



Marxism And Identity Politics - A Theoretical Approach

Dr. Sujata S Pol

Dambal Plot , Chikodi , Belagaum Dist-591201

E-mail: sujupol@gmail.com

Abstract: *The second half of the 20th century saw the rapid emergence of large scale and multi- different socio political movements. These movements were based on the politics of Identity or the Identity Politics. The term Identity Politics has been used in intellectual arena (both academic and political) since the 1970s. During the 1980s the identity politics became prominent and wide spreading in the new social political, cultural and even environmental movements and their practices. It can obviously be found in, feminist movements, racial movements, movements of religions minorities, caste based movements, gay and lesbian movement and so on.*

Key Words: *Marxism, Politics, Philosophical, Western, Identify, Orientation.*

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper attempts to analyse critically the theory and basic stand points of Identity politics and counterpoising some basic Marxist analysis as much more effective ways of fighting against oppression of the working class of the world.

Post Modernism and Identity politics

The term 'Post Modernism' first entered the philosophical lexicon in 1979 with the publication of the book the post modern condition by Jean Francois Lyotard¹ Post modernism arose out of a profound sense that the Enlightenment philosophy is dead. The enlightenment which began in Europe in the 18th century and established in the 19th century expressed universal values of freedom, progress, and equality. Post modernism questions all the philosophy and politics which was universal and totalizing or generalizing. It only recognizes the multifaceted identities and differences among identities.

"The western writers hold the view that the theme of identity and the phenomenon of identity movements are related to the emergence of modern conditions. They consider that along with post modernism, a disillusion on Enlightenment reason and consequently, on essentialist political aimed on universal, emancipator and objective progress as set in. Once the grand narratives conventional modernity have come to an end, the politics of group identities have entered in to the political arena."² And also the Postmodernisa exposes itself as 'Post Marxist' philosophy that means chronologically new one than Marxism.

"Post modernism only recognizes a mosaic of identities, differences and conflicts. Hence what a possible is recognising the fragments of a particular identity. What is possible are particular struggles a autonomous social movements which are based on a fragmented politics of 'difference' and 'identity'³ Hear post modernism gives the origin to the Identity Politics.

Theory and Politics of 'Identity'

The term identity politics and movements linked to it came into being during the latter part of the 20th century. Today, all over the world, identity politics has become an important feature of politics and political activities. Till the 1960s, the concept of identity politics did not even exist. It is from the 1980s that identity politics came into prominence.⁴

Identity politics are political arguments that focus upon the interest and perspectives of various social groups that people identify with. Identity politics includes the ways in which people's politics may be shaped by aspects of their identity based on race, class, religion, gender, ethnicity, ideology, culture, nation, and sexual orientation. Minority



influence is a central component of identity politics. Minority influence is a form of social influence which takes place when a majority is being influenced to accept the beliefs or behavior of a minority.

According to the theory of identity politics, a person may have multiple identities but it is the identity which he or she perceives to be the defining one that determines that person's identity. So a person may be male, a worker and a black. If he perceives his colour as the main identity, then that would be the identity by which he should be recognised. He is to be mobilised as a black person and not on the basis of his being a worker. According to identity politics, it is not the class that he belongs to which determines his identity. Identity politics promotes difference and separateness to stress one's distinct identity. People getting together and mobilizing on the basis of a common identity, whether race, ethnicity, caste or religion, to put forth their demands or assert their rights of the State and society is termed identity politics.⁵

Identity Politics: A Marxist critique

According to Marxism, When the classes come into existence coincidentally brings a new social phenomenon called politics. Politics is the relationship that obtains between classes, nations and other social groups with in a country or between countries. Politics does not cover all and any relations between classes but specifically those pertaining to the struggle for state power, its order, orientation, methods and means to relations with other countries, to internal competitions between parties etc.⁶

Lenin also states clearly that, Politics as the relation "of all classes and strata to the state and government."⁷ On the contrary identity politics stands only for differences but not for the relations.

There are clear differences in strategy between Marxism and the theory of identity politics. Marxism which sees exploitation as an objective phenomenon and the consciousness of exploitation as subjective depending on the consciousness of the individual, identity politics posits that oppression itself is a subjective feature dependent on the individual who experiences it. In the view of identity politics, class is just one type of identity. It rejects the concept of class exploitation by capitalism and the ruling class order. It does not recognise the basis of class exploitation under capitalism and the concept of a class divided society ruled by the ruling classes. But, Marxism which sees exploitation as an objective phenomenon and the consciousness of exploitation as subjective depending on the consciousness of the individual, identity politics posits that oppression itself is a subjective feature dependent on the individual who experiences it.⁸

2. Conclusion

Marxism is about demanding that the entire working class movement champion the rights of all the oppressed, thereby putting the collective strength of the working class behind the fight against oppression. As long as the oppressed can be divided, they can be easily managed by their enemies. The dominating class has always relied upon a "divide and defeat" strategy to maintain its rule, aimed at keeping all the exploited and oppressed fighting against each other instead of uniting and fighting against their real enemy. Once they unite in a common movement, they cannot be defeated. And that is the method proposed by Marxism for the 'Equality of Mankind'.

Notes & References

1. The Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy, 'Post Modernism'-Internet version.
2. N. Muthumohan, Identity and Deference: In Post modern and Post colonial Perspectives, p.1.
3. Prakash Karat, The Challenge of Identity Politics, The Marxist, Vol.XXVII, 1-2, January- June, 2011, p.41.
4. Ibid., p.39.
5. Ibid.. pp.41 -42.
6. Z. Berbeshkina, L.yakovleva and D. Zerkin, What is Historical Materialism? Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1985, p.113.
7. V.I.Lenin, What is to be done?, Collected Works, Vol.5, 1977,p.422.
8. Prakash Karat, Lv., cit., pp.42-43.