

## ON MARXISM

(People's March Interview with Balagopal)

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Marxism traditionally has a stand on various issues. A stand on the primacy of class, a stand on the determining nature of the economic base, a stand on ideology, a stand on ideas in general. All ideas are not ideology. But Marxism at least appears to have a theory of all ideas, not just of ideology, of history as a structured thing. Now these are various ideas that are present in Marxism. None of them is absolutely wrong. The problem is if I had thought all of them are wrong it is very easy to dismiss and write whatever.... None of them is absolutely wrong, but I think all of them have a partial truth which has been illegitimately extended into a total truth.

So what happens is in different contexts one will have to discuss different things. When one talks about ideas and ideology, is it the case that every idea can be attributed to some either class interest or class practice? Attributing ideas to class interest is dogmatic kind of Marxism. But then within the Marxist tradition there are broader interpretations in which you don't say class interest, but class practice that is the practice of a certain class gives rise to certain ideas which may or may not correspond with any predetermined interest of the class. But it is born from the practice of that class.

But even in that broad sense, is it the case that every idea can be explained as being derived from a certain class practice? Secondly what is the structure of ideas? Ideas have a particular content and certain general values in terms of which particular contents are expressed. Now these general values are always stated universally, whether they are meant universally or not can be a matter of debate and discussion. But they are always stated universally. And that has the consequence that a particular idea stated in terms of general universal values gets expanded beyond its particular context. Often it even goes to the opposite, like you have rule of law which we talk about in Civil Liberties.

Even assuming that it came up as a general universal value in terms of which the particular interests of the bourgeois were expressed in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, 17<sup>th</sup> century. Later the fact that it is expressed as universal value has entailed its expansion to a wider frame work in which it is not necessarily congruent with Capitalists interests, not 100% congruent.

What I am trying to say is that each of these elements of Marxism gets questioned in a different context. So when one talks about ideology, there are certain contexts in which one has to -ideas and ideology, their class basis, their base in the class interest or class practice- in certain context one will have to bring it out. Similarly, if you are talking about the primacy of class, now in India, we see that in terms of actual politics or actual social struggles class is not really appeared to be primary. Now that can be rationalized in 100 ways. You may say that the stunted nature of capitalist development has resulted in a situation where class formation is not very sharp or strong and therefore preclass formations are dominated and so on. That is one explanation.

The other explanation could be that class came up as a primary form of social grouping only in European history. It is nowhere else in the world, neither ancient, nor medieval, nor modern, you find class as the primary unit in actual social and political struggles. So to assume that what happened in European history is the norm and everything else is a deformation which has not happened because of Imperialism or something is a peculiar form of logic. That is one kind of logic. You can start with a different logic. If you don't assume that what happened in Europe is the norm, then one may have to conclude that class may not be the primary social unit in terms of public life.

After all the whole discussion from the time of Marx till today about Asian societies has been that because of some reason some Asiatic mode of production has come up and because of that class formation has not been very sharp and because of that class struggles have not become very sharp. All this because of, because of implies that what happened in Europe must have happened here, because it did not happen here there has to be some reason for

it. Why should that kind of an argument be there? So in this context one has to and especially when one talks about India in the context of caste as a major phenomenon which has come forward as a focus of political mobilization. In that context, one will have to talk about whether class is the really primary element in society.

Similarly inevitability of Socialism and other things in the whole of the Marxist tradition. The reason why capitalism is always going to be a crisis ridden, that I think is a major achievement of Marx that capitalism will be always crisis ridden and the particular way in which it will be crisis ridden was very sharply, beautifully predicted by Marx. That is true. But he also believed that within this crisis ridden capitalism a force will come up which will build Socialism. That I think is neither logically nor historically substantiated, that the working class will struggle and build Socialism. Working class will struggle whenever it is oppressed. Every class will struggle when it is oppressed. But the struggling working class in its struggles will either inevitably in the sense of the natural law as Plekhanov, Koutsky and others spoke which was actually not the kind of terminology that Marx ever used. But Marx also believed, though he would never have used like the words iron law of history which Plekhanov, Koutsky and even Lenin used, Marx would not have used such expressions, still he also believed that in some sense it is inevitable, not in the sense of the Iron law of history which the subsequent Marxists spoke.

