

# The Marxian Concept of Man in the Indian Context

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This paper is an attempt to relate the original thought of Karl Marx regarding man and his destiny to the contemporary Indian context. By Indian context I do not mean the various systems of philosophy and currents of religious thought that developed in the past. My concern is with the present, a present that includes all domains of national life—economic, social, political, and cultural. The past will be of interest only in the measure in which it is alive in the present. What I propose to do is to try to answer the question, how far the thought of Marx and the socio-cultural forces and trends in India can act each as a corrective and a complement to the other. The end-result of such a dialogue will take us beyond both Marxism and the prevalent patterns of thinking and practice in India.

The issues upon which such a dialogue will have to centre are many, ranging from the production of things to the production of ideas, from the economic to the cultural and the religious. I shall focus attention only on some of them that I consider central and most significant for the future of Marxism as well as of our country. Let us begin with Marx's understanding of man's relationship to nature.

## 1. The human significance of productive forces

For Marx man's relationship to nature is not contemplative but dynamic, practical. Man in association with his fellowmen makes use of tools and machinery to reshape nature and adapt it to satisfy his needs such as for food, clothing, housing, and medicine. This whole process is called productive force. As such, it includes as integral elements not only tools and machinery but also the existing level of science, technology and the organization of labour. If productive forces have to do with man's relation to nature as mediated by other men, the relations of production, on the contrary, have to do with man's relationship to his fellowmen as mediated by the process of production. More specifically, the relations of production refer to the relations that exist between those who own the means of production and appropriate the product and those others who do not. The dialectical conflict between the productive forces and the relations of production is for Marx the very mainspring of history, the matrix of all revolutions. In the words of Marx: 'At a certain stage of their development, the material forces of production in society come in conflict with the existing relations of production...within which they have been at work before.'

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From forms of development of the forces of production these relations turn into their fetters. Then occurs a period of social revolution.<sup>1</sup>

Implied in this text as in many others is the idea that what stands in the way of human advancement is the relations of production, contrasted with which productive forces constitute a principle of human liberation. This is also borne out by the absence in the works of Marx of any sustained critique of the productive forces capitalism has brought into existence. He has no doubt highlighted the dehumanizing character of the extreme division of labour, itself a productive force, that characterizes capitalist production. But such division of labour is seen as a necessary stage in the development of man, which in the long run will create the objective, if not also subjective conditions for the supersession of capitalism itself and for the emergence of a socialist society.

Today, more than ever, there is need to take a critical view of the productive forces of capitalism in order to draw from it the right theoretical and practical conclusions; all the more so, since contemporary capitalism is far different from the one that existed in 19th century England. What distinguishes monopoly capitalism is that it controls the market instead of being controlled by it. This it does mainly by creating artificial needs in the people for the wares it has to sell. Production of this type necessarily leads to an overgrowth of material means of production in the form of irrelevant machinery. What is worse, no sooner is a machine made than it is rendered obsolete, because the consumers have been already conditioned to consider the latest the best. This tallies with the principle widely held in capitalist countries that whatever is technically possible, whether useful or not, ought to be accomplished. The machines rendered obsolete go to form the graveyards of capitalism, unless, of course, they are exported to the economically backward countries. The growth of machinery is matched by an equally stupendous growth of irrelevant science and technology. The gravity of the problem will become clear when we remember that 65 per cent of the corporate investments in the western world are for 'rationalization' and technical innovation,<sup>2</sup> calculated to deform and denature the masses by reducing them to consumers of useless and even harmful goods (male and female deodorants, cosmetics, helps to sexual potency etc.) or to fashion the instruments of mass murder and collective extermination (nuclear bombs, missiles, armaments in general). This being the case, it is wrong to consider the capitalist productive forces in the form of science, technology, and machinery as neutral or, worse, as instruments of human liberation. Far from being the prerequisite for the birth of the free *social individual*, they are rather so many obstacles in its way.

Seen from this angle, one sees the relevance of the Gandhian critique of technology and industrialization. There is, to be sure, a

<sup>1</sup> Karl Marx, 'Preface to a Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy': T. B. Bottomore and Maximilien Rubel (ed.), *Karl Marx, Selected Writings in Sociology and Social Philosophy* (abbr. SW), Pelican, 1970, p. 68.

