

# Embedded with Jargon, Ending in Rituals: Political Agenda Restated

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Ideas and institutions, political or otherwise, emerge at a point of history out of the genuine needs or ungentle desires of the society or a section of it. But time and again it has been observed that once these ideas and institutions take concrete form, their existence gets primacy over their relevance. Emerged out of the dynamics of various processes, these in turn, influence the all social processes and beset a new chain of developments which are sometimes needed and many a times not. Comprehending the social development in this fashion, a deduction can be made that any social theoretical attempt claiming to be containing whole of the universal wisdom is of limited use and to establish any new social arrangement on the basis of such wisdom is all the more difficult. But humankind has never given up the struggle to be the master of its own kind with one or another kind of utopian vision. The main propelling force behind any utopian move is and has been the idea of freedom. Fredric Engles defines freedom as the 'the recognition of necessity' and politics is the instrument for the realisation of that necessity. The ideas of equality and justice are complementary to this principal concern of freedom. The proposed study is oriented towards this generally perceived and not so specifically addressed objective.

Various social theoretical efforts have been made in the past, social issues have been addressed from variety of vantage points predominantly under modernistic influences, and various ways and programmes of actions suggested for human emancipation. Modernity guided by its overriding 'scienticist-productivist' concern alongwith capitalist work ethics that helped in producing various ideas, institutions and ideologies which virtually placed mankind under one or another kind of commandist control strategies, and mankind found itself under 'Benthamite panopticon'. So Marxism and liberalism, the twin children of modernity shared the common

premises of scientist-productivist logic, which was supposed to be the source of progress and liberation of humanity. Structural differentiation emerged for and by the organisation and needs of industry were the bases for Marxist and liberal politics to observe, analyse and characterise the new social formations created by the modern social concerns. One may claim to find the theory and laws that govern the history, and historical mission of the newly emerged class, the proletariat, to achieve its liberations via class struggle for the establishment of 'scientific socialism'; while the others characterise this structural formation as constitutive of multiple and competitive sections of the society competing for their mutually antagonistic interests. Liberals claim that these interests could be reconciled through politics by mediating between these sections of the society. Although we see the emergence of instrumental nature of politics since Machiavelli, but here from starts the real instrumental politics with the flagship of 'the people'. Although this connotation may be found, as Althusser remarks, in Locke, Rousseau and other thinkers but it really became competitive only after Marx.<sup>1</sup>

*Interestingly, privileges were the seminal sources of Marxian as well as liberal politics as the former thought of demolishing them via class struggle to establish emancipatory social order while the liberal politics premised itself in the politics of rights to ensure some sort of level playing field for various competing sections of the society. At the beginning of the 21st century, both of these kinds fell prey, albeit unwittingly, to the same forces of logic of modernity and its predominant concerns alongwith capitalist work ethics and forms of organisation. The societies established around Marxian ideas unfortunately ended in tragic clashes; and liberal politics organised around liberal principles became impotent to address its stated concerns. Being aware of its sticky wicket, liberal politics resigned invisibly to the 'invisible forces'. The slogan of victory of one over other is a hollow sham to hoodwink the emotional lot. In fact, both liberal and Marxian politics have been defeated to the extent of irrelevance. Now politics is just a structure of the society like any other, performing its functions, i.e. management of state; and instrumentation seems beyond its power.*

Now what liberal politics puts before us in the plate is 'do it yourself' or 'a little bit more cheaper'. The idea of freedom, equality, justice and rights has given way to the consumer freedom, consumer rights etc.; equality is paradoxed with 'clash of civilisations'. 'End

of history' said good-bye to the concept of justice. Now politics is liberal corporatist in nature, playing the role of its historical mission, the 'collaboration'. The structure and role of the liberal parties and movements corresponds to their historical mission, which can also be verified and visualised in the role they played in fascism, Nazism or in this age of 'return of war'.

In case of Marxist politics, a more comprehensive effort is required to put the record straight. Karl Marx on the basis of the principle suggested by Hegel, the principle of dialectical reasoning in which ideas unfold to new higher stages of social and political organisation, utilised the principle of 'dialectical materialism' in the history. Putting Hegel on his feet, he propounded his materialistic conception of history; he saw a dialectical relationship between the forces of production and means of productions, which he calls them as relations of production. The locomotives of history are the classes and struggle between them which constitute the core of social historical development and thus comes out with an unilinear thesis of the history of social development. But none other than Balibar (1994) says in his book *Classes, Masses and Ideas: Studies on Politics and Philosophy* that "class struggle organized as class struggle" in history is not the rule, they are the exceptions and this should be accepted as Marxist or revised Marxist thesis'.<sup>2</sup> He qualifies the class struggle in history with *organised* form and links it with the concepts of mass struggle or mass movement. But Adorno in his *Negative Dialectics* (1973) stated, 'No universal history leads from savagery to humanitarianism, but there is one leading from slingshot to Megatom bomb, it ends in the total Menace which organized mankind poses to unorganized men in the epitome of discontinuity.'<sup>3</sup> So linearness and strict class sense to history is being denied.