In some sense he also believed it is the natural culmination or the normal culmination that one should expect, would expect from the working class struggles is Socialism. This I think is unsubstantiated in any sense. Here one will have to ask this question, which Marx never asked, why would human beings want Socialism. Why would human beings want socialism so strongly that they will resist everything else and build socialism? Human beings, you can discover that they want socialism; you can also find that they want power, they oppress other people to establish power over them, the same person also wants socialism. What Human beings want is a very complex thing. Why under given historical social conditions human beings predominantly want socialism or a

predominant class of society will predominantly want socialism and build it is I think is a completely unanswered question. And to answer this question you need a concept of a Human being other than a class being.

Within the Marxist tradition, there are two kinds of interpretations one is the so-called Materialist interpretation, the other is what is called Humanist interpretation. Materialist interpretation, I think basically can be attributed to Engels, Plekhanov, Koutsky, and Lenin. That is a tradition. Althesser tried to give it a very elaborate form. The Humanist interpretation, both of them have roots in Marx, in Marx you can quote the origin of both. The Humanist interpretation was picked up by, Gramsci is a very major Humanist interpreter of Marx and it goes on, lots of people are there.

Materialist interpretation says that the economy- production forces, production relations- is the basis of society and the contradictions with in this that will determine the course of history. Humanist interpretation says Human practice . But of Human practice productive practice is the most important factor that way it gets linked to the materialist interpretation. But Human practice is given primacy, But even here Human practice is taken to be class practice. Even in the humanist interpretation where Human being is given a place, Human practice which is supposed to be the fulcrum of history is defined to be class practice. And Human being is defined to be a person who produces intelligently, creatively with a prior picture in mind, not a mechanical producer but still a producer. An intelligent, creative producer of material life that is the Human essence. That is what Marx could say. But it is that aspect of man which is central to history, to the historical evolution. Is that sufficient?

The moment you start questioning the primacy of class, then where is the class? Where does it become primary? It becomes primary within the historical interpretation. Where is historical interpretation? The materialist interpretation does not have any room for a Human being except as a product of material forces. The humanist interpretation gives Human practice the central position, but Human practice is class practice, productive practice. Is a Human being

sufficiently defined as a creative, intelligent producer of material goods? That is to say is the physical potential of a Human being, physical including intellectual , I am including intellectual in the physical not just brute force, physical intellectual potential of Human being, is it a sufficient potential to take note of. Because this Human being is supposed to who want socialism. He is supposed to want a society where justice is there. Justice is not wanted only by the intellect. It is a moral idea. It is linked to the behavioural potential Human beings. To want justice, to realize justice is to behave justly, you have to behave justly. To assume that Human beings will want to consciously behave justly rather than unjustly, predominantly justly so that a just society becomes possible raise the question of human behavior. What are the motivating forces? What is the structure of the Human character? What is the structure of Human personality? These are very difficult questions, which have no place, whatsoever, even within the Humanist interpretation of Marxist theory.

What I am trying to say is this, if I am raising different issues in different in different contexts, each of the gaps in Marxist theory is adequately raised only in different contexts. Only when one raised it in a context, the thing can be made clear. Only then one can have revision of the whole theory. That is one reason. The other reason I have no time. If I am put in jail for six months I will write what I want to write. But nobody wants to put me in jail. I take my time and write. I will definitely write, I have gradually formulated. I am also rereading all that I read more than a decade ago. For the last 8-9 years I had practically stopped reading assuming I have understood all the weaknesses of Marxism and understood that it is not a weakness, the answer everything I know. And now to my mind everything is open, I am rereading all that I read and I am discovering many things I have thought not be discovered ten years ago. My discovery is going on. I think I will write.

