that Rogozhin's love reeks of filthy lucre. He actually bids a hundred thousand rubles for Nastasya against Totsky's seventy-five thousand, as though that woman has come under his liability and possession. Unforgettable is the price he offers for her, "the heavy roll of notes, five inches thick, stoutly and tightly wrapped in a copy of the "Brizheviye Vedomosti". Since it is the price he has put on Nastasya, she assumes it to be hers and proposes to burn it, letting Ivolgin the man of Napoleonic pride and equal lust for money, to try to get it out of the fire. Here is how she puts the terms herself for the compensation of Ganya Ivolgin:

"Then listen, Ganya; I want to see into your soul for the last time. You have been torturing me for three months past, now it's my turn. You see this roll, there are a hundred thousand rubles in it! I'm just going to throw it into the fire, before every one, all are witnesses. As soon as the fire has got it all alight, put your hands into the fire, only without gloves, with your bare hands and turn back your sleeves, and pull the bundle out of the fire. If you can pull it out, it's yours, the whole

hundred thousand. You will only burn your fingers a little – but it's hundred thousand, think of it! It won't take long to pull out. And I shall admire your spirit, seeing how you put your hands into the fire for my money. All are witnesses that the bundle shall be yours. And if you don't, then it will burn; I won't let any one touch it. Stand away! Every one stand back! It's my money! It's my wages for a night with Rogozhin. Is it my money, Rogozhin?' (160)

By thus burning the bundle of hundred thousand rubles, she achieves the objectives at a single go: that of testing the character of Ganya at the superficial level, but at the deeper level, of expressing her deep hatred, mistrust and cynicism of the materialist Russian nobility which takes money as the insurance for a happy life. The foul and evil-smelling maelstroming of a money-carazed society threatens to engulf Nastasya Filippovna: intent on marrying one General Yepanchin's daughters — a former attempt to contract a marriage was simply forestalled by Nastasya Filippovna's threat of a terrific scene in public — Totsky wants to make a assurance double sure by marrying her off as the only heiress of the hundred thousand rubles. This burning of the hundred thousand rubles is the climax of the anti-capitalist theme in Dostoyevsky's novel. How better to create a pungent defiance of a money-minded culture than to make a woman socially and sexually exploited by the money-grubbers burn down the money in front of them?

In the same line of her explosion of hatred against her mentor and exploiter, Nastasya expresses with audacious clarity her refusal to go on accepting any more charity and patronage from Totsky. She puts it very clearly that she is no longer to remain his pet, as somebody hired to quench his sexual passion and deign to his pride of nobility. The novelist makes appropriate observation of such moments, because, as



it has been maintained by this paper, it is his own dissatisfaction with his society that is corrupt and money-worshipping but pretends to harbor sublime virtues:

Nastasya Filippovna broke in suddenly. 'Did you mean to say that? Don't deny it, you certainly mean to say that. Afansy Ivanovitch, I had forgotten to add, take back the seventy-five thousand, and let me assure you that I set you free for nothing. It's enough! It's time you too were free. Nine years and three months! Tomorrow, a new leaf; but today is my birthday, and I am doing what I like for the first time in my whole life. General, you too take back your pearls; give them to your wife; here they are. Tomorrow I shall leave this flat for good, and there shall be no more parties, friends.' (144)

In a society, in the context of this paper the nineteenth century Russian middle class or bourgeois society, that values monetary strength as the surest and perhaps only way means to a safe and successful life, every human conduct is oriented in the materialistic gain of one or another sort. Marriage too was not spared this consideration by the to the core materialist society in nineteenth century Europe. Russian society was not intact from this mode of thinking. As a result, marriage became an institution whereby to secure one's familial connection to a high status family, and thereby acquire the facility accruing to such a family. The role of the parents in such a society was to become an unseen onlooker who was ready at the slightest possibility of their ward likely to make a wrong choice, but as long as the child was likely to run after a wealthy and renowned person, they kept quiet. The right choice, of course, never meant good character and intellectual nobility, though that was no disadvantage if only the candidate happened to be well-off really, though later quality would have been acceptable by itself. Such state of affair is poignantly

commented upon and ridiculed by the seemingly naïve but really sharp scrutinizing eyes of Dostoevsky in the early pages of the novel while describing a family in which every one is absorbed in the pursuit of getting connected with the high circle:

