UNIT 11: MARXISM: ALIENATION, CLASS STRUGGLE

UNIT STRUCTURE

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11.1. LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit you will be able to

- Define what is Marxism
- Analyse the concept of Alienation as treated in Marxism
- Discuss the concept of Dialectical Materialism
- Discuss the dialectic of Class struggle
- Explain the basics of Socialism

11.2. INTRODUCTION

In order to understand the socio-philosophical theories it is necessary to study the theoretical speculations in general and the theorists in particular. The German philosopher Karl Marx (1818-1883) is a thinker who occupies a considerably significant position in socio-economic and philosophical debate that remains indispensible in any further analysis in this sphere. His doctrines related to social reformation through revolution hold effective even in today's society. This particular unit is designed to present the significance of the different doctrines of

Marx in understanding society through its stages of Historical Development.

Marx was born on May 5, 1818 in the Rhenish city of Trier, Germany. At a very young age Marx came under the influence of the great philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel during his period at the University of Berlin as a student. He soon became famous as a young Hegelian, debating and countering Hegelian synthesis. After completing his student life Marx eventually became the editor-in-chief in the new liberal-radical and bourgeois paper *Rheinische Zeitung*. Through his radical writings Marx got regarded as a leading radical intellectual. But the newspaper got suppressed by the authority in order to prevent Marx from publishing radical views against the Russian Government. Marx's next active phase as an intellectual and radical thinker again resumed in Paris from 1843-1845 when he met his young Hegelian friends from Berlin. This period gifted Marx with his lifelong friend in his intellectual journey Friedrich Engels. It was through Engels that Marx got introduced to an understanding of the misery of the working class. Marx, along with Engels got actively involved in the revolution against the capitalist society in order to uplift the working class and establish a classless society. Marx nurtured his radical sentiment with this companion and analysed society though the lens of the struggle between the two classes. According to Marx," struggle, rather than peaceful growth was the engine of progress". This struggle is explained through the concepts of Historical Materialism, alienation, class struggle etc. In this unit we shall discuss the socio economic views of Karl Marx expressed through the concepts of class struggle, alienation and other related issues. The concept of Class struggle and alienation play significant role in the formation and reformation of society for long. These concepts are further intertwined with a lot of related concepts like capitalism, Historical Materialism, Dialectical materialism, Socialism etc. When understood through the lens of Marxism all these concepts appear in a chain confined in cause effect kind of relation. This chain is aimed to be understood in this unit.

11.3. WHAT IS MARXISM?

Marxism is understood to be the socio-political and economic theories propounded by the German economist and social philosopher Karl Marx (1818- 1883). Friedrich Engels (1820-95) was a close companion of Marx in the development of any social, political or economic theory that are studies under the tag of Marxism. However, the name Marxism became popular after Marx's death. It is a comprehensive worldview comprising a well known body of philosophical, economic, political, sociological, scientific and moral principles which form an independent intellectual structure. In the beginning, Marxism was a European phenomenon. But, with the passage of time the message of Marx and Engels has spread its root all over the world. It is to be noted that the developed form of Marxism is not restricted to the thoughts of Marx and Angels. Rather, it is claimed to be a rich tradition of social thought- a living tradition with immense possibilities.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS 1

1. Which year was Marx born?

Ans:.....

2. Name the social philosopher who remained Marx's companion in development of his socio-political and economic theories.

Ans:.....

3. Define Marxism.

Ans:.....

In course of time Marxism has taken different forms. The origin tenet of Marxism as a scientific system of thought is called Classical Marxism. Karl Marx (1818-1883) and Friedrich Engels (1820-95), the Russian revolutionary thinker V.I. Lenin (1870-1924), the Polish activist Rosa Luxemburg (1871-1976) and the Chinese revolutionary thinker Mao Zedong (1893-1976) are the chief exponents of this tenet. The emphasis

of the Classical Marxists is on establishing a classless society. They believe that private property divides the society into two polar opposite classes where one is the dominant class and the dominated class. The dominant are the capitalists and the dominated are called the working class.

