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## **Classical Marxism to Postmodern Marxism: Theorization of Social Conflict and Ideology as a Determinant**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The present article examines different theories and schools of thought within Marxist paradigm and on the basis of these theories, gives its own angle to look at the nature of the social conflict. This study aims at developing a comprehensive view of the factors that determine the social conflict. This study employs an Eclectic Marxist approach to social conflict utilizing and reformulating Marxist theory. The present research concludes that there is a multiplicity of factors that makes a whole and this whole is conducive to a social conflict. Every element (religion, ideology, culture, economy, politics etc.) that makes this whole plays a significant role to create the social conflict. The contribution of these elements or components varies in different situations. Different parts play their roles at different times through the whole they form. This article also traces the roots of social conflict on account of ideology. Drawing on different schools of Marxist thought it establishes the case of ideology as one of the potent source of social conflict. Economic determinism alone cannot ascertain the social conflict but ideology has also a part to play. Insistence on mere economic dialect and exclusion of consciousness and moral elements can limit the scope of the theory of social conflict. The researcher draws support in favor of his argument from different Marxist theorists who are disenchanted with classical Marxism and criticize Marxist ideas of economic determinism and deterministic and reductionist interpretation of history. These different Marxist schools of thought vary while assigning primacy of place to humanism, economic determinism, superstructure, infrastructure and subjectivity and objectivity in the Marxist theory of history and society. Thus this work includes the ignored ideological aspect of Marxist paradigm.

**Keywords:** *Ideological conflict, Social conflict, Marxist theory, Economic determinism, Non-economic determinism*

### **Introduction**

This article is basically a review paper of different theories and schools of thoughts concerning Marxist paradigm: Classical Marxism, Marxist Humanists, Analytical Marxists, Western Marxists and Postmodern Marxists. The study enables the readers to understand the topic/phenomenon when they go through contrasting and similar Marxist standpoints presented in it. This review article summarizes the current literature on economic reductionist and non-economic reductionist interpretations of social conflict in order to widen the understanding of readers on this topic. This review paper uses an eclectic approach as a research method which takes into account the various approaches and theories of social conflict within Marxist paradigm. Different Marxist theories and viewpoints are compared to undertake their analysis.

This paper is segmented into four parts: First part introduces the phenomenon of ideology based social conflict, second part discusses Marxist theory, third part which is the most important part of the section comprises the main argument of this paper that points out the ignored and overlooked aspects of ideology and moral values in Marxist theory, and the fourth part concludes the paper.

### **Conceptualization of Social Conflict**

Conflict arises when different conflicting values are espoused by human beings (Honigmann, 1959). If one selects one value, it cannot select the other; one is preferred to the other. One cannot espouse democracy and authoritarianism simultaneously or one cannot eat the cake and have it. It is not necessary that a conflict would be between virtue and evil, moral and immoral or right and wrong. Conflict is all about different values espoused by different people however necessarily incompatible values. The word conflict is derived from the Latin word 'conflictus' means clash or collision. Conflict is described as "a struggle over values and claims to scarce status, power and resources" (Coser, 1956). Another definition is useful to understand the elements involved in conflict. It sees conflict as a disagreement through which the parties involved perceive a danger to their needs, interests or fears. Conflict is inherent in societies and it takes different forms ranging from visible and overt conflicts to covert and hidden conflicts (Pirages, 1976). Conflict also operates on different levels; on individual or minor level it is visible between individuals who clash with one another for economic, political and social gains however on major level conflict takes the facade of organized struggle among interest groups, corporations and political parties.

We do not live in a non-ideological world; rather we find ourselves in a world where ideology is a permanent feature of our social and political life. Ideology is continuously contributing to shape the world. Theory of economic determinism was developed in nineteenth century by Marx and Engels, mainly influenced by the industrial revolution and its subsequent conflict between the working class and owners of the means of production. It was mainly attributed to material dialectics and its influence in forming social reality and shaping history. History from empiricists' point of view is an independent measure of the validity of any theory. History of nations does not only profits from the alterations in economic system which alone cannot produce political, social and ideological alterations in the lifecycle of societies but history proceeds through the events of transformation in a society's political, economic and ideological structures. No single aspect of social life can solely be declared as a base but can be a part of base which is a product of different systems existing in a society. At different times, a different part plays a decisive role in determining the event, action, and thought.