All that would be left for the parents to do would be to keep an unflagging and, as far as possible, unnoticeable watch over them, that they might make no strange choice and show no unnatural inclination; and then to seize a fitting moment to come to their assistance with all their strength and influence to bring things to a finish. The mere fact, too, that their fortune and social consequence was growing every year in geometrical progression made the girls gain in the marriage market as time went on. (33)

Such mercantile and mercenary concern and watch out of the parents over their daughters is carried in a materialist and money-minded society. The reason is that in such a society one's success in life is counted in terms of the social standing one acquires in property and monetary matter. The noble values of real education, humanitarian sensibility, and good moral character do not make much sense. Thus, for the sake of appearance, they also become the virtues if only on a pretended grounds:

Madam Epanchin was jealous of the dignity of her family. What must it have been for her to hear without the slightest preparation that this Prince Myshkin, the last of the family, of whom she had heard something already, was no better than a poor idiot, was almost a beggar, and was ready to accept charity! The general reckoned him making an effect, impressing her at once, turning her attention in

another direction and avoiding the question of the pearls under cover of this sensation. (45)

The pride in a family name or genealogy is nothing but the vanity of people who have nothing in themselves to be proud of. The hollow pride of family name is nothing but the expression of one who has nothing of human virtues than the practice of dropping names.

Kolya is a boy of about fourteen, still a fresh soul, unslurred and undestroyed by the materialist attitude of the age. He can comment shamelessly about the corrupted society and money-minded gentry as it is shown in his conversation with Prince Myshkin. Dostoevsky take the occasion to pass comment and judgment upon his more corrupted fellow beings:

And what is there in them, the sensible people? They are all money-grubbers, every one of them. Ippolit justifies usury, he says it is right; he talks about an economic upheaval, the ebb and flow of capital, confound them! It vexes me to hear it from him, but he is exasperated. Only fancy, his mother, the captains widow, you know, gets money from the general and lends it him at high interest! It's a horrible disgrace! (124)

### **Biblical Reference in the Novel**

The novel *The Idiot* is, blandly speaking based on a most serious theme, one taken from the Bible. As it is recorded in the Bible, the light and redeemer of the world, the only begotten son of God came to the world, preaching them repentance of and forgiveness of sins, but the world did not accept him because it wanted to indulge in its sins committed in the darkness. It so much despised the son of God and the

savior of mankind that even some of those suffering the same fate as his while on the cross had fun of him challenging him to save himself if he was really the son of God and the anointed man of God. He was humiliated, called a fool, called him a full master of the devils, Beelzebub, and what not. He was made to shed his innocent blood for the atonement of our transgressions and sins, as a unblemished lamb is sacrificed for appeasing the wrath of God.

The world, as the Bible records, is antagonistic to and very different from the godly qualities as exemplified by Christ and the response of the majority of the people towards him. Similarly, the very title of Dostoevsky's novel reflects the childlike innocence and humble suffering Christ bore for our sins. In the context of the novel, it is Prince Myshkin who is compared with a sheep, lamb, and is frequently termed a fool, an idiot even to his face by his colleagues. The concern of the novelist over the loss of innocence, trustworthiness, purity and natural love for each other in his fellow countrymen roused him much, so that he had to write a novel, dedicating his heartfelt sympathy for an innocent hero, but at the same time making it inevitable that such innocence cannot survive in this throat cutting materialist society.

Therefore novel abounds in many references directly to the Bible, which only shows how much Dostoevsky was convinced that only the divine words and intervention could uplift and heal the corrupted humanity of his times. There are meaningful and suggestive allusions to Bible in the novel whose significance which one cannot miss even at a cursory reading of the novel.

Lebedyev is interested in interpreting the contemporary industrial development and the problems of ruin of environment in terms of the ruins as forecast and envisioned by Saint John the Divine as it is recorded in the Holy Bible. He thus interprets the section of the third horse:

‘Yes, I am a great hand at interpreting the Apocalypse; I’ve been interpreting it for the last fifteen years. She agreed with me that we are living in the age of the third horse, the black one, and the rider who has the balance in his hand, seeing that everything in the present age is weighed in the scales and by agreement, and people are seeking for nothing but their rights – “a measure of wheat for a penny and three measures of barley for a penny”; and yet they want to keep a free spirit and a pure heart and a sound body and all the gifts of God. But by rights alone they won’t keep them, and afterwards will follow the pale horse and he whose name was death and with whom hell followed . . . .

