KARL MARX AND HIS IDEAS ABOUT INEQUALITY

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Karl Marx critically analysed inequality of wealth. His primary understanding was that inequality was structural, historical, alienating and by nature economic and social both. It was representative of exploitation of one class by another. Marx initiates the argument that a worker, involved in a capitalist system, has to survive at any cost. Capitalist class in itself is self sufficient class but such is not case with working people who are trapped in the vicious cycle of capitalist system. This leads to their alienation and destroy natural elements of their personality and life. Marx views time as a precious commodity in human life but workers are devoid of it. “Time is the room of human development. A man who has no free time to dispose of, whose whole lifetime, apart from the mere physical interruptions by sleep, meals, and so forth, is absorbed by his labour for the capitalist, is less than a beast of burden.”

In the contemporary world order particularly after the introduction of globalization, Marxian interpretation overrules the other.

For Marx, man is not man today but “he is a mere machine for producing foreign wealth, broken in body and brutalized in mind. Yet the whole history of modern industry shows that capital, if not checked, will recklessly and ruthlessly work to cast down the whole working class to this utmost state of degradation.” This state of affair is obtained as capitalist model first puts pressure for survival then creates greed for the consumption. Workers degrade, alienate, and finally fall into zone of different forms of inequality.
For Marx the inequality is embedded in the capitalist system itself. There is explicit division of money power. The means of production are in hands of capitalist class possessing liquid as well permanent assets. They are with disposable time. They are controller of the monetary system. They decide the movement of physical-material condition of the society. Their power is unmatched. Working class can only work but cannot decide. Thus inequality in decision making is caused. “The capitalist mode of production, for example, rests on the fact that the material conditions of production are in the hands of non workers in the form of property in capital and land, while the masses are only owners of the personal condition of production, of labor power. If the elements of production are so distributed, then the present-day distribution of the means of consumption results automatically.”\(^3\)

In the contemporary order masses work but people with ascribed-networked status, accumulated money, rented income enjoy. Those with resources may expand their wealth base with less efforts but the others only participate in the system as only a bread earner. Technical and managerial manpower is subordinated and dependent upon the real decision maker, the capitalist class.

In Marx’s opinion, inequality of wealth has historical roots. Every generation awakens in its milieu, largely decided by the status of material and wealth, by the structure and superstructure. There is no option to think in new terms. It is a historical bonding, a kind of contract which is difficult to be broken. “Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living.”\(^4\) Capitalist class will continue to appear in several new forms. Globalization, neo liberalism are its new incarnations. End of History, End of Theory are its new philosophical arguments.

This historical necessity has been utilized well by the people with wealth. They innovate and with support of accumulated wealth create new industries. The emergence of many new industries testify that “the very development of modern industry must progressively turn the scale in favour of the capitalist against the working man, and that consequently the general tendency of capitalistic production is not to raise, but to sink the average standard of wages, or to push the value of labour more or less to its minimum limit.”\(^5\) Karl Marx looked this development as birth centre of inequality of new order. The traditional wealth, modern wealth fuse and the
decision making power being in hands of the producing class decide the material standard of the working class. In today’s time in many developing countries including India many private entities do not pay in real terms the wages which should be in accordance to genuine work-payment standard.

The expansion of capitalist order is next step in which two major elements work together; the concentration of wealth in few hands and the establishment of networking among the capitalists. This systematic development leads to global inequality. “As soon as the labourers are turned into proletarians, their means of labour into capital, as soon as the capitalist mode of production stands on its own feet, then the further socialization of labour and further transformation of the land and other means of production into socially exploited and, therefore, common means of production, as well as the further expropriation of private proprietors, takes a new form. That which is now to be expropriated is no longer the labourer working for himself, but the capitalist exploiting many labourers. This expropriation is accomplished by the action of the immanent laws of capitalistic production itself, by the centralization of capital. One capitalist always kills many. Hand in hand with this centralization, or this expropriation of many capitalists by few, develop, on an ever-extending scale, the cooperative form of the labour process, the conscious technical application of science, the methodical cultivation of the soil, the transformation of the instruments of labour into instruments of labour only usable in common, the economizing of all means of production by their use as means of production of combined, socialized labour, the entanglement of all peoples in the net of the world market, and with this, the international character of the capitalistic regime.”

Marx is prophetic as the globalization has emerged its living example. It has deprived the people and workers of underdeveloped and developing nations to survive in new economic milieu with dignity and equality.

The inequality in economic terms has a critical impact on society, where inequality in social relationship is born. The social classes emerge which are governed by the economic bases. “When we look at social relations which create an undeveloped system of exchange, of exchange values and of money or which correspond to an undeveloped degree of these, then it is clear from the outset that the individuals in such a society, although their relations appear to be more personal, enter into connection with one another only as individuals imprisoned within a certain
definition, as feudal lord and vassal, landlord and serf, etc., or as members of a caste etc. or as members of an estate etc.”

The capitalist system wants to show that it wants to reduce the inequality. For this very purpose, capitalist class use tool of philanthropy. According to Marx ‘bourgeois philanthropy’ is just a fallacy of idea and action as “each capitalist does demand that his workers should save, but only his own, because they stand towards him as workers; but by no means the remaining world of workers, for these stand towards him as consumers. In spite of all 'pious' speeches he therefore searches for means to spur them on to consumption, to give his wares new charms, to inspire them with new needs by constant chatter etc. It is precisely this side of the relation of capital and labour which is an essential civilizing moment, and on which the historic justification, but also the contemporary power of capital rests.” In present time middle class and poor people should take care of themselves like statements echo this thought.

Marx views the “demands of hypocritical bourgeois philanthropy to be self-contradictory and thus to prove precisely what they were supposed to refute, namely that in the exchange between the worker and capital, the worker finds himself in the relation of simple circulation, hence obtains not wealth but only subsistence, use values for immediate consumption.” This is one important factor which leads to inequities in already unequal society.

Karl Marx looked to environmental resources also as source of generating inequality. He argued when capitalists “productively exploited nature-given materials — the soil, the seas, ores, forests, etc. -- which do not constitute elements of capital-value, are more intensively or extensively exploited with a greater exertion of the same amount of labour-power, without an increased advance of money-capital. The real elements of productive capital are thus multiplied without requiring an additional money-capital.”

This creates more wealth to the already rich class. The packed potato chip eating culture, introduction of new food habits by food MNC reflect this tendency. The establishment of new eating culture, mining activities, deforestation for timber and land, contract farming, attack on farmers’ land rights, introduction of GM crops are new form of exploiting the environmental resources. These activities create inequality as with less efforts more is generated, an objective of contemporary globalization.
Karl Marx viewed the emergence of capitalist system as a consequence of historical forces. His interpretation of history was materialistic from where he discovered the natural laws of class formation. He also brought the seeds and expression of inequality, its various forms in his writings. These are little obscure in his work but are relevant for the present society where inequality as major problem and shortcoming of capitalist system has emerged and is a cause of concern.

References:

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