

## DESCRIBE AND EXPLORE MARXISM

Even before the Industrial Revolution in Britain during the late 1700s, manufacturing was being done at homes through hand-tools or basic machines. Pre-industrial can be defined as the period during which there were no machines or tools to assist in performing tasks on a massive scale (Gaunt, 1977 pp.183-210).

Industrialization brought about the defining shift towards power-based, specialized machinery, factories as well as mass-production. Karl Marx believed that the Industrial Revolution was not fair to the workers as it deprived them of their independence as well as the pride they took in their work (Draper, 1978). Marxism is based on the political as well as economic theories of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels during the mid -19<sup>th</sup> century, which over a period of time, was further developed by their followers leading to the formation of the basis of communism. The founders of Marxism analysed the impact of capitalism on the working class as well as the political and economic developments. Capitalism may be defined as an economic system which is largely based upon the private ownership of the means of production as well as distribution of goods and is, to a great extent, characterized by a free competitive market that is motivated by profits (Schumpeter, 2010). However, Marxism happens to be the antithesis of capitalism. Marxism is defined as a system of socialism wherein the dominant feature would be the public ownership of the means of production, distribution, as well as exchange (AllAboutPhilosophy.org, 2019). The paper intends to explore the Theory of Marxism as formulated by Karl Marx and the various aspect of the social topic.

### **The working Class**

Karl Marx used to live in London during the period of industrialisation and did travel extensively throughout Europe. Marx believed that social inequality was largely a result of division of labour which lead to the formation of divisions in society based on

class. Owing to the industrialisation, he witnessed the emergence of a new class based on the emergence of factory work and factory production. Accordingly, these workers were restricted largely to the production units. This led to an unprecedented number of products being manufactured at extremely low unit- cost. It was the technical innovations as well as division of labour that enabled greater profits for the owners. Marx has termed the difference between the production costs and the labour costs as 'added value'. The added value that had been created by the workers vanished into the factory owners' pockets. The workers were entitled to only what the owner chose to pay for their labour in spite of the added value they created.

In the case of capitalism, the proletariat or the working class' ownership is limited only to their capacity to work as they are able to sell their own labour only. Marx defines a class on the basis of the relationship between its members and the means of production. According to him, history is nothing but the chronology of class struggles, uprisings and wars. In case of capitalism, the workers are usually paid the bare minimum in order that the worker, and family if included, can survive and continue to be available for work. The worker is isolated since he has does not have any control over labour or even the product he produces. The capitalists are the ones who sell the products that are produced by the workers at a value that is proportionate to the labour involved. Surplus value is defined as the difference between what the workers are paid and the price for which the products have been sold.

The misery of the proletariat is further heightened during the periods of economic recessions, when the working class is not able to sell the entire product of their labours and the dominant capitalists are unable to sell the entire surplus value. According to Marx, a proletariat or socialist revolution would invariable occur if the state or the ruling class forcibly exerts domination over the working class in the form of a dictatorship.

## **Exploitation**

On the basis of economic and social grounds, Marx perceived capitalism to be an evil for the society, more so for the working class (Crocker, 1972. pp.201–215). The gap in capital between the owner and worker kept increasing resulting in the worker becoming further impoverished relatively. Marx was of the belief that labour was an essential component of a man's social life, but in capitalism, he realized that labour was subservient to profit. Owing to this, labour not just lost its relevance in the working class, but also became the prime reason behind their misery. The philosophical phenomenon of alienation gradually transformed into social phenomenon as the workers not only became irrelevant in the economic field, but in the field of politics and religion as well. Marx was of the view that religions had been created by people and served as opium for the workers. Faith in God helped the workers bear an otherwise unbearable life. Marx believed that religions could become irrelevant in communism as the workers would no longer require its support.

According to Marx, a commodity is a product having a value for use as well as an exchange value. The use value would be the consumption value a product has minus the labour. There was considerable difference between the use value and the exchange value, which implied that the selling price was high owing to the low labour cost, thereby making the labour irrelevant. Since much more has been produced post the industrialisation, the products could easily be replaced. Owing to this, products were now perceived differently by the society. Marx named it as the fetish character. In the initial part of his book *Das Kapital*, Marx had stated in a poetic manner that he witnessed the emergence of two fetishes: a capital as well as commodity fetish. Later on, he switched to using the term exploitation. The second as well as the third part of *Das Kapital* were later completed and published by Friedrich Engels post Marx's death (Marx, 1951).

