

Indian Society: Sociological Perspectives
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Week-05
Lecture-22

Marxian Theory of Social Change

Welcome back to the class. We are continuing with the Marxian framework to understand society in general. And as I was mentioning in the previous class, a comprehensive understanding of Marxian framework in general is very much required to understand how his ideas were used to study different societies. So, when you look into the larger question of how in society was studied by different perspectives like Indological or Empirical or Marxian perspective, the larger theoretical framework is very much needed. Why that certain scholars found Marxian framework suitable to study Indian society while several others found that is unsuitable. So, in order to capture this particular or in order to understand these questions, it is vital that we have a kind of larger understanding about what is Marxian theory.

So, in the previous class, we looked at the larger philosophical, you know, treatise of Marx about the nature of society. And we found that he, of course, like any other social scientist, he was a product of his time, when he began thinking about this thing, it was Hegel, who was the most influential scholar who propounded a theory of dialectical idealism. And we found that Marx was unhappy with the emphasize on ideals and he was a staunch critic of idealism and instead, he adopted a Hegelian idea of dialectics and then used that particular idea to make sense of society by looking, by emphasizing the material dimension. So, we had that elaborate discussion in the previous class.

So, we talked about how he understands human labor as the central component of a human society and how he understood this mode of production as the base and above which a superstructure is built with all other, your legal and aesthetic, literary, judicial, political systems. So, we also found that each of these arguments about each of these epochs, really reflects a kind of a social relations of production and how the specific mode of production that he talks about, how it produces different kind of social structure. So, that is his overall theory about the social structure and today's class, we are trying to understand how he proposes the social change. As we discussed, he has a theory of history, he also has a speculative history. He also prescribed what is the kind of a overall

course of human society as if human society is destined to take a particular shape.

So, this is what we look into that. Just as an economic conception of society, he advanced an economic interpretation of history. For Marx, the history of humanity is not a story of great men or great ideas or spectacular political events or the unfolding of human consciousness. Instead, he declared the true focus and the theatre of all history is economic life. It is a very, very fascinating argument because the way we have studied history conventionally, is not it? It is always through the study of great people, the empires, the kings who ruled over from one particular time to the other time.

In a Marxian framework, he would say that, of course, these people might be important, but these people were not the driving force of history there, but rather these people simply represented a kind of a particular economic order. And without understanding the economic base, how, what was the kind of a production during that particular time, how did different people who engage in productions interacted with each other, what kind of social framework or social institutions that they developed. So, without looking into each of these important features, you are not going to understand. The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggle. So, this is another very, very popular slogan or a very popular statement that the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggle.

So, every society, he would argue, has to be understood as a product of prolonged or a series of class struggles. And there is no society in the world which was free from class struggle, which is free from strong contentions or contestations for its material basis. So, freemen and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild master and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on the uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight that each time ended, either in the revolutionary constitution or society at large or in common ruin of the contending classes. So, it is a very, you know, a pessimistic, dark picture about human race, about human society, but he would argue that every society, irrespective of the regional, linguistic or cultural differences, really talk about a society where people were at war with each other, people had very opposite, irreconcilable economic interests and the whole history of human kind is history of a class struggle, whether it is between freemen and slave, between patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild master and journeyman or in other words, he equates each of them with oppressor and oppressed is nothing but the story of social conflict. And so, this is where it is written in communist manifesto.

First there is, according to Marx, a strong historical tendency driven by the requirement of human survival along with advances in science and technology for the forces of production to develop to increase in power over time. So, social change, he argues, is

explaining that. A strong historical tendency driven by the requirement of human survival along with advances in science and technology for the force of production to develop into, to increase its power over time. So, the transition from a feudal society or even a primitive communism characterized by say a tribal life based on subsistence and hunting and gathering, from there you move into a feudal society and from there you move to a slave society and from a slave society you move into feudal society and from there you move into capital society. All these things is actually necessitated for better control of over the nature, so that you are able to subsist well and also encouraged by or contributed by the developments in science and technology.

