
III. KARL-MARX

(1818—1883)

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1. Life and Works :—

Karl Marx was born in the Rhineland town of Trier on 5 May 1818; he was the second surviving child of a bourgeois Jewish family. Marx's father had accepted the Christian faith to save his business. His mother, however, continued her old Jewish faith. It is for these reasons that it is said that Marx was a Jew and not a Jew and was Prussian and not a Prussian.

He studied at Gymnasium (Grammar-School) at Trier. It is said that neither his father nor his school had any influence on him.

At the age of seventeen, he went to study at the University of Bonn. Here he met a girl, Jenny Von Westphalen. This was his first year in the University. His father did not like him to squander his time foolishly and sent him to the University of Berlin. Marx could not care less about his father's advice. He used to burn his letters, and used them for pipe-lighters.¹

In Berlin, Marx started taking interest in philosophy. This meant the study of Hegel, as Berlin was home of Hegelianism.

In 1840, Marx submitted his doctoral thesis on the philosophy of Democritus and Epicurus to the University of Jena. He did not present his thesis to the University of Berlin. He thought that, because of his liberal views, the University of Berlin might have rejected it.

After his studies, Marx became the Editor-in-Chief of a newspaper, *Zeitung*. This job he got through the efforts of his friend, Moses Hess.

The newspaper did not last long. In an editorial, the Czar of Russia was severally attacked; the Prussian King, due to the pressure of the Czar, closed the publication of the paper.

Marx's father died in the meanwhile and the way was

clear for Marx to get married. He married in April 1843 and the couple left for Paris. In Paris, Marx has to edit a newspaper, *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher*. It is to be remembered that as yet Marx was not a socialist.

It was in Paris that he met the working class of socialists. In this newspaper, Marx talked of Jews and the proletariat in the same tone.

1844 is the year when Marx found a great friend. Engels had come to contribute an article in his newspaper. He met Marx, stayed with him and became his life-friend. Engels was a rich man and gave an unflinching financial support to Marx.

The first fruit of their deep friendship was a book, *The Holy Family*, in 1844. It was a polemic against Bruno Bauer.

Marx also met another distinguished socialist, Proudhon. But Marx found no attraction towards him. In fact, Marx criticised Proudhon throughout his life. Proudhon wrote a book, *Philosophie de la Misere*, and Marx made brutal attack on him. Proudhon said: "The real sense of Marx is that he regrets everywhere that my thought agrees with him and that I have expressed it before him... The truth is that Marx is jealous."²

The newspaper was banned and Marx left Paris on 1st February 1845. The most important thing to be remembered about Marx is that when he came to Paris he had no views about socialism. But when he left Paris he was a devoted and true socialist.

On 5 May 1846, he outlined a project of starting a socialist movement through correspondence. In Brussels, he founded a Communist Party. This was to serve as a link with Correspondence Committee. In 1847, Marx and Engels visited England to make a league of all the communist organizations under

different shades. The mission was not much of a success. He came back to Brussel and Engel went to Paris.

A success came in 1848. He was asked to draft a manifesto for the Communist League. It was published on February 24, a day before French Revolution of that year. Marx visited Paris in July, 1849. It was a post-revolutionary period and Marx had no impact on the course of the French Revolution. He returned to London in August 1849 and stayed here until his death in 1883.

The Socialist movement was in a doldrum for a decade and it was lifted out of this position by Proudhon and Marx, Marx found a job with the New York Tribune. In his articles, he tried to raise money to support himself. At the same time this served him as a vehicle of communicating his ideas to the English reading public.

Strangely enough first Socialist Party was founded by Lassalle and Marx vehemently opposed it. Lassalle did not have the opportunity of patronising this Socialist Party as he died in a duel in 1864 over a girl. It was on 28 September 1864 that a meeting of Socialist Parties of all countries was convened. Marx played a role here and converted the meeting into the first International Meeting of Socialist Parties. But subsequently, Marx played no direct role until 1869.

