

## **The Social Inequality Portrayed on Bong Joon Ho's Parasite Movie**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study aims to analyze the social inequality portrayed in the Parasit movie directed by Bong Joon Ho. For research method, a qualitative approach is chosen to be applied which is content analysis as research design. In collecting the data, the writers use the Parasite movie as an object of the research, and search a lot of references from the internet and libraries to support the theories as baselines of analysis. Parasite movie depicts the two families' lives, Park's family and Kim's family, where the social conditions and the daily lifestyles are very contrastive; the first family is rich and wealth and the later one is poor and deprivation. These social inequalities reflect a social phenomenon in the real world which becomes the motives for fraudulent and greedy character and gradually leads to criminal actions. The gaps between both families are demonstrated in some aspects, such as economy and work, education, house, food, and fashion. And the disparities shown by those elements indicate where the social class they belong and what the impact to their life.

**Key words:** Social Inequality; Parasite Movie; Social Gap

### **INTRODUCTION**

Social inequality is a phenomenon in human society which has arisen since past decades until nowadays. It does not always become a social problem for the poor country and developing country but also for rich countries in America and Europe that have a titled prosperous and democratic nation; the cases of stratification are still heard. Social inequality comes up since the existence of unequal opportunities and rewards for different social positions or statuses within a group or a society. The unequal opportunities cover several aspects such as power, work, education, health, race and ethnicity, etc. However, the increasing economic and cultural sector

in this modern era assumed could eliminate the problem of social inequality. But in fact, it still remains as an invisible case in society which is unrealized by the power or people who do not really pay attention to the surroundings and have been lulled by their prosperity and individual interests

These social issues are frequently brought as themes in literary works and become an expression and indirect criticism toward society. The movie as a part of literary work is often used as a medium to describe social reality. It is also formed with facts, inspiration, motivation, experience, and others. The main function as entertainment, the movie also sends moral messages behind its story. Through the movie, the writers can convey the meanings and moral values that viewers can assume the shape and emotional impact of reality. An epic story is shown by Parasite movie that depicts the social inequality in South Korea. The film which was released in 2019 and directed by Bong Joon Ho, received awards from various international arenas, such as the Cannes Film Festival, Golden Globe Award, etc. Parasite is also the first non-English language Asian film that received Oscar awards in 4 categories. Through this film, the director provides a contrasting picture of life between poor and rich families, especially in urban areas.

This film portrays a social inequality between two South Korean families who have different backgrounds. It describes the social inequality of the main characters, showing two groups of the upper class and lower class. The lower class becomes a *parasite* for the upper class because it quietly relies on their livelihoods to the upper class, while the upper class depends on the lower class to handle household chores or any jobs that they cannot do. Less economy to the poor family becomes motives for fraud and greed and gradually leads to criminal actions. Interestingly, this movie shows the complete characters of a human from the good and the bad side. Like most films, the poor people have protagonist character and tend to be a good and oppressed one, while the rich are the opposite. Contrary in this film, there are no black or white character but it turns to be grey. A good person could change become an evil because of certain circumstances that could happen in the real world. The stereotypes and the theme of the story that touches on real-life make this film interesting to analyse.

The Parasite depicts a contrasting life between the poor family and the rich family. The unfortunate one, Kim's family as the main focus of this story, lives in a small, seedy, insect-infested semi-basement apartment. Due to the less chance to get a job, they are willing to work anything even though they have to fold pizza boxes to fulfil their daily needs. In financial constraints, Kim Ki-woo, the first son of Kim's family, was offered by his best friend to take over the job of being a private English tutor for Park Da-Hye, the son of Park's wealthy family. Gradually, Kim's family strive anyways in order one by one of their family members could work for Park's family, by recommending one each other and lying as professional service providers who don't know each other. They also came up with tricky scenarios, so that the previous worker was expelled and the one who replaced that position was a member of Kim's family.

The specific genre of this movie is a tragic comedy thriller. And this movie is worth to be analyzed because it provides a phenomenon that displays social issues arisen among people in society. Describing the social interactions in people's lives is reflection of social inequality nowadays. It cannot be denied that the economic factor is considered to be the main factor in the emergence of social inequality. For example, the number of unemployed in an area is due to a lack of job opportunities. This is because the competition for a certain level is very high. The formation of certain groups in a community dominates certain positions. Besides, there is also a social class that makes a distribution of economy and chance to get a job are not equal. Social class is the classification of people who belong to a certain social system into hierarchical layers according to the dimensions of power. Social class can arise because of several divisions of classes in society based on certain criteria such as economy, wealth, employees or laborers, education, status, decent, ethnic, and so on. So, these elements of life indicate whether a person comes from high class or lower class. These potential gaps have separated the lives of the poor people from the lower class and the rich people from the upper class into different worlds. The poor are getting poorer and having the worst conditions because of their lack of social resources. While the rich are getting wealthier since they have access to high-quality resources even for their generations.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Social Inequality**

