

DIALECTICS OF ECONOMICAL BASE AND SOCIO-CULTURAL SUPERSTRUCTURE: A MARXIST PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract: *In Marxist theory, social structure consists of two parts - Base and Superstructure. This base and superstructure designate the social relations of a historically determined society as a whole in which material relations represent the real base or the foundation of society where as political, religious, philosophical and ideological relations etc. represent the superstructure, which rise upon the given base and are determined by the base. The historically determined base in turns determines the nature and type of social superstructure. A radical change in the economic structure of a given society produces change and radical transformation in the entire social superstructure. The relation between the base and the superstructure has a dialectical character. In the class society the base and superstructure have a class character. The antagonistic nature of the base in the social formation, such as slavery, feudalism and capitalism, is reflected as well in the superstructure itself. The process by which social ideas originate and develop in a historical epoch is a complex and often contradictory one. These ideas do not come into the world as an automatic reflection of the base, of economic realities. These ideas, social institutions are not created independent of economics but by the people in accordance with the existing social conditions. The change in the base and superstructure is only possible by the class struggle, when such conditions for change are ripe within the existing production relations.*

Key Words: *Marxism, Base, Superstructure, Material conditions, Dialectics, Class struggle.*

1. INTRODUCTION:

The works those were regarded as great scholarship in nineteenth century Europe are German Ideology, British Economy and French Materialism. In this century German Philosophy was enriched with the help of Hegelian dialectic method and the materialism of Feuerbach. On the other hand British economy was developed by the enquiry of economic structure of a nation. Adam Smith and David Ricardo proposed their value of labour theory that enriched British economy as capitalist system. And also we can see in this century the great development of socialistic theory in French socialism. These are all regarded as the source of Marxist theory. Marxism has its three parts –Marxist philosophy, Marxist economy and Marxist socialism. Dialectic materialism is understood as Marxist philosophy. The use of this dialectic materialism is for the enquiry of historical development of human civilisation and known as historical materialism also. So, Marxist philosophy is referred as dialectic and historical materialism. In Marxist theory, social structure consists of two parts – base and superstructure. Base and superstructure designate the social relations of a historically determined society as a total system in which material relations represent the real base or the foundation of society. On the other hand the political, religious, philosophical and ideological relations etc. represent the superstructure, which rise upon the given base and is determined by the base.

2. ECONOMIC UNDERSTANDING OF BASE AND SUPERSTRUCTURE:

Marxist philosophy used dialectic materialism and historical materialism as a way of interpretation of human civilisation, what is known as materialistic interpretation of history or socio-economic interpretation of history. According to this theory, what happened in the society is created by materialistic or economic circumstances. What man has founded from the primitive age to till now, like religion, marriage system, art, culture, civilisation are all determined by the material or economic condition. For this reason Marx was of the opinion that economy is the base of all things. The economy of a given society determines its social, religious and cultural life. So we can say that civilisation of a particular stage entirely depend upon the economic condition or economic environment of that stage. For example, the economic environment of primitive age was based on slavery, that of feudalism in mediaeval age and of capitalism in the modern age. According to Marxist theory, in future a new economic condition will arise upon within the womb of modern capitalist society, which would replace the entire economic system of capitalism and establish a new economic system according to which the entire superstructure will be transformed into different shape [Joseph Stalin 1975; 25-39].

For Marx, the usage of social process of production determines the man's relation and their right in society. The mode of production, the relations of production and the means of production – all these construct the economic

structure of a society. This economic structure also transforms itself with the development of mode of production and as a result of it the social consciousness of man also changes. Through economy Marx gives a new interpretation about social system, known as economic interpretation of society. But here we have to be cautious that the term 'economy' does not only refer to currency, but also refers to the way in which man produce and uses things for their subsistence. According to Marx, whatever man produces for their subsistence within the sphere of social relation is collectively known as economy. From the primitive age man continuously wield over the nature and as a result of it new things are coming under the man's utility and mode of production and its process. In the development of various social stages, according to the economic interpretation what we have understood is that, economy does not only determine the social mode of production but the social relation of production is also determined by it. In this way, the arrival of social relation of production from its particular economic system divides the social members into different classes. For example, in the economic system of husbandry, society divides its social members into slave and clan head and the agricultural society divides into landlord and serf and later it divided into many subsets. In the modern age, the capitalist economy divides the social members into two broad categories – bourgeoisie and proletariat. According to Marxism, how the social property will be distributed and who will accrue how much property – these are all determined by the economic system of that particular stage. Therefore it can be seen that only with the transformation in economic mode of production, the social system, social structure and social changes happen and they get into a new shape [Maurice Cornforth 1949; 34-47].