Marxism has very good understanding of Capitalism as form of society, at least as a form of economy and certain aspects of Capitalist ideology, like fetishism and so on .it is good. So much of which is come from Marxism has become part of common sense today that we don't really realize that it come

from Marxism. That ultimately I think any theory, its real victory is when it becomes part of common sense and what cannot become part of common sense gets discarded. In that sense today for instance whenever we see anything unjust, automatically we see the structural roots of the injustice. This is something we have learned from Marxism. Now it has become part of common sense. Lots of people who don't believe in Marxism also automatically do this if they find something unjust. Where is the structure which is giving rise to unjust, they automatically try to locate it. And then within the structure they locate those who are benefiting and those who are losing from the structure. Feminists do this. Ambedkarites do this. Modern ambedkarite interpretation of caste is so different from Ambedkar's interpretation though they go on quoting Ambedkar. It is strongly influenced by Marxism, Marxist way of looking at things which is not Ambedkar's way of looking at things, that caste is a structure who is benefiting, who is losing and once you see injustice rooted in a structure that some are benefiting, some are losing then the next thing is that those who are losing from the structure should fight against the structure and transform it. Only then injustice will really go, until then whatever you do injustice will not go, these are all ideas which today taken to be part of common sense. In other words the fight against injustice, many of the ideas are required for the fight against injustice, I think have been formulated by Marxism and have become part of our common way of thinking.

It is still not fully adequate because I think that when we talk of injustice and fight against injustice ideology is very important. There I think Marxist understanding of ideology is very inadequate. Much more needs there. Because ideology is what you believe in. You believe in something not because somebody has opened your brain and injected something into your brain. You believe in because that is the way you understand it. Now why is it that oppressed people themselves understands society in such way that they internalize the ideas of which are convenient for the oppressive system is a very difficult question to answer. The only one line answer which Marx gives in German ideology is that the ruling class controls the instruments of intellectual

production as well as material production. That is one very small aspect of it. That is not sufficient.

And subsequently many ideas have been put forward by Althusser, Gramsci and so on. None of them gave the complete answer. Because to give a complete answer the nature of formation of ideas, and ideas are never born in your brain, they are part of your personality. What you believe is part of your personality, not merely a function of your intellect. What you believe is part of your, I am not saying that they are determined by personality, it's part of your, ideas are linked to your personality. Then you have to take into consideration the formation of personalities. Erich Fromm was the only Marxist or semi-Marxist person who tried to understand the formation of personality, ideas as a linked thing, ideology as a linked thing. And why given his understanding of Freudian theory of formation of personality, oppressive ideology are there, Erich Fromm went quite far, but I don't think even his ideas are adequate, because the optimist in him overcomes the scientist in him after a while. But still Erich Fromm has gone very far.

So what I am trying to say is that if we say that Marxism is sufficient for fighting injustice but not sufficient for building a just society that itself is over simplification because Marxism gives us a lot of ideas for fighting injustice but there is one great lacunae that is in the understanding of ideology. It is precisely because Marxism has a no notion of Human being as an intelligent, creative producer that is not sufficient for understanding the notion of ideology. By merely saying that the ruling class produces ideology and induct it into our minds, why can't we produce something and induct into the minds of the ruling class. It does not seem to happen, the reverse seems to happen. so some things are there. It is not very easy to ....

I am able to identify a few things. But I think it requires a comprehensive understanding. So with these deficiencies nevertheless Marxism is a very useful and I think the positive ideas which have come from Marxism as far as the fight

against injustice go, they will stay. They are now part of the political understanding of the human race which nobody can now deny.

On the other hand, the reconstruction of society on a just basis, there I think Marxism has practically nothing to offer. Because the only thing Marxism has to offer is to locate a class in society, which will build the just society and then Marx consciously say that I won't say anything about how it is going to be. Though he didn't have a blue print, but he has many ideas about what kind of society is just society. I think the crucial characteristic is where "The full development of each will be a precondition for the full development all". That one sentence contains so many contradictions, so many problems. That the full development of each person will be a precondition for the full development of whole, which is a very remarkable in the sense that it does not set individual against society as many Marxists do, many communists, many Marxists in the name of Marx set the individual against society. Society is important, individual must be subordinated. That is rubbish as far as Marx is considered. For him any subordination of individual to society was as bad as subordination of society to individual. A fully developed individuals making up a fully developed society, fully developed in the complete individualistic sense. Each individual fully developed in the complete individualistic sense, which would shock many communists for saying so. But such individuals making up a fully developed society. Fully developed in the sense that a society which does not oppress one section for another, which gives the full positive Human civilisational possibilities potential to everybody. If this is your definition of communism, I believe that among all the various definitions he gave at various steps, this is the most useful one, and as a goal this is the most useful one.