<sup>2</sup> Roger Garaudy, *The Alternative Future*, Simon and Shuster, New York, 1972, p. 129.

certain ambiguity in the position of Gandhi in this matter. At times he gives the impression that he views industrialization as intrinsically evil. He wrote in the *Harijan*: 'Pandit Nehru wants industrialization because he thinks that, if it is socialized, it would be free from the evils of capitalism. My own view is that the evils are inherent in industrialization and no amount of socialization can eradicate them.'<sup>3</sup> But it is likely that he understood socialization to mean statization, which will only accentuate the centralism that marks large scale industry. And he is justified in rejecting every form of centralization, whether economic or political, as detrimental to the freedom of the individual. In any case what he staunchly opposed was that industrialization which was motivated by the lust for profit. He welcomed all industrialization that contributed to the total well-being of each and all. 'Men go on "saving labour" till thousands are without work and thrown on the open streets to die of starvation. I want to save time and labour, not for a fraction of mankind, but for all. I want the concentration of wealth, not in the hands of a few, but in the hands of all. Today, machinery merely helps a few to ride on the backs of millions. The impetus behind it all is not the philanthropy to save labour but greed. It is against this constitution of things that I am fighting with all my mind.'<sup>4</sup> This in reality is a plea for a new type of science, technology and industrialization that would answer human, social needs, a plea that is quite in harmony with the fundamental concern of Marx himself. In fact, if we Indians are not to lose our national soul and identity we should opt for a path of technology that reflects what is best in our own system of values. Seen in this perspective, the numerous firms and factories that dot our landscape, set up to produce luxury goods to satisfy the engineered needs of a fraction of the population, deserve to be dismantled and consigned to the dunghills of history. As a possible alternative we should welcome the Gandhian stress on indigenous and appropriate technology.

## 2. The humanization of needs

Man is not only action seeking to transform his environment: he is also passion, passion for fuller knowing and being. As passion, he has needs which are the well-spring of action. Every action he initiates is in response to a passion, to a need. Similarly, the products he brings into existence are meant to satisfy his needs. His needs, however, are not static, given once and for all. In satisfying given needs he acquires new ones, physical as well as spiritual. And the greatest of his needs is the need for other men. For Marx, therefore, the whole of history is a preparation for man to become an object of sense perception and sensuous need.<sup>5</sup> In capitalism, however, the proper unfolding of the wealth of human needs is thwarted. Produc-

<sup>3</sup> *Harijan*, 29-9-1940.

<sup>4</sup> *Young India*, 13-11-1924.

<sup>5</sup> Karl Marx, 'Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts' (abbr. MSS): T. B. Bottomore (ed.), *Karl Marx, Early Writings* (abbr. EW), C. A. Watts & Co. Ltd., London, 1963, p. 164.

tion for profit leads to the proliferation of manipulated, inane needs which, in the final analysis, is equivalent to the reduction of all needs to that for money. For, being the universal equivalent of all commodities, money can be exchanged for wealth, power, prestige, sex, love or even the favour of God. It reduces all human values to commodities, all qualities to quantity. 'The need for money is, therefore, the real need created by the modern economic system, and the only need it creates.'<sup>6</sup>

The materialism of needs can be overcome only in a socialist society in which production will be not of exchange values but of use values, i.e., for the satisfaction of social needs. Such a society will witness an explosion of human needs. It will see the birth of 'the plenitude of human need,' of the wealthy man 'who needs a complex of human manifestations of life, and whose own self-realization exists as an inner necessity, a need.'<sup>7</sup> It will create the conditions in which man's need for self-expression, for the production of the beautiful, and for human togetherness will be fully satisfied. It will also bring to perfection the specificity of his basic drives. In the words of Marx, 'Let us assume man to be *man*, and his relation to the world to be a human one. Then love can only be exchanged for love, trust for trust, etc. If you wish to enjoy art you must be an artistically cultivated person; if you wish to influence other people you must be a person who has a stimulating and encouraging effect upon others. Every one of your relations to man and to nature must be a specific expression, corresponding to the object of your will, of your real *individual* life.'<sup>8</sup>

