
UNIT 15 KARL MARX

Structure

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15.1 INTRODUCTION

In the entire history of political thought, both in influence and in criticism, few political theorists can match Karl Heinrich Marx. Reflecting on the contemporary world from the background of Victorian optimism in England, Marx was confident of human liberation by transcending the realm of necessity to a realm of freedom. Along with Friedrich Engels (1820-95), with whom he shared an unparalleled partnership, Marx dissected 19th Century capitalism as 'scientific socialism' mainly to distance themselves from the early socialism of Owen, Fourier and Saint-Simon whom they dubbed as 'utopian socialists'.

Like Hegel, for Marx, the study of history **was** of crucial significance. Rejecting Hegelian dialectical idealism, Marx offered dialectical materialism emphasising that the primacy of the mode of production of the material means of life essentially conditions the overall existence of human beings as manifested in human relationships. Understanding reality in terms of base that included mode and relationships of production and the superstructure that included political, cultural and intellectual dimensions, Marx observed that individual consciousness was determined by societal process. Emphasising all history as the history of class 'struggle, Marx's stages of social evolution had five different stages: (a) primitive communism, (b) slavery, (c) feudalism, (d) capitalism and (e) communism. Marx's major concentration was on analysing contemporary capitalism as in the first three he had little interest and desisted from making a blueprint for the future communist society except providing a sketchy outline. He analysed capitalism dialectically praising its role in revolutionising the means of production while condemning it for its inequities, wastage and exploitation. However he was mistakenly confident that the days of capitalism would be over soon. Many commentators believe that the best way to understand Marx is to see him as a critic of 19th Century capitalism.

15.2 LIFE AND TIMES

Marx was born at Trier in Rhineland (Prussia) in a Jewish family. He embraced Christianity during his childhood. He studied History, Law and Philosophy at Bonn, Berlin and Jena. He received his doctorate (Ph.D. Degree) in Philosophy from the University of Jena. It was during his student days that he was attracted to socialism—a doctrine, which was considered quite dangerous by the rulers of those times. Because of his socialistic convictions and his radical anti-state views he was expelled from Prussia and was forced to take shelter in France and Belgium. While he was in France he continued organising the German workers working in that country. Consequently the French Government under the pressure of the Prussian Government expelled him from France. In 1849 he migrated to England and stayed there till his death in 1883.

15.2.1 Beginning of an Intellectual Journey

Marx has written so extensively on various issues of Philosophy, Economics, Politics and Society that it is difficult to discuss all his complex ideas in a few pages. Because of a wide range of issues on which he wrote it is equally difficult to put him in a straight jacket of any one discipline. During his student days Marx was attracted to Hegelian Idealism but he soon shifted his interest to Humanism and ultimately to Scientific Socialism. He was also influenced by some of the major movements of his times. During his formative years the idea of evolution, in one form or the other, was very much in the air. While one version of evolution was articulated by Hegel (*Evolution of Absolute Idea* or *Spirit*), the other version was propounded by Darwin (in his *Origin of Species*). Although Marx accepted a few of the contemporary themes, he rejected some others. His most seminal contribution lies in offering an alternative theory of historical evolution—the theory of Dialectical Historical Materialism. Through this theory he rejected the Hegelian and Darwinian theories and propounded his own theory to explain the course of human history. Marx also entered in polemical argument with many of his contemporaries, particularly Proudhon and Bakunin and various socialist groups of Europe,

15.3 THEORY OF ALIENATION

One of the most original contributions of Marx is his Theory of Alienation. This is contained in his early work—*Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*—which were written in 1843 but were discovered nearly fifty years after his death. These Manuscripts show that ‘early Marx’ was mainly interested in the problem of alienation.

In order to understand Marxian Theory of Alienation it is important to understand Hegel’s views on alienation. This is so because Marx borrowed his idea of alienation from Hegel. And Feuerbach’s, particularly from Hegel. He did so while dealing with the Hegelian notion of Phenomenology. For Hegel, alienation is the state of consciousness as it acquaints itself with the external world in which objects appear to man external or alien. Nature is a self-alienated form of Spirit/Absolute mind. Man is self-alienated Spirit/God in the process of de-alienating itself. Feuerbach’s position is just the opposite, i.e. that man is not self-alienated God; rather God is self-alienated man. According to Hegel, consciousness emancipates itself from this alienation by recognising that the objects that appear to consciousness to exist outside it are only a phenomenal expression of consciousness. In other words, it is recognition by consciousness that objects are merely alienated or reified consciousness. Marx vehemently attacks Hegel for identifying the existence of objects with alienation, which makes the objective world a mere phantasm. Marx does so by distinguishing between *objectification* and *alienation*. Objectification

is based on the premise of material existence of the objects; while alienation is a state of consciousness resulting from specific type of relationship between men and objects. Such relationships cannot be a fantasy because objects are real.

