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Editor: Saikat Banerjee

**Editor:** Dr. Saikat Banerjee  
Assistant Professor, Department of English  
Assam Don Bosco University



## **Underdogs as Protagonist: in the play *Caucasian Chalk Circle* of Brecht**

**Subhash Kumar Saroj**

Assistant Professor  
Dept. of English, CMP College  
University of Allahabad, Prayagraj.

**Abstract:** In this paper, I propose to search out the justification of the socially unprivileged class. I have even chosen to deal with the heroes of Bertolt Brecht; as heroes and protagonists in most of his plays belong to working-class society. Before going any further the term underdog ought to be understood in an exceedingly clear sense. What does the term underdog mean? The word is generally used in-game to address the person who is at loss. But the term is used also in defining the status of a person in society. In simple words, an underdog is a person who has little status in society and the person is supposed to be loser not the winner. Defining the underdog Susan Niditch says, "The person is least likely to succeed and does succeed with the use of native wisdom, physical prowess, or with the help of an agent, human or divine." In case an underdog achieves the desired thing and gets a good position in society, life, and career, the upper – class society gets upset by the person and his achievement. They did not hope it to happen so. Typically it is found that the underdog is at an obstacle in life and different fields owing to injustice, discrimination, and negligence of the upper- category of the society done towards them. They're victims of the society of the upper- class. They are with less power, money, respect, etc. than the remainder of society. There is least probability to succeed or win within the competition of life and different areas conjointly. They live in adversity, in an exceedingly position of inferiority and that they have little livelihood to grow, develop and flourish in life. The underdog despite the inferiority, discrimination, and inequality done towards them, they fight to try and do their utmost and best in their fields. By doing well, they become heroes within the eyes of individuals.

**Keywords:** Underdogs, Alienation Effect, Working – Class, Proletariat, protagonist.



Brecht was born in 1898 in Augsburg. He was interested in writing from his childhood. During the First World War at the age of seventeen, he wrote an article regarding the death of a soldier by the title 'it is sweet to die for the fatherland.' This essay gives the echo of the same theme in the poem 'Dulce et Decorum Est' by Wilfred Owen a soldier-poet. Brecht later expressed this thinking of war in the play *Life of Galileo*. It was a counter reply to the quotation, Dulce et Decorum Est, Pro Patria Mori, which means it is sweet and honors to die for one's country. He opined that only fool think so to die for once country. He worked in different means and different strata of life. When Brecht was writing during that time the deprived and parasitic class of society was in a very miserable condition. He had a soft corner for them. He believed that poetry should be written in simple words. It seems he was influenced by the romantic poet John Keats. Keats has said. "If poetry does not come as naturally as leaves to branch, it had better not to come at all." In simple words, as it can be said best words in the best orders make a poem. He was also influenced by Kipling. Brecht too, like Kipling, was interested in men of action. Kipling was an imperialist and was interested in the expansion of the regional empire, while Brecht was concerned with building a socialist empire; while Brecht wanted to create an atmosphere of values around him and to have a place especially formed for working-class poetry. But other aspects of Kipling's work that fascinated Brecht were his dealings with an exotic world-India, Africa, America. Yet the world of Kipling was populated with ordinary people like Tommy Atkins, Danny Deever, O'Kelly and some of them were soldiers, sailors, and most of the men of working-class background. This gave Brecht exactly that consignment of the ordinary people. He invented and contributed the Alienation Effect to the world of drama, which before him were unnoticed. The alienation effect is a device of breaking the emotional identification of actors with the characters they perform and an emotional detachment of the audience with the incidents, events, and happenings of the play being shown on the stage. He wrote many plays which dealt with working-class people. He died in 1956 in Berlin.

In the plays of Brecht, generally it is seen that a protagonist is an ordinary person of lower-class society. Brecht presents the core life of people as they really are in their life and their life



together in society. As he has said, in his letters which are compiled as a book by John Willet *Brecht on theatre: Development of an Aesthetic* that he wants to show the people as they really or not making the illusion of life? And his plays reflect the real life of poor people. He presents the hardships and miseries of working-class people and their lives in a very simple and effective way. Because he opines that the simplest way of living is an art in itself. Epic theatre of Brecht is a working-class theatre. The working class (so-called labor and proletariat class in the Marxist sense), are the people who are employed for wages, especially in manual labor occupations and industrial work. The working class only relies upon their earnings from wage labor, thereby; this class consists of the working population of industrialized economies and rural working areas.