And that he produced, it actually led to the increase in power over time. This fact, the continuous accumulation of productive forces endows human history with a certain coherence of meaningfulness and paves the way for progress. So, this continuous accumulation of productive forces that more and more sophisticated materials and tools and raw materials are used and you are able to create more wealth and more advanced forms of economy emerge. All these things it endow human history with certain coherence of or meaningfulness and paves way for progress. In contrast to the philosophers of the French enlightenment for whom progress meant the liberation of humanity from false ideas, a passage from ignorance to wisdom, for Marx progress takes the form of increasing economic productivity and the evolution of modes of production.

It is again a very fascinating position because almost all the emancipatory ideas of progress of humankind, that human, this enlightenment project that human beings will be freed, will be liberated from the shackles. They will be liberated into more open ideas and other things did not make much sense to Marx. It does not mean that Marx outrightly rejected them. But Marx argued that this true liberation happens only if the kind of a fundamental transformation happens on the base. Only with the abolition of class system, only the abolition of class structure that the true emancipation will happen.

So that is why Marx was almost contemptuous of the kind of argument about human emancipation in a capitalist society. He identified capitalist society as the most treacherous, most exploitative, most ruthless forms of oppression. And he believed that it is a necessary step so that the final era of communism can be welcomed. Second, as the introduction of new methods of production transforms the labour process and increase productivity, the social relations of production are likewise altered. Advances in technology courses shifts in the class structure and in the larger social framework of society.

In acquiring new productive forces, men change their mode of production and in changing their mode of production, in changing ways of earning their life, they change all

the social relations. So, he says that this transformation in technology and advancements in having better control of society, this brings in much more larger changes all across the society. The hand mill gives you society with a feudal load, the steam mill, society with the industrial capitalist. So, there is a similar argument that we have been talking about. So, the advances in the technology causes shifts in the class structure and the larger social framework of society.

In acquiring new productive forces, men change their mode of production. And in changing their mode of production, in changing the way of earning their living, they change all their social relations. So, a transformation from one particular stage to another, it is so comprehensive. It leaves no aspect of human life unchanged or untouched. So, it is a kind of a comprehensive change that happens when a mode of production moves from one particular kind to another.

Third, as a society's productive forces develop, Marx argues, they eventually come into conflict with the existing relations of production, which fetter or inhibit the continued growth and full utilization of society's productive capacity. So, he, in simple words, what his argument is, the technological aspects of production, the use of raw materials and the kind of machines that you use, the technology that you use, these material dimensions change much, much faster. They evolve much faster because human intervention in science and technology, new innovations are much, much, happen much quickly. So, there is fundamental, very rapid transformation happening in the, on the forces of production. But these changes in the force of production will not be facilitated by or it will not be matched by the kind of changes happen within the social relations.

Or in other words, the social organization of labor, the social organization of production about, as we discussed earlier, the relations of production, how people, different kind of people or different strata of people who are involved in process of production, how they are organized, what is the kind of a nature of relation between them. Is it between like a bourgeoisie and a proletariat or is it between a serf and a lord or is it between a slave and the master. So, this particular framework, these particular social relations, it is much, much slower to change compared to the changes that happen in the realm of technology or the means of production. This means of production changes much faster in comparison with the relations of production. And thereby at some point, these relations will become a kind of fetter, a chain, an obstacle.

For example, Marx argues that in a, when capitalism emerge, capitalism really, it is not only the story of say electricity or steam engine or other kind of mechanisms, but it is also vast possible mainly because you had a mobile labor force, independent labor force who is not permanently attached to a particular lord, but rather who are the free agents.

And in the absence of such a free agent, you would not have had capitalism in place. So, he argues that it becomes a fetter. They come into conflict with the existing relation of production with fetter, which fetter or inhibit the continued growth and full utilization of society's productive capacity. At a certain point, the relations of production are unable to accommodate the potential built up by the forces of production and this circumstance create a pressure for the fundamental change in the economic structure of society.