Contrary to what is commonly held, there are points of convergence between the Marxian critique of needs and the Indian tradition of renunciation and simplicity which still survives in Gandhism. Like Marx, Gandhi too rejected the materialism of needs characteristic of capitalism. He wrote: 'The more we indulge our passions, the more unbridled they become. Our ancestors, therefore, set a limit to our indulgences. They saw that happiness was largely a mental condition. A man is not necessarily happy because he is rich, or unhappy because he is poor. The rich are often seen to be unhappy, the poor to be happy. . . Observing all this our ancestors dissuaded us from luxuries and pleasures. . . It was not that we did not know how to invent machinery, but our forefathers knew that if we set our minds after such needs, we would become slaves and lose our moral fibre.'<sup>9</sup> However, the basic concern underlying this rejection of consumerism is the realization of authentic selfhood understood as freedom from, and control over, one's passions, a motive that is conspicuously absent in the writings of Marx. With the latter the rejection of the quantification of needs is inspired by the concern for the total man and for the development of all his truly human needs. While Marxism has to integrate

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 168.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 164-5.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 193-4.

<sup>9</sup> *Hind Swaraj*, pp. 87-8, cited by Sriraman Narayan, *Relevance of Gandhian Economics*, Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 1970, p. 4.

within itself self-control as a positive human value, Gandhism in turn needs to make its own the concern for the blossoming of all human needs. The Gandhian tradition must shed its romanticism of poverty and its nostalgia for the simplicity of the primitive man.

If it is true that man works in order to satisfy needs, it is no less true that he experiences work itself as a fundamental need. For Marx work is more than a mere means; it is an end in itself; an essential dimension of his being. Under the system of private property, however, work is debased to the level of a mere means for maintaining oneself in existence. Determined by external conditions over which he has no control, the worker falls under the law of necessity. Freedom from this law can be achieved only if 'socialized mankind, the associated producers, regulate their interchange with nature rationally, bring it under their common control, instead of being ruled by it as by some blind power, and accomplish their task with the least expenditure of energy and under such conditions as are proper and worthy for human beings.'<sup>10</sup> However, Marx himself saw clearly that even in a socialist society man will never be fully free from the law of necessity since he will still have to work in order to satisfy material wants. This led him to the conclusion that development of human potentiality for its own sake, the true realm of freedom, only begins where that labour which is determined by need and external purposes ceases, i.e., outside the sphere of material production proper.<sup>11</sup> Now, what is production free from need if not the creation of the beautiful! That this is so is borne out by the fact that Marx distinguishes man from animals in terms of his capacity to produce in freedom from physical need and in accordance with the laws of beauty.<sup>12</sup> This proves conclusively that his thinking cannot be reduced to mere economics. The economic is the basis of human life but in no way its ultimate purpose. The ultimate lies in the realm of spiritual, aesthetic creation.

In recognising values higher than the economic Marx comes closer to the dominant Indian tradition that upholds the primacy of the spiritual over the more material values. His position has also religious implications which he himself could not have perceived. The creation of the beautiful—of beautiful things, persons, and human relations—is precisely the process whereby the divine reveals itself on the face of the earth. The aesthetic therefore may be represented as a meeting point of the human and the divine. As such, it could as well become the meeting point of Marxism and religion.

However, Marx's views on the objective preconditions for the development of artistic creativity cannot be accepted without reservations. He held that the realm of freedom is accessible only to those societies that have developed their productive forces to the maximum and thereby been able to shorten the working day.<sup>13</sup> This means in effect that the highly developed capitalist countries are nearer that

<sup>10</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital III*; SW, pp. 159-160.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> EW, p. 128.