## **Alienation**

In the case of a capitalist society, the workers have no ownership over the means, such as raw materials, machines and factories that they use for their work. All of these belong to the capitalists for whom the workers work, selling their "labour power" or their work abilities for a wage. (Mészáros, 2006) Such a system of labour conveys four relations which form the core of Marx's Theory of Alienation:

1) The workers are isolated or alienated from their productive activity and have no role in deciding what needs to be done or how it is to be done. It is the capitalist who not only sets the terms as well as speed of work but also decides on the hiring or firing of the workers.

(Armando, 2017)

2) The workers are alienated even from the outcome or the product of the activity, which means that they have no control over what is being made or even what may happen to it after work is completed. (Armando, 2017)

3) The worker is also alienated from others due to competition as well as mutual indifference coming in the way of mutual cooperation. This is seen not only in the relation with the capitalist controlling the worker's activity for furthering his or her own profit-enhancing interests, but even in the relations between the individuals since each person is trying his best to survive in the wake of fierce competition as well as the insecurities.

(Armando, 2017)

4) And last but probably the most important, the workers are alienated even from realizing their true, distinct potential for both creativity as well as community sharing as human beings. Owing to the labour which does alienate them from their activities, product as well as other people, the workers, over a period of time, end up losing their abilities to develop their finer qualities. (Armando, 2017)

The axing of such relationships into half does leave on one side a critically diminished individual, who not only becomes physically weak, but also confused, alienated

as well as powerless. The other side of this axing has the products as well as the ties with others that are beyond the control and comprehension of the worker. Furthermore, as it subjected to the mystics of the marketplace, the worker's product passes from hand to hand, and in the process, changes form as well as names all along in terms of "capital", "rent", "interest", "commodity", "value", "wage" all depending largely on the one having them as well as how they would be used. Ultimately, these products, no matter how they are perceived, re-enter the worker's routine life in the form of the landlord's house, the boss's factory, the banker's loan, the grocer's food, the various laws as well as customs that define his relations with other persons.

Unconsciously, the worker ends up building the conditions that ultimately results in his own alienation. This world which the worker creates while lost in alienated labour does re-appear but as some other person's private property that he may have access to only by selling his labour-power as well as doing more alienated labour. Although Marx's prime examples of alienation have been drawn from the workers' life, there are other classes that have been alienated too, to the extent that they either share or are directly impacted by these relations, including those with the capitalists.

### **Strengths and Weaknesses of Marxism**

#### **Strengths**

**Equality** - Even though Marxism's system of government is regarded as communism, it does place sufficient emphasis on human rights, having its founding principles encompassing issues such as equal gender roles, education as well as health-care for all. Marx proposed equality before the law as well as societal services, wherein each individual had both equal stance as well as opportunity without any gender bias. This implies that every individual would stand a chance to have access to most critical things the individual

would need irrespective of what the individual does, where he or she lives or even how much he or she is making for providing a better life to his or her dependents.

**Benefits to society** - If one takes a close look at the Marxist theory, one would find that it does consider society at large, which implies that it does acknowledge all the social forces that are involved, and that also includes the vested power interests of various groups. It stresses upon the role of class struggle as well as the conflict that exists within the society especially between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. It helps effectively explain the changes in society. In spirit, it does organize a society under capitalism, wherein the bourgeoisie has a tendency to maximize profits with the proletariat.

**Capitalism** - It is ironical that although the massive multi-nationals have been dominating the entire world economy, the capital advocates continue to say that the future lies with the smaller businesses or that “Small is beautiful”. Nevertheless, one may consider that the buoyant phase of capitalism has gone far beyond recall. However, according to Marxism, free competition would inevitably beget monopoly, wherein the conflict between big and small capitals invariably yields the same result. The modern times have witnessed the enormous power the multi-nationals as well as monopolies exercising complete stranglehold on the world, as they hold access to the economies of scale, have incredible amounts of money, are able to even manipulate the commodity prices or for that matter, even influence the government policies. Marxism had been able to predict this inevitable propensity towards monopolization; wherein free competition would become a standard.

**Reduce debt** - According to the Marxist philosophy, communities should work together towards achieving success, wherein everyone would combine with the objective of providing for each other, of course with the support of the government which would distribute resources as and when required.

**Unions Rights** - Instead of exploiting the managers, Marxism lays more emphasis on unions to stand up for the workers' personal rights, creates a system of checks and balances with the objective of achieving the maximum level of production. It is largely believed that this philosophy prevents workers from being exploited by the management and that the unions are a great boon or idea.