Since Marx recognises the autonomous existence of objects, alienation can be got over only by 'object-creating praxis', i.e. by changing the very conditions in which the objects are created. In short, whereas for Hegel alienation is a state of consciousness subject to elimination by another state of consciousness, for Marx alienation is related to the real existing objects and can be overcome in the real sphere of object-related activity.

In Marx's view one consequence of Hegelian position is that the whole history is reduced to an act of thinking because Hegel sees all concrete events only as manifestation of Idea or Spirit. Since in Hegel the abolition of alienation is merely at the level of consciousness it becomes 'impossible to abolish real alienation. Hence, men are forced to legitimise their chains. Secondly, for Marx alienation is rooted in the historical situation and its consequences. In the capitalist society the creation of objects (production) does not help man to realise himself, i.e. to realise his potential. This inability of man to realise his potential while being engaged in the creation of objects causes alienation. Hence, alienation will be overcome when the production of objects will lead to unfolding of the human potentialities.

In capitalism production takes place in alienating circumstances and this makes objectification (creation of objects) into dehumanisation. The object produced by the labourer by his labour, its product, now stands opposed to him as an alien being as a power independent of him. In essence, labour itself becomes an object. What is embodied in the product of his labour does not belong to the labourer, it is no longer his own. It belongs to some one else: the capitalist. The greater this product is, the more he is diminished and de-humanised. Thus, you can say that, for Marx, labour becomes a dehumanising act when it is not a voluntary but a coercive activity. But what makes the labour coercive is not the nature of labour (nature of labourer's work) *per se* but the historical conditions in which this labour is performed. Hence, the society that will abolish alienation will not abolish labour, it will only abolish the alienating conditions in which labour is performed. In other words, labour will exist even in a socialist and a communist society but it will not be a coercive activity. The crucial question is whether the work serves 'as a *means for existence* for the labourer or becomes the very *content of his life*. This amounts to saying that objectification (producing objects by one's labour) will continue even under communism but alienation will not.

From the above account you must have noticed that alienation as it exists in a capitalist society has many dimensions. However, three dimensions are fundamental: i) Man's alienation from nature; ii) alienation from humanity or fellow workers; and iii) alienation from himself. Alienation from nature implies that the labourer is alienated from his faculty and capacity of shaping the world because the world appears to him as his master. Secondly, alienation occurs because of the worker's inability to 'own' the product of his work, which belongs to someone else, Not only this, even his labour is not his own because he has sold it to another. Moreover, what is embodied in the product of his labour is no longer his own. Hence, he gets alienated from the object of his labour. This object which he has produced assumes an external existence. It exists independently outside him and appears alien to him. It stands opposed to him as an autonomous power, as a hostile force. Thirdly, alienation occurs because work for the labourer is not voluntary but it is imposed on him. It is forced labour that he has to perform. It is not for the satisfaction of his needs but for the satisfaction of others' needs. Hence, work for him becomes drudgery, a monotonous and boring activity. For twelve hours the worker weaves, spins, drills, turns, builds, shovels, breaks stones, carries loads without knowing why he is

doing all this. Another aspect of alienation is the domination of dead, objectified labour (machinery) over the living labour (the worker). In this process the worker becomes an appendage of the machine. His product and his machines become his real masters. He feels alienated from himself. It is because of this that man feels himself to be freely active only in animal functions—eating, drinking and procreating—while in his human functions he is reduced to an animal. The animal in him becomes human and the human in him becomes animal, Marx further explains it by saying that:

the less you eat, drink, buy books, go to theatre or to ball or to the public house, and the less you think, love, theorise, sing, paint, fence etc, the more you will be able to save and the greater will become your treasure which neither moth nor rust will corrupt—your capital. The less you are, the less you express your life, the more you live, the greater in your alienated life and the greater is the saving of your alienated being.