<sup>13</sup> SW, p. 160.

threshold beyond which the creators of beauty will replace the producers of commodities. This claim does not tally with historical experience. True, the satisfaction of basic material needs is a prerequisite for artistic creation. With an empty stomach one cannot paint, dance or write poetry. But there is no basis for any dichotomy between the realm of necessity and the realm of freedom, between the production of the useful and the creation of the beautiful. It is a part of common experience that aesthetic creation accompanies even ordinary economic activity. The farmer who scatters the seed, the woman who harvests, the artisan who makes utensils—all of them act each according to his or her sense of form, rhythm, and harmony. The purely economic action divorced from the pursuit of the beautiful is a mere abstraction. More, even aesthetic creation as such, realized outside the realm of economic activity, is found in all cultures and at all stages of the development of productive forces. In earlier times this was made possible by so organizing the relations of production as to provide for the maintenance of poets, musicians, artists, etc., from the common resources of the community. The people of developing countries therefore are not condemned to being second class citizens in the world of artistic creation. However, under the existing conditions of capitalist exploitation aesthetic creation is largely a luxury of the privileged classes and is infected with the virus of capitalist values. Hence Marx is right in his contention that only under socialist relations of production will man be able to develop his creative powers to the full.

### 3. The emergence of the social individual

Man, according to Marx, is essentially related not only to nature but also to other men. Even his relation to nature, whether of production or consumption, is mediated by society. How does Marx define further this sociality of man? One thing is clear: his view of man steers clear of both individualism and collectivism. He rejected the notion of the individual as an isolated being closed in upon himself and guided solely by egotism and private interest. He consistently criticized the tendency of bourgeois intellectuals to eternalize the man of private interest and competition as the natural man as he always existed. For him the bourgeois individual was a product of capitalism and, as such, destined to disappear. Equally consistently he opposed collectivism which sacrifices the individual to society as though he were but a means to social ends. It is significant that he defined socialism as 'an association, in which *the free development of each* is the condition for the free development of all.'<sup>14</sup> Similarly, in the *Capital* he speaks of socialism creating the conditions for the free and full development of the individual. The same idea is repeatedly stressed in his other writings, especially in the *Grundrisse*.<sup>15</sup>

But the freedom of the individual envisaged here is not such as finds its limit in the existence of other men. It is only in a society

<sup>14</sup> Marx-Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1973, p. 76.

<sup>15</sup> Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*, Penguin Books, 1973, pp. 158, 609, 705-6.

based on competition that the other is experienced as a limit or a threat to one's freedom. For Marx, the other, society, is the condition for the individual's realizing his freedom. 'Only in association with others has each individual the means of cultivating his talents in all directions. Only in community therefore is personal freedom possible. In the previous substitutes for community, in the State, etc., personal freedom existed only for those individuals who grew up in the ruling class and only in so far as they were members of this class. The illusory community in which, up to the present, individuals have combined always acquired an independent existence apart from them, and since it was a union of one class against another it represented for the dominated class not only a completely illusory community but also a new shackle. In a genuine community individuals gain their freedom in and through their association.'<sup>16</sup>

Each man therefore is a centre of free decision and initiative which however can be realized only within the framework of his essential relation to others, to society. Society is neither outside individuals nor a mere aggregate of individuals, but 'the sum of connections and relationships in which individuals find themselves.'<sup>17</sup> Whereas in capitalism these connections and relations take the form of forces alien and hostile to individuals, in socialism these will be transparent to them and under their control. In that society each individual will encompass in thought as well as in being the whole of the human kind. 'Though man is a unique individual—and it is just his particularity that makes him an individual, a really *individual* communal being—he is equally the *whole*, the ideal whole, the subjective existence of society as thought and experience'.<sup>18</sup> To the end Marx remained true to this vision of man. In his mature writings he will refer to the *individual communal being* as the *social individual*, i.e., the individual who has understood and appropriated the general productive forces of society and has learned to master his own social relations.<sup>19</sup> The social individual is for Marx the effective and definitive supersession of both collectivism and individualism.

The Marxian conception of man and society, if assimilated by our people, can become the driving force for a social and cultural renewal in India. The same individualism he castigated is, unfortunately, the dominant ethos today. Private interest reigns supreme not only in the economic but also in other spheres of life. The politician makes use of the people; the workers, the trade union; the government official, the rules and procedures; the teacher, his pupils—each to promote his own private well-being. How true is the observation of Marx that in capitalism society is reduced to the position of a mere means to individual ends! Marxism comes as an antidote also to the religious tradition which in the main is a quest for the liberation of the individual as

<sup>16</sup> Marx-Engels, *The German Ideology*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1976, pp. 86-7.