### **Weaknesses**

**Eliminate religion** - According to Marxism, although one has the freedom to choose one's faith, one doesn't have the freedom to practice it in an organized way. It is quite apparent that religion could eventually position one group as superior to the others and that itself contradicts the equality principle of Marxism. Therefore, there can be no organized religion that could impact the prominent beliefs that was followed across the world, Christianity and Judaism included. Since Marx was of the view that religion was being used for controlling people, Marxism wouldn't permit people the freedom to choose their spirituality.

**Adversely impact the educational system** - It is essential for one to note that the Marxist education tends to implement all that is totally state- controlled, implying that it attaches immense importance to the role played by the state in the field of education and expects the state to determine the curriculum construction, teaching methodology, as well as examination system and not permit other agencies in education, either local or regional, to have any say in the matter. Marxist philosophy on education believes that economics is the root cause of all human activities and although this has not been scientifically proven, economics does occupy a pivotal position in the curriculum and happens to be one of the primary objectives for acquiring productive skills and results in creative faculties wherein children are neglected.

**Private ownership** - Although one is provided a place to live in the community as well as allowed to contribute towards the common good, one is not entitled to any private property

ownership, implying that one wouldn't be having much control over one's residence or one's contributions. Marxism proposes that private properties as well as businesses be abolished so that it is impossible for any individual to take undue business advantage of some other person thereby depriving him of any reward for working.

**Curtail opportunities for entrepreneurs** - If one does business under Marxism, then essentially, he or she is working for the government implying that no one works as an entrepreneur, a freelancer or even sole-business owner as everything is run via the government.

**Lead to communism** - Communism is a strong possibility in Marxism since this philosophy has a tendency to lead towards dictatorship. It is apparent that it won't allow anyone to remain an individual thereby leading to a dangerous trend in society where no one is motivated.

In this theory, though equality may sound great, citing examples of people being treated fairly, one must keep in mind that individuality is lost or rather scuttled under Marxism. The strengths as well as weaknesses of this philosophy highlight certain sets of benefits as well as drawbacks, since a system of government is created which is highly prone to abuse, and that is precisely why Marx needed to fix its flaws. However, by examining both its key strengths as well as weaknesses, one would be able to conclude if it is in society's interest or not.

### **Conclusion**

To conclude, Marxism is an economic system wherein the majority of the means of production are owned by the government or public companies along with the distribution and exchange of goods. However, Marxism is not a mere economic theory but a thought process (Illing, 2017). Karl Marx believed in the welfare of the working class and their liberation. He was strongly opposed to the Industrial Revolution as it took away the economic liberty of the

labourers, and made them captivated and at the mercy of the industrial giants. Marx believed that capitalism initiates an environment of exploitation and leads to social and political issue for society. Marx's perspective about the unfair treatment of the workers and their exploitation at the hands of the capitalist manufacturers can be witnessed even in the modern-day world. Majority of the manufacturing companies based in the developed countries have their manufacturing units based in the third world nations. The working condition in these manufacturing units are terrible and they are greatly exploited because of their cheap labour cost. (Kelly, 2013) They are made to work in inhumane conditions and given much lower wages compared to the ones prevalent in their home country.

In the modern-day world, countries like the Soviet Union and China have adopted Marx's idea of social structure and incorporate a 'classless' society. Communist leaders such as Lenin and Joseph Stalin unwaveringly proclaimed an orthodox approach to the communism and altered it to manifest their own interest. (Rostow, 1955) As globalisation proceeded, the awareness of human exploitation at the hands of industrialists became a world-wide socio-political problem. With various doctrine ensured to curb this global problem the workers started getting better treatment and deals at work. Further, with the failure of Communist Bloc in the Soviet Union, the rise of the welfare movement for the workers working in manufacturing factories and other industries, and their subsequent improvement in their working conditions, have led to the Marxist view getting less taken and question Marx's economic perspectives.

Apart from criticising capitalism, Marx played a major role in historical materialism. Marx believed in having a combined approach of both dialectics and materialism, and it is with the help of the dual approach that he was able to achieve at a methodical understanding of the way human history evolved (Stalin, 1938). In the modern world, Marx's impression

could be seen in various branches of studies such as economics, history, arts, literature and criticism.

Last but not the least, Marxism as an economic system intends to seek overall welfare for the society and curb the increasing gap between the rich and the poor (Sunkara, 2013).

However, in the modern-day world, one needs to use the theory with a little discretion as the globalisation process has created a general awareness amongst the people and made them have a holistic approach towards the human and environmental good.

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