Between this and the idea that I will only identify a class in the society which in the course of its own struggle without necessarily aiming to liberate everybody in a selfless manner, but in the course of its own struggle will build that society, between these two there is a huge gap which neither Marx nor any Marxist has----



So I think as far as the reconstruction of a society on a just basis is concerned there is very little that Marxism can offer us. Though the just society as defined by Marx I think is a very fine idea. I think in its absolute form it is a utopia, it will never be achieved. I think there will always remain conflict between full development of individuals and full development of society, but we can bridge it, we can reduce it, we can lessen the contradictions to a large extent. That is a different matter. One has to work for it.

Where do you fix your site? Marx would agree, everybody would agree that change is not only change in production relations and productive forces, it is a comprehensive change. But then of all the changes that is required naturally you fix sites on one change which is fundamental to the total change. Definitely nobody can accuse Marx of saying that only economy should change. That is definitely not true. But he thought or he thought that he deduced from history that change in the mode of production will be the fulcrum around which the total change will be----.

My own point is this. See human beings are such that, once again I am introducing a concept of human being which in this sense is absent in Marxism, human beings are such that you put them in hell, they will fight for paradise, you put them in paradise they will make hell out of it which is not meant as a cyclical argument that they will build paradise make hell of it, some things remain, at each phase something will remain. What remains? Marx recognized one thing which will remain that is development in science and technology. That was supposed to be something which is accumulated over history. If that alone is seem to accumulate over history, I don't think we will understand how a just society can be build. But in the continuous struggle to build paradise and then his continuous capacity to destroy paradise what remains are certain values and certain institutional norms of human life, certain institutions themselves which incorporate these norms at each stage certain things remain. They remain, that does not mean they automatically remain, they can remain, sometimes they do remain and if we consciously ensure that they remain at each stage, at each cycle , that consciously whatever is the values and institutional norms and the

institutions build around these norms which have been created , which could facilitate , they may not be ideal right now, they could facilitate the building of a just society, if they are conserved as much as we conserve the science and technology when we move from one phase to another. Within Marxism, that is a peculiar thing, that everything that survives from one phase to next phase of history is regarded as a leftover except in technology. Technology is assumed to naturally, correctly, positively accumulate, everything else is not seen as an accumulation, it is a leftover. And then Marxist theory has to wonder why it is leftover. And for instance why Greek art is still appreciated? Marx himself had some peculiar answers and Lucio kolletti and others have tried to give some other peculiar answers. These peculiars answers have to be given because you feel uncomfortable that anything other than technology can accumulate in history. If it accumulates it must be a leftover from the past which is either a completely redundant, useless cancer which is hanging over from the past or it must somehow seem that it is an old idea which is rearticulated in terms of some new class interest. Because you can't accept that there can be accumulation of certain values and institutional norms, it could be aesthetic norms, aesthetic values whatever, in whatever form, I am not totally ruling out reinterpretation. But that they can also accumulate just as technology can also accumulates, even though the use of technology is often again determined by future social conditions. There we don't feel any discomfort, but here we feel discomfort. And that is because of the peculiar nature of the theory. That is I think is the deficiency of the theory.