<sup>17</sup> Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*, p. 265.

<sup>18</sup> EW, p. 158,

<sup>19</sup> *Grundrisse*, p. 705.

distinguished from collective salvation. Equally relevant in the Indian context is Marx's criticism of collectivism and the primacy he accorded to the free development of the individual. As regards large sections of the population in rural areas the individual is still caught up in the collectivism of the joint family, the caste, the tribe or the community. (May it not be these conditions in which the individual could not come to his own that made him seek compensation in the form of a merely individual salvation?) Besides, capitalism has produced its own form of collectivism in the shape of techno-bureaucracy. As monopoly capitalism gathers strength there will be an increasing tendency to sacrifice personal freedom to the requirements of corporate production. The irony of it all is that even the political parties that draw inspiration from Marx have thrown to the winds their master's profound concern for the free and full development of the individual. Thanks to the impact of the Stalinist perversion of an authoritarian model of socialism, they reflect both in their structure and functioning the ethos of collectivist regimentation from above. What is more, the type of new society they project follows the centralized, statist model. The original vision of Marx therefore opens out the possibility and the need for a third alternative different from both capitalism and communism. Unfortunately, the constraints of the dialectic and, possibly also, lack of time prevented him from doing justice to the subjective conditions of revolution (consciousness, organization, goal) which would guarantee the birth of the social individual. Neither did he explain how the new society has to be structured if the freedom of the individual is to be secured. Here Marxism could learn from the political philosophy of Gandhiji who rejected every form of authoritarianism, whether in the new social order to be constructed or in the struggle for realizing it, and consistently advocated the decentralization of power and the primacy of direct over indirect democracy.

#### 4. The growth of man into a subject

The dialectic of the subject and the object is central to Marxian thinking. Contrasted with Hegel, the fundamental concern of Marx was not the elimination of the object by reducing it to the subject but the elimination of the *alienated character* of the object whereby it installs itself as alien and hostile to man. In other words, his aim was to render the objective world (productive forces and relations of production) transparent by bringing it under the conscious control of man. The subject of history is yet to emerge. We are now living in the prehistory of man, of man dominated by the world of objects. This domination, however, is not such that he is totally devoid of freedom and initiative. Even in the present stage of alienation man is, though within limits, the creator of history. There is no complete dichotomy between prehistory and history. He wrote in his *Theses on Feuerbach*: "The materialist doctrine concerning the changing of circumstances and education forgets that circumstances are changed by men."<sup>20</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Karl Marx, *Theses on Feuerbach*: SW, pp. 82-3.



Similarly, in the *Holy Family*: 'History does nothing; . . . it does *not* fight battles. It is *men*, real, living men, who do all this, who possess things and fight battles. It is not history which uses men as a means of achieving—as if it were an individual person—its own ends. History is *nothing* but the activity of men in pursuit of their ends.'<sup>21</sup>

Though the birth of authentic subjectivity is the primary concern of Marx, it is rendered highly problematic by the premises of his own thinking, especially by the determining role he attributes to productive forces. True, he recognizes the capacity of consciousness to transcend the given by ideally projecting models to be subsequently realized in practice, and sees in this capacity the distinctive characteristic that marks man off from animals.<sup>22</sup> But in the analysis of the concrete dialectics of history, the subjective is represented as determined by the objective, by productive forces. Typical is the following passage where he describes the emergence of revolutionary consciousness: 'When the worker recognises the products as being his own and condemns the separation of the conditions of his realisation as an intolerable imposition, it will be an enormous progress in consciousness, *itself the product of the method of production based on capital*, and a death knell of capital in the same way that once the slaves became aware that they were persons, that they did not need to be the property of others, the continued existence of slavery could only vegetate on as an artificial thing, and could not continue to be the basis of production.'<sup>23</sup> That the capitalist mode of production will give rise to revolutionary consciousness is but a postulate of dialectical thinking disproved by subsequent history. Besides, how could a consciousness determined by the object (the mode of production) inaugurate the history of man as a self-determining subject? It looks as though the profound concern of Marx to save human subjectivity founders on the rock of the dialectic.