So this is what he explains it as a kind of a dialectical process. There is a particular force from the means of production to develop much faster and relations of production changes much much slower and that leads to a kind of a conflict where it reaches another level which again has these opposite tendencies which reaches another level and in the Marxian scheme of things, this fundamental opposition dissolves only in the era of communism. And we are left with no choice to wonder how that happens or how because there is no historical evidence to show that in any of the communist societies anything like that ever happened. But it was Marxian prediction and when Marx lived, he did not have the opportunity to understand more advanced and sophisticated versions of capitalism. So, capitalism thrived even after the death of Marx.

Capitalism is the only viable option as of now. We do not have anything that is viable as of now though many people are extremely critical of that. It seems to be the most resolute economic system creating lot of disparity and then violence in society but that continues to be the one. Fourth, once it reaches a crisis point, this kind of dialectical process, Marx argues the contradiction between the forces and relations of production inaugurates an era of social revolution. This is eventually resolved by the destruction of the old economic structure along with its whole immense superstructure and its replacement by a new mode of production suitable for the continued growth of the force of production.

So this is exactly what we mentioned. This transition from this stage-by-stage transitions from primitive communism to slave to feudalism to capitalism, they are all a product of this kind of dialectical process through which it reaches here but which again has this dialectical process which reaches here. So that is the point where he talks. Once it reaches a crisis point, Marx argues the contradiction between the forces and relations of production inaugurates an era of social revolution. So according to him, each of this transition happened through a kind of a revolution and this eventually resolved by the destruction of the old economic structure along with its whole immense superstructure.

So the superstructure of a slave society is entirely different from that of a feudal society which is entirely different from that of a capitalist society. So, he argues that it will be a kind of a comprehensive change that happens. Human history propelled by the

accumulation of productive forces is thus for Marx a story of how one mode of production develops, matures, stagnates, and eventually give way to the another, more advanced mode of production. So, this is how he visualizes social change. So, this is how his prescription to understand social change.

So it becomes important for us to understand a typical Marxist scholar would use this kind of a framework to explain how social change happened in a country like India or a country like Britain or a country like, in any other country in the world. Because this, he provides it as a universally acceptable framework. His formulation of major modes of production, slavery, feudalism, capitalism and post capitalism, communism, and Asiatic mode of production. So, this is something that we have been mentioning throughout this lecture. So, he talks about, maybe this primitive communism also included there.

The primitive communism or the earliest form of human subsistence where people depended upon hunting and then food gathering as their most important form of survival. From that system to slavery to feudalism to capitalism and to communism. So, he has this kind of a evolutionary pattern and it was very, very common there. Every scholar would come up with a very evolutionary model which is applicable to throughout the world and mostly it would be a kind of a uni-linear evolutionary model. Something like this that every society is supposed to join this particular evolutionary model.

And depicting the Europe as already having reached the zenith or already having reached the top and all other societies having to do the catching up business. So, he presented this, the communism or capitalism according to Marx would end this historical dialectical process and that will herald a completely different kind of society. And then here he talks about this Asiatic mode of production which he is not very comfortable in placing where exactly it comes. But he says it is something that does not really fit in, in his overall scheme of things because in Asia the Asiatic mode of production is something very unique. And this again really influenced a lot of scholars both economists and historians and sociologists try to understand Indian society through the framework of Marxian argument about Asiatic mode of production.

And he also has another phrase this oriental despotism, Asiatic mode of production and oriental despotism. These are the two terms that he uses or two frameworks that he uses basically to make sense of transformations happening in the Asian societies or specifically Indian society. The dialectical process inherent in the economic base of each of these modes create crisis revolution and creates a qualitatively better form which again contains the inherent contradiction. So, this movement of thesis, antithesis and synthesis towards a structurally more complicated mode of production will come to an end with the post capitalist era where the classes will be obliterated, and state will wither away. This

is what exactly what we have been discussing about.

So, his prediction that a society where a classless society will be established the classes will wither away. But at the same time also please keep in mind he talks about the dictatorship of the proletariat. So, he believes that this communism will be characterized by the dictatorship of the proletariat. And that is a very, as you know it can be very problematic prescription. What does it mean to be dictatorship of proletariat? And whether this dictatorship by anybody, whether by proletariat or by anybody may not be a good idea because dictatorship assumes a kind of particular kind of governance with particular idea about individual rights and freedom and other stuff.