In 1867, he published the first volume of his work "The Capital. More than Communist Manifesto, it added to his reputation. Marx, after the publication of this book, began to dominate the political thinking of the 19th century. In 1872, the session of International took place under the chairmanship of Marx. Marx had established his hegemony as forceful thinker but he showed no practical wisdom of controlling the actual politics. The International was slipping out of his control; the only way he could save himself from the total defeat was to

shift its Head Quarters to New York. Marx wanted to give it a silent burial.³

Lenin was intellectual successor of Marx in the twentieth century. He succeeded in capturing power in Russia in 1917. This event had given an enduring life to the ideas of Marx.

Marx was an extremely poor man. In 1853, he had to borrow £20 to pay for his daughter's coffin. Once he had to pawn his Over Coat to raise the price of paper on which to write a pamphlet.

He loved his wife and had six children from her (the 7th was still-born). When his only son, Edger, died he felt so miserable and admitted that he knew for the first time what real suffering was. He was survived by two daughters. His wife died in 1881 and this broke Marx's heart. He lingered on a bit and died on 14 March, 1883.

Marx had lived in poverty but even in this he maintained a dignity and grace. His life in London was really different. Marx lived differently what he wrote. He was not a follower of his own ideas. No wonder he once said, "Thank God I am not a Marxist".⁴

2. Dialectical Materialism:—

Dialectic may be provisionally defined as "the theory of the union of opposites. The term itself comes from a Greek word meaning to discuss or debate and it originally signified the art of discussion with a view to arriving at the truth by exposing the contradictions contained in the arguments of the disputants. When Plato presented his famous theory that "ideas alone are real and phenomena only the reflection of them, he gave the name of dialectic to the science which arrives at a knowledge of the nature of ideas".⁵

Plato used dialectic to renounce obstacles while Hegel used

it to convey the meaning that any progress towards reality and truth was possible. The dialectical process is thus one of thesis, antithesis and synthesis.

"The thesis offers a proposition. The antithesis denies, or in Hegelian terminology, negates it. The synthesis enhances what is true in both the thesis and the antithesis, and thus brings us one step near to reality. But as soon as the synthesis is subjected to closer inspection, it, too, is found defective; and thus the whole process starts over again with a further thesis, negated in turn by its antithesis and reconciled in a new synthesis. In this triangular manner does thought proceed until at last we reach the absolute, which we can go on contemplating for ever without discerning in it any contradiction. The term dialectic is thus used for that process of conflict and reconciliation which goes on within reality itself, and within human thought about reality."⁶

"I therefore openly avowed myself the pupil of that mighty thinker (Hegel), and even here and there, in the chapter on the theory of value, coquetted with the modes of expression peculiar to him. The mystification which dialectic suffers in Hegel's hand, by no means prevents him from being the first to present its general form of working in a comprehensive and conscious manner. With him it is standing on its head. It must be turned right side up again, if you would discover the rational kernel within the mystical shell."⁷

Marxism, according to Hunt, consists of three elements:

"1. A dialectical philosophy borrowed from Hegel but transformed into dialectical materialism, from which in turn historical materialism derives.

2. A system of political economy, of which the dynamic part is the labour theory of surplus value and the conclusions drawn from them.

3. A theory of the state and of revolution."⁸

Marx and Engels have been called materialists and economic determinists, and economic determinism has also been called a form of materialism. Marx said in the Preface of his Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy: "In the social production which men carry on they enter into a definite relations that an indispensable and independent of their will, these relations of production correspond to a definite stage of the development of the material forces of production. The totality of these relations of production, constitutes the economic structure of society—the real foundation on which legal and political superstructures arise and to which definite forms of social consciousness correspond."⁹

Marx at another place says: "In acquiring new productive forces, men change their mode of production, and in changing their mode of production, their manner of gaining their living, they change all their social relations. The windmill gives you society with the feudal lord; the steam-mill society with the industrial, capitalist."¹⁰

In his Communist Manifesto, he says: "The bourgeoisie cannot exist without constantly revolutionizing the instruments of production, and thereby the relations of production, and with them the whole relation of society."¹¹

At another place both Marx and Engels repeat: "As individuals express their life, so they are. What they are, therefore, coincides with their production, with what they produce and with how they produce it. What individuals are, therefore, depends on the material conditions of their production."¹²

According to Marx, man must engage in production to keep himself alive. In this respect, production is basic; Marx and Engels both believed that the character of production determines in general the character of social life. Thus

economic determinism means one form determines the other.