Be that as it may, the main failure of Marx lies less in what he says than in what he fails to say about subjectivity. Till the end he was engrossed in analysing the objective structures of society, especially the capitalist system of his day. Nowhere in his writings do we find any serious discussion of the existential problems which each man faces in the intimacy of his own subjectivity. Marx has nothing to say on the ambivalence, fragility and vulnerability of human freedom; nothing also on the existential problems associated with aggression, lust, sin and guilt. Even on the problem of death what he says sounds casual and evasive. He wrote: '*Death* seems to be a harsh victory of the species over the individual and to contradict their unity; but the particular individual is only a *determinate species-being* and as such he is mortal.'<sup>24</sup> Here Marx sacrifices the individual as a determinate species-being to the universal species-being which is mankind as a whole. His humanism thus breaks down before the problem of death.

<sup>21</sup> Marx-Engels, *The Holy Family*: SW, p. 78.

<sup>22</sup> *Capital*, Everyman's Library, London, 1967, Vol. I, pp. 169-170.

<sup>23</sup> *Grundrisse*, p. 463.

<sup>24</sup> MSS, EW, pp. 158-9.

The failure to grapple with these existential problems has serious implications for revolutionary action. How could there be irrevocable commitment to revolution if the ambivalence of freedom (the will to power and the desire to serve, the drive for aggression and the instinct for fellowship, loyalty and defection, courage and cowardice, etc.) are not resolved, and how could they be resolved unless man is taken hold of by an ultimate concern? How can anyone sacrifice his life for the cause of revolution if its final outcome escapes him as pertaining to a future he will not live to see? How could that future confer meaning on his present individual existence? It is vain to hope that the mere restructuring of the economy will *ipso facto* solve these and other problems of human subjectivity.

It is here that Marx stands to gain from dialogue with the Gandhian philosophy. It was the unique contribution of the latter to have combined the Indian religious tradition with its stress on subjective liberation consisting in freedom from anger, lust, self-seeking, and attachment and in freedom for communion with the Absolute, with the struggle for political liberation. He struck a new path of religiosity which seeks the Absolute in the heart of the relative. Satyagraha which means 'holding on to truth' includes commitment not only to truth as revealed in concrete historical situations but also to the truth of all truths, the absolute truth. In the measure in which the revolutionary has achieved *freedom from* the bondages within and *freedom for* the pursuit of the Ultimate he is able to maintain serenity in the face of conflict, universal compassion in the thick of struggle, and an attitude of forgiveness towards his class enemies. Were a revolution to be guided by unbridled passions, it would either prove abortive or would only serve to install new structures of exploitation and domination.

Marx in his turn brings a much needed corrective to the tendency in Indian tradition to consider human subjectivity in isolation from the world of objects. He can free us from the illusion that the problems regarding sin, guilt, death and the meaning of life can find an adequate solution without in any way changing the world we live in. The inhumanity of objective conditions—structures of thinking and acting—can and do accentuate or even generate existential problems of the kind mentioned above. The existing social system condemns millions to death and makes life so intolerable that for many even death appears as a welcome liberation. It maintains conditions which diminish freedom, foster deviance and crime, and create morbid guilt. This concrete dialectic of the subjective and the objective, of the personal and the structural, is something that India has to assimilate from the Marxian heritage if her spiritual energies are not to be squandered in the pursuit of the illusory, naked self.

## 5. History as the self-creation of man

Marx inherited from Hegel the seminal idea that man is not an immutable essence given once and for all but a process and a project. And the very process whereby he comes to birth is history. The dynamic principle of this historical process is the dialectic of negativity, which

assumes the twofold form of objectification and alienation.<sup>25</sup> Objectification is constitutive of the essence of man, and, as such, characterizes all the stages of his history including that of socialism. It consists in this, that man externalizes his powers in the form of products—material; social, and cultural—and thereby attains to richer and richer humanness. Through objectification he becomes subject; by humanizing nature he becomes naturalized. Alienation, on the contrary, consists in the objects of his creation becoming alien and hostile to him to the extent of enslaving him.<sup>26</sup> Between the two processes of objectification and alienation there is at once unity and distinction. In the pre-history of man in which he has not truly emerged as subject objectification necessarily takes the form of alienation, work as self-affirmation becomes self-negation. It is only under conditions of socialism, in other words, with the inauguration of man's authentic history, that work, objectification, will cease to take on the form of alienation.