Social inequality is a situation that occurs in society because of inequality in various sectors of people's lives. "Inequality is the state of not being equal, especially in status, rights, and opportunities-is a concept of social justice theories" (Luthra et al., 2020). ). While Chakravarthy (2015) said, "Inequality in an income distribution in a society delineates disparities of incomes among the individuals in the society". So, it tends to economic disparities income which refers to how economic variables are distributed between individuals in a group, between groups within a population, or between countries. Other expert defines that social inequality does not merely focus on economic stratification, but it also alludes the other aspects of life such as health and education. As Binelli et. al. (2015) cited "A measure of inequality in the 'effective freedom to achieve' will have to take into account disparities both in actual income, education and health and in their future expected equivalents". He also added that wealth, gender, ethnicity, labor market segmentation, housing, and other a few become social concern in society. All these aspects bring to inequality in living standards, such as inequality in employment income levels, educational attainment, health status, and so on.

The main actors in social change are not individuals, but social classes in society. In every society, some classes dominate and control the situation and condition of people's life especially the economy and power. In the economy,

it is often said that there are upper and lower classes. The term class does not always have the same meaning, even though it embodies a system of primary positions in society. The definition of class is in line with the definition of layers without having to distinguish the basis of the existing layers in society, these layers are formed based on the level of status in society.

The division of the population or society into tiered classes that are manifested into the upper, middle, and lower classes is called the social class system. A person's social class is determined by his or her social and economic rank in society, including occupation, education, ancestry, group, and recognition of others. The class theory contains the main subjects that are the basis of the collision between classes. Class as a living reality, practiced by those who accept dynamics and actions. Where a man's ability to meet his various needs depends on his involvement in social relationships with others to transform the material environment through his productive activities. As stated by Paul Doyle Johnson in the book *The Theory of Classical and Modern Sociology* (Umanailo et al., 2019) social class has three class terms. In the following is explained in detail.

**a) The Bourgeoisie Class (Upper Class);** The bourgeoisie is a special designation for capitalists in modern economics. They have production tools and employ hired workers. The term bourgeoisie is more often and more practically interpreted as a class that has means of production or can be said to be a social class of individuals who have characteristics of capital ownership and behavior related to ownership of the capital. Owning production tools and employing hired labor. They consist of businessmen, landowners, and nobles. In a capitalist society, the dominant class is the bourgeoisie.

**b) The Middle Class ;** The middle class is ideological, which is an aspect of the process of differentiating the rights and obligations of citizens based on differences in age, sex, and occupation regarding part of a complex class. It is a group that is quite widely found in the community. In terms of the middle class, their roles as managers, and supervisors (coordination and control e.g. consist of government employees) while technically still being workers who exchange their labor for wages.

**c) The proletariat Class (Lower Class) ;** Proletariat are those that do not have soil and production tools. Which they are, sell their power, and don't have their production tools. It is the largest group in society. Is the largest group in society. They are mostly ordinary people. The proletariat is the opposite of the bourgeoisie, which is workers who sell their services and do not have their production tools. Their work is closely related to the work of a laborer, farmer, fisherman, or people who work with muscles and hands. The proletariat is a class that has a fairly radical chain. The proletariat lives within the poverty line caused by a lack of resources.

The impact of social differences are shown in various dimensions such as economy, education, health, even it portrayed on people's daily need attributes like food, fashion and house. According to Hombres et all (2012) "There is an impact of the inequality indicator itself from the merging of the three social classes in society" .Each class has a different effect on whether the lower class will receive the worst situation. He also added the impact of social class in five aspects, which are economy, work, education, health and behavior. The economics aspect illustrates where money is indeed an important determinant of social class, because of its role in providing an overview of one's family background and way of life. So, money is a factor that determines social class into a source and type of income that provides an overview of his family background and possible ways of life. Apart from the economic aspect, in social class the other main aspect is work. Certain types of work environment and experience are important measures of social class because so many other aspects of life are work-related. In life, the impact of social inequality in terms of the aspect of work plays an important role, because it affects a person's economy in living. In other words, every type of work is part of a way of life where other types of work are different from one another. This is why work becomes something that can provide direction or information to determine a person's social class.

Another aspect that determines a person's social class is education. As Machin and Vignolet (2004) said that parents' income and social class have become increasingly important determinants of cognitive development If someone has a high education, it requires a lot of money and motivation, so the type and level of education also affect the level of social class. Inequality in education affects human self-development which is usually caused by a person's low education, which can affect a person's mindset. Without a good education, a person can become lazy, pessimistic, and easily give up. And it will also affect the economy and jobs.