And therefore we will have to fix our sites on what values, not merely abstract values, but concrete in terms of social norms and social institutions which become binding on human beings through cultural. To what extent this can prevent human beings from making hell of paradise. The desire to make paradise of hell is, it is part of human beings, because in hell you are deprived. And when human beings are deprived they will fight. They will struggle; there is no doubt about that. But then once they achieve some kind of a ideal, good relation, the struggle one against the other to dominate will again start. That

can be prevented only by strongly entrenched cultural norms of justice and equality, which again have accumulated from the time of Buddha they have gone accumulated and the disservice that Marxism has done is by delegitimizing all these concepts, attributing to some class interests in the past and therefore it is only that class interest and nothing else, if it still survives it is again useful for Gandhi to again reimpose some bad class interest on society. This delegitimation of positive values that have accumulated from the past that is one of the disservices that Marxism has done to history. It has to be converted into a positive ---- and that accumulation, I am not merely talking of abstract values, values, they always get incorporated in society, sometimes they are reinterpreted negatively. The value of sacrifice, for instance, is interpreted very negatively for women. One has to be very conscious about such things. How positive value can be interpreted, institutionalized very negatively? Women have suffered it continuously. So the positive incorporation of values, only the positive interpretation of values has to be there, it has to be continuously done so that a buffer gets built in social culture and therefore derivatively in human personalities against the tendency to reduce every paradise to hell. That I think is necessary. And that requires a conceptualization of human being. What is human personality? How is it formed? What are the innate tensions within a human being? Simply divide, one can say there both evil and good possibilities in human beings, which are permanent, they are universal. You are never going to get perfectly good human being, or perfectly evil human being. But when I am talking good and evil, I am talking in terms of good is that which **suberves** unity among human beings, evil is that which divides human beings. I am talking only in the terms of socialism, in that sense I am talking about good and evil. Both good in the sense of that which unites people, evil in the sense that divides people, both are potentially possible for human beings. Now how is this potential worked into a certain personality type or character type in society? This psychoanalysis alone has tackles. That is why a lot has to be learnt from psychoanalysis. So on this have to be put together to not to generate one more absolute truth, but to give some idea of how it should **proceed**.

There I think we cannot specify any class, any caste, or any one preassigned liberator. It could be communist party if it can get over its ideological, theoretical drawbacks, it could be some other party. I am not interested in which party; I am only trying to say that it is a human task, which only human beings do, can do. There cannot be preassignment of this task to any one class or caste or any section in society. So ultimately which human beings chose to do this is partly a matter of what kind of human beings are formed by social influences, but partly also a matter of ----, partly a matter of how much will power, partly a matter of how much we are prepared to overcome our limitations and take up this task.

And that is concerned there has never been any vulgarity in Marx's own thought. He never said that only those who are born in the working class will do all this. His point, I think, was that the experience or life conditions of working class will generate the force necessary for that, many workers will participate; others who are not part of the class may also participate in it. But even in that sense, I don't think one can assign this to any class, this role to any class. It is a human task which human beings have to do. Those who live a life of suffering are more likely to be attracted, but the very fact that they are attracted and they fight often means that they move out of the life of suffering then they no longer be interested, somebody else may have to take it.

At some point even if you have a society like United States of America where, may be there is nobody who in terms of physical suffering needs socialism, a large number of people may believe that in terms of the kind of emotional, cultural and life which is provided by Capitalism, it is a disgusting system and we want a better life, and then the choice may not be only form any one class. May be the very big millionaires may not want it, but then ----- it is a brutalizing way of life, even if I may getting lot to eat and lot of comforts.

We have to take the present form. But whatever the argument given, whatever the excuse given, today the situation is that one can not call it a