Here any one can ask there are so many factors are working in the society, but why Marx only concentrates on economy? However, it needs to be mentioned that "Marx never meant to claim an absolute validity for economic consideration to the exclusion of all other factors. It is not that the situation is the cause, in the sense of being only active agent while all phenomena are only a passive result. It is on the contrary a case of mutual action on the basis of economic necessity which, in the last instance, always works itself out"[Frederic Engels, Letters of Engels 1898; www.marxist.org]. In this letter though Marx accept the other factors which mutually work together, but according to him, in the last economic necessity always work itself out. That is why Marx and Engels both believed that the economic factor is the base of all things.

The base and superstructure has a class character in the class society because of the antagonistic nature of base in various social formations, such as feudalism, slavery and capitalism, and this antagonistic nature of base reflect itself within the superstructure. Moreover, the intellectual basis of state rule, the ideas justifying the use of state power and its distribution, are those of the ruling class ideas depend upon certain economical base. The intellectual social culture is merely a superstructure resting on the relation of production, on ownership of the means of production; in short socio-economic circumstances. The class as a social ideas arise out of dominant views and institutions of the society what is the product of a definite economic structure. These dominant views and institutions express the outlook and interest corresponding to the given economic structure and in the class society this outlook and interest is not more than that the outlook and interest of dominant, exploiting class. The class when it disconnect with the existing economic system being to take up the struggle against it and they immediately find themselves confronted with the whole sets of legal, political and social views and institutions which serve to protect the existing economic system and to suppress opposition to it. Therefore the history of class struggle proves that the dominant class establishes the legal, political and ideological superstructure of any society to fulfil the role of protecting and upholding the economic structure of that society and the interest of ruling class. The Marxist class struggle teach us not to respect the oppose views and institutions which serve the interest of dominant class against the subordinate class, but fight for new views and institutions which help to organise and inspire the broad alliance of all subordinate oppressed people and to break the opposed power and overcome the resistance of the oppressors and build a social society [Maurice Cornforth 2012; 218-228].

The process in which social ideas originate and developed is a complex an often contradictory one. These ideas, known as superstructure, do not come automatically into the world as the reflection of the base or economic realities. Economy does not produce these ideas directly, but ideologies are the product of human being. Human beings create these social ideas not arbitrarily, but in accordance with existing economic condition, i.e. the base. There is a relative independence in the development of social ideas. The origin and development of economic condition directly affected on the existing moral, religious, political, social, philosophical, ethical, legal and other ideas and transform a new ideological view. In the final analysis these ideas are determined by the economic base. For Marx, ideologies cannot be eliminating from the social context in which it arise. In the social process of production material life conditions the political, legal, ideological and intellectual life process in general: "... the economic structure of society always furnishes the real basis, starting from which we can alone work out of the ultimate explanation of the while superstructure of juridical and political institutions as well as of the religious, philosophical, and other ideas of a given historical period" [Frederick Engels 1901; 62-63].

3. DIALECTIC RELATION OF BASE AND SUPERSTRUCTURE:

Dialectic is the base of Marxist philosophy. Before entering into Marx's dialectic relation of base and superstructure, first of all we have to understand – what is dialectic? The term 'dialectic' originate from Greek

'dialogue', means 'a conversation between two or more people.' But it has a special meaning in Marx's philosophy. In Marxist philosophy, the term 'dialectic's referred to the unitary theory with the help of conflict between two opposite events. Hegel used the term 'dialectics' in the same way. According to David Guest- "This (dialectics) has been explained as derived by Hegel from the same root as 'dialogue'- the ideas being that the conflict of opposites which leads to dialectical movement in general is essentially similar to that clash of opinions which in course of lively and fruitful conversation leads to emerge of some new point of view" [David Guest 1939; 45].

The relation between base and superstructure has a dialectic character. According to dialectic method, all things and process are in a state of development, even though this may not always be evident to the naked eye. To say a thing is developing, is to say that it is changing- either growing or decaying, and usually this process go on simultaneously. Our material world represents itself through the process of ever changing form of social facts and matters. All the social events and things holistically related and depend upon each other. The development of society is possible within this relation- the relations of contradictions between two opposites. All the social events evolving through a particular process, nothing is happens arbitrarily. The cumulative change in the material base encourage in the social superstructure- thoughts, feelings, views and institutions etc. therefore, feelings, consciousness, thoughts, institutions and social systems are all reflection of material world or the base. As these thoughts, consciousness, views, institutions and social systems grown in the course of material development, therefore, they are all the by-product of material base and they it is impossible to eliminate them from its material base [V. Adoratsky 1934; 64-69].