During twentieth century which is attributed to ideology, the world saw communism and capitalism fighting one another in the war of ideas and each was eager to prove its dominance over the other. No one can deny the role and relevance of conflicting ideologies in that era. During the cold war, although USSR was less efficient and not as much prosperous than its adversaries mainly USA however Soviet Union was equally competitive with its rivals. It was the power and strength of ideology which made Soviet Union compete his rivals for several decades. Some scholars claim that the conflict was aroused because of incompatible ideologies and ended only when Soviet ideology lost its intimidating edge. Others also believe that in the absence of

## Classical Marxism to Postmodern Marxism: Theorization of Social Conflict and Ideology as a Determinant

conflicting ideologies, other structural reasons could not spark a rivalry between two blocks and that Cold war was the ultimate result of clash of ideologies (Rosecrance & Stein, 1993). The notion that ideology was the defining factor of Cold war is also strengthened by fact that Soviet foreign policy was shaped in the light of Marxist ideology and also that liberal values were essential to American goals (Mueller, 1993).

### **Linking Ideology with Conflict**

Conflict has different dimensions; ideological conflict belongs to intense conflict category as it seems irreconcilable. Unlike inconsistent and multipolar affinities and loyalties that reduce the aggressiveness of conflict, unipolar and consistent affiliations with certain ideas, principles and ideologies enhance the intensity of social conflict (Rae, 1969). One of the main factors that leads to group identification and hence towards dissimilar preferences and choices is ideology. Ideological schism is the result of different existent values or set of beliefs that are incompatible with each other and espoused by different peoples. Individuals and groups enter into political arena with different expectations and preferences; these elements direct them towards sharp divisions (Pirages, 1976). Heterogeneous societies suffer more from differences and divisions than homogeneous societies and are less likely to exhibit political stability. The clash of dissimilar beliefs leads to a conflict based on divergent values and beliefs. These differences of ideology are also a reason behind the political conflict. History shows that ideologies have been responsible for generating conflict and bloodsheds as some groups having ardent ideals have attempted to impose their ideology upon others by force e.g. communist movements in many countries have been guilty of many ideologies related deaths and wreaking havoc (Misztal, 1995; Thomas, 1977). This paper explores ideology as one of the major determinant of social and political conflict and does not undermine the importance of other factors e.g. ethnicity, religion, nationalism and economic needs as possible sources of conflict in various societies at different times.

Ideological conflicts are contrasted with personal and other conflicts in the context that all other conflicts occur due to the non-moral actions (Mabbott, 1948); whereas ideological conflicts are purely value based conflicts. After the World War II, the problem of ideology and ideological conflict stood at the heart of many events. During the Cold war, the world saw the ideologies of communism and capitalism leading Soviet Union and United States of America to a conflict or even close to war. The conflict between East and the West was an ethical one, a conflict of values. This conflict was reflected in Cold war in the battle of minds and ideals and in ideological warfare which characterized the whole period (Tiner, 1952). Ideology was the reason which divided the states into different ideological blocks; this ideological distribution created incentives for states attached to different powerful sides in form of alliances, and economic and military aid (Haas, 2014).

Conflicting political ideologies or rival philosophies are divergent systems which embody contrasting beliefs and values attracted to different people which imply that two or more than two parties in societies hold different ideas and beliefs which are not found mutually attractive by all. The conflict occurs when a set of values which is actively propagated by a section of society is met with equal resistance from the adherents of a contrasting value system (Honigmann, 1959). Although ideological

conflict polarizes the societies but it is not hazardous for the health of political systems. Ideological conflict affects the political behavior of masses; it increases the political participation and involves more citizens in political process (Rogowski, 2014).

### **Marxist Paradigm**

Marxist paradigm does not comprise only classical Marxism but it also encompasses many other schools of thoughts that come under the umbrella of Marxism. The following sections deal with these schools of thoughts.