In Marxist theory and socialist literature, the term working class is often used reciprocally with the term proletariat. It contains in it all the workers who dispense the physical and mental labor in turn to produce economic values for the owners of production. To define the working class in accordance with Marxists and socialists, the working -class are peoples all those who have nothing else with them except than their labor-power and skills to sell out in return of money. In this sense, it includes both the white and blue-collar workers, manual and mental workers of all types, excluding only those individuals who gain their income from business ownership and from the labor of other ones. Like Marxist Brecht holds the same notion regarding the working class. He founded a theatre for working – class and called it Berliner Ensemble. He wanted to bring the stage at such level that working- class could see the changes and suffering that are subject to their life. He calls his theatre a working-class theatre and defines working-class theatre thus:

‘If any theatre is capable of going ahead of its public instead of after it, then is the theatre of the working - class. But going ahead does not mean excluding the public from the share in what is being produced but withdrawn from him; he is not to be led but to make his decision. Going means to be ahead of its public interest.’



He wanted to show the reality of their life, not the one which they wanted to see in the theatre. He seems to find less point among the rich or upper-class people than among the ordinary men. He wanted to change the nature of our social class.

The heroes of his early plays, as may be seen, are self-indulgent, war-profiteers, gangsters, and revolutionaries who are generally cowards. This is largely on account of the reason that his characters, like him, do not make show of anything like chivalry and poignancy. For according to him, Heroism can only happen when one makes the lively presentation of all contradictory qualities in all circumstances. It means behaving heroically in all the difficult situations. To quote G.B. Shaw here, as he has written in the play *Arms and the Man* "Soldiering is the coward's way of attacking mercilessly when you are the strong, and keeping out of harm's way away when you are weak." He advocates for every man to act in all circumstances with decency, responsibility, and humor. And it should be thought as his duty even if it creates contradiction by everyone. Like the Marxist, he is not curious about the individual characters but he looks into the social relations of his characters in society. For he is too much interested in society's real disease and the remedies to cure them. Brecht has affirmed in one of his essays *Brecht on Theatre* that when he read Karl Marx, he understood totally that Marx is his true audience. He gives his characters an opportunity to develop their opinions as to the highest stature. One of the main characters of the *Caucasian Chalk Circle*, Azdak who is judge not appointed but usurped the seat when found it vacant, he breaks the law to do justice to the poor, trembles and cowardly hides himself when the soldiers of Duke come to arrest him: he is afraid of the consequence as he says, "I do not want to display human greatness just to please anyone." (5th act CCC) His best-known plays which Brecht himself has called 'Operas' "*Rise and Fall of the City of Mahogany* and *Three Penny Opera*" were addressed as sharp satires against the prevailing social order even then these plays were received very enthusiastically by the capitalist society. In these plays, he has treated the neglected class and denounces the upper class even then it was a successful play and it was appreciated by the capitalist class.



This paper seeks to the suffering and injustice done towards the underdog and how they have been presented in the plays of Brecht. In the play *Caucasian Chalk Circle* all except than a few characters who appears occasionally in the play, are from the lower class society. The protagonist, Grusha Vachnadze is a kitchen maidservant in the palace of George Abashwili who is the governor of Grushinia . She belongs to a poor family. She tries to do her utmost in every situations of life. She is the heroine of the play. When there was mutiny between the Prince and The Grand Duke. The soldiers in the house of the governor mutinied. The palace workers were running away, nobody at that time cared about the baby Michael, the heir of the state except Grusha. She rescues the child from the Fat Prince who the leader of the rebellion group. If the fat Prince had got hand over the baby, he would have killed him. She took the child of the Governor, Michael while Natella Abashwili, the wife of Governor was busy in selecting and picking up sarees. The only concern she had was of clothes and thinking that which one she would be carrying with her even in the peril of life she was not caring about the child. She was more conscious about her wearing than to take the child with her. As the cook of her palace says, "All her mistress was thinking of was what dresses she'd take along." She cares little about the lower people as she says in the first act of the play, "all the wretched are to be torn down to make room for the garden." She even says about Azdak that he smells bad she didn't like the poor people. In this regard, the statement of the cook is an important one. "Her Grace would pull her hair out on the spot if she didn't know Azdak is for poor. He goes by the face." V (CCC). He never demanded for his fee from the poor as he says in the 5th act. "From starvelings I never get things. I might just starve myself." Another leading character of the play Azdak, a village scrivener, is also from the lower – class and is the working-class underdog. He did not have the money, position, and facility as the people of the rest of society have. To some extent, Azdak was the voice of Brecht he had heroic qualities but did not want to be a hero. He dared not to come in front of society. He did not want to be a hero as he says, "I am not cut to be a hero." He is an illiterate person he didn't know much about the rules and norms of the state even then he gave very good judgment. He gave the judgment in the favor of Grusha. He found that the children should go the motherly care and land should go the farming person it means



that who cares much for the child is real mother and the person who farms well on the land is the true owner of the land. From several criticisms and however, a lot of discussions with many audiences it appeared that Azdak was the representative of the 'little people who gets 'caught up in the war because there is nothing they can do about it, they are powerless in the hands of fate' etc. (Brecht: Brecht on Theatre: 220). The concept of the little man was advocated by Anton Chekhov and Maxim Gorky in the plays and novels respectively.