(186)

Lebedyev is, as Prince Myshkin says of him, more open in the evening after some drinking bouts. He is open and given to criticizing what he terms an atheist and corrupt society of so-called intellectuals and scientists, as his harangue on this topic bears it all:

‘But in the evening more open! In the evening more hearty and open!’

Lebedyev turned to him warmly. ‘More open-hearted and definite, more honest and honorable; and although I am exposing my weak side to you, no matter. I challenge you all now, all you atheists. With what will you save the world, and where have you found a normal line of progress for it, you men of science, of industry, of co-operation, of labour-wage, and all the rest of it? With what? With credit? What credit? Where will credit take you? (348-9)

Lebedyev's pondering upon the causes and effects of poverty is worth citing here.

How movingly and touchingly he talks about the poor condition of the people and the pitiful and disturbing effect it creates upon a feeling, sensitive heart:

I couldn't endure the scurrying, hustling people, everlastingly dreary, worried and preoccupied, flitting to and fro about me on the pavement. Why their everlasting gloom, uneasiness, and bustle, their everlasting sullen spite (for they are spiteful, spiteful, spiteful). Whose fault is it that they are miserable and don't know how to live, though they've sixty years of life before them? Why did Zarnitzym let himself die of hunger when he had sixty years of life before him? And each one points to his rags, his toil-worn hands, and cries savagely "We toil like cattle, we labour, we are poor and hungry as dogs! Others don't toil, and don't labour, and they are rich!" (367)

Good can be done and must be done at individual level. That was what Christ also taught to his disciples and through them to the whole of humanity. That any one who provides a bowl of cool drinking water or visits the prisoners at the prison house, or feed the hungry ors clothes the naked really serves the Lord in his caring motives. This supreme virtue of altruism is appreciated in the pages of the Holy Book as we turn to its pages we read many incidents wherein love and care for each other is taken as the second greatest commandment, the first one being that one should love the God with all his might, heart and mind. As it is observed by Lebedyev, any one who attacks individual charity, attacks human nature and casts contempt upon personal dignity. The organizations of public charity and the problem of individual freedom are two distinct questions, and not mutually exclusive.

In this respect, a tale of a caring father is recounted. He was a paragon of care and love towards the most dejected and rejected ones, the prisoners. The father used to treat them all with love and feeling, with equal respect, for being a man of God, he was no respecter of persons. For all human beings have sinned, and, as it says in the book of the Roman, all have fallen short of the glory of God; it is equality that governs all in term of sin and forgiveness. The father seems to have understood this fact; therefore he tries to treat the prisoners with human touch and compassion, hoping to bring change internal in them by the words of God. He gives the hymn books to them who can read so that when they sing and chant the hymns to the literate ones would reach the ones who cannot read the hymns. Thus, to the scribe of these lines personally, is one of the most moving and most sublime moment in the novel when one inspired by the providence provided care and word to the needy and rejected ones. Here goes a rather lengthy introduction to him:

He spent his whole life visiting prisons, and prisoners; every party of exiles to Siberia knew beforehand that the 'old General' would visit them on the Sparrow Hills. He carried out this good work with the greatest earnestness and devotion. He would turn up, walk through the rows of prisoners, who surrounded him, stop before each, questioning each of his needs, calling each of them 'my dear' and hardly ever preaching to any one. He used to give them money, send them the most necessary articles – leg-wrappers, under garments, linen, and sometimes took them books of devotion, which he distributed among those who could read, firmly persuaded that they would read them on the way, and that those who could read would read them to those who

could not. . . . All the criminals were on an equal footing with him, he made no distinction between them. (376)