According to Marx's dialectic method, having once arisen on a particular base, the superstructure reacts upon the base and on the development of as a whole. For Marx, the entire social system transform through this dialectic way. The material or economic condition of a particular society transform the immense social life with the transformation of material or economic conditions the entire superstructure of a particular society more or less rapidly transforms. The economic transformation of a particular epoch found a new social environment (i.e. social structure, system, function) and also formed a new mode of relation, a new mode of production for sustain its existence. But the economic transformation does not construct easily these because of the presence of previous old social system. In that situation, the arrival new social relations come into conflict with the existing social relations. Consequently, the previous social system begins to disappear slowly and the new social relations fulfilled that place with the emerging economic circumstances. Marx identified the conflict between this two opposing interest of class as class struggle. This class struggle has the power to reinstates a new social system after annihilating the previous one. Therefore, radical change in the material base transforms the social superstructure. Marx identified it as the social revolution. For Marx, the seed of revolution fulfil itself in the womb of material conditions and later it appears in the reality. Though man's idea or thought works actively to fulfil the material revolution, but in the last instance this thought or idea is entirely bound within the material conditions. Without the base of material environment idea cannot work actively. This is the prime content of Marxist dialectic materialism. The active role of dialectic in the material world makes a revolutionary change in the superstructure and "one cannot judge such a period of transformation by its consciousness" [John Raines (Ed) 2002; 109]. That is why Marx in his "*Preface to the Critique of Political Economy*" reached the conclusion that; "My inquiry led me to the conclusion that neither legal relations nor political forms could be comprehended whether by themselves or on the basis of so called general development of the human mind, but that on the contrary they originate in the material conditions of life" [John Raines (Ed) 2002; 109].

Therefore, superstructure depends upon the base. But the relation between base and superstructure is not one way traffic, they have a dialectic relation. It is not true that the base always plays the primary role in social system; in spite of this in some cases superstructure have the power to transform the entire base. Superstructure is represented itself in the state, ideology, social institutions, way of life etc. These are all having a great importance in the process of historical development. Philosophers, historians, politicians are all the members of society and their contribution in the social life affect the social development. In a short, we can say that historically base plays the prime role of the social development as universally, but in particular cases superstructure also affect the movement of historical development by the help of a particular ideology. When the old social system became their fetter, with the help of a particular ideology the members of the society make a revolution which deconstruct its previous social system and from there arise a new social system by the help of that particular ideology. Here the base is affected by the superstructure and both base and superstructure interact with each other. That is why Engels understood that, material production and each historical age inevitably emerge from material condition which makes the base of the intellectual and the political history of that age [V. Adoratsky 1934; 71-83].

4. MATERIALISTIC UNDERSTANDING OF BASE AND SUPERSTRUCTURE:

Marxist philosophy is based on the ground of materialism. In Marxism Materialism is understood as all the things in the universe are natural, there is no such things as supernatural, and follow the natural laws. Marx understood that material conditions of life determine the legal relations, law, politics, ideology, in a word the whole superstructure of a society. In this context Frederick Engels said that, "The materialistic conception of history starts from the proposition that the production of the means to support human life and, next to production, the change of things produced, is the basis of all social structure, that in every society that has appeared in history, the manner in which

wealth is distributed and society divided into classes or orders depends upon what is produced, how it is produced and how the products are exchanged. From this point of view, the final cause of all social changes and political revolutions are to be sought, not in men's brain, not in men's better insights into eternal truth and justice, but in changes in the mode of production and exchange" [Frederic Engels, *Socialism* 1901; 65].

If we concentrate deeply on the above saying then we can understand the inner meaning of materialistic understanding of reality. The great contribution of Marx and Engels is that they established a law of historical development of the society and material condition of social life. For Marx, material condition of social life transforms into different form from age to age. In the primitive society the mode of production was husbandry which determines their social life. Later when man found the agricultural system then it became their mode of production and their social life is also determined by it. After that when big industries, factories were established by the human labour, then machine became the mode of production which determines their mode of life. In this way change in the mode of production change the entire social system. Marx believed that social relations, social structure, social system are all determined by the social process of production. In Engels words, "The simple fact, hitherto concealed by an overgrowth of ideology, that mankind must first of all eat, drink, have shelter and clothing, before it pursues politics, science, art, religion, etc.; that therefore the production of the immediate material means and consequently the degree of economic development attain by a given people or during a given epoch, from the foundation upon which the state institutions, the legal conceptions, arts and even the ideas on religion, of the people concerned have been evolved, and in the thought of which they must, therefore, be explained, instead of vice-versa, as had hitherto been the case"[Frederic Engels, *Speech at The Grave of Karl Marx*, www.marxist.org].