Before shifting his concerns towards political economy Marx started as a philosopher. But he left philosophy for Economics as he found German philosophy to be more confined to the world of ideal abstractions and generalizations. In his thesis he declared, “The philosophers have only interpreted the world, the point however is to change it”. However, the influence of philosophy is prominent in Marxist thoughts. Marx extensively followed some basic concepts offered by Georg W. F. Hegel, the German philosopher of 19th century Western philosophy. The concepts like labour, property, alienation, and objectification are concepts derived from Hegel by Marx.

Marxism appeared as a response to the capitalist system created by liberalism with its doctrine of laissez-faire or free market economy. Though liberalism arose as a philosophy of human freedom giving freedom to individuals over property holding, yet it took a negative turn till the middle of the 19th century giving rise to capitalism. Under the liberal period a small class of people had the privilege to utilise the power over the working class. Marx firmly opposed this class division in society and fought aggressively expressing concern over the development of the working class through revolution against the capitalist system. In his life time Marx poured his entire interest in understanding capitalism as a system that creates alienation among human beings at many different levels. Apart from Alienation, some of the main tenets of Marxism are: Dialectical Materialism, Historical Materialism, Theory of Revolution, Class conflict/ struggle and the Concept of Surplus Value.

11.4. ALIENATION

The concept of alienation does not have a clearheaded definition and treated in varied ways in different branches of thought. It may be

defined as a condition in which men are dominated by force of their own creation and confirms them as alien powers. The dictionary meaning of the term "Alienation" is "estrangement". Briefly, alienation stands as an umbrella concept incorporating many other dimensions as powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, social isolation, cultural estrangement and self alienation.

Alienation is a central concept in Marx's early writings. The concept has a long and distinguished history. Its origin can be traced back to the Judeo- Christian tradition that stressed on salvation of man to free himself from alienation appearing in the form of dehumanization in the world. However, the concept got prominence in the 18th century after the Industrial Revolution as material demands overtook all other necessities of man. In such an environment alienation came to prominence as a state of experience of an individual or a group facing material conflict with the rest of the society.



LET US KNOW

Though any discussion on alienation primarily refers to Marxism, it is to be kept in mind that serious discussion on the problem of alienation has been initiated in German philosophy, through the philosophy of Hegel in the late 18th century itself. The concept is known to be an important legacy of the Hegelian school of social philosophy that has later got widely treated in Marxism and Existentialism.

Marx on alienation:

Following the dialectic of Hegel, Marx introduced the concept of alienation in a proper theoretical way. While Hegelian interpretation of alienation was centrally confined to the idealist standpoint, Marx's was materialistic one. His treatment was in terms of alienation of the labour or the working class in the material world through production relation. He developed his philosophy in a rather secular mode. Accepting all earlier interpretations he applied the concept in the production system

introducing it as a distinct theory in the field of both economics and Sociology. His ground was more a socio-economic one, related to production relation in a capitalist society. According to his theory the social arrangement of the modernized and capitalist society is such that it is unable to provide the opportunities to decide on the type of work the worker performs. The capitalists have increased the workers' ability to work harder, faster and for long period of time, but they have deprived the workers from the personal wealth which comes from the product they produce. This situation has deprived the working class from meaningful and creative existence. They inevitably lose control over their lives and selves and can never become autonomous and self- realized human beings. Their freedom gets arrested in the hands of the bourgeois.