This indifferent seeming but really touching care extended by the father to the prisoners being take to Siberia speaks some important truths aloud. First, if only each capable individual only learnt to be heedful of the feeling, and needs of other, as the father was, then there would be no question of strife and dissatisfaction over trivialities in human society. This would have been an idealistic model of state, as envisaged by the Christian community, the Church, as it is outlined in the book of The Acts of the Apostles wherein in the fellow believers shared, even selling their landed property, among themselves what was needful and thus lived a true community life and fellow feeling. This model of society is sharply in contrast to the one promoted in a capitalist, self-centered, and that cutting society wherein economic gain is aimed at every other cost, be that theological, moral or familial. The suggestion of the novel is clear, that such a competitive society merely helps in fulfilling early the apocalypse of Bible that in those later days people will be devoid of natural love, will be selfish, money minded, greedy and unfeeling.

### **Materialistic Problems and Christian Solutions**

The world today after a century is no worse than it was in the nineteenth century that Dostoyevsky lived in and felt disgusted with. The world was no less sinful and vicious six thousand years ago when Moses received the Ten Commandments. It was no less depraved two thousand years ago when Jesus had to come in human form to redeem the world once and for all by paying by his blood for all its transgressions. The novel is rich in allusions from the Holy Scripture. Some of them are explained here below to indicate how they are suggested as the antidote to the materialist problem of the modern world.



In the very title of this novel and in the portrait of its main character, Dostoyevsky lays polemic stress on the conflict between reason and the heart. Prince Myshkin, the hero of the story, a frail and sickly epileptic without the least education, proves wiser than others who have every worldly advantage over him in wealth and education and are proudly aware of this advantage. He finds no difficulty in solving the most complex problems of human relations, in which his “betters” are hellos since they are guided only by their selfishness. It may be that the author associated this character with the figure of a simpleton in Russian folk-lore, Ivan the Fool, who by his simplicity outwits the wisdom of the wise, Indeed, from the viewpoint of pedestrian commonsense, Prince Myshkin is, to say the least, a crank. He is selfless, so much so that all egoistic passions, and above all the lust for money, are alien to his character; he is sincere and truthful, and he has a genuine love for people. He is charmingly naïve. Sensitive to a degree, he is always ready to sacrifice himself, without the least reserve, for others. If thought or consciousness is a disease, then Prince Myshkin is the personification of a healthy spirit. But his ailment does not hamper his serenity of spirit, but, on the contrary, enhances it, making him the superior of these who, speaking conventionally, are *healthy* since the latter – morally speaking –are sick people poisoned by overriding selfishness, lust for money, and a striving to wallow in the sordid interests of this world. He has the pure faith of a child; his soul is childlike, and it is this that makes him wiser than all around him. Unlike Dostoyevsky’s rationalistic characters, with their morbid and painful dualism Myshkin knows no conflict between the mind and the soul, between good and evil.

‘The principal idea of the novel,’ Dostoyevsky wrote to his niece Ivanovna when he began work on the book – incidentally the first edition was dedicated to her –“is the depiction of a positive hero. There is nothing in the world more

difficult than that, especially today. All writers, not only in our country but even in Europe, who have tackled the problem of the depiction of the positively beautiful, have met with failure, because this is an immense task. The beautiful is an ideal, and an ideal has been brought forward neither here nor in Europe.” This biographical and authorial admission makes it clear that the writer had full sympathy with the innocent, trusting and compassionate quality of his protagonist.

In his reflection on the character of his positive hero Dostoyevsky compared him with Don Quixote and attributed the fascination both of Cervantes' hero and his own to the fact that they are both the embodiment of a beauty that is not aware of its own worth. Dostoyevsky's keen analysis of Don Quixote's universal fascination may indeed be applicable to Prince Myshkin. This however is not the sole reason for a comparison of these two characters. They also have in common their disavowance from the realities of life and their utopianism. But the tragedy lies in the fact that, despite his effort to save a ruining life as that of Nastasya Filippovna, Myshkin fails on both accounts. His love is tinged with suffering, pity and compassion but that serves to humiliate her more. She has to decide not to marry him; for he is so noble in her eyes that she cannot think of disgracing such a noble heart by being tied up with him.

