
Analysing Karl Marx Theory of Historical Materialism

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Abstract

Historical Materialism is the methodological approach of Marxist historiography that focuses on human societies and their development over time, claiming that they follow a number of observable tendencies. This was first articulated by Karl Marx (1818-1883). It is principally a theory of history according to which the material conditions of a society's way of producing and reproducing the means of human existence in Marxist terms. The union of its productive capacity and social relations of production, fundamentally determines its organization and development. Historical Materialism looks the causes of the developments and changes in human society in the means by which humans collectively produce and necessities of life. Social classes and relationship between them, along with the political structure and way of thinking in society are found on economic activity. Marx analysis of history is based on his distinction between the means of production like land a natural resource and technology that are necessary for production of material goods and the social relation of production. In other words people enter into social relationship as they acquire the use of means of production under capitalism people sell their labour power when they accept compensation in return for whatever work they do in given period of time. Marx, however believe that capitalism was prone to periodic crisis. Marx theory of Historical Materialism uses the evolution of productive forces and class struggle to explain history. In this research paper i am going to prove and analyse how changes took place in historical materialism down the ages due to mode of production.

Key Words-Mode of production, class struggle, economy, capitalism

Introduction

Materialism includes scientific explanation of things. The idea of materialism is against the idea of idealism. Idealism is a theory that final reality lies in a sphere of transcending phenomena. On the other hand materialism means that everything exists depends upon matter. Three kinds of materialism are there- philosophical, scientific and at last historical materialism. According to Marx the ultimate fact is matter. The entire world whether it is living or non-living is made up of matter. Matter includes three characteristics and these are-

Matter Is Always moving

Matter is always lively and it is not stationary. According to its nature it always moves and in result worlds also keep on moving. The earth is not at rest. It moves on its axis. From this, the Marxists conclude that everything in the world is reordering or changing.

Unity of Opposites

The Marxists also call it as review of opposites. The second feature of matter is that it includes two mutually opposite elements. A magnet, for example has two different poles-the north pole and the south pole. Both the poles are close to each other. If we break the magnet than still the poles will exist. Thus by its nature, the matter is has two opposite sides. Similarly the society also includes mutually opposite classes and it result in conflicts.

Qualitative and Quantitative Change

The third feature of matter is it change according both quantitative and qualitative. The Marxists call it the law of transformation.

Thus Materialism, explains the nature of human society and about its development. The material world is primary and mind is secondary. Marx traced historical events as a materialistic understanding of reality. Historical materialism is based upon a beliefs of human history. It is based understood as sociological theory of human evolution.

Historical Materialism

Marx's theory of historical materialism is related to his general theory of society, which deals largely with the opposition found in the capitalist societies. In the theory of historical materialism, Marx tried to put together his economic ,social and political views into the unified body of ideology. This is the main theory that we need to understand in order to hold his sociological thought.

It refers to a set of assumptions Marx made about nature of social reality. It presents Marx basic world view and at the same time analyse social reality. He has explained the societies in terms of the future of society. His sociological view concerned with the mechanism of change.

Forces of Production

According to Marx the productive organisation of the society is the mode of production. It includes the forces of production; and the 'relations of production'. The forces of production, appear to be the capacity of a society to produce. The capacity of production depends upon scientific and technical knowledge , technological equipment, machinery, raw materials and the organisation of labour.

The relation of production includes social relation. These social relations unavoidable because production a social activity cannot be carried in isolation.

BASE

According to Marx there are two types of structure. One is basic structure and another is super structure. Base includes the area of economic activity. The economic base of a society includes its infrastructure. If any change come in material condition it will also affect the social relations. Forces and the relation of production fall in this category of infrastructure while the superstructure includes the ideological elements of society and legal educational and political institutions as well as values, cultural ways of thinking, religion, ideologies and

philosophies. Any analysis of the society must start with the analysis of the base because in the last analysis superstructure is determined by its base only.

Social Change in Terms of Social Classes

According to Marx, change always comes in society and man is constantly struggling for supremacy over nature and thus constantly tries to improve upon the “forces of production”. Hence forces of production are dynamic in nature. As society is made up of interrelated parts change in force of production leads to change in relation of production. When force of production and relation of production have changed, the economic sub-structure is transformed and leads to transformation in super-structure too. According to Marx, social change includes display of regular pattern. Marx said social change shows a regular pattern. Marx said in broad term a historical sequence of main types of society which start from simple to undifferentiated society of “primitive communism” to the complex society of modern capitalism. Analysing historical development in European society according to the methodology of historical materialism Marx discuss four stages and they are as follows-

- A. Primitive Communism**
- B. Ancient Society**
- C. Feudal Society**
- D. Capitalist Society**

Primitive communism represents the earlier stage where forces of productions are were simple and everybody could own them. Ancient society was divided into masters, those who own forces of production, and slaves who themselves owned by the masters. Feudal society was essentially an agriculture society consisting of land owning nobility and the landless serfs who enjoyed the ride to work in the lords land. Capitalist society emerged with the growth of industrial mode of production and includes of bourgeoisie who own the forces of production and the proletariat who contributed their labour. Capitalist society was unstable and would eventually transform into a communist society.

Contribution of Historical Materialism to Sociological Theory

This theory of historical materialism played a very important part in formation of contemporary sociology. Marx was influenced by Hegel, Saint Simon, Adam Ferguson. Marx introduced a new element to understand the structure of society. The feature of historical materialism was widely used accepted by other sociologist.

Historical materialism introduced into sociology a new method of inquiry , new concepts, and other hypotheses to show rise, development and decline of particular form of society. At last historical materialism not only provides a method to understand the social reality, it is also a method to understand the other method’s existence.

Conclusion

Historical materialism is a interpretation of social, cultural and political phenomena. It propounds that social institution and values related to it are known by the modes of

production processes rather than ideas in the explanation of history. In Marxist sense the "word" determined" means to determine in the last analysis and should not be taken in absolute sense. It is a dialectical theory of human progress. It regard history and the development of human beings as the efforts is masters the forces of nature and also of production. As all production is carrier out within a social organization, history is succession of changes in social system, the development of human relations geared to productive activity .History is progress because human beings ability to produce their "forces of production" is increasing. It is regression because in perfecting the forces of production they create more and more complex and oppressive social organization. Historical materialism is also based upon a philosophy of human history. It is best understood as sociological theory of human progress. As a theory it provides a scientific and systematic research programme for empirical investigation. At the same time it contains within a revolutionary programme of inventing into society. In this unique combination of scientific and revolutionary feature which is the hallmark of Marx original formulation. The approach of Marx is best illustrated in his own analysis of transition from feudalism to capitalism in Europe and the analysis of the nature of capitalist society.

Criticism: Philosopher of science Karl Popper ,the poverty of historicism and conjectures and regulations critiqued such claims of the explanatory power or valid application of historical materialism by arguing that it could explain or explain away any fact brought before it, making it unfalsifiable

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