UNIT 7: KARL MARX: HIS ASSOCIATION WITH HEGEL, ENGLES AND DIALECTICAL MATERIALISM

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7.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit. you will be able to–

- understand the influence of Hegel in the writings of Karl Marx
- understand the influence of Engles in the life and works of Karl Marx
- discuss dialectical materialism
- understand the concept social class according to Karl Marx
- understand the analysis of Marx regarding class conflict in capitalist society.

7.2 INTRODUCTION

Karl Marx was born in the year 1818 in the city of Trier in Germany. There he received his early education. He was a great social thinker who has made important contributions in different disciplines like political science, economics, philosophy, history etc. He started a new political philosophy

and became the champion of the poor, the needy and the oppressed. Marx had no where called himself a sociologist. But his ideas regarding the social conflict and social change has a great sociological importance. He was the founder and chief advocate of communism. From a very early age Marx could feel the oppression of the poor people by the rich people and therefore he began to understand how the process of oppression occurs. In his famous work, 'The Communist Mennisfesto, 1848', he said that 'the history of all hitherto existing societies is the history of class struggle'. These words sum up the fact that conflict between different classes had existed in the world right from the beginning of the history.

However, it is believed that the ideas that one develops cannot claim absolute uniqueness. This is because ones ideas are influenced by different situations that he or she encounters and also by the ideas of different people one meets in the process. We have already stated that Karl Marx has made significant contribution towards a scientific understanding of human society. But his ideas were influenced by the social and economic situation in the society in which he lived, the intellectual environment of his day and the people whom he met. Thus, Industrial Revolution and French Revolution had a profound impact on his thought process. Along with this the Hegelian ideology, which was dominant during that period, had also influenced him and it was reflected in his writings. Along with these, Fredrich Engle's support and influence in the life and career of Marx had been immense. In this unit we will try to trace the influence of Hegel and Engles on Marx and understand Marx's method to analyze class struggle, known as *dialectical materialism.*



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q.1: In which year was Karl Marx born?

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Q.2: When was the book, 'The Community Mennifesto' published?

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7.3 INTELLECTUAL ORIGIN OF KARL MARX

In this section we are going to discuss the intellectual background that had a strong bearing on Marx's ideas. In this respect the name that comes unfailingly to our mind is George F.W. Hegel was born in Germany in the year 1770. His ideas dominated the intellectual arena of his time. Hegel had a firm belief in the rule of law rather than uninformed rule by men. Therefore he supported the Prussian state. His philosophy had a significant contribution in the development of idealist philosophy which started with ***Immuneal Kant***. According to idealist philosophy, human society develops when 'ideas' progress. According to Hegel, throughout the history of mankind, philosophical thought had criticized the existing state of affairs. The criticisms of the existing order have been instrumental in giving birth to new cultural affairs. For example, at a certain point of time sati was an essential part of some of the regions in India. These brutal practices were abolished only after a few individuals started 'thinking' that it is an oppressive practice and then they began to criticize it. Criticism led to its abolition. Similarly, superstitions are mainly ideas of human begins regarding some events. It is only when our thinking ability develops that we begin to recognize the problems regarding the superstitious practices and therefore criticize them. Thus, development of ideas and thought processes of men lead to the development of human society.



Immuneal Kant was born in the year 1724. He has contributed significalty towards modern philosophy. According to in order unravel truth both rationalism and empiricism is essential.

According to Hegel ideas develop in a dialectical process or in order words, in conflicting process. This means in every age a dominant idea (also known as *thesis*) exists but gradually a counter idea (also known as *antithesis*) begins to develop against that dominant idea. Then a conflict emerges between the dominant idea and the counter idea. As a result of this conflict, a new idea develops which is called the *synthesis*. Then this new idea or the synthesis becomes the dominant idea. Thus, over time this idea becomes thesis and then again gradually an antithesis also surfaces and the process goes on. This whole process is called *dialectical triad.*

Marx has borrowed this idea of dialectics or conflict from Hegel. But he criticized Hegel on the ground that dialectics or conflict does not take

place in the domain of ideas but in the domain of 'matter'; that is, conflict takes places in the material world. This idea of matter is borrowed from Ludwig Feuerbach. He argued that throughout the history there has been oppression of a section of man by another section of man. Religion (it is the domain of ideas) is used as a mechanism to disguise this reality. So men, in order to liberate themselves, must critically understand the material world to recognize their source of exploitation.