#### **Karl Marx**

Karl Marx contributed a lot to the theory of social conflict. He exposed causes that give birth to hostility and elaborated the exploitation of a certain segment of social structure and also the details of an unequal access to resources. However, Marx's interest was in materialistic interpretation of political and social conflict and he had little to say about other factors i.e. values and principles that also give rise to conflict as Althusser asserts, "Marx broke radically with every theory that based history and politics on an essence of man" (Andrew, 1975, p. 4). Contrary to Marx, materialism is not shown as a base of conflict in this work but roots of conflict are shown as ideological apparatuses. In a theory of social conflict whose focus is on ideology, conflict could be seen flowing from ideological differences of different segments of society and emphasis is put on the ideological aspects of conflict. The theory evolves as a critique of Marxist economic determinism. Karl Marx stated in *Das Capital*:

That the mode of production of material life dominates the development of social, political and intellectual life generally... is very true for our own times, in which material interests preponderate, but not for the middle ages, in which Catholicism, nor for Athens and Rome, where politics reigned supreme. (2009)

Marx's emphasis was completely on material production and therefore he excluded non-economic factors. Marx paid little heed to mental production as a source of social conflict. The present paper particularly emphasizes means of mental production and their importance as sources of social conflict as it believes ideas and beliefs create deep rooted cleavages in society. Inevitability of ideological based conflict or seriousness of conflict based on ideology is needed to be investigated.

For Marx, ideology is the result of material relations; he assumes that ideas, values and morals of a class are determined by its position in relations of production; ideologies are interwoven with material activity as existence of people is conditioned by the social and productive forces of the world they live in (McCarthy D. , 1994). Ideologies were theories that legitimated economic and social relations. Gramsci differs from Marx's conception of ideology and he interprets ideology as an organic link which asserts the dialectical unity between structure and superstructure as he proclaims:

...material forces are content and ideologies the form, though this distinction between the form and the content has purely 'didactic' value, since the material forces would be inconceivable historically without form, and ideologies would be fancies without the material forces. (Texier, 2014)

Gramsci emphasizes the importance of superstructures of culture, ideology and consciousness and disprove any efforts of breaking down the unity of historical

## Classical Marxism to Postmodern Marxism: Theorization of Social Conflict and Ideology as a Determinant

process and to separate the content from the form. He believes that such exertion would undermine the significance of the role of superstructures by making them seem as individual fantasies empty of economic roots as it would lead to the flawed conceptions of idealism and economism. He also asserted the “primacy of ethico-political moment of history over economic determinism; man is the protagonist of history” (Salamini, 1974, p. 7). His main concern was the assertion of conscious and active role of men in historical development. Gramsci also argues that an aspect of social reality is inseparable from other aspects of that reality (Woolcock, 1985). Althusser and Foucault have also stressed the theorists to move ideology away from ‘false consciousness’ towards outlook of ideology as cultural practice (McCarthy D. , 1994).

Karl Marx characterized all thinking prior to his including bourgeois thinking as ideological but believed his thinking was scientific. In his work *The German Ideology*, Marx brought all ideas of thinkers from Plato to Burke under the banner of term ‘ideology’ (Drucker, 1972). Marx and Engels used the term ‘ideology’ to refer to distorted and unreal beliefs intellectuals hold about society. According to them, those who formulated ideologies suffered from false consciousness; they were mistaken about their own beliefs and the power of their ideas (Eyerman, 1981). Real life of human beings is contrasted with illusions and imaginations people hold as Engels stated:

Ideology is a process accomplished by the so-called thinker consciously...but with a false consciousness. The real motive forces impelling him remain unknown to him; otherwise, it simply would not be an ideological process. Hence he imagines false or seeming motive forces. Because it is a process of thought, he derives its form as well as its content from pure thought, either his own or that of his predecessors. He works with mere thought material, which he accepts without examination as product of thought, and does not investigate further for a more remote source independent of thought; indeed, that is a matter of course for him, because, as all action is mediated by thought, it appears to him to be ultimately based upon thought. (McCarthy T. , 1979, p. 3)