Marx presents his theory of alienation in *The Economic and Philosophical Manuscript of 1844*. In a capitalist society the nature of individuals depends on the material conditions determining their production which are always found to be coercive in structure. In such a system the workers always perform their functions in a forced environment and labour remains external to the worker. Hence, it does not belong to their essential being. The labourer cannot work freely as per his mental and physical energy and this ruins his body and mind. Hence, he remains outside his work without attachment. He feels comfortable when he does not work and when he works he feels not at home. The social arrangement of the capitalist society is such that it is unable to provide the opportunities to decide on the type of work the workers perform. The capitalists have increased the workers' ability to work harder, faster and for long period of time, but they have deprived the workers from the personal wealth which comes from the product they produce. It has deprived the working class from meaningful and creative existence. They inevitably lose control over their lives and selves and can never become autonomous and self- realised human beings. Their freedom gets arrested in the hands of the bourgeois. In such a forced situation of self-sacrifice, where the labour is completely external to the

worker, he is left alone only with the animal functions like eating, drinking etc. It is not that alienation is manifested only in the result of the production; rather the entire production activity is overpowered by the phenomenon of alienation. Thus, in the capitalist production system the relationship between men is transformed into a relationship between things that overpowers human relationships. The world of objects overpowers the human world and man is turned against his basic nature in alienation from his needs and capacities.

Marxism considers the self as a social creation that is drawn by needs and capacities. According to Marx, man's essential nature is defined by the reciprocal relation between his needs and capacities. Human need is specifically to maintain his physical existence in coordination with nature and the means to satisfy this need is his labour or the productive activity or life activity. This productive activity itself gets promoted as the life activity of man which in turn is called the species character. Marx emphasises on the free and conscious activity of man as his life activity or species character. It is this conscious life-activity that distinguishes man from animal and signifies him as "species being[1]". Since "species being" is the universal essence, the activities and capabilities of man gets developed through social practices, and hence in a way the essence of man may be termed as socialised labour. Unlike animals man produces in accordance with the laws of beauty and nature. He does not merely produce for himself but in accordance with the standard of every species. Therefore, when he works he objectifies himself into it consciously, intellectually, physically and reflects himself through his creation. But in a capitalist mode of production this essence is interrupted. Under the capitalist pressure, man gets alienated from his essential nature, from his conscious free activity and thus from his species life.

Marx explicitly mentions four types of alienation in labour under capitalism. These are:

- Alienation of the worker from his or her 'species essence' i.e. from himself.
- Alienation between workers, from the fellowmen. Capitalism reduces labour to a commodity to be traded on the market and hence, the workers get deprived of any social relationship and remain alienated from the fellowmen.
- Alienation of the worker from the product. Since the product is appropriated by the capitalist class, it escapes the worker's control.
- Alienation from the act of production itself. The workers cannot work according to their choice and hence, his work becomes meaningless activity, offering little or no intrinsic satisfactions.

Thus, alienation in the domain of work has a fourfold aspect: Man is alienated from the objects he produces, from the process of production, from himself, and from community of his fellows.



LET US KNOW

"Species being" is primarily Feuerbach's terminology which Marx used in discussing alienation in the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscript of 1844*. However, the meaning and connotation is Marx's own. He applies the term to mean "the universal essence that contains all the specificities of man's successive modes of social relations".

Distinctly, according to Marx, alienation is caused by capitalist relations. However, though Marx's discussion of alienation in the *Manuscripts* emerges through the critique of political economy, its scope never remains limited to the discussion of economic activities understood in the narrow sense. According to him, in a capitalist society alienation engulfs almost every realm of our life spiritual, political and religious, and alienates man from his essence in all these spheres. Hence it is emphasised that no sphere of human activity is free from alienation as long as man lives in a society characterised by estrangement of labour. However, alienation in the workplace assumes

for Marx an overriding importance, because to him man is over all *Man* the *Maker*. Interestingly, the concept of alienation appears only in Marx's early writings. It cannot be found in the latter writings of Marx. However, this does not indicate that the concept loses its significance in the Marxist concepts focused in his later works, such as *Das Kapital (1867)*. Even if not explicitly discussed, the concept remains central to Marx's socio-economic analyses throughout his period. The concepts of Historical Materialism, class struggle all has a root in the concept of alienation.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS: 2

Q.4. Name the 19th Century Western Philosopher who influenced Karl Marx.

Ans. .....