7.3.1 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels

Karl Marx met Friedrich Engels after he went to Paris in the year 1843. Engles was a son of a textile manufacturer but he developed a compassion for the misery of the working class. It is also said that much of Marx's concern for the working class developed after his exposure to Engels and his ideas. Due to the similar way of thinking Marx and Engels collaborated on a number of books, articles and also worked together in radical organizations. The famous 'Communist Mennifesto' was a collaborated work of Marx and Engels. Engels had lent support to Marx so that Marx could concentrate on his intellectual and political endeavors. However Engels had always stressed on the fact that he was a junior partner of Marx. After the death of Marx in 1883, Engels became the major spokesperson of Marxian thought.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q.3: Fill in the blanks:

a) Hegel is associated with ..... philosophy.

b) A dominant idea is also known as .....

c) Karl Marx borrowed the idea of ..... from Ludwig Feuerbach.

7.4 DIALECTICAL MATERIALISM

Taking the two concepts of Hegel and Feuerbach (that is dialectics and materialism respectively) into consideration, Marx had put forth the theory of social change. Though Marx had borrowed the idea of dialectics (conflict) from Hegel, he criticized Hegel on the ground that an idea is just a manifestation of the material world. Our consciousness does not lead to our material condition but it is our material condition that will determine our consciousness (idea). In other words, social life is dependent on the economic conditions. Therefore, according to Marx, it is the changes in the material world that lead to the changes in the ideas and this is how a society progresses.

According to Marx, what makes human beings different from animals is their ability to create something new out of the nature. The task of creating/ producing differs in different societies according to their economic organization or mode of production.The mode of production or an economy consists of *two aspects*: *the relations of production* and *the forces of production*. While producing, man enters into a definite relation to the production process. This is called relations of production. For example if there are two blacksmiths, one of them is the owner of the shop and the other is a paid worker. Therefore both of them will have different 'relation to production'. One will be the owner and will control the means of production and the other will work under him. Accordingly their class status will differ. One will be the dominant class and the other will be the subordinate class. This relation of production is dependent on the material forces of production (land, labour, capital and enterprise). This implies that as the material forces of production change, the relations of production also change.

According to Marx, the economy or the mode of production determines the kind of social, political, legal, religious and, education systems etc prevailing in a particular society. For example, in ancient Indian societies the production took place using simple tools and accordingly the education system was also different. Today our society has become very complex. The production process takes place with the use of complicated machines.

Now in order to effectively carry on the production process, our education system has undergone a lot of changes. Accordingly the law and order system has also undergone a drastic change. Therefore, according to Marx, as the production process or the economy changes all other aspects tend to change. Therefore, for him the economy is the foundation or the infrastructure of a society. All other aspects like the legal system, polity, education etc are parts of the superstructure. In other words the superstructure of a society is dependent on the infrastructure.

In every stage, after a certain period of time, the material forces of production come into conflict with the forces of production. This conflict arises because the material forces of production develop due to the improvement of science and technology but the relations to production do not develop accordingly, and this leads to conflict. As a result of the conflict between the forces of production and relations of production, the whole economy or the mode of production changes. Accordingly the other aspects of society like education, law, religion etc also undergo changes. Taking this materialistic conception of society as the basis for his thinking, Marx tried to study how society undergoes changes. According to him, the western society had developed through *four* main stages. These stages are:

- Primitive Communism
- Ancient Society
- Feudal Society
- Capitalist Society

Primitive communism existed at the dawn of human history. During this phase man lived at a state of communism. Because both the forces of production and the products of labour were communally owned, these societies are the only classless society in human history. Therefore there was no conflict among the individuals in society. Each and every member produced for himself/herself as well as for the society. All the three other stages, namely Ancient society, Feudal society and the Capitalist society were the results of economic development with the notion of private property

However as the notion 'private property' emerged, there came in the idea of private ownership of the forces of production. This led to the

fundamental contradiction in human. Through the ownership of the forces of production, a small minority was able to control the labor of the majority. Therefore, a conflict of interest arose between the minority (who owns the means of productions) and the majority who performs the productive labour. During the *Ancient stage* the minority, that is, the owner or the dominant class is known as the Masters and the subordinate class was known as the slave. In the *Feudal societies* the dominant class was known as the feudal lords and the subordinate class was known as the serfs. Finally, during the *Capitalist phase* the dominant class is called the bourgeoisie and the subordinate class is called the proletariat.