Myshkin is incapable of offering her or any body else for that matter, a simple, earthly, human love. At one time it seems as if his feeling for the young daughter of the Ipanchins, Aglaya, approaches the human and the earthly love. But again he plays a fatal role in the life of this young girl who is seeking for some ideal, some way out of her vulgar and materialistic environment, and who loves Myshkin in an earthly and human way. She thinks him to be above the banal strife of selfishness, pettiness and

callousness of the money-minded society though acknowledging that she herself is a member of the same.

Thus, in his relation to these two women, as well as with other people, Myshkin proves utterly incapable of bringing any light into the life of others or of opposing even slightly the general lust for wealth and the power of blind and overwhelming passion. On the contrary, he himself falls victim to the play of passion of others. The novel thus bears witness to the moral miserable failure of the best character of the novel and of the novelist as well. The novel seems to be suggesting, by the failure of Myshkin that the kingdom of truth and justice is not of this world. The failure of this noble character thus can be understood on a higher plane: it is not his personal failure; rather it is the postponement of the establishment of the eternal kingdom of God till the Son come in the cloud with a host of trumpets blown by his heavenly angels.

Prince Myshkin is a universal appeaser, who preaches the idea that all estates and hostile groups should be united, and is opposed to the corruption of society, which Dostoyevsky considered the principal feature of his time. He defined the theme of his novel *The Hobbledehoy* as that of the decay of society. There is a figure of vastly greater importance to Dostoyevsky than that of Don Quixote, a queer but very human character in the novel of the same title by Portuguese writer Miguel Cervantes, namely the figure of Christ, with whom Myshkin is compared in the deepest undercurrent of the story. In his notes prior to the writing of the novel, Dostoyevsky wrote; "Prince Myshkin is Christ." Myshkin's very "appearance" after an absence of many years spent in solitude in the diabolical complexity of life. Purity is trampled underfoot in this world and beauty is defiled and desecrated.

What is it, then, that this modernized Christ has brought with his coming? Will he be able to calm seething passions, slave suffering and unite people in a feeding of love? In what action and which relations with others is the character and mission of this positive hero displayed? In fact, he fails to save any body, not least Nastasya. It is not because the power of truth, beauty and compassion has diminished; these virtues are as beloved and appreciated by God as they were, since the book of Genesis tells that God created everything in six days and was pleased with His creation because it was good and beautiful. It is the failure of the corrupted humanity to accept and appreciate truth and beauty, fellow-feeling and compassion.

The beautiful Nastasya Filippovna is pensive too; her years, though young she is, have taught her to assume a thoughtful, even sad countenance even at this age. This fact does not go unnoticed by Prince Myshkin when he first sees her portrait. He notices that her eyes are lit up by deep thoughts, because she has been accustomed to thinking from her early age. Her seducer, Totsky, a subtle connoisseur of beauty, had sort of bought her and educated her for the purpose of his enjoyment wither young years. Her expressions therefore, are disdainful though they are passionate. The disdain she contains is for such corrupt and lustful people in the society as Totsky.

The beauty of Nastasya Filippovna is the one trampled and exploited by the world's lust and greed. The prince does not fail to notice its depth and, if given an opportunity, redeeming power, like that of Christ's' redeeming power of love. The novelist provides a detailed study of Myshkin's impression regarding her:

He felt an urge to delve into the secret of the face that had so recently evoked his amazement. That impression had hardly left him, and he now hastened to verify something that welled up in him. This face, of such rare beauty and some other intangible quality, now engrossed him

even more. It seemed that it bore the imprint of some boundless pride and disdain, almost hatred, but at the same time it had something trustful, something surprisingly simple-hearted. This contrast, when one looked at these features aroused a kind of compassion. The dazzling beauty was almost unbearable — the beauty of that pale face, its slightly hollow cheeks, the blazing eyes; a strange beauty!” (72)

This is tragic theme of beauty which is aware of its own worth but also knows that it has been ravaged and blasphemed. This beauty is proud, as real beauty always is, but also is imbued with contempt, almost hatred. This is an outraged beauty, a beauty that has been crucified, like Jesus was crucified at Calvary on a cross. Nastasya's beauty is in need of protection, it is in jeopardy in a money-crazed world. Seeing such a beauty as exemplified by her, the Prince is led into believing that it will be redeemed. But like so many of his ideals, it too is rejected, for the beauty itself is in need of protection and is finally destroyed by that world. Actually, by the end of the novel, Nastasya loses her reason. Even beauty is not spared by such a hatred-ridden society as the nineteenth century Russia. The success of the novel lies in that the unsavory combination of beauty and sanity rends the heart of Prince Myshkin and the readers too. Nastasya Filippovna is driven mad and then is murdered by those around her. The process of assault in her existence was begun by the rich and corrupt landowner Totsky, and then it was completed in the physical level by the ravenous merchant Rogozhin.