There is much confusion over the forces of production and relations of production. Forces of production stand for the resources, tools and methods. While relations of production are described as follows by Plamenatz : "If we identify relations of production with relations of property (as I think we must if they are to have any identity at all), it becomes easy to see that they are not determined by what is produced and how it is produced".¹³

It followed that all else—including religion—is derived from man's material condition. This idea was first expressed by Feuerbach¹⁴. Marx believed that forces of production is sub-structure and religion, ethic and law or superstructure. When the sub-structure changes, the superstructure changes automatically.

3. The Class Conflict—

"The History of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles."¹⁵ Bourgeoisie are those who own the means of social production and employer of wage-labour. And proletariat are the wage-labourers who have to sell their labour in order to live. This class struggle is called by Marx as all written history.

In the early epoch of history, we find almost everywhere a complicated arrangement of society into various orders, a manifold graduation of social rank. In ancient Rome, we have patricians, knights, plebeians, slaves; in the Middle Ages, feudal lords, vassals, guild-masters, journeymen, apprentices, serfs; in almost all of these classes, again, subordinate gradations".

"The modern bourgeois society that has sprouted from the ruins of feudal society, has not done away with class antagonisms. It has but established new classes, new conditions,

new forms of struggle in place of the old ones."¹⁶ And in the days of Marx, he said, the society as a whole is more splitting up into two classes, Bourgeoisie and Proletariat.

"The executive of the modern state is but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie."¹⁷ "It (bourgeoisie) has converted the physician, the lawyer, the priest, the poet, the man of science into its paid wage-labourers."¹⁸

The bourgeoisie has forged the weapons to fell the feudalism. Now they have called into existence the men who are to wield those weapons—the modern working class—the proletariat."¹⁹

Marx says that the class labourers "who live only so long they find work, and who find work only so long as their labour increases capital."²⁰ "In proportion, therefore, as the repulsiveness of the work increases, the wage decreases."²¹ He thinks that in modern industry men would be superseded by women. He held that the low strata of the middle class—the small trades-people, shop-keepers and hand-craftsmen and peasants—all these sink gradually into the proletariat.

The reason Marx advanced in support of his theory was that the smaller capital would not be able to compete the modern and their specialized skill is rendered worthless by new methods of production.

With improved machinery, the labourer is paid less and here begins the battle between the individual proletariat and the bourgeoisie. Workers achieve sporadic victories, but the real meaning of them lies in the expansion of the "Union of Workers." Improved means of communication brought the workers closer to each other.²²

This organization of the proletariat into a class, consequently into a political party, is continually being upset by the competition between the workers themselves. But it ever

rises up again, stronger, firmer and mightier. It compels legislative recognition of particular interests of the workers by taking advantage of the division among the bourgeoisie itself. Thus the ten hour bill in England was cited as a success in this direction.²³

When the decisive moment comes, the class that holds power shall cut itself adrift "and joins the revolutionary class, the class that holds the future in its hands...particularly the bourgeoisie ideologists".²⁴

Of all the classes that force the bourgeoisie, "the proletariat alone is a really revolutionary class."²⁵ He calls the middle-class as reactionary and the "dangerous class", "the social scum", as a "bribed tool of reactionary intrigues".²⁶

4. A Movement of Majority—

Previously every class that came to power fortified itself. "The proletariat cannot become masters of the productive forces of society, except by abolishing their own previous mode of appropriation and thereby also every other previous mode of appropriation".²⁷

All previous movements were movements of minorities, or in the interest of minorities. The proletariat movement is the self-conscious, independent movement of the immense majority, in the interest of the immense majority. The proletariat is the lowest strata of society and it cannot raise itself up without the whole superincumbent strata of official society being sprung into the air.²⁸

5. National and International aspects—

Though not in substance, but in form the proletariat struggle is at first national. The proletariat of each country must settle matters with his own bourgeoisie.

This is the veiled civil war within existing society up to the

point where "that war breaks out into open revolution, and where the violent overthrow of the bourgeoisie lays the foundation for the sway of the proletariat."²⁹

6. Proletariat Victory Inevitable—

The advanced industry and the competition of the wage earner throws the labourers to each other. This is how he thinks the bourgeoisie digs its own grave. "Its fall and the victory of the proletariat are equally inevitable".³⁰

7. Role of Revolution—

Marx was not the first to suggest the need for change in the existing society; many men preceded him. He, however, advocated the change through revolution. He concluded his Communist Manifesto in plain words: "The communists disdain to conceal their views and aims. They openly declare that their ends can be obtained only by the forcible overthrow of all existing social conditions. Let the ruling classes tremble at a communist revolution. The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win.