Q.5. Name book by Karl Marx that contains the detail discussion of the concept of Alienation.

Ans. .....

Q.6. What are the four stages of Alienation as mentioned by Marx?

Ans. .....

11.5. DIALECTICAL MATERIALISM:

Dialectical materialism finds its root in the philosophical doctrines of Hegel called Dialectical Idealism. Hegel tried to explain the mechanism of social change through this mode. He considered ideas or the spiritual consciousness as the essence of the universe. The term dialectical originally refereed to the process whereby the ideas are formed and reformed in the process of intellectual debate. The first idea or proposition advanced regarding an issue is called the thesis. This idea is challenged by some other idea in the pretext that it does not represent the absolute truth. This second idea is called the antithesis—the negation of the thesis. Even the anti thesis does not reflect the absolute truth and both thesis and antithesis clash with each other and in this clash the untrue elements are destroyed and the true elements remains. This

remaining element representing the true ideas is called the synthesis which combines the valid elements of the thesis and antithesis. But, in course of time the synthesis so evolved does not remain the whole truth and gets challenged by another idea that stands as the antithesis of which it turns out to be the thesis. This process goes on till it reaches the absolute idea which is the whole truth without any contradictions. According to Hegel social institutions develop through this dialectical process until it reaches the establishment of the nation-state, the highest stage of social development according to Hegel.

Marx adopted this Hegelian dialectic. But instead of Hegelian 'Ideas', he considered "matter" as the real force behind all social development and social institutions are developed according to the material conditions of human life. With this, Marx replaced Dialectical idealism with Dialectical Materialism. Having the philosophical basis as Dialectical Materialism, Marx then proceeded to its application in practical life in terms of the material needs of man pervaded by the aspects of production relation. This is in turn called Historical Materialism. The main theme of Historical materialism is society as a process of development determined by the economic relations related to production, sustenance, distribution etc. All types of social relations prevailing at any stage of historical development are determined by economic conditions mediated by the production system.

11.6. CLASS STRUGGLE:

As stated in the *Communist Manifesto (1848)*, "The history of all hitherto existing societies is the history of class struggle". Marx's concept of class struggle is closely associated with the concept of revolution. And this revolution centres round the production system in a capitalist society. Revolution and reformation according to Marx takes place through a dialectical process, otherwise called dialectical materialism. Marx's conception of economy was based on the notion of the mode of production. For Marx the most important method of classifying people

into groups is through the production process rather than religion, language nationality and other identities. The mode of production is like a building structure called the “substructure” on which other things of the society are erected on. The legal, political, religious and moral institutions are all called “superstructure” which is shaped according to the changing character of the base. Social classes are determined as per the involvement of the people in the production system. And since the production relations are changing all the time the classes are also emerging in new directions. The clash between the existing social relations and the production forces gives way to another revolutionary class that overthrows the existing classes. This change happens in a dialectical process and each social relation is vulnerable to get overthrown by another as each class contains within itself the seed of its destruction. Following this process Historical Materialism, history experiences the decay of the primitive society and feudal society. According to Marx, the capitalist society also contains the seed of its decay as it creates two classes of the haves and the have nots.

In a capitalist society the factory is said to be the prime locus of antagonism between two classes—the exploiters and the exploited, between the owner and the labourers. Marx and Engels wrote, “Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeians, lord and serf, guild master and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried out an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight”. In a class society there is an inherent contradiction between two classes. Interest of a particular section of people dominates the whole of the society and it stands as an insolvable contradiction between the part and the whole. This conflict of class interest is according to Marx the prime determinant of all social or historical progresses.