The above quotation shows that property for Marx is not the realisation or fulfillment of personality but its negation. Hence, it is not only the property-less (the workers) who are alienated, but so are those who have property (the capitalists). The possession of property by one person necessarily entails its non-possession by another. However, in Marx's view the problem of alienation cannot be solved by assuring property to all (which is in any case impossible) but by abolishing all property relations. Hence, the abolition of capitalism is a necessary pre-requisite for the abolition of alienation. Capitalism, by definition entails alienation.

Communism for Marx is not only the positive abolition of private property but also the abolition of human self-alienation. Therefore, it is the return of man to himself as a social, i.e. really human being. Secondly, Marx argued in his *The German Ideology* that the main cause of alienation is fixation of activity due to which what we ourselves produce becomes objective power above us, going out of our control, thwarting our expectations, bringing to naught our calculations. Man will be redeemed from alienation in the communist society because nobody will have any exclusive sphere of activity and each one can become accomplished in any branch he wishes. There it will be possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticise after dinner, doing just that which gives me pleasure without ever becoming a hunter, fisherman, shepherd or critic. This will be the real state of freedom for man from alienation and exploitation.

15.4 DIALECTICS

Marx borrowed his dialectical method from Hegel but modified it in a fundamental way. While Hegel had applied his dialectical method in the domain of ideas, Marx applied the Dialectics to explain the material conditions of life. In the process of doing so he denounced the Hegelian philosophy of dialectical idealism, on the one hand, and the theory of mechanistic materialism, on the other. Hence, the Marxian theory of society and history may be called *Dialectical Materialism*. (In fact, Engels in his *Anti-Duhring* applied the dialectics even to physical nature. This has become a subject of intense debate among post-Marx Marxists). Marxian dialectical materialism, developed by Engels has three dimensions:

- i) The law of transformation of quantity into quality. It means that quantitative changes lead to qualitative revolutionary situation.
- ii) The law of unity of opposites (contradiction), and
- iii) The law of negation of negation (thesis-antithesis and synthesis).

Marx holds that the *material* and the ideal are not only different but opposite and constitute a unity in which the material is primary and the mind (idea) secondary. This is so because matter can exist without mind but mind cannot exist without matter because historically it (mind) has developed out of matter: In this way Marx completely inverted the Hegelian position. You would recall that for Hegel mind was primary and matter secondary. Marx pointed out that with Hegel "dialectics is standing on its head. It must be turned right side up." This he did by making matter *primary* and mind secondary.

15.5 THEORY OF HISTORICAL MATERIALISM

The most seminal contribution of Marx is his theory of historical materialism. In his *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* Engels defined historical materialism as a theory which holds that the ultimate cause which determines the whole course of human history is the *economic* development of society. The whole course of human history is explained in terms of changes occurring in the modes of production and exchange. Starting with primitive *communism* the mode of production has passed through three stages: slavery, feudalism and capitalism and the consequent division of society into distinct classes (slave-master, serf-baron and proletariat-capitalist) and the struggle of these classes against one another. The most profound statement of Marx which explains his theory of historical materialism is contained in his Preface to a Contribution to the Critique of Political *Economy*. In this work Marx contends that:

the economic structure of society, constituted by its relations of *production* is the real foundation of society. It is the *basis* on which rises a legal and political *super-structure* and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. Along with it, the society's *relations* of production themselves correspond to a definite stage of development of its material productive forces. Thus, the mode of production of material life determines the social, political and intellectual life process in general.

The general relations as well as forms of state are to be grasped **neither from themselves nor from** the so-called general development of human mind, but rather they **have their roots** in the material conditions of life. As the society's productive forces develop (animate energy getting replaced by inanimate energy—for example oxen ploughing getting replaced by ploughing with tractor) they clash with the existing relations of production which become a fetter on their further growth. Thus, begins the epoch of social revolution. This **contradiction between forces of production** and relations of production divides the society into classes. As people become conscious of this conflict they fight it out. The conflict is resolved in favour of the productive forces and new, higher relations of production, whose material conditions have matured in the **womb** of the old society emerge. The bourgeois mode of production not only represents the **most recent** of several progressive epochs, but it is the last antagonistic form of production.