Two different versions of stories ran in the Frankfurt performance. The critics had observed the great suffering of the maidservant Grusha. The spectator saw how the kitchen maid, after making so many sacrifices, is finally permitted to keep the child. This decision is brought about by Judge Azdak in the fifth act of the play. It is to be taken in the notice about Azdak why Brecht had interrupted the Grusha action by inserting an entire act to relate in such detail the history of the judge? For the fact that Azdak is an unusual judge and it is clearly evident in the act where he gave the judgment to keep the child, not to the governor's wife but the maid Grusha. The play may need "such a poor people's judge" to end as the author wishes. In the play as a judge, he acted sensibly, not followed the rules determined by the ruling class and one-sidedly interpreted in its favor. The most important fact about his integrity was that at least that he did take bribe by the members of the privileged class in imparting justice to the poor. Judge Azdak became famous for the fact that he did not deliver a formal judgment. Popularity of Azdak in *Caucasian Chalk Circle*, was due to the fact that he never judged by the rules of but he knew the truth behind the law which was made in interest of the rich only. Courageously he turned the rule and law so that it could yield something benefiting for the poor one. He was poor and judge for the poor.

The present tries to search out the discrimination done the poor class of the society in the plays of Bertolt Brecht. In the play *Caucasian Chalk Circle*, the victory fell in the lap of Grusha as she socially important person in respect of behavior and care of child, but "in the old Chinese drama too wherefrom Brecht had taken the plot of the play, the mother did not win out openly because she gave birth to the child, but because she too was socially more valuable person than the opponent



mother. Grusha was given authority of the child not because of that fact she faced great hardship and suffered a lot. Because she wanted to keep the child to herself till he could learn to speak few words. She never claimed her possession over the child on the basis of problems faced by her in life due to the child. And thus she was germane to the child and to become a good member of the society the proper guidance of a good mother is badly needed. Whereas Natella Abishbili's claim over the child, being the biological mother was uncontested, the child was probably given to her in case it was in the interest of child, but the wife of Late Governor wanted the child for the sake her own benefit. She wanted to have the inherited property of the child. Azdak being the judge of poor had to be sure of what was good for the child. That was why he asked the maid Grusha,

"If he were yours, woman, wouldn't you want him to be rich? You'd only have to say that he is not yours. And immediately he'd have a palace and many horses in his stable and many beggars on his doorstep and many soldiers in his service and many petitioners in his courtyard, wouldn't he? What do you say? Don't you want him to be rich?"

Grusha became silent, but Brecht put into a song what she was going on her mind:

If he went in golden shoes  
He would cruel be;  
Evil then would be his life.  
He could laugh at me.  
Too heavy is a heart of stone  
For human breast to bear!  
Bad and powerful to be  
Is too great a care?  
Hunger he will have to fear,  
But no hungry one!  
Darkness he will have to fear,





But not the sun!

"I think I understand you, woman," said Azdak. He knew which mother he would choose for the child. He already knew what was right the test which he took was only to affirm his decision. He said.

"The court has now ascertained who the true mother is (to Grusha) Take your child and clear out. I advise you not to stay in the city with him."

"Things should belong to those who do well by them,

Children to motherly women that they may thrive.

The people of Grushinia did not forget him, they long remembered

The days of his judging as brief Golden Age when there was almost Justice."

In the last years his life, his theatre was probably visited by more people coming from the West than from the East Berlin. On other theatres in both the East and the West Berlin had such high number of intellectuals of working – class as the epic theatre of Bertolt Brecht. They visited the theatre to see the intellectual anomaly. The irony of Brecht's life was such that he never had a single audience from working class, the party, and the East for whom he had established his theatre while his theatre was mostly frequented by intellectuals, poets whom he did not liked. In present time his plays are seen being enacted all over the world and amongst capitalist countries but not in the Soviet Union which is the country of Karl Marx and working class people. In most of the plays like *The Life of Galileo*, *mother courage* *The Good Women of Setzuan*, he has described their life. All the protagonists of these playas are socially deprived class. They are the underdog of society. Even then, by using their intellect, prowess, and ability, they got the position of hero in the eyes of peoples of society of both strata. So, no doubt, it would not be wrong to say that the protagonists in his plays were persons of low social status but had nobility in them and Brecht had made them immortal by enlivening them in his works.



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