As pointed out by Hegel and latter reiterated by Marx, in society there may be two types of groups among people in a society, “we” and “us”. “we” is a psychological concept, not a real union. It refers to a crowd or group of people having no close relation; a group of people unknown to each other. On the other hand “us” refers to a group of

oppressed people who get united with a common goal to overthrow the oppressors. In a capitalist society the workers get united with this "us" feeling and form a hostile group when they continuously face wage discrimination and oppression. People belonging to a particular stratum share common interests and potentialities sharing similar productive relations. This potential relation is called the class-in-itself *(Klasse an sich)* that changes into class-for-itself *(Klasse-fuer-sich)* when a group of individuals facing some oppression become involved in a common struggle. They develop a strong in-group consciousness sharing same social problems. In this process a social class gets formed that raise voice for the protection of their common interest. This sort of a self conscious class emerges whenever a common feeling of deprivation realized both in the economic and political sectors affecting life morally and ideally. However, although a collective group of people may occupy similar positions in the process of production with similar needs and aspirations in life yet they may not appear as a class. For this the internalised class consciousness is the most essential factor among the members of a particular class. A class is born when the people involved in this collective group internalise the similarity of their interest against the oppressing class and revolt against it. It rises as a self conscious body that can create and recreate history through revolution.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS: 3

Q.7. What does Marx mean by Species being?

Ans.....

Q.8. What are the classes that Marx finds getting involved in struggle?

Ans.....

However, it is not only the economic factor that leads to a class conflict or revolution. Along with the economic deprivation the prevailing political ideology takes the role of an instigating factor for it. It a clash

between the dominant ideologies of the dominating class and the rival ideology of the dominated class to overthrow the domination that leads to revolution under favourable conditions. Thus, we get the working class standing together to protect their economic and political interests against the bourgeoisie class. Actually the seed of conflict is rooted in the very motto of Capitalism as it cannot by definition take care of the common interest of the mass. While the working class shares a strong common consciousness of preserving their rights against the capitalist class the capitalist section does not share any such common interest. The market and the competitive mode of production in capitalist system tend to separate individual producers and it rather leads one more to self-interest than class consciousness. That is why it became a clue for the working class to over throw the capitalist society and establish socialism.

Thus, we see that through the concepts of alienation, Dialectical materialism, class struggle etc. Marx presents a real picture of the changing history of society surrounded by conflict over material needs. The revolutionary ideal of Marx aims at establishing a classless society where no division will exist on the basis of wealth generated through the production system. According to Marx, “once the workers become aware that they are alienated from the process of production, the dusk of the capitalist era has set in”. Marx believed that Capitalism will give way to socialism. Being an exploitative and oppressive system it would give rise to the two classes of haves and have nots—the capitalists and the working class and the capitalist society would be transformed only by its victims –the working class through class struggle.

Throughout his life Marx tries to educate the working class the most scientific way of upliftment making them conscious about their miseries and deprivation in a capitalist society. The radical sentiment of Marx, hence, still persists in the societies where there occur any discrimination among people in context of wealth and property holding.



12.7. LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have discussed the Marxist doctrines of Alienation and Class Struggle along with other related issues. Let us review the unit through the following points:

- Marxism is understood to be the socio-political and economic theories propounded by the German economist and social philosopher Karl Marx (1818- 1883), and Friedrich Engels (1820-95) in the 19th century. Marxism gets expressed through the concepts of Class Struggle, Alienation, Revolution, Historical Materialism, Dialectical Materialism, Socialism and other related issues.
- Marx extensively followed some basic concepts offered by Georg W. F. Hegel, the German philosopher of 19th century Western philosophy. The concepts like labour, property, alienation, and objectification are concepts derived from Hegel by Marx.
- The aim of Marx was to establishing a classless society. Marxism appeared as a response to the capitalist system and he fought aggressively expressing concern over the development of the working class through revolution against the capitalist system.
- Alienation: The concept appears only in his early writings. Marx's concept of alienation is developed following the dialectic of Hegel. He introduced the concept in terms of alienation of the labour or the working class in the material world through production relation. According to his theory the capitalist society is unable to provide the opportunities to decide on the type of work the worker performs. The capitalists have increased the workers' ability to work harder, faster and for long period of time, but they have deprived the workers from the personal wealth which comes from the product they produce. This situation has deprived the working class from meaningful and creative existence. They inevitably

lose control over their lives and selves and can never become autonomous and self- realized human beings. Thus, alienation in the domain of work has a fourfold aspect: Man is alienated from the objects he produces, from the process of production, from himself, and from community of his fellows.