7.4.1 Social Class

The concept of social class was fundamental to Marx's theory of conflict. Some of its basic aspects are discussed below:

- **Origin of Social Classes:** Social classes emerged with the private ownership of the material forces of production. With private ownership of the forces of production, different relation to production was created. Some people owned land; and others were tenants on their land, some are employers and others work for wage as employees. Thus, according to the Marxian perspective the relation between the two classes is both of dependence and exploitation.
- **Class Role and Class Struggle:** Throughout the different stages in human history (except in primitive communism), there has always been the existence of a dominant economic class which controls all the aspects of a society including the government .
- **Progressive and Reactionary Classes:** History is continuously renewed through class struggle. As technology changes, the ways of social organization also undergoes change. This process helps in creating new classes which challenge the existing order and thereby pushing the society to a higher level.
- **The End of Clas System:** Marx envisioned that only in the capitalist stage the 'class system' will be overthrown. Because

in this stage the subordinate class will not wait for the internal contradiction to change the society rather they will develop an intellection stance and direct a revolution. This is termed as *praxis* by Marx, which means applying theory to direct action.

7.4.2 Class Conflict in Caputalist Society

Karl Marx employed his ideas of social conflict mainly in the analysis of the capitalist society. His views regarding social conflict in capitalist society can be enumerated in the following points:

- **Significance of Property:** In the capitalist societies the ownership of means of production is held by a few people. Those who have the monopoly over the private property also control the political machinery. Therefore, they are able to control the courts, the policy, the media etc.
- **Surplus Value:** The Capitalist regime sustains by accumulating more and more profit by forcing the workers to work for extra time. Though the workers work beyond their capacity to earn profit but they do not get any share of the profit.
- **Pauperisation:** Amidst extreme exploitation of the workers, their economic situation deteriorates and they become more poverty-stricken.
- **Aliennation:** Due to the increasing exploitation and the inhuman working conditions the workers gradually become alienated. The workers do not find any sense of fulfillment in their work/creation. This is because they do not have any ownership over their creation and most importantly their labor/creation becomes a mechanism of their exploitation. In such a situation man becomes alienated from himself, from the process of production, and also from the product of their labor. Along with these the workers also become alienated from his fellowman as well as from the entire community.
- **Class Solidarity and Antagonism:** According to Marx. A time will come when the workers will become aware/conscious of

each other's pathetic situation. As a result, a class consciousness will develop and they will become 'class-for-itself'. Class-for-itself is a term used by Marx to indicate a group having similar relation to production and who are conscious about their exploitation by others. Thus, they begin to organize themselves to launch a struggle against the exploiters.

- **Polarisation of Classes:** As the workers begin to mobilize themselves politically, the polarization between the workers and the owners increases.
- **Revolution:** At the height of class war, a radical revolution will break out which will destroy the entire capitalist social structure. This revolution is most likely to occur during the economic crises.
- **Dictatorship of the Proletariat:** The revolution will bring an end to the capitalist regime. The revolution would be radical but would not involve mass killing. Since the property will be taken over by the proletariats the bourgeoisie will come to the ranks of proletariat. Thus, from then on property would be equally used for the well- being of all. This will lead to a classless society where no one owns anything but everyone owns everything.

7.5 CRITICISMS

Karl Marx's ideas have been rigorously discussed and debated, across all social science disciplines. Here, we are going to discuss the shortcomings as well as its relevance to modern social analysis.

- Marx over-emphasised the economic base of political power. There are also other sources of power. For example, in India even economically poor Brahmins have more political say than some economically better off but lower caste individual.
- Again, economic class does not always determine one's conduct and provide explaining for historical trends. For example, Nationalism continues to be a strong force which binds people irrespective of different classes.

