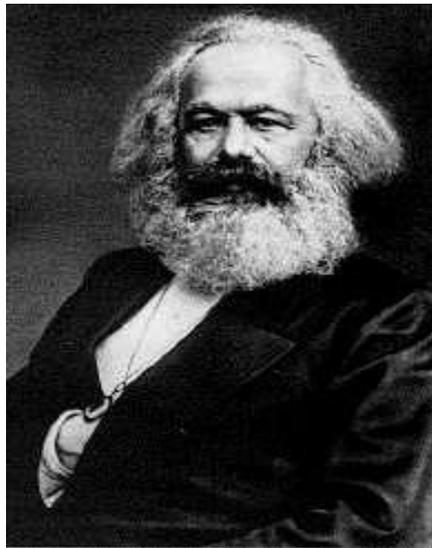


Module-3

KARL MARX



(1818-1883)

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(1818-1883)

Karl Heinrich Marx was a German philosopher, revolutionary economist and leader of modern "scientific" socialism. His basic ideas—known as Marxism—form the foundation of Socialist and Communist movements throughout the world and are considered to be one of the important pillars of sociological thought.

Marx was born in Trier, Rhenish Prussia (present-day Germany), on May 5, 1818, the son of Heinrich Marx, a lawyer, and Henriette Presburg Marx, a Dutchwoman. Karl attended the Friedrich Wilhelm Gymnasium in Trier for five years, graduating in 1835. Marx then turned to writing and journalism to support himself. He was influenced by Hegelian dialectical idealism and initially joined the Young Hegelians. In 1842 he became editor of the liberal newspaper *Rheinische Zeitung*. During this period various strands of sociological thought, especially the works of Kant, Ricardo, Smith, Saint-Simon and Feurbach influenced him. Besides, the French and the Industrial revolutions had a decided influence on his thought. In January 1845 Marx was expelled from France. He moved to Brussels, Belgium, where he founded the German Workers' Party and was active in the Communist League. Here he wrote the famous *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (known as the *Communist Manifesto*) in 1848. After being at Cologne and Paris, Marx finally moved to London. At London Marx's sole means of support was journalism. In London in 1864 Marx helped to found the International Workingmen's Association (known as the First International).

The major works of Karl are as follows:

1. Communist Manifesto (1867-1894)
2. The Capital (1844)
3. A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy (1859)
4. Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of the Right (1859)

Marx's intellectual endeavor was influenced by three things:

1. German philosophical ideas
2. French socialism
3. British political economy.

Marx was not only a thinker but also a revolutionary activist. He said, “The philosophers have interpreted the world, the point however is to change it.” This suggests the very essence of Marxian dialectics. He was not only interested in floating a thought or idea but also his ideas were to change the entire world.

THE CONCEPT OF DIALECTICS

The word dialectics refers to a method of intellectual discussion by dialogue. It is a term of logic. The meaning of dialectics is the conflict between two mutually opposite forces or tendencies. According to the Greek philosopher Aristotle (384-322 B.C) it referred to the art of deputation by question and answer.

In descending form of dialectic, one is able to explain the manifestation of a higher reality in the phenomenal world of sense-experience. The word dialectics has been taken from the Greek word “Dialego” which means the ability to conduct disputes and the attempts to resolve the contradictions. This term has been used by Marx to understand the contradiction between the opposite tendencies found in the society.

Dialectics means contradictions in the very essence of things. Everybody is seen in the contradictions of its opposite and these contradictions form the very basis of social change. Social change is possible in the society because of the existence of opposite tendencies in the society. Something new has to come.

These dialectics can help to understand the very nature of directions of social change. Dialectics is the method used by Marx to advance his arguments by which change in the society can be expected. This is called Marx’s methodology. Method is the technical procedure with the help of which conclusions are arrived at. His basic intentions were to bring about a change in the basic order of society.

Dialectics is the very basis of social change is based on the following assumptions:

1. The existence of opposites.
2. Polarization of the opposites.
3. The basis of change lies within the system.
4. Every succeeding stage is much more advanced than the preceding one.

Dialectical schools of thoughts were divided into two schools of thought.