While recounting his treatment in Switzerland by a doctor named Schneider, Prince Myshkin also takes the time to tell that he was called a child by the doctor. He

thus tells of what the doctor thought of the patient that was under his custody for two years and whom he had greatly improved with genuine care and treatment:

At last Schneider uttered a very strange thought – it was just before I went away. He told me that he had come to the conclusion that I was a complete child myself, altogether a child; that it was only in face and figure that I was like a grown-up person, but that in development, in soul, in character, and perhaps in intelligence, I was not grown up, and that so I should remain, if I lived to be sixty. (67)

Rogozhin knows that the Prince is very innocent and harmless, like a sheep. The very term he uses while accusing Ganya of offending such a good-natured person as the Prince is “sheep” (108). One is reminded of Jesus as the Lamb of God, the unblemished lamb who was sacrificed for absolving the human race of the original sin committed by the first couple Adam and Eve:

The picture represented Christ who has only just been taken from the cross. I believe artists usually paint Christ, both on the cross and after He has been taken from the cross, still with extraordinary beauty of face. They strive to preserve that beauty even in his most terrible agonies. In Rogozhin’s picture there is no trace of her strive to preserve that beauty even in his most terrible agonies. In Rogozhin’s picture there is no trace of beauty. It is in every detail the corpse of a man who has endured infinite agony before the crucifixion; who has been wounded, tortured, beaten by the guards and the people when He carried the cross on his back and fell beneath its weight, and after that has undergone the agony of crucifixion, lasting for six hours at least (according to my reckoning). It’s true it’s the face of a man only just

taken from the cross – that is to say, still bearing the traces of warmth and life. (380-81)

This crucified picture of Christ should not fail to tell the corrupted humanity today that has been more and more sinking into the quagmire of crimes, treachery, hypocrisy, and every other conceivable sin, that Christ had to suffer on the cross so that all their sins, of the past and future be purged by his precious and holy blood. This is a most revealing thing to any sinful person, and all have sinned judging from the standard of the holiness of God. That means, it was only the infinite mercy and forgiving nature of God the father who sent the Son to the earth in human form to take all the sins in his suffering. Then, why are men today busy in following their own paths of salvation, when the Son has already declared and proved that he is the only way, life and truth through him people can come to the Father?

This message of Christianity has to spread today to the millions who are dying without knowing what a wonderful plan of salvation God has made for them. It may seem impossible in today's mercantile world where without money nothing can be had, but God's gift of salvation is totally a free gift, only the condition being that one has to accept the inherently sinful nature of humanity, repent for one's sins, and accept Jesus Christ as the anointed son of God who came down to cleanse our sins by facing the death of the cross and rose on the third day from the grave and is now sitting on the right hand side of the father, waiting for the gospel or the good news to be spread to all and each in the world and suddenly he will come to take up his followers, and to judge the quick and the dead.

In the final analysis, the central theme of the novel appears to be love, all redeeming love. It was the unconditional love of God that made him send his beloved son to die for the sins of human beings of all ages. He showed his love in that Christ

who came to suffer for us while we were still sinners in the eyes of God. In the novel, it is the compassionate love, mingled with pity, as embodied in Myshkin's feelings toward Nastasya Filippovna, that is the hope for the world.

Dostoevsky has succeeded in depicting a sweet and pure man in opposition to the evil and oppressive power of money. But he has created a dualism in his treatment of Nastasya Filippovna whom he both exalts and humiliates at times. But final compassion of the author rests with her. She is the victim of the lustful love of many, including the final attack of the possessive and almost demonic Rogozin whose love for her takes a murderous turn. This is how the world often treats beauty—it either wants to have it all for itself, or if that is not possible, it will destroy the beauty. The possessive and accumulating instinct is at the heart of capitalist mode of production and consumption. It also is the ideology of socialism though wrapped in much subtler guises than that of capitalism. But the spirit of love and forgiveness are never possessive and consumption-oriented. They are liberative and redemptive. This dualism accounts for the appeal the novel has upon the readers.