- Class Struggle: This conflict of class interest is according to Marx the prime determinant of all social or historical progresses. Social classes are determined as per the involvement of the people in the production system. And since the production relations are changing all the time the classes are also emerging in new directions. The clash between the existing social relations and the production forces gives way to another revolutionary class that overthrows the existing classes. This change happens in a dialectical process and each social relation is vulnerable to get overthrown by another as each class contains within itself the seed of its destruction. This is called Historical Materialism.
- Capitalism, being an exploitative and oppressive system gives rise to the two classes of haves and have nots—the capitalists and the working class. In such a society the workers get united with this "us" feeling and form a hostile group when they continuously face wage discrimination and oppression. People belonging to a particular stratum share common interests and potentialities sharing similar productive relations. This potential relation is called the class-in-itself *(Klasse an sich)* that changes into class-for-itself *(Klasse-fuer-sich)* when a group of individuals facing some oppression become involved in a common struggle.



12.8. FURTHER READINGS

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12.9. ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans.to Q. No. 1: In the year 1818

Ans.to Q. No. 2: Friedrich Engels

Ans.to Q. No. 3: Marxism is understood to be the socio-political and economic theories propounded by the German economist and social philosopher Karl Marx. It is a comprehensive worldview comprising a well known body of philosophical, economic, political, sociological, scientific and moral principles which form an independent intellectual structure.

Ans. to Q. No 4: Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel

Ans. to Q. No. 5: Economic and Philosophical Manuscript 1844.

Ans.to Q. No. 6: According to Marx alienation in the domain of work has a fourfold aspect: Man is alienated from the objects he produces, from the process of production, from himself, and from community of his fellows. These four types of alienation can be stated as follows:

- Alienation of the worker from his or her 'species essence' i.e. from himself.
- Alienation between workers, from the fellowmen. In Capitalism the workers get deprived of any social relationship and remain alienated from the fellowmen.

- Alienation of the worker from the product.
- Alienation from the act of production itself. The workers cannot work according to their choice and hence, his work becomes meaningless activity, offering little or no intrinsic satisfactions.

Ans. to Q.No 7: "Species being", according to Marx, is the universal essence that contains all the specificities of man's successive modes of social relations. It is the universal essence, the activities and capabilities of man that get developed through social practices. It may be termed as socialised labour in Marx's interpretation.

Ans. to Q.No.8: According to Marx, there is always clash or struggle between two classes—the exploiters and the exploited, between the owner and the labourers. In a capitalist society dominated by production relation these two conflicting classes are the working class and the capitalist class.



12.10. MODEL QUESTIONS

A) Very short questions.

i) Marx is influenced/not influenced by Hegel. (choose the correct one)

ii) According to Marx, the History of social development is a peaceful process. (T/F)

iii) Karl Marx is a German/French philosopher. (choose the correct one)

iv) "Class-in-itself" is a we/us group. (choose the correct one)

v) Name two books written by Marx and Engels.

B) Short Questions: (within 150-200 words)

i) Discuss is the role of Alienation in class struggle.

ii) What do you mean by 'substructure' and 'superstructure'?

iii) What does Marx mean by the concept of 'we' and 'us' groups?

iv) What is Historical Materialism according to Marx? How does he relate it to Hegel's concept of Dialectical idealism? Discusss.

C) Long Questions: (Answer within 500 words)

i) "The history of all hitherto existing societies is the history of class struggle". Discuss after Marx and Engels.

ii) Can Social Alienation be overcome at any stage according to Marx? Critically discuss.

iii) Analyse the relevance of Marxist concepts in present socio-economic environment.

iv) Explain and examine the theory of Alienation as maintained by Marx and Engels.

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