## **METHOD**

### **Design and Sample**

This research method is conducted using a qualitative approach which is content analysis as research design. The sample is Parasite Movie itself.

### **Instrument and Procedure**

There are several stages in collecting data whether it comes from the object of the research and also from the references as the second data to support the analysis. In the first stage, the writers collect any theories that are related to the topic from the internet, library and other references. This theory is a baseline in the content

analysis of the movie. Then the writers watch the movie several times to fully understand the story and the aspects that related to the topic of the research.

### **Data Analysis**

While watching the movie the writers try analysing the scenes and dialogues that shows the social inequality. The writers look for some important details that support the topic and are connected to the theories; then put and categorize the data based on the purpose of the research. The last, the writer writes down and edits data collected into a complete paper.

### **RESULT AND DISUSSION**

Parasite movie is admitted by the world film industry as one of the best films in 2019 from South Korea. Since its artistic pictures and interesting story that reveals the dark side of human experience, it has achieved rewards from global film industry. This film brings the topic of disparity between the rich and the poor family and class consolidation in Korean society. This theme is usually avoided by film industries which prefer taking light and popular themes such love, comedy, family drama etc. The movie tells a story about two different families with different backgrounds and social statuses. Park family lives in Korea city with His wife, Choi Yeon-Gyo and their two kids; a beautiful teenager Da-Hye and a little boy Dasong. They are a rich family with a beautiful big house and luxury cars. As a rich family, all their needs are available with high quality standard. They looked happy and do not have a significant problem in their life. They also have a housemaid or housekeeper who works loyally and dedicatedly named Gook Moon-Gwang and a driver called Park Keun-Rok. In their lifestyle, the Park's family members often use decent and branded clothes. They look clean and elegant as common people in the upper class. Based on the description above it can be said that Park family comes from the upper class or Bourgeoisie Class. It reflects from the ability to hire people to work with them and the attributes that cover this family.

It is contrary to Kim's family, the other family that becomes the main actors in this movie. Kim lives with his wife, Choong-Sook and two children Ki-Woo or Kevin and Ki-Jung or Jessica. They are poor and live in a suburban and dirty neighbourhood. The house is a semi-basement apartment which crowded and small for four family members. The lower land of the site causes the flood, so when the rain comes, they have to evacuate to another place. They do not have a car or any expensive and luxury possession. Kim as a father is unemployed. To fulfil their need, they have to take part-time jobs to fold pizza boxes to gain little money. All members of Kim's family strive to work with Park's family which is become the conflict of this movie. With regard to the features of Kim's family, it can be categorized that they are a poor family and included in the lower class or the proletariat class. In the following is analysis on elements of social inequality portrayed in both families.

### **Profession and Economy**

Social inequality has a major influence on one's profession and economy. Social status shows the type of job a person has. Generally, the upper-middle class's profession earns quite a lot of income, such as entrepreneur, CEO, manager, director level, or experts in some field who work using their brains and mind. On the other hand, at the lower level, they usually work using physics and get wages or salaries based on their physical ability.

Telling in this story that Park is a great worker that has a profession as an architect and CEO in a well-known company with a nice office. His position as a boss can be seen in the picture in the scene, 00:37:39 – 00:38:13 which shows he is in a meeting and has a secretary. From his job, he earns a large income that affects his family's life. It indicates that his life is very wealthy and all his family's needs are fulfilled with high standards and luxurious facilities. Unlike the Park family, all of Kim's family are employed. At first, they only worked as a pizza cardboard folder. Later on, by any means, they are finally able to work for the Park family. Kim Ki-Taek (father) becomes the driver, Choong-sook (mother) becomes the housekeeper, and Kim Ki-woo and Kim Ki-Jung (the children) become the tutors. The process of getting work in Park's family shows how hard they strive for the jobs until they have to manipulate their data and act fraudulently even tend to criminal actions. This describes the predicament for the lower class to get decent work. They have to struggle to meet daily needs such as food, clothes, and houses which are commonly still below standard. So it can be said that social inequality influences towards work and the economy in a person's life which also has an impact on the other life factors.

### **Education**

Education is one factor as a gateway to lead a good future. A highly educated person which has high education and broader mindset already has the capital to get a decent job. People in the upper class are really concerned about their children's education and can provide good quality of education for them. On the other hand, lower-class people have many obstacles to take their children into higher education since of the cost factor. The Park family can provide the best education for their children. His daughter Da-Hye's, is sent to a good school and also given a private tutor to accompany her when studying at home. His little son Dasong has got full attention on his development, in terms of physical things and also psychological matters. Meanwhile, Kim's son, Ki-Woo, cannot continue his education at the college because of the money, although he has been accepted for the entrance test to a good college. And his younger sister Ki-Jung also experienced the same thing and could not continue her education to a higher level. Even though both of them have quite brilliant brains, they have to stop because of economic factors.