Marx's materialist interpretation of history thus explains the general course of human history in terms of growth of productive forces. The productive forces, as already pointed out, consist of means of production (machines, tools and factories) and labour power. The relations of production correspond to society's productive level. In addition to ancient, *feudal* and bourgeois modes of production Marx also talked of the Asiatic *mode of production*. On the one hand, Marx distinguished between forces of production and relations of production on the other lie distinguished between the base and the super-structure. For Marx, the productive forces are not objective economic forces which do not require the mediation of human consciousness for their emergence or existence. Likewise, the distinction between the material base and the ideological super-structure is not the distinction between matter and spirit but between conscious human

activity aimed at the creation and preservation of conditions of human life, and human consciousness which provide rationalisation and legitimisation of specific form that human activity takes.

Like his dialectics, Marx constructed his materialist conception of history out of the Hegelian system itself which had sought to bridge the gap between the *rational* and the *actual*. Marx, in fact, borrowed such concepts as civil society and property from the Hegelian system and set them in a revolutionary relationship to the concept of the state. Hegel confronts civil society as a *sphere of materialism* and counter-poses it to the state as *sphere of idealism*. In sharp contrast to this, Marx holds that relations as well as forms of state are to be grasped neither from themselves, nor from the so-called general development of human mind but rather they have their roots in the material conditions of life. You must also understand the way in which Marx differentiates between his materialist conception of history and Hegelian idealist conception of history. To Hegel, it is the life process of the human mind, i.e. the process of thinking which under the name of the idea gives momentum to history. Thus, for Hegel, the real world is only the external, phenomenal form of the idea, while for Marx the ideal is nothing else than the material world reflected by human mind and translated into forms of thought. To put it differently, while in the Hegelian scheme *consciousness determines existence*; in the Marxian scheme it is the *social being* (conditions of existence) that *determine their consciousness*. Thus, the relationship between economic and the political in Marx is such that the political structure reflects the socio-economic conditions. It is the economic fact of life, which produce or determine the nature of ideas. Thus, Marx reduced all thought and action to the material conditions of life. Consciousness is nothing but the reflection of material conditions of men's existence. However, this relationship between material conditions and ideas is not necessarily direct and automatic. It is rather complex. Marx expressed his position in a very technical language. He argued that the doctrine that men are products of circumstances and up-bringing and that, therefore, changed men are products of other circumstances and changed up-bringing forgets that it is men that change circumstances and that educator himself needs education.

The above statement of Marx will help you to understand that in Marx epistemology ceases to be merely a reflective theory of cognition but becomes a vehicle for shaping and molding reality. Thus, Marx's epistemology occupies a middle position between classical (mechanical) materialism and classical idealism. Since, it synthesises the two traditions, it transcends the classical dichotomy between subject and object. In short, Marx denies the validity of traditional mechanistic materialist modes of consciousness. To Marx, reality is always human reality, not in the sense that man shapes nature because this act of shaping nature also shapes man and his relation to other human beings. It is a total process, implying a constant interaction between subject and object "My relationship to my surroundings is my consciousness".

In a subtle sense, the Marxian philosophy of historical materialism is different not only from Hegelian philosophy; it is also different from that of Feuerbach. While Feuerbach saw the unity of man and nature expressed by man's being a part of nature, Marx sees man as shaping nature and his being, in turn, shaped by it. To put it in simple words, whereas Feuerbach *naturalises man*, Marx *humanises nature*. Marx argued that man not only satisfies his needs through his contact with nature but also creates new needs as well as possibilities of their satisfaction. Thus, according to Marx, man's needs are historical not naturalistic. The never-ending dialectical pursuit of their creation and satisfaction constitutes the main course of historical development. Here again, the Marxist position is different from pragmatists. While pragmatism starts with the premise that man adopts himself to a given pre-existing environment, Marx views man not adopting himself to the environment but shaping his world. To put it differently, reality is viewed by classical materialism and pragmatism as if it were merely a passive object of

perception; while, for Marx, reality is not only shaped by man but it also reacts on man himself and shapes him. Thus, it is a two-way interaction: man shaping nature and getting shaped by nature.

15.6 THEORY OF CLASS WAR

The understanding of the concept of "class" is central to the understanding of Marxian philosophy. The sole criterion on the basis of which the class of a person is determined is his ownership (or control) of means of production (land, capital, machines & technology). Those who own or control the means of production constitute the bourgeoisie (exploiters), and those who own only labour power constitute the proletariat (exploited). Thus, classes are defined by Marx on the basis of twin criteria of a person's place in the mode of production and his consequent position in terms of relations of production. The lack of ownership (or control) of means of production and lack of property and the immediate need to get work i.e. the class of concrete labour are some of the characteristic features of the proletariat class. Since class is based on ownership (or control) of means of production and ownership of property; the disappearance of class difference depends on the disappearance of property as the determining factor of status.