- Marx did not give importance to certain forces like expansion of civic participation and gradual recognition to human rights which was observed during 19th century.
- His vision regarding extreme polarization between classes has not been true in modern capitalist societies where requirement for specialization has created a number of strata.
- Marxist notion that structural change would be possible only through violent revolution has been proved wrong. Today organized labour has been able to effectively influence the authorities to bring changes without violent revolution.
- Social structural change does not necessarily take place through revolutions. Today's working classes are better organized because of the formation of trade unions. Today the workers can tilt the balance of power in their favour and effect significant changes gradually, and without violent revolutions.
- The State is seen to play the role of welfare association and cannot be identified with the interests of the propertied class alone.
- Modern experiences in societies with capitalistic orientations have not shown any signs of destructive class war. Marx's class-less and state-less society is an utopian idea only, in the sense that it is too perfect to happen.
- But, despite these shortcomings, the contributions of Marx have been tremendous. Exploitation is associated with those vested with power over those who do not possess power. There is some form of social stratification in society and class forms a defining characteristic of capitalistic society.
- Marx developed a variant of sociology of knowledge which stressed the primacy of the economic principle in the evolution of ideologies, philosophical system, politics, ethics and religion.
- The class which has the dominant material force in the society at the same time dominantes the intellectual ideas.
- His theory of social stratification is also a theory of social change.
- He made a significant contribution to the sociology of revolution.



7.6 LET US SUM UP

- Marx was born in the year 1818 in the city of Trier in Germany.
- His ideas regarding the social conflict and social change have a great sociological importance.
- He was profoundly influenced by the Hegelian idea of Dialectics.
- Hegel pointed out, that society changes when ideas change.
- According to Hegel ideas change in a dialectical process.
- In every age a dominant idea (also known as thesis) exists.
- To counter the dominant idea a new idea or antithesis emerges.
- The conflict between the dominant idea and the counter idea leads to a synthesis.
- According to Marx society changes not because of changing idea but due to changes in the material world. In other words social life is dependent on economic conditions.
- The economy changes in dialectical way.
- The economy consists of two aspects, they are: forces of material production and relations of production.
- In every age the material forces of production progresses faster due to improvement of science and technology. But the relations to production do not progress at the same pace.
- This is because those who are the owners of the means of production want to maintain the existing relation of production because they gain more profit from the process. But they do not want to distribute the profit to the workers.
- According to Marx, a time comes when the workers become conscious of this exploitation.
- The workers gradually unite and organize themselves in order to claim their rightful due.
- In the process both the classes (the haves and have nots) become more and more polarized from each other.

- At one point, a conflict emerges between those who wants to retain the existing system of relation to production (share of profit) and those who want to change the existing exploitative system.
- This conflict leads to the formation of a new system. In the ancient phase the conflict between the masters and slaves gave wat to the formations of the feudal stage, in the feudal stage the conflict between the feudal lords and serfs gave way to Capitalism.
- According to Marx in the age of Capitalism the conflict between the bourgeoisie and proletariat would finally lead to a classless society.



7.7 FURTHER READING

1) Abrahim, Francis and Morgan, John Henry (2009); *Sociological Thought*; New Delhi: Macmillan Press ltd.
2) Coser, Lewis A. (2004); *Masters of Sociological Thought*; Jaipur: Rawat Publications.
3) Ritzer, George (2011); *Sociological Theory*; New Delhi: Tata McGraw-Hill Edition.



7.8 ANSWER TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans. to Q. No. 1: Karl Marx was born in the year 1818.

Ans. to Q. No. 2: The book, 'The Community Mennifesto' published in 1848.

Ans. to Q. No. 3: a) Hegel is associated with idealist philosophy.

b) A dominant idea is also known as thesis

c) Karl Marx borrowed the idea of matter from Ludwig Feuerbach.

c) The superstructure is dependent on the .....



7.9 MODEL QUESTIONS

A) Short Questions: (Answer each question in about 1 or 2 words)

Q.1: From whom did Marx borrow the idea of dialectics?

Q.2: What are the two classes according to Karl Marx during capitalism?

B) Write Short Notes: (Answer each question in about 150 words)

Q.1: How does society progress according to Hegel?

Q.2: What are the different stages through which human society has progessed?

C) Long Questions: (Answer each question in about 300-500 words)

Q.1: What do you understand by dialectical materialism? What are the different stages of struggle in a capitalist society?

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