Now, the fundamental alienation of man, the matrix of all other alienations, is private property. Its suppression, therefore, will mark the definitive resolution of his conflict with nature, with society, and with himself, and, positively, the appropriation of human nature through and for man.<sup>27</sup> To understand Marx's conception of history it is essential to grasp what he meant by dialectical supersession of alienation. The German word for supersession, *Aufhebung*, meant not only abolition but also preservation.<sup>28</sup> Therefore, socialism as a higher mode of social existence, represents not merely the negation of capitalism but also the recuperation of all the wealth of the earlier stages of development. It will leave behind the feudal relations of *dependence*, while realizing on a higher plane the non-fetishist, personal character of human relations that obtained in feudal society. Similarly, while the capitalist relations of production will be abolished, the wealth of productive forces and the objective conditions for a fuller and richer life that they brought into being will be maintained and further developed. Likewise, socialism does not signify the destruction pure and simple of the state but of the state as the guardian of the privileged classes. What it seeks is not the abolition of family as such but of the bourgeois family which reduces women and children to the position of so many units of productive forces. In short, the future is not built on the ashes of the past but on the wealth of possibilities contained in it.<sup>29</sup>

If so, the very logic of the dialectic requires that the model of socialism we project must have deep roots in our cultural tradition. It cannot be an imported one whether from the Soviet Union or China. And it is precisely here that the main weakness of the Communist

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 202.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 201.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 155.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 211.

<sup>29</sup> Karl Marx, *Die moralisierende Kritik und die kritisierende Moral*: SW, p. 245.

parties of India lies. They lack continuity with our past. Their language and patterns of thinking and acting savour of alien lands and alien cultures. They tend to apply the laws of capitalist development in the West as enunciated by Marx as applicable *in toto* to India, thus neglecting the specificity of conditions in our country, and this in spite of Marx's own warnings on the matter.<sup>30</sup> This is the underlying cause of their revolutionary impotence. Nothing less than a creative reinterpretation of the original thinking of Marx will enable them to project a model of socialism and develop a methodology of action which will truly reflect the values and aspirations of our people. The warning against severing our links with the past applies also to those others as well, who look to the technocratic society of the West as the new heaven and the new earth.

Another important lesson we have to learn from the Marxian dialectics of history concerns the continuity between the present and the future. Marx has repeatedly pointed out how capitalism brings forth the objective conditions for its own supersession which is socialism.<sup>31</sup> His treatment of the subjective conditions, however, is sketchy and inadequate. But the main thrust of his thought on the matter is that there should be continuity at the level of consciousness between the struggle for socialism and socialism itself.<sup>32</sup> The structure and the ethos of the society envisioned must be reflected already in the movement aimed at achieving it. The end must justify the means; the goal, the course of action. Conditions for the free and full development of the individual must therefore be realized, though imperfectly, in the political organization of the masses themselves.

Here too the theory and the practice of the Indian communists need to be criticized. They have reduced the concept of the classless society into a mere myth, into a new opium for the masses. The overall goal they have in mind has no functional relevance for the day to day struggles of the working class. There is a complete dichotomy between means and ends. The means are trade unionism and the politics of power, which pose no threat to capitalism as such, whereas the intended goal is the creation of a new society based on the socialisation of the means of production. They seek state power in order to abolish state power; they use an authoritarian party organization to usher in a non-authoritarian society. What is worse, the struggles they organize are inspired by the values of the same capitalism which they profess to overthrow. This contradiction between means and ends can be solved only by rethinking both in the light of whatever is seminal in the teaching of Marx and with reference to the specific conditions existing in India.