In *Communist Manifesto* Marx-Engels said: "The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles". They argued that class conflict is the real driving force of human history. In the capitalist societies class differentiation is most clear, class consciousness is more developed and class conflict is most acute. Thus, capitalism is the culminating point in the historical evolution of classes and class conflict. The distinctive feature of bourgeois epoch is that society as a whole is more and more splitting up into two great hostile camps, into two great classes directly facing each other—bourgeoisie and proletariat.

Marx also made a distinction between the objective fact of existence of a class and its subjective awareness about its being a class—class consciousness. Division of labour is the main source of historical emergence of classes and class antagonisms. Each new class which puts itself in place of the one ruling before it, is compelled, merely in order to carry through its aims, to represent its interest as the common interest of all the members of society.. The class making a revolution appears from the very beginning not as a class but as the representative of the whole society.

Through a detailed historical analysis Marx showed that no major antagonism disappears unless there emerges a new antagonism. Thus, general antagonism between the rich and the poor has always been there but in capitalism it has been sharply polarised into antagonism between the capitalist and the proletariat. Thus, in capitalism the emergence of proletariat has a special significance. It is not just a historical phenomenon because its suffering, its exploitation and its dehumanisation is a paradigm for the human condition at large. This is so because in proletariat class Marx sees the contemporary and the final realisation of universality. He endows this class with a historical significance and mission. It can redeem itself only by a total redemption of humanity. When the proletariat announces the dissolution of the existing class-based social order it only declares the secret of its own existence, because it is the effective dissolution of this order that will lead not only to the emancipation of the proletariat but to the emancipation of humanity. For such emancipation of humanity it is essential to abolish the institution of private property. Private property as private property, as wealth is compelled to maintain itself, and thereby its opposite—the proletariat, in existence. The proletariat is compelled as proletariat to abolish itself and thereby its opposite, the condition for its existence, what makes it proletariat, i.e. private property. Emancipation of society from private property, from

servitude takes the political form of emancipation of humanity as a whole. All human servitude is involved in the relation of the worker to production and all types of servitude are only modification or consequence of this relation. Hence, the proletariat can abolish all classes and all class antagonisms by abolishing itself as a separate class. In final analysis Marx visualised the emergence of a classless society. Such class-less society will also be a stateless society because with the disappearance of classes the very rationale for the existence of state will disappear. According to him the rationale for the existence of state is to defend the interest of the bourgeoisie.

15.7 THEORY OF SURPLUS VALUE

Another key feature of class relations in capitalism, according to Marx, is the expropriation of surplus value by the bourgeoisie from the labour of the proletariat. The theory of surplus value is discussed by Marx in great detail in his *Capital*. The theory of surplus value is rooted in the labour theory of value propounded by Ricardo and classical economists. The labour theory of value holds that labour spent by the labourer in the production of a commodity is the sole criterion for determining its value. Of course, it will also depend on the "use-value" of that commodity. Marx admits that human labour cannot create value by itself alone. It uses instruments of production which are owned by the capitalist. The capitalist buys the "labour power" of the labourer and applies it to the raw material to produce commodities which have an exchange value. The difference between the *exchange value* of the commodity and the wages paid to the worker by the capitalist in producing that commodity is surplus value.

In fact, Marx explains the whole process of exploitation with the help of his theory of surplus value. It is a distinct feature of capitalist mode of production. To put it in simple words, surplus value accrues because the commodity produced by the worker is sold by the capitalist for more than what he (the worker) receives as wages. In his *Capital* Marx elaborated it in a very technical language. He argued that the worker produces a commodity which belongs to the capitalist and whose value is realised by the capitalist in the form of price. The value of the commodity depends on the capital involved in its production. This capital has two parts—constant capital and variable capital. Constant capital relates to means of production like raw material, machinery, tools etc used for commodity production. The variable capital refers to the wages paid to the worker. It is the value of what the labourer sells (his labour power). Surplus value is the difference between the value produced by the worker and what he gets in exchange for this value of his labour. This is called variable capital because it varies from beginning to the end. It begins as value of the labour power and ends as the value produced by that labour power in the form of a commodity. Labour power has thus a unique quality of its ability to create value.