1. Idealistic School represented by Hegel
2. The Materialist school represented by Forbic.

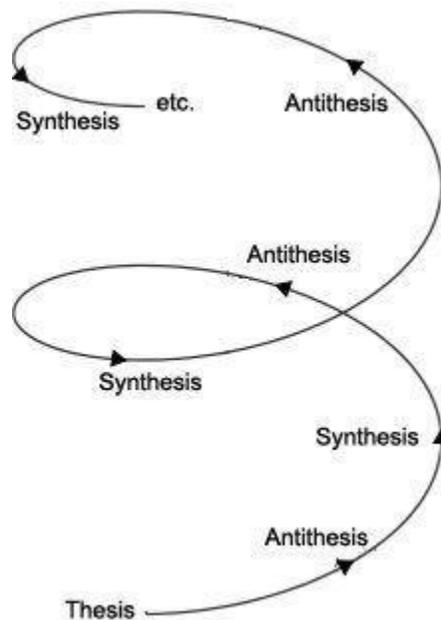
Marx was influenced by both Hegal and Forbic. He started with Hegelian idealist dialectics, during his days of stay in Germany, and later voted for Forbic's materialist dialectics, during his stay in France. He rejected idealism and accepted materialism. "Hegal turned Marx right way up."

DIALECTICAL MATERIALISM

Materialism suggests that the world is material by its very name. Everything is caused, oriented, moved and developed by matter. Matter decides and determines everything in the society. Matter has the objective existence. From matter we get materialism that can be seen, observed material and its true value can be ascertained. A matter is knowable. It can be known on the other hand. To Hegel the world is ideal by its very nature. Ideas determine the matters or reality. Reason is the essence of reality. Idea is what it is as against what is not.

Ideas run the world but matter runs the one that have a subjective existence. Matter has a subjective existence. In fact, this is an egg-hen question as to which idea is first or matter is first.

Marx says “My ideas of dialectics are not only different from Hegel but also are its direct opposite.” Hence Marx believes that the idealists are superficial about their position. In fact, Marx idea is nothing but the material world reflected by human mind and translated into human thought. Marx believes that which is ideal is also material.



A GRAPHIC REPRESENTATION OF MARX'S DIALECTICAL MATERIALISM

LAWS OF DIALECTICAL MATERIALISM

The Three Laws of Dialectical Materialism are:

1. Law of unity and struggle of opposites.
2. Law of transformation from quantity to quality.
3. Law of Negation of Negation.

Law of unity and struggle of opposites talks about the very nature or cause of social change.

The law of transformation from quantity to quality talks about the very manner of social change.

The law of negation of negation talks about the very direction of social change.

HISTORICAL MATERIALISM

Marx's theory, which he called "historical materialism" or the "materialist conception of history" is based on Hegel's claim that history occurs through a dialectic, or clash, of opposing forces. Marx's analysis of history is based on his distinction between the means of production, literally those things, like land and natural resources, and technology, that are necessary for the production of material goods, and the social relations of production, in other words, the social relationships people enter into as they acquire and use the means of production. Together these comprise the mode of production; Marx observed that within any given society the mode of production changes, and that European societies had progressed from a feudal mode of production to a capitalist mode of production.

The capitalist mode of production is capable of tremendous growth because the capitalist can, and has an incentive to, reinvest profits in new technologies. Marx considered the capitalist class to be the most revolutionary in history, because it constantly revolutionized the means of production. In general, Marx believed that the means of production change more rapidly than the relations of production. For Marx this mismatch between base and superstructure is a major source of social disruption and conflict. The history of the means of production, then, is the substructure of history, and everything else, including ideological arguments about that history, constitutes a superstructure.

Under capitalism people sell their labor-power when they accept compensation in return for whatever work they do in a given period of time (in other words, they are not selling the product of their labor, but their capacity to work). In return for selling their labor power they receive money, which allows them to survive. Those who must sell their labor power to live are "proletarians." The person who buys the labor power, generally someone who does own the land and technology to produce, is a "capitalist" or "bourgeois."

Marx, however, believed that capitalism was prone to periodic crises. He suggested that over time, capitalists would invest more and more in new technologies, and less and less in labor. Since Marx believed that surplus value appropriated from labor is the source of profits, he concluded that the rate of profit would fall even as the economy grew. When the rate of profit falls below a certain point, the result would be a recession or depression in which certain sectors of the economy would collapse. Marx understood that during such a crisis the price of labor would also fall, and eventually make possible the investment in new technologies and the growth of new sectors of the economy.

Marx believed that this cycle of growth, collapse, and growth would be punctuated by increasingly severe crises. Moreover, he believed that the long-term consequence of this process was necessarily the empowerment of the capitalist class and the impoverishment of the proletariat. He believed that were the proletariat to seize the means of production, they would encourage social relations that would benefit everyone equally, and a system of production less vulnerable to periodic crises. In general, Marx thought that peaceful negotiation of this problem was impracticable, and that a massive, well-organized and violent revolution was required. Finally, he theorized that to maintain the socialist system, a proletarian dictatorship must be established and maintained.