#### IV. Conclusion

In the very little of the novel *The Idiot* and in the portrait of its main character Dostoyevsky lays polemic stress on the conflict between the corruption and altruism. Prince Myshkin, the main character of the story who is a frail and sickly epileptic without the least education, proves wiser than others who have every worldly advantage over him in wealth and education and are proudly aware of this advantage. He finds no difficulty in solving the most complex problems of human relations, in which his "betters" are helpless since they are guided only by their selfishness. He is charmingly naive. Sensitive to a degree, he is always ready to sacrifice himself, without the least reserve, for others. His ailment does not hamper his serenity of spirit. On the contrary, it makes him superior of those who, speaking conventionally, one healthy, since the latter-morally speaking-are sick people poisoned by overriding selfishness and lust for money.

The novel studied in this thesis is a serious pondering upon the theme of the clash between the good and the bad. One is led to ask what happens when the ideal human being comes into the real world which is not so or at all ideal. The answer is not heartening; as the case of Myshkin shows, the truth is manipulated and polluted for the love of money and self-interest. Dostoyevsky intended to represent Prince Myshkin not only as a saint but even as a reincarnation of Christ. He felt that his society was threatened by the greedy god Baal, antagonist to God, and tempting men towards materialism. After being associated with the materialistic ideologies of capitalism and communism, Dostoevsky came to believe in the power of Orthodox love to save Russians from the increasing threat of spiritual death posed by socialism and capitalism.

The novel *The Idiot* is the story of the brief sojourn in Russia of Prince Myshkin, the last of an invalid gentleman, the last of an aristocratic family who arrives there from a mental home in Switzerland and returns to it a few months later. By recounting the events in the brief episodes of this epileptic and to the world abnormal youth, the novelist Fyodor Dostoevsky takes occasion to vehemently comment upon the inherently corrupt aristocratic and bourgeois Russian society of his times. But this critique of a Russian money-grubbing middle-class and hypocrite nobility is a universal critique of the insincere and materialist humanity as we see and face today. The world has gone sour and so has the life of the people, especially the poor and the honest ones. Therefore, a divine intervention is required and in order to take place. Only the intervention of God would redeem the world. Or, better, only accepting his standard and way of salvation, as proclaimed by Jesus Christ is the hope for the world stifled by materialist and petty considerations. This is the spiritual antidote suggested by the novel as a cure to the spiritually and morally dying world today. In the novel's characters, it is only Prince Myshkin and Nastasya Filippovna who do not succumb to the tyranny of the deity Baal, or the power of money. They, embodying love and beauty, defy the enchantment of materialism. The novelist has quite succeeded in conveying this message of spiritualism through the novel.

In the novel *The Idiot* Dostoevsky attempts to portray the ideal man, a positively beautiful individual, as it exemplified in the person of Prince Myshkin. Prince Myshkin represents all the qualities deemed the best aspects of a human being. He is frank and open; he does not plot in the dark after having dined and whined with his friends. He says what is in his mind, and does not take unnecessary offences at petty retorts or accusations. He is also very meek and ready to accept his faults and ready to forgive others their failings. He actually does not think about himself; but

thinks how best he can serve others in any way possible. His altruism and compassion, in fact, remind one of the supreme sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Such seemingly perfect humanitarian sensibilities and virtues, sadly, are not recognized by this materialistic world occupied by the sense of self-fulfillment, geocentricism and lust for money at any cost.

In the novel, there are instances which reveal how the novelist explored the idea of redemption in a series of characters who are condemned to death. The last moment cancellation of their death penalty provides them the opportunity to realize the importance of life and time. Though they were once sinners, now they see new light and meaning in their life and try to live better. Prince Myshkin lives among such people, recounts their stories and tries to provide the moral and spiritual support to the needy. This makes him loved and liked by all. This is the redeeming capacity of love and self-sacrifice, the qualities appreciated as true Christian elements.

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