Marx argued that the capitalist appropriates part of the labour of the worker for which he (the worker) does not get paid. Thus, surplus value is unpaid labours of the labourer. It can be variously measured in terms of time as well as in terms of money. Suppose a worker works for ten hours in producing a commodity. He may get paid for only what is equivalent to his eight hours labour. Thus, his two hours labour has been appropriated by the capitalist. Marx also argued that gradually the proportion of surplus value becomes more and more. In the example cited above the worker was not paid for his two hours labour out of ten hours that he had spent in producing a commodity because he was paid only for his eight hours labour. By and by, the proportion of unpaid labour will increase from two to three, four or five hours. Finally, a stage comes when the worker gets paid only the minimum that is necessary for his survival. (His survival does not mean only his personal survival but also the survival of his

family so that when this worker is not able to work (due to old age or death or illness) his children may take his place). As pointed out above, the working class consists of those who own nothing but their own labour power which they are forced to sell in order to live. According to Marx, the history of capitalist production is a history of struggles by the capitalist to increase his surplus value and resistance by the workers against this increase.

There is a difference in the way in which surplus value was created in the slave society and under feudalism and the way it is created in the capitalist society. In the former the slave or the serf who created surplus value was tied to his master or the feudal lord but in capitalism there is a 'free contract' into which the worker 'voluntarily' enters with the capitalist. Of course, this freedom is a myth because the worker has no option but to sell his labour power. He must enter into contract with some capitalist. The only option that he has is to choose the capitalist to whom he wants to sell his labour power. Thus this freedom is freedom to choose his exploiter. The slave and the serf did not have this freedom.

15.8 THEORY OF REVOLUTION

The basic cause of revolution, according to Marx, is the disjunction that arises between relations of production and the means of production. As means of production (technology etc.) grow with growth of scientific knowledge, they go out of step with the existing relations of production. A stage is reached where the relations of production become a fetter on the production process itself. This gives rise to immanent demand for a transition to a new mode of production. The capitalist mode of production emerged from the womb of feudal order in the same way as feudal mode of production emerged from the womb of the slave society. Likewise, socialism will emerge from the womb of bourgeois society itself. This is so because capitalism constantly revolutionises its own means of production and thus undermines its own conditions of existence. In fact, the bourgeoisie produces, above all, its own grave diggers. Marx asserted that the bourgeois relations of production are the last antagonistic form of social process of production—antagonistic not in the sense of individual antagonism but class antagonism arising from the social conditions of life of the individuals. Thus, the productive forces developing in the womb of bourgeois society create material conditions for the resolution of that antagonism.

Marx's assertion that the bourgeois relations of production are the last antagonistic form of social process of production is rooted in the assumption that all the previous historical movements (revolutions) were movements of minorities in the interest of minorities. The proletarian revolution will be different from them. The proletariat, the lowest stratum of capitalist society cannot stir, cannot raise itself to the position of ruling class without the whole superincumbent strata of officials being sprung into the air. Along with it, Marx also spelled out the method, which will be followed by the proletariat class to achieve its objective. In the Communist *Manifesto* Marx and Engels declared that communists scorn to hide their views and aims. They openly declare that their purpose (revolution) can only be achieved by the forcible overthrow of the whole capitalist order. Thus, the emancipation of the proletariat is predicated by Marx on the emancipation of humanity.

Here it is important for you to bear in mind that in the history of revolutions there is a debate about the role of *subjective* (human) and objective (material) factors in making a revolution. Whether it is the mere existence of a proletariat class which will bring about the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism or is it the consciousness of this proletariat which is necessary for doing so? Marx's position in this regard is very significant. He sees a dialectical relationship between philosophy's comprehension of the world and its ability to change it. Theory must

evolve a proper interpretation of the world before it is able to change it. The ultimate task of philosophy is not merely to comprehend reality but also to change it. Praxis revolutionises the existing reality through human action. Revolutionary praxis has, therefore, a dialectical aspect. Objectively, it is the organisation of the conditions leading to ultimate human emancipation and subjectively, it is the self-change that proletariat achieves by its self discovery through organisation.