people's movement, though it is a political movement for the benefit of the poor, there is no denying it. It still works 85-90% for the benefit of the poor, to protect them from the arbitrary actions of the government, oppression of the land lords, to give them economic benefits and so on. It is not a self conscious movement of the poor. It is actually an armed movement which uses a lot of violence for the benefit of the poor. But then once this movement gets detached from the poor becomes a movement above them, over them, to protect them and to use a tremendous amount of violence in order to protect them, or to give them some rights, or give them some satisfaction and so on, a gap develops between the people and the movement. Movements have become largely unaccountable to the people. They have very little accountability to the people. Whenever even if they invite their own sympathizers to discuss with--- they don't have open meetings and debate. They sit somewhere and call their sympathizers from the village, what we call militants. The word militant is used differently in Andhra Pradesh than in Kashmir and Punjab. Kashmir and Punjab it is the armed activists who are called militants, in Andhra Pradesh it is the persons in village who act as a link between the people and M.L party, they are called militants. They may or may not be armed. Usually they are not armed or they have some small weapon with them, nothing beyond that, they live in villages more or less, semi legal. What I am trying to say is that these parties today, given the situation have very little direct contact with the people (28.24) they call these militants, talk to them, take their advise and generally give the directions to these fellows who will go and implement ... which means that for the people even to tell them what they feel is very difficult unless they do it through the militants and then you have to tell the militants only what the militants like, you can't tell through them that these militants are bad fellows, you replace them, you can't tell them. So complaint and criticism against the party has become very difficult. We know this because when we go to..... see APCLC is the only organization which actually ----what is happening at the ground level. You can meet lots of revolutionaries from Andhra Pradesh who will give you what their party tells you. I don't want to say that everything is negative. I would still say that on behalf of the poor people in Telangana these

are the only who works. There is nobody else. There is no point in denying that. That will not exhaust all the questions one can ask. One can ask a lot of questions afterwards. The first question is what is the accountability they have towards the poor people. What is the mechanism that poor people have to hold them accountable? There is no mechanism. So when we go the villages somebody comes and says I have been threatened by them, they told me that I am doing this bad thing, I have not done so and we say why don't you communicate, they will say how do I communicate, I have to communicate through the village militants, who are the fellows who are actually instrumental in giving me a bad name in the first place, how do I communicate through them, you please tell them. So, we say that we don't have direct contacts with them, then they will say that we know that you don't have direct contacts with them, but somehow send a message. This is a request we get every day when we go to Warangal, Karimnagar, these villages and we try to send a message oneway or the other. Some times in an extreme situations we will give a public statement also as APCLC that this is being done, it is wrong, please stop doing this. Some times. Very occasionally we give. The point I am trying to say is that their answerability, accountability to the people has decreased a lot.

Secondly, the problem with using violence as the principle means of serving any class of society poor or rich or whatever is that, violence and terror has to be generalized if it is to work. You cannot have a partial terror aimed only at one class of society. That doesn't work, that doesn't serve your purpose because the terror used as a weapon to safe guarding or serving the interests of one class ultimately it turns out that it always injures your own social base much more than it injures your enemy. It is a fact, which I think somebody was speaking of yesterday also. It is a fact that Kashmiry militants have killed many, many kashmiry Muslims than Hindus. Khalisthanis in Punjab have killed many, many more Sikhs than Hindus. And Naxalites in Andhra Pradesh have killed many more poor people than rich people. That's how terror works. And then it becomes very uncomfortable. A poor person is a agent of the land lord, agent of the state, police informer whatever he may be or he may not be, point

is that once you use violence and terror as the means of serving the poor or whichever class, it gets generalized and you start using it significantly against your own class. Apart from the general logic of terror as a political means, there is also the specific intolerance, which communist parties have that they do not tolerate differences within their social base, they will tolerate the enemy much more, within their social base they don't tolerate differences. A rich man who criticize them, is against them may not be killed immediately. He is an enemy any way. One may kill him any day. But a poor fellow who becomes critical has to be killed today itself because he is in the social base. This is the logic, which works very much against the poor people. So that today a large number of the particular communities which are the social base of the Naxalites- the tribals in Telangana, Dalits- those among them who have gone to school, college got educated or moved on the society they have a strong feeling, they have today a strong feeling that even though all of them acknowledge that they have benefitted a lot from the Naxalites, but we are in a position where we have to accept them as the only leaders, they cannot seek any politics other than their politics. Don't we have this freedom? Ultimately the freedom of your own social base, freedom from you- not freedom from the state- you have in fact fought to get them some freedom the state, you have does so, you have given them a spine to stand up and question. It is very fine. But the spine to stand up and question you that you have destroyed. This is a peculiar position. That is one reason why whenever one talks of repression against them –have feel that unless one puts the whole picture and talks in this context it does not serve much use. And it becomes a little painful to go on writing this again and again, so I am not writing much.