And we do not have any very good examples about how the communist societies evolved and whether they really represent a truly classless society or a stateless society or a society without stratification. We have absolutely no good evidence and all these societies were class societies. There were different classes emerged and they were not egalitarian societies. They were glaring inequality in the society.

So, it is all a different set of points. Now, he defined classes on the basis of ownership of the means of production. Those who own and those who do not own, the haves and the have nots. So, that is what is something impromptu for him. So, for him the overall group of people who involved in this most of production are divided into the haves and the have nots between the people who own the means of production and the people who do not own the means of production and ultimately it becomes a kind of a struggle between these two groups and masters and slaves, feudal lords and serfs, bourgeoisie and proletariat. So, in each of these cases, the first group of people, they are the owners of the means of production.

In a capitalist society, bourgeois are the ones who own the factory, they are the ones who own all the raw materials. In a feudal society, the agricultural land, the equipments, the tools, everything is owned by the feudal lords and in the, in a slave society, it is the masters who own everything. The masters even own the slaves. So, it is a, in a sense it is a kind of very oversimplified version, there is no doubt about it, into two halves, into haves and the have nots.

But we know that the reality is not that simple. Capitalism provides lot of challenges to this oversimplified notion of bourgeois and proletariat. You know there are petty bourgeois and there are lot more classes have been invented by subsequent Marxist scholars later in order to fit in into these things. And you will also this similar kind of an argument when somebody try to understand a complex society like India. So, we have some very interesting discussions coming up, how you look at the agrarian system in say

of 1960s and where do you fit in that? Is it feudal or is it capitalist? Is it semi-feudal or is it pre-capitalist? How do we make sense of that? Where do the tenants come in picture? So, lot of subsequent theoretical arguments, very intense debates during 1980s and early 90s were characterized by this concern about these categories. So, the history of all hitherto existing history is the history of class struggle.

This is a, as I mentioned, it is a very, very popular, extremely popular kind of a slogan where he says that the history of every society is the history of class struggle. So, now the class struggle happens, and class polarization happens. Then people of these two opposite classes come together, the bourgeois and the proletariat. They say that there is a class in itself into class for itself. When the workers realize their historic role, he talks about class consciousness.

He talks about how there is a class polarization happening in society with one group becoming the proletariat, the other group becoming the bourgeois and the proletariat eventually, historically, they will be more aware about their own historical role, that their historical role is to overthrow this particular system and to establish a new society. So that what he calls it as a transition from a class in itself into class for itself. People are acquiring that historical consciousness of having to work for a larger historical cause of revolution. So, they realize that their destiny is basically to change the society, to change the social structure, to bring in revolution and the worker realizes their historical role and then the revolution happens and the proletariat have nothing to lose but the change, they have their world to win.

Working men of all countries unite. This is again from this Communist Manifesto, one of the most popular pamphlets or booklet written by Engels and Marx. So, this was his idea about social change. And now every Marxian scholar who have ventured Marxian framework to understand society have followed this framework in its spirit. Because Marxian framework provides you with a very clear theoretical framework to understand the society. Look at what is the economic structure, what is the social organization of production, who are the people who are involved, what is the kind of class structure and what are the consequences that this particular class structure produce and what are the evidences for revolution.

What are the evidences for revolution, has revolution already taken place or is it going to happen, what is the level of class consciousness. So, this become a kind of a very mechanical imposition of this Marxian framework into different school, different regions of the world. That is why the Marxian framework became important in certain place while it became absolutely not accepted or did not gain much traction in many other place. For example, a country like India, a Marxian framework that depends solely on

the question of class was absolutely inadequate to understand the social reality. Because in India social reality was also heavily influenced by the caste question.

And the caste is something that will not or cannot fit in into the larger Marxian argument. And we will discuss those points in great detail in the coming classes. So let us stop here. I hope you understood these larger basic arguments of Marx. Thank you.