Marx held that Socialism itself was an "historical inevitability" that would come about due to the more numerous "Proletarians" having an interest in "expropriating" the "bourgeois exploiters" who had themselves profited by expropriating the surplus value that had been attributable to the proletarians labor in order to establish a "more just" system where there would be greatly improved social relations.

CLASS STRUGGLE

It is important to recognize that Marx viewed the structure of society in relation to its major classes, and the struggle between them as the engine of change in this structure. His was no equilibrium or consensus theory. Conflict was not deviational within society's structure, nor were classes functional elements maintaining the system. The structure itself was a derivative of and ingredient in the struggle of classes. His was a conflict view of modern (nineteenth century) society.

The key to understanding Marx is his class definition.¹ A class is defined by the ownership of property. Such ownership vests a person with the power to exclude others from the property and to use it for personal purposes. In relation to property there are three great classes of society: the bourgeoisie (who own the means of production such as machinery and factory buildings, and whose source of income is profit), landowners (whose income is rent), and the proletariat (who own their labor and sell it for a wage).

Class thus is determined by property, not by income or status. These are determined by distribution and consumption, which itself ultimately reflects the production and power relations of classes. The social conditions of bourgeoisie production are defined by bourgeois property. Class is therefore a theoretical and formal relationship among individuals.

The force transforming latent class membership into a struggle of classes is *class interest*. Out of similar *class situations*, individuals come to act similarly. They develop a mutual dependence, a community, a shared interest interrelated with a common income of profit or of wages. From this common interest classes are formed, and for Marx, individuals form classes to the extent that their interests engage them in a struggle with the opposite class.

At first, the interests associated with land ownership and rent are different from those of the bourgeoisie. But as society matures, capital (i.e., the property of production) and land ownership merge, as do the interests of landowners and bourgeoisie. Finally the relation of production, the natural opposition between proletariat and bourgeoisie, determines all other activities.

As Marx saw the development of class conflict, the struggle between classes was initially confined to individual factories. Eventually, given the maturing of capitalism, the growing disparity between life conditions of bourgeoisie and proletariat, and the increasing homogenization within each class, individual struggles become generalized to coalitions across factories. Increasingly class conflict is manifested at the societal level. Class consciousness is increased, common interests and policies are organized, and the use of and struggle for political power occurs. Classes become political forces.

The distribution of political power is determined by power over production (i.e., capital). Capital confers political power, which the bourgeois class uses to legitimize and protect their property and consequent social relations. Class relations are political, and in the mature capitalist society, the state's business is that of the bourgeoisie. Moreover, the intellectual basis of state rule, the ideas justifying the use of state power and its distribution, are those of the ruling class. The intellectual-social culture is merely a superstructure resting on the relation of production, on ownership of the means of production.

Finally, the division between classes will widen and the condition of the exploited worker will deteriorate so badly that social structure collapses: the class struggle is transformed into a proletarian revolution. The workers' triumph will eliminate the basis of class division in property through public ownership of the means of production. With the basis of classes thus wiped away, a classless society will ensue (by definition), and since political power to protect the bourgeoisie against the workers is unnecessary, political authority and the state will wither away.

Overall, there are six elements in Marx's view of class conflict.

- Classes are authority relationships based on property ownership.
- A class defines groupings of individuals with shared life situations, thus interests.
- Classes are naturally antagonistic by virtue of their interests.
- Imminent within modern society is the growth of two antagonistic classes and their struggle, which eventually absorbs all social relations.
- Political organization and Power is an instrumentality of class struggle, and reigning ideas are its reflection.
- Structural change is a consequence of the class struggle.

Marx's emphasis on class conflict as constituting the dynamics of social change, his awareness that change was not random but the outcome of a conflict of interests, and his view of social relations as based on power were contributions of the first magnitude. However, time and history have invalidated many of his assumptions and predictions. Capitalist ownership and control of production have been separated. Joint stock companies forming most of the industrial sector are now almost wholly operated by non-capital-owning managers. Workers have not grown homogeneous but are divided and subdivided into different skill groups. Class stability has been undercut by the development of a large middle class and considerable social mobility. Rather than increasing extremes of wealth and poverty, there has been a social leveling and an increasing emphasis on social justice. And finally, bourgeois political power has progressively weakened with growth in worker oriented legislation and of labor-oriented parties, and with a narrowing of the rights and privileges of capital ownership. Most important, the severest manifestation of conflict between workers and capitalist--the strike--has been institutionalized through collective bargaining legislation and the legalization of strikes.

These historical events and trends notwithstanding, the sociological outlines of Marx's approach have much value. His emphasis on conflict, on classes, on their relations to the state, and on social change was a powerful perspective that should not be discarded. The spirit, if not the substance, of his theory is worth developing.