Working men of all countries, unite!"³¹

The same view was expressed in his masterpiece, Capital. "Force is the midwife of every old society pregnant with a new one. It is itself an economic power".³² It is correct to say that wherever the Communist regimes were established in the twentieth century, they were established through revolution.

8. Family, Law, Morality, Religion—

The proletariat is without property and his relations with his wife and children has no longer anything in common with the bourgeois family-relations. He is stripped of all national character: "The bourgeois family will vanish as a matter of course when its complement vanishes, and both will vanish with

the vanishing of capital".³³

Marx knew he would be criticised for this radical idea. He said, "Do you charge us with wanting to stop the exploitation of children of their parents? To this crime we plead guilty."³⁴

Marx wanted that the home education should be abolished and its place should be taken by "social" education. This would render the family institution useless.

After demolishing the most sacred of all the existing institutions, the proletariat would go round with a hammer in his hand and destroy all vestiges of the past system: "Law, Morality, Religion, are to him so many bourgeois prejudices, behind which lurk in ambush just as many bourgeois interests".³⁵

9. Period of Transition—

Marx was certain that the days of capitalists are numbered. Before there could be established a Communist Society, he envisaged a period of transition: "Between the capitalists and communist society lies the period of a revolutionary transformation of the one into the other. There corresponds to this also a political transition period in which the state can be nothing but the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat".³⁶

But this transition has become so long in Russia and China that people have started believing that, in the name of poverty, the communist capture power and they keep people down for ever. It is, in fact, a theory of force and fraud. There seems no apparent sign that the state is likely to wither away in any communist country. The hold of the state has become so strong that only bloody revolutions could free the people of these countries from the dictatorship of their own people.

10. The World History—

It is now a time to discuss Marx's concept of World History.

Marx believed in the continuity of history. He did not believe that a number of different parallel histories existed in the past. Economic, political, artistic and religious histories were in fact single history; and economic factor is the one that maintained the unity of history.³⁷

Marx studied history scientifically; the purpose was to predict the future. He had made it known that the communist revolution was inevitable.

The history of class struggle is briefly described by Marx in the preface of his critique of Political Economy: "In broad outline we can designate the Asiatic, the ancient, the feudal, and the modern bourgeois modes of production as progressive epochs on the economic formation of society, The bourgeois relations of production are the last antagonisms, but of conflict arising from conditions surrounding the life of individuals in society. At the same time the productive forces developing in the womb of bourgeois society create the national conditions for the solution of that antagonism. With this social formation, therefore, the prehistory of human society comes to an end".³⁸

Marx and Hegel are not very far from each other in depicting the past; the real difference lies in the place each gives to the motive force in the historical process. Hegel believed it was "idea"; Marx explained it was "matter"; but they both differed widely from Ibn-i-Khaldun, Spengler and Toynbee. Marx occupies a novel place among the theorists of civilization.

11. Marx as an Historiographer—

Marx has outlined the past history as a development towards a final aim—the establishment of a proletariat dictatorship; and, ultimately the State is going to wither away.

He is an historiographer of the past, present, and future. His ideas, after the successful communist revolution in Russia

in 1917, has been immortalized.

Marx has been studied minutely and his theories have been proved false. Popper, in his *Open Society*, calls the new socialism as new "opium for the people".³⁹

There is no shortage of writers who condemn him as an advocate of dictatorship. He is rightly condemned as a Jew conspirator who ignited fire in every faith to destroy them.

The enduring value of his work lies in his emphasis on the economic freedom of the people. This was a catching idea: "The imposing achievements of socialism in the Soviet Union and the other socialist countries is the best possible testimonial the Marxist-Leninist theory can have."⁴⁰ "All official and liberal science defends wage-slavery in one way or another, whereas Marx has declared relentless war on that slavery".⁴¹

A STUDY OF HISTORIOGRAPHY

for

M.A. Students
&
OTHER COMPETITIVE EXAMINATIONS

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