<sup>30</sup> See Marx's reply to Mikhailovsky (1877): David McLellan, *The Thought of Karl Marx*, Macmillan, London, 1971, p. 136; also letter to Vera Zasulich (1881), Marx-Engels, *Selected Correspondence*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1965, p. 339.

<sup>31</sup> *Grundrisse*, pp. 540-1, 704-6; *Capital*, Everyman's Library, Vol. II, pp. 845-7.

<sup>32</sup> *German Ideology*: SW, p. 80.

## 6. Beyond theism and atheism

Strictly speaking religion should not come into the picture of any discussion on the essential structure and dynamism that constitutes man as man. For the man-God relationship is not constitutive of human essence. It has only the significance of a historically conditioned product. Still it is necessary to touch upon the problem, because Marx's conception of man will come into bolder relief only when seen against his atheism.

The Marxian critique of religion is two-pronged: sociological and postulatory. In a world in which man is alienated from his product, from society, and from himself, belief in God emerges either as a protest against that world and a search for illusory consolation on the part of the oppressed, or as a means employed by the oppressors to legitimize their interests.<sup>33</sup> The roots of religion are therefore to be sought in the state, in class formation, and most importantly in economic alienation. The suppression of alienations at the level of social praxis will *ipso facto* bring about the disappearance of religion.<sup>34</sup> Alongside this line of argument there is another strand of criticism in Marx based on the postulate that the existence of God is irreconcilable with the freedom of man. 'A being does not regard himself as independent unless he is his own master, and he is only his own master when he owes his existence to himself. A man who lives by favour of another considers himself a dependent being. But I live completely by another person's favour when I owe him not only the continuance of my life but also its creation; when he is its source.'<sup>35</sup> In fact, if we consider the intellectual development of Marx as a whole he first arrived at atheism as a postulate and only subsequently instituted a sociological criticism of religion. Already in his doctoral thesis of 1841 he had made his own the Promethean confession, 'I hate all the gods,' and come to acknowledge human self-consciousness as the highest divinity that brooks no rival.<sup>36</sup>

Marx's criticism dealt a severe blow to that God of organized religion who is neutral to the rich and the poor, who consoles the oppressed while sanctioning the oppressor, who gloats over the powerlessness and abjection of man, who delights in the sight of bent knees and prostrate bodies, who reckons as loss to himself every gain that accrues to man, and who makes use of every limitation of man as but one more cord to bind him with. Still, this God is very much alive even today, especially in India where a system of institutionalized murder is maintained with the connivance, if not the active support, of religious leaders. His removal from the scene is an essential prerequisite for the creation of a more humane society in India.

The atheism of Marx contains also another, deeper layer of truth which his prejudice prevented him from seeing. This deeper truth

<sup>33</sup> Karl Marx, 'Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right', EW, p. 43.

<sup>34</sup> MSS, EW, p. 156.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 165.

<sup>36</sup> Marx-Engels, *On Religion*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1975, pp. 14-15.

has to do with the living God who is encountered not so much in temples and sanctuaries as in homes, firms, fields, and the marketplace, where man meets his neighbour. The name of this God is Protest, the absolute and unconditional protest against, and the total negation of, every form of evil, personal as well as structural. As a Protester, he is not neutral but partial to those who have reason to protest, namely the poor, the unwanted, and the unloved. But he not only negates but also affirms. To affirm is to render firm, to sustain, to legitimize. As the legitimizer of whatever furthers human fullness, he confronts man with unconditional demands and calls for total surrender. Not to surrender to him is to deny one's own humanity. The God who is protest and legitimization in one is equally the condition for the possibility of genuine freedom. He is the negation of all freedom in isolation. He shatters all human attempts to achieve freedom within the confines of finitude and invites every man to dialogue with himself, outside of which none can become fully free. Marx's profound insight that man can realize freedom only in a community needs to be reinterpreted to include in the term 'community' also community with God.

The liquidation of the class-God and the unveiling of the face of the true God demands that we seek to change the world, since it is on the face of man that the splendour of the living God shines forth. In accomplishing this task believers will learn to go beyond traditional theism, and non-believers beyond sterile atheism. Both will then rediscover the true God whose glory is the freedom of man.