

Karl Marx and Alienation

Karl Marx

- Karl Marx was born in Prussia, on May 5, 1818.
- His famous contribution are the Communist manifesto (1848) and volumes of Capital.
- Marx's theory of capitalism reflects on the forms of domination and forms of exploitation.
- Characteristics of capitalism - social relations are constituted by labour and fundamentally different from those characteristics of the non-capitalistic society.
- Capitalism characterises society in terms of class relation structured by private ownership of the means of production and market regulated economy.

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- Capitalist own and control production whereas proletariats with labour create wealth for the society.
- Class opposition occurs because of the structural contradiction of capitalism – opposition between the dominating and the exploited.
- The social wealth produced by the workers is appropriated by the capitalists for their individual/particularistic ends.
- Capitalists employ workers (own labour time) and the means of production (tools and raw material).

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- Marx's critique of political economists in understanding the society has been the basis of his writings.
- Acc. to him, there are two problems with political economists understanding –
 - Political economists assume that the condition of production found in capitalism can be attributed to all forms of economy. Self-seeking and the pursuit of profit are seen as natural characteristics of individuals. Whereas, Marx believed that capitalism or for that matter any form of productive system are a product of historical process.
 - Economic relations can be treated *in abstracto*. Economists talk of 'capital', 'commodities', 'prices' etc. as if they have life independent of human mediation.
- Economists reduce everything into 'economic' and do not consider anything outside this.
 - Unemployed worker, working men, thieves, beggar, unemployed, criminals do not exist for political economy.

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- Marx offered structures of capitalism that cause alienation.
- Alienation has four basic components:-
 - Productive activity – workers do not work for themselves but for the capitalists who pay them a subsistence wage in return. Both the worker and the capitalist believe that the payment of the wage means that the productive activity belongs to the capitalist.

Marx argued that productive activity in capitalism is reduced often to boring and stultifying means to fulfilment of the only end that is earning money to survive.

Productive activity belongs to the capitalists because they decide what is to be done with it and workers are alienated for that activity.

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- Product – The workers are alienated not only from the productive activity but also from the object of those activities – product.

Marx argued the product of the labour does not belong to the workers, to be used by them in order to satisfy the basic needs.

The worker does not have control over the product. They lack detailed knowledge of aspects of production process.

Ex – Automobile assembly line workers and the end product car.

Here assembly lines are so long that many steps are involved and individuals are reduced to insignificant role in the whole process.

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- Fellow workers – Marx assumes that people basically need and want to work co-operatively in order to appropriate from nature what they require to survive.

Marx argued that in capitalism this co-operation is disrupted and strangers are forced to work side by side for the capitalists. Even if workers are friends, the nature of technology makes for great deal of isolation.

Workers are also forced into outright competition and sometimes conflict with one another. The reward system, pitting one against the other generates considerable hostility among workers towards their peers.

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- From their own human potential/himself – Marx assumes that individuals perform less and less like human beings as they are reduced in their work to animals, beasts or inhumane machines.

In capitalism according to Marx the natural interrelationship between the head and the hand is broken so that only a few people are allowed to do the head work and most others do the handwork that is devoid of the mental component.

- Sources of alienation –
 - Structures in the modern workplace that subdivided labour into narrower and narrower specialities.

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- Sources of alienation –
 - Those structures in the modern workplace that limit the amount of control workers exercise over the work they do.
- Alienation carries with it the assumption that the dignity of the workers can not be maintained unless the work process allows autonomy, responsibility and self-fulfilment.
- The feeling of powerlessness, isolation and self-estrangement – alienation of the worker.

Communism

- Marx drops the term democracy in favour of ‘communism’. For him overcoming of alienation hinges on the supersession of private property.
- Acc. to him what is most essential is through reorganisation of society based upon eradication of the then existing relation between private property and wage-labour.
- Abolition of private property, central government controlling all aspects of economic and political system.
- Revolution as a means of achieving communist state.

Karl Marx Theory of Surplus Value

- Capitalism according to Marx – emphasises on the system of commodity production.
- Capitalist system producers simply do not produce for their own needs or for the need of the individual with whom they are in personal contact.
- Capitalism involves nation-wide and often international exchange market.
- Every commodity has two fold aspect according to Marx:-
 - Use value – which is realised in the process of consumption.
 - Ex- Cars have use value – transport or Food have use value – satisfying hunger.
 - Exchange value - value a product has when offered in exchange for other products.
 - Ex- Car exchange value for chairs. Car has more exchange value than chair as for its production machines, factory, labour, etc. is required whereas for producing chair labour, machinery required is comparatively less. (However, this is not fixed)

Karl Marx Theory of Surplus Value

- An object can have use-value whether or not it is a commodity but a commodity or a product must have use-value.
 - Ex- If a person grows vegetables on his farm and uses them then it has use value but is not a commodity. When we go to the market and buy vegetables then it is a commodity.
- Exchange value - It presupposes a definite economic relation and is inseparable from the market on which goods are exchanged.
- Labor theory of value –

Both use-value and exchange-value must be directly related to the amount of labour embodied in the production of a commodity.

Karl Marx Theory of Surplus Value

- Labor theory of value –

Exchange-value can not be derived from use-value.

Ex- Deciding the exchange value of corn and iron. For some corn might be important and for some iron so use-value is not the right indicator of exchange-value. Here exchange value will rest upon some quantified characteristics of labour.

Capitalists are not interested in the use-value of a good but in the exchange-value which is produced by labour (concrete labour).

Karl Marx Theory of Surplus Value

- Labour process time –

$L \times P = \text{Wealth}$; (L- Labour process, P- its productivity)

$\text{Production} = \text{Wealth} / \text{Labour}$

Forces of production–

Capitalism produces forces of production. To produce more wealth the relation of labour will be more complex.

Ex- Necessary labour needed for food production + Surplus labour = Total Labour (food produced)

Forces of production + relation of production = Mode of production.

Karl Marx Theory of Surplus Value

Mode of production – comprises of both relation of production and forces of production.

- Abstract labour – is an historical category. It is the socially necessary labour time. Productivity will increase the wealth but in that case the socially necessary labour time will fall.
 - Ex- Productive labour will be productive of surplus value whereas unproductive labour will not be productive with surplus value.

Karl Marx Theory of Surplus Value

- Rate of surplus value = rate of exploitation.
- Surplus value is the source of profit.