### **Classical Marxism**

Classical Marxism equates ideology with false consciousness while referring to the writings and actions of intellectuals and capitalists. Marxism interprets ideologies as fabricated conceptions or false consciousness of a class of its being; false consciousness is “harbouring of false beliefs that sustain one’s own oppression” (Cunningham, 1987, p. 255). False consciousness encourages inequality by leading the members of a class to believe that they are inferior and unable to stand up against oppression. Ideologies are false because they mystify or mask realities and hide truths which are beneath them. Marxist theory offers a materialist explanation for this false consciousness (McCarthy D. , 1994). Marx did not criticize ideologies for nurturing human interests but because they congealed class rule (Poster, 1974). For Marx, “Ideology is meaning in the service of power” (Thompson, 1990, p. 7). This ideology or false consciousness helped the dominant groups to assert their authority over subordinate groups through their control of education, economic system, culture and education (Jost, 1995). Ironically the consciousness and actions of working class is excluded from the paradigm of false consciousness. The problem

of ideology and false consciousness is limited to the sphere of superstructure (non-economic aspects) however social existence of working class which is confined to economic activities and 'base' social practices are excluded from the territory of ideology and false consciousness. Marxism believes that 'ideologists' and producers of ideas were disillusioned about their cognition and its effects but working class was free from such delusion as it knew that "property, capital, money, wage, labor and the like are not ideal figments of the brain but very practical, very objective products of their self-estrangement" (Marx & Engels, 1975).

On few occasions, Engels varied from Marx and took a middle position when he said:

It is not that the economic situation is cause, solely active, while everything else is only passive effect. Economic relations, however much they may be influenced by the other – the political and ideological relations are, still ultimately the decisive one. (Smith, 1984, p. 520)

Marx and I are partly to blame for the fact that the younger people sometimes lay more stress on the economic side than is due to it. We had to emphasize the main principle vis-à-vis our adversaries, who denied it, and we had not always the time, the place or opportunity to give their due to the other elements involved in the interaction. (Vere, 2010, p. 264)

### **Marxist Humanists**

Marxist humanists argue that Marxism has been identified with the economic materialism and materialistic interpretation of history that restricted the role of men and women in shaping history (Resnick & Wolff, 1982). They contend that Marxism must not be limited to a social reality which only emphasizes economic determinism but importance should also be given to political, cultural and intellectual sides of history. According to them, Marx is concerned with the total development of human capacities through overcoming the shortcomings of every aspect of social reality; Marx is of the view that capitalism has not only exploited the economic resources of the poor but also has oppressed them in every domain of life and usurped the power to determine their own lives (Poster, 1974). However, on the contrary, both revisionist Marxist and orthodox Marxists believe that economic determinism is the main factor in the thoughts of Marx and there is no moral element involved in his work. Besides Marx himself claims that morality is a form of ideology which must be discarded and he categorically denies the presence of morality in his works (QU, 2011). As Marx stated in *The German Ideology*:

The morals, religion, metaphysics and other forms of ideology and the forms of consciousness corresponding to them no longer retain their apparent independence. They have no history, they have no development, but men, developing their material production and their material intercourse. With this, their reality, their thinking, and the products of their thinking also change. (1968, p. 64)

### **Analytical Marxists**

Analytical Marxists think otherwise, e.g. Lukes reveals there is a contradiction in Marx's approach to morality: on the one hand Marx believes that morality as a custom of ideology serves the class interests; on the other hand, Marx's work is full of moral judgments especially when he talks about the cruel exploitation in capitalist

## Classical Marxism to Postmodern Marxism: Theorization of Social Conflict and Ideology as a Determinant

societies (Lukes, 1985; Andrew, 1975). Marx's ideas about religion are not different from his thoughts on ideology; he considers religion as a tool of domination of ruling class over an oppressed class (Gollin, 1970). Marx equates ideology with false consciousness and refers it to ways in which society accepts the ideas and interests of dominant class (Stoddart, 2007).