Thus, the dilemma of determinism vs. *voluntarism* is transcended by Marx through the dialectical nature of revolutionary consciousness. Objective conditions themselves will not bring about the revolution until and unless the proletariat grasps the fact that by shaping its own view of the world it also changes it. If revolutionary consciousness exists then revolution is bound to occur. When the worker comprehends that under capitalist production he is degraded to the status of a mere object, a commodity; he ceases to be a commodity, an object and becomes a subject (active agent). This is revolutionary consciousness. The understanding of the existing reality by the proletariat is, therefore, a necessary condition for the possibility of revolutionising it. In other words, it is only an understanding of the internal dynamics of capitalism by the proletariat that will enable it to make revolution which will signal the transition from capitalism to socialism.

15.9 DICTATORSHIP OF PROLETARIAT

Dictatorship of the proletariat is another important concept in Marx's writings. Marx did not write very clearly and systematically about the dictatorship of the proletariat and about the exact nature and form of post-revolutionary communist society. At best his treatment is sketchy. In a letter to Wedemeyer (March 5, 1852) Marx said that he had not discovered the concept of classes and class struggles.

What I did that was new was to prove: (a) that the existence of classes is only bound up with particular phases in the development of production; (b), that the class struggle necessarily leads to the dictatorship of the proletariat; (c) that this dictatorship (of the proletariat) itself only constitutes the transition to the abolition of all classes leading to the establishment of a classless society.

Thus, the dictatorship of the proletariat is a necessary intermediate point or a transitional phase on the path from capitalism to socialism and communism. In the Critique of the Gotha Programme he further clarified that between capitalism and communist society lies a period of revolutionary transformation from one (i.e. capitalism) to the other (i.e. socialism). In political sphere this transformation will take the form of dictatorship of the proletariat. It is the first step in the revolution of the working class which will raise the proletariat to the position of a ruling class. In Marx's view during the dictatorship of the proletariat there will be a regime in which the proletariat will control the state power. Such a transitional phase of dictatorship of the proletariat is necessary because the destruction of whole capitalist social and political order cannot be fully achieved without capturing the state power and without using it as an instrument to create conditions for the ushering in of a communist social order.

15.10 VISION OF A COMMUNIST SOCIETY

Communism is explained by Marx as a form of society which the proletariat will bring into existence through its revolutionary struggle. In Communist *Manifesto* Marx and Engels argued that the communists have no interests separate and apart from the interests of the proletariat as

a whole. In his *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* Marx defined communism as the positive abolition of private property. It also entailed the abolition of classes and abolition of division of labour. In economic terms the communist society will be a "society of associated producers". In political terms communism will be the first state in the history of mankind to use political power for universal interests instead of partisan interests. Thus, it will be different from the state in capitalism which is no more than the Managing Committee of the Bourgeoisie. For Marx the state in capitalism is serving the long-term interests of the bourgeoisie as a whole. It promotes and legitimises the exploitation of the proletariat by the bourgeoisie.

In *Critique of the Gotha Programme* Marx talked of two stages of communist society. In the first state communism will bring about the socialisation of means of production. It means that the means of production will not be in the hands of any one class but in the hands of society as a whole. At this state wage labour will continue to exist and the organising principle of the economy will be: 'from each according to his capacity to each according to his work'. It means that every one will work according to one's ability and get according to the amount of work done. At the second and the final stage the communist society will ensure the end of man's domination by the objective forces. As already stated communism for Marx is not only the positive abolition of private property but also the abolition of state and abolition of human self-alienation. It will be a class less and stateless society in which government of men will be replaced by administration of things. It will be return of man to himself as a social, i.e. really human being. Communism is viewed by Marx as the true final solution of the conflict between existence and essence; objectification and self affirmation; freedom and necessity; individual and the species.

Marx also claimed that communism is the final solution to the riddle of history and knows itself to be this solution. Man in communism will become conscious of himself as the prime mover of history as well as its product. As stated earlier, since communism will ensure the disappearance of social division of labour; it will become possible for man to do one thing to day, another tomorrow "to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening and criticise after dinner without ever becoming a hunter, a fisherman, a shepherd or a critic" (*German Ideology*). Moreover, it will be a state of plenty where every one will work according to capacity (ability) and get according to need. The creation of new needs will also ensure the creation of means for their satisfaction. History will not come to an end; it will continue' in terms of creation of new needs and creation of methods of their fulfillment.

It should be noted that under communism alienation will come to an end but labour will continue to remain a vital need. The sphere of material production will remain' in the realm of necessity. The realm of freedom will begin only in the leisure time. Thus, work will continue to be an obligation even in a communist society.