According to Marxism, the economic structure formed the real basis of social life because historical materialism gives this determining importance to economy. It is often describe as economic interpretation of history and compared with all other kinds of materialistic interpretations of history which are based on natural elements such as geography, race, climate etc. but it does not mean that the explanation of historical materialism is one-sided explanation of everything in the terms of economics, the way that other interpretations of history explain everything in terms of race, geography and climate etc. it does not deny the importance of natural factors and neither it endows the other materialistic interpretation with a significant independent of economic factor, rather these are all importance of social life, which is what human being actively turns them into. What distinguishes man from animal is that animal use nature without any transformation of it, whereas man transforms their nature according to their utility. Man used the nature to produce their means of subsistence. The human production for means of subsistence is a particular expression of their mode of life. This natural condition of production can be divided into two: human physical conditions (e.g. labour) and natural conditions. Again natural conditions are subdivided from economic point of view into two, natural wealth of subsistence (e.g. soil, fruits, water etc.) and natural wealth of labour. This division is the decisive factor of the beginning of all human civilizations. As Marx understand that all historical writing must proceed from these natural foundations and from their modification in the course of history by the action of men [Karl Marx and Frederick Engels 2015; 36-38].

Here Marx referred twofold process, on the one hand, he exhibited the importance of natural factors as the base of social production, and on the other hand, he points out that it is not only natural factors that determines human, but also human who increasingly determines nature. According to Marx, man is not simply a piece of nature, but also a force what reforms nature. This leads us to a further understanding of natural factors. Without any mediated form, this natural factor does not affect the human relations directly. Therefore, the effect of natural factors depend upon the mediation of human relation which is arises on the foundation of those natural factors. According to historical materialism, these effects are also changed according to time. The conjunction between effects of natural factors and the human relation is basically a twofold one. It depends upon on the decrees and increase process of natural factor to social life. The decrees of natural factors (e.g. natural fertility of soil, weather, climate etc.) make man to dependent more on artificial technological means. Now a day's man is less on natural harvests and catastrophe etc. than he was centuries ago. It is merely possible on the development of technology along with the decrees natural forces. Therefore, natural forces become less important with the advance progress technology historically. But on the other hand, the importance of nature increases since man exploits much more than they did in the earlier. The man's dependence on both the decrees and the increase of natural forces comes under the 'socialisation of nature'. This 'socialisation of nature', in other words mastery over nature, is actually the increased interlocking process of society with nature. Therefore, the influence of nature over man became a form of mediated, while it is social relationship which influences directly [Franz Jakobowski 1976; 30-32].

Nature became a 'realm of necessity' in which men depend upon. But, man has the ability or power of regulating the dependency on nature in a rational way, in a practical way, as much as his knowledge about nature improves and this knowledge is merely possible in the process of 'socialisation of nature', the process transformation of nature in the production of their nature. The relation of production arises on the basis of natural condition, in turns which determine the superstructure. This relation of production formed the economic basis of the society and first of all is should be recognised as human relations. There is a comprehensive misunderstanding of Marx's notion of materialistic or economic interpretation that ultimately leads to fatalism, because of economic structure and forces are

independent from man. But Marx and Engels, on the contrary, considered that the effect of man's own forces which confront him as alien, because of the natural division of labour. When Marx talks about natural economic laws at that time this kind of economic fatalism arise. But this kinds of views about natural economic laws can be remove when human labour will occupied by the socialised society and man's production will socialised [Franz Jakobowski 1976; 33-37].

5. CONCLUSION:

The difference between man and animal is that animal use nature without any transformation of it, whereas man transforms their nature according to their utility. In the process of transformation of nature men are educated in making and using tools and became a tool using animal. With the help of using tools man's production experience and skills also developed side by side. These are all successive development of productive forces. The growth of productive forces is the root cause of social development. As a result of it, the growth of productive forces changes the pattern of mode of relations. The new productive forces develop itself in the womb of old social system. With the emerging of new productive system the entire social system transform slowly, not immediately. At a certain stage of social development this transformation happens. The relation between productive forces and productive relations has an indivisible unit. The relation of production is the necessary condition of social production this relation of production affects over the forces of production. Here a new mode of production help the growth of forces of production at the beginning, but later this mode of production became fetters of the growth of forces of production. As a result of it the social revolution arises. The social development is not possible without any struggle or revolution. Revolution is the way of social development and class struggle helps it to be successful. The class struggle does not only represent itself as the economic structure of a society but also religious, political, ideology etc, in a word the entire superstructure of the society. Therefore, in the history of human society each and every relations of production, economic structure, which is the base of society, and the superstructure changed by the class struggle, when such conditions for change are ripe within the existing production relations.

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