### **Western Marxism**

Founders of Western Marxism i.e. Gramsci, Lukacs, Sartre, Korsch and theorists of Frankfurt school all criticize Marxism for its economic determinism and materialistic interpretation of history. They are disenchanted with deterministic and reductionist analysis of history and believed Marxism would have to accept the significance of human agency (Femia, 1983). Especially Gramsci in his Marxist theory asserts the primacy of humanism over economic determinism, superstructure over infrastructure and of subjective dimension over objectivity in the Marxist theory of history and society (Salamini, 1974). Gramsci rejects the materialism in his work Notebooks where he contends: "Man does not enter into relations with the natural world just by seeing himself part of the natural world, but actively, by means of work and techniques. Further: these relations are not mechanical: they are active and conscious" (Gramsci, 1971, p. 352).

### **Postmodern Marxists**

Postmodern Marxists detach ideology from its economic base and drift away from conventional Marxist concern of material world towards the direction of consciousness and ideology. "There are no such things as material interests but discursively constructed ideas about them" (Wood, 1986, p. 86). Apart from replacing materialism with ideas, few scholars also displace the proletariat class from its advantaged position at the midpoint of Marxist theory (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985). "Thus instead of focusing on the single discourse of proletariat, Marxist theorists are urged to focus on a multitude of diverse discourses emanating from a wide range of dispossessed voices such as women, blacks, ecologists, immigrants, consumers and the like" (Ritzer & Schubert, 1991). Consequently Marxist theory has been decentered because it no more focuses only on the material aspects and proletariat.

### **Non-Marxists**

Another viewpoint contrasted with Marxist theory is that materialistic aspect of social structure does not determine its non-materialistic aspects. The rejection of the theory of economic determinism or over-determinism comes from non-Marxists. Over-dependence on economic materialism and omission of other factors is a bone of contention between these Marxist and non-Marxist school of thoughts. These critics believe non-economic aspects also help to shape history and even influence economic aspects of social reality and that Marx was mistaken when he laid more stress on materialistic side than was due to it (Resnick & Wolff, 1982). This critique of ultimate determinism asserts that only materialistic interpretations of social reality cannot ascertain the social totality and is to be understood through a combination of political and ideological standpoints.

### **Conclusion**

The theory of economic determinism was inaugurated by Marx as a reaction to industrial revolution and it dominated the world scene in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the first half of 20<sup>th</sup> century. No doubt 19<sup>th</sup> century was Marx' century and is attributed to material dialectics; however, the 20<sup>th</sup> century is burdened by conflicting ideologies and ideological debate. The roots of much conflict are found in material disputes and a substantial portion of conflict could be called economic or materialistic in nature but the importance of other factors as potential sources of conflict cannot be underestimated. Though this study believes that a considerable portion of social and political conflict is also rooted in different ideologies followed by different people and groups; however, it does not neglect other factors such as psychological needs, ethnicity, religion, culture, nationalism, regionalism etc. which are also major bases of conflict and equally viable. Therefore, the intent of this argument will not undermine the significance of economic determinism and other factors mentioned above but to give substance to the notion that beliefs, ideas and values also guide actions in social and political world.

This review paper which is based on a difference of views within Marxist theory, tries to show that ideology as a source can lead to conflict in society i.e. ideological conflict or ideology/value based conflict. This paper also argued that such form of conflict is chronic because of the nature of ideological systems which are divergent from each other. This paper does not renounce ideological conflict for its contentious nature as it sees ideological conflict as a result of different ideological choices people opt in a system. This article points out the gap in Marxist theory as far as ideology based conflict is concerned. Different Marxist critics have varied views about classical Marxism. They do not agree to the view that economic determinism is solely responsible for social conflict. On the basis of views of these Marxist schools of thought, the study claims that ideology is a powerful factor like economic determinism that creates social conflict. The present review paper exploiting the above given schools of thought assigns the primacy of place to ideology as well as other factors contributing to social conflict.

Classical Marxism to Postmodern Marxism: Theorization of Social Conflict and Ideology as a Determinant

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Classical Marxism to Postmodern Marxism: Theorization of Social Conflict and Ideology as a Determinant

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