15.11 GENERAL ASSESSMENT

Marx is undoubtedly one of the most influential philosophers of modern times. His ideas have acquired the status of a powerful ideology. His ideas on Alienation, I-historical Materialism, Class War, Surplus Value and his vision of a Proletarian Revolution, Dictatorship of the Proletariat, Socialism and Communism have been extensively discussed, debated, modified and sometimes even rejected by his followers and adversaries. His writings are so voluminous and his themes are so wide-ranging that Marx has come to mean different things to different people. For example, there are studies which seek to distinguish between 'early' and 'later' Marx. While 'early' Marx is projected as a humanist philosopher interested in redemption of mankind

from alienation; the 'later' Marx is viewed as an economist and a revolutionary interested in abolishing exploitation. 'Early' Marx is Marx of the Economic and Philosophical *Manuscripts*; while the 'later' Marx is Marx of the *Communist Manifesto*, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* and *Capital*. There are also studies which see an underlying unity between the 'early' and the 'later' Marx. Some studies have even tried to assess the influence that Engels exercised on Marx and influence that Marx exercised on Engels. Such studies have a valid point to make because initially Marx was basically a philosopher, while Engels was basically an economist. Due to influence that they exercised on one another Marx moved from Philosophy to Economics; while Engels moved from Economics to Philosophy. So much so that it is almost impossible to give a universally acceptable and a non-partisan assessment of Marx.

Marx's vision of a new social order in which there will be neither alienation nor exploitation, no classes, no class antagonism, no authority, no state is highly fascinating and because of this attraction, Sabine called Marxism a utopia but a generous and a humane one. However, though he admitted that historical developments are always open to several possibilities yet he did not agree that such possibilities were open to his own theory. However though, not putting his own theory to the possibility of dialectical critique as Avineri said, was a grave mistake. Berlin commenting on his tremendous popularity for generations found that to be a negation of Marx's rigid framework of determinism. Plamenatz distinguished between a German Marxism and Russian Communism. Harrington portrayed the contemporary radical view of Marx as being an excellent critic of capitalism but unable to provide a detailed alternative to it. This failure of Marx is mainly because of the fact that he was writing at a time when democracy was only one of the possibilities and not a universal reality as it is today. Because of this lacuna he could not grasp the dynamics of democracy and the importance of civil and political liberties for any civilised society.

15.12 SUMMARY

Karl Marx is known for his radical socialist convictions and anti-state views. He borrowed the concept of alienation and the dialectical method from Hegel but modified them in a fundamental way. He attacked Hegel for identifying existence of objects with alienation which makes the objective world a mere fantasy. Marx even applied Dialectics used by Hegel in the domain of ideas to explain the material conditions of life. Marx holds that the material and the ideal are not only different but opposite and constitute a unity in which the material is primary and the mind (idea) secondary. Thus according to him, the ultimate cause which determines the whole course of human history is the economic development of society. This was explained by the theory of historical materialism. Starting with *primitive communism* the mode of production has passed through three stages: slavery, feudalism and capitalism and the consequent division of society into distinct classes (slave-master, serf-baron and proletariat-capitalist) and the struggle of these classes against one another. The general relations as well as forms of state are to be grasped neither from themselves nor from the so-called general development of human mind, but they have their roots in the material conditions of life. Classes are defined by Marx on the basis of twin criteria of a person's place in the mode of production. Class is based on ownership (or control) of means of production and ownership of property, Surplus value accrues to the capitalist, because the commodity produced by the worker is sold by the capitalist for more than what he (the worker) receives as wages and this is the distinct feature of the capitalist mode of production. The disappearance of class difference and the disappearance of property is the determining factor of status. In final analysis Marx visualised the emergence of a classless society and this can be achieved according to him, through revolution and dictatorship of the

proletariat. This will lead to the establishment of a Communist society and this is the final solution to the riddle of history.

15.13 EXERCISES

- 1) What is Marxian theory of alienation?
- 2) Is there a difference between the Young and the Old Marx?
- 3) "The history of the hitherto existing society is the history of class struggle". Explain and discuss.
- 4) Critically examine Marx's theory of surplus value.
- 5) Discuss Marx's theory of historical materialism.
- 6) What are Marx's views on Proletarian Revolution and his vision of post-revolutionary society?