## **House**

House is an important place for the family to gather and take rest from all activities. A good and comfortable house is needed for family members because they spent most of their life there. The house also indicates a social class or status in the environment. A lot of upscale have high-rise residences near comfortable hills and large, sunny green yard environments, and large houses in less populated areas. Or they prefer elite, high, areas which are secured by guards and avoid floods. Its described from Park's house. He has a big and luxury house which he bought from the famous designer Namgoong Hyunza, the owner and first builder of the house. It has many rooms with a large and fancy living room faced a beautiful, large yard which is only closed by glass. So when Kim Ki-Woo entered Park's house as an English teacher for the first time, he felt as he were in heaven. Meanwhile, the lower class lived in dense, narrow, and slum settlements with views of houses and the adjacent public road. This scene shows Kim's family lives in Banjiha, where poor Koreans live in an underground settlement, making them prone to flooding during the rainy season. There were shabby iron railings outside the windows, stains on the windows, and socks in the foreground, revealing a small, dirty, and messy basement. There are two distinct portrayed in each house and neighbourhood, between the two classes. This social class inequality can be seen in how the bourgeoisie class (upper class) and the proletariat class (lower class) enjoy life.

## **Food**

Food is a basic human need, but it can also represent a person's social class and lifestyle. A person from the upper class sees food not only as a body need but also could be a social style for gathering. Frequently upper-class people hold meetings or parties at a luxury resort with delicious meals in serving. In the movie, the eating scene appears many times and it is a common thing to show the gap in their class between the rich and poor by representing the difference in food. In the scenes, it is very contrast circumstances between the Kim and Park families. From the beginning of the story shows the various foods made by the Park's family with expensive and quality ingredients. When the Park family held a birthday party for their son, a variety of food is available; from appetizers, main menus and desserts are served in luxurious places. The opposite situation of the Kim family, they need food just only to fulfil their stomach. The choices are limited from instant noodle, a slice of bread or a slice of pizza. It also shown the condition when they found an opportunity to eat a free buffet meal and ended up going the driver's cafeteria, where drivers usually eat.

## **Fashion**

The function of fashion is not merely to cover the body but it can be a symbol of someone's identity. By the times, fashion has been developing; its image represents someone's wealth and status. It showed that when Mrs. Park chooses a dress for Da-Song's birthday in her dressing room which seen a lot

of clothes neatly arranged in the wardrobe; it is very spacious, clean, and expensive. As the wife of a CEO, Mrs. Park has a special room to put her fashion. Contrary to Kim's family which only wears simple clothes that are only put in the corner of the house. It depicts that there is a sock hanger-on ceiling which indicates there is no special place to put the clothes. And Kim's family clothes look thin and quite shabby due to their dense, rundown, and hot environment. When Park's son is getting his birthday, this scene clearly shows the inequality of status from both families. The guests' clothes indicate the Park's friends and colleagues are from the upper class. They wear fancy, elegant and lux clothes. The different situations happen to Kim's family; they also present at the event. Kim Ki-Woo feels inappropriate because of the difference in status and seems confused when choosing clothes to wear because all the clothes came from the charity of victim flood.

Shortly, it can be said that social inequality is also reflected in the aspects of people's life. The people's basic needs such as house, food, clothes, job are various; rich and poor people chose based on their ability to afford it and their class and status. And it is as their identity and symbol of the social class in their environment.

## **CONCLUSION**

Parasite movie is a very successful Korean film and has received many awards in various arenas. A film that tells two family's lives with different statuses and social classes. In the story, Kim's poor family tries to get a job in Park's rich family. However, because they do not meet the proper requirements, Kim and his wife with their two children come up with tricky scenarios and falsified data, so that they could be accepted one by one. Even though both families do interact closely and get mutual benefit each other, this contrasting life cannot merge their lives, and still, there is a gap that separates between the two. This social gap actually becomes trigger for fraud and criminal action by the Kim family. The social inequalities portrayed in this movie are in terms of economy, education, housing, food, and clothing. These elements of life reflect their class differences; as the Kim family from the lower class can become workers in the family garden by living in a simple apartment, quite shabby clothes and mediocre food. The contrary conditions are illustrated from the Park family, where he can pay his employees, he lives in a big and luxurious house with his high living standard. This film actually shows a picture of solidified social classes and the cruel reality that still exists in society. This could be enlightenment for the community that these social issues may still arise in its surroundings.

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