Marx gives a first rate account of the mechanism of capitalist oppression; but so good is it that one finds it hard to visualise how this mechanism could cease to function. He suggests that the day property becomes collective or socially owned all will be well. But there are difficulties in this proposition as Marx himself showed clearly that the true reason for the exploitation of workers is not any desire on the part of capitalist to enjoy and consume, but the need to expand the undertaking as rapidly as possible so as to make it more powerful than its rivals. So, as long as there is a struggle for power on the surface of the globe, and decisive factor in the victory remains the industrial production, workers will be exploited.<sup>4</sup>

Simone Weil (1934) further elaborates on this oppression in her

book *Liberty and Oppression* that 'the power which bourgeois has to exploit and oppress the workers lies at the very foundation of our social life and cannot be destroyed by any political and juridical transformation. This power consists in the first place and essentially in the modern system of production itself, that is to say big industry'.<sup>5</sup> Marx in *The Capital* writes, 'in the factory there exists a mechanism independent of workers, which incorporates them as living cog... this separation of the spiritual forces that play a part in the production from manual labour, and the transformation of the former in to power exercised by capital over labour, attain their fulfillment in the big industry founded on mechanization. The details of the individual destiny of the machine workers fade in to insignificance before the science, the tremendous natural forces and the collective labour which are incorporated in the machines as a whole and constitutes with them the employer power.'<sup>6</sup> Thus the workers' complete subordination to the undertaking and to those who run it is founded on factory organisation and not on the system of property. Similarly the separation of spiritual forces that play a part in production are robbed from workers by degrading division of labour into manual and intellectual labour. Mind it, it is the requirement of big mechanised industry and its organisation that provides foundation to our culture, the culture of specialist. Here I again quote Simone Weil, 'Science is a monopoly, not because public education is badly organised, but by its very nature; non-scientists have only access to the result, not to the methods, that is to say they can only believe not assimilate. "Scientific socialism" thus itself remained the monopoly of select few, and the "intellectuals" possessed, unfortunately, the same privileges in the working class movement as they do in bourgeoisie society. And the same applies, further more on the political plane.'<sup>7</sup>

In Marx's view, 'the development of productive forces constitutes, in the last analysis, the true motive power of history, and that it is practically unlimited. This hope still raises a passion for possibility of a real democracy in Marxism. Every dominant class or every social system has a historical "task" or "mission" of carrying the productive forces to higher level, until the day when all further progress is arrested by the social cadres, and a new class takes over. The fact that Marxists criticize the capitalism not because it had grinded the millions and millions of men and women but because it is now obstacle in the way of revolution. The essential task of revolution consists in the emancipation of productive forces not of men and women. The ever increasing upgradation in the technology



and development of productive forces gave Marx enough comfort that until humanity reaches at last a truly paradisaical state, abundant production would be at the cost of a trifling expenditure of effort and the ancient curse of work would be lifted. Backed by such a moral certainty, Bolsheviks astonished the world in many ways by their strength.<sup>8</sup>

Again, he 'never explains why productive forces tend to develop by accepting without proof this mysterious tendency. He did not ally with Darwin, as he liked to think, but with Lamark, who in similar fashion founded his biological system on an inexplicable tendency of living creatures to adept themselves, and that to the social question of social institutions in opposition to development of productive forces, it is always the later that wins not the former. He knew perfectly well that upto the present, social transformation has never been accompanied by any clear realization of their real long-term consequences. So, this assertion of development of productive forces has no scientific basis at all.'<sup>9</sup>

As regarding the revolution, 'it is often said that situation is objectively revolutionary and that, all that is lacking is the "subjective factors" as if the complete absence of that very force which alone could transform the system were not an objective characteristic of the present situation whose origins must be sought in the structure of our society.'<sup>10</sup>

Marx's truly great idea on which Simone Weil laid great emphasis is that human society as well as in nature nothing takes place otherwise than through material transformation. 'Men make their own history; but within certain fixed conditions. To desire is nothing, we have got to know the material conditions which determine our possibilities of action; and in social sphere these conditions are defined by the way in which man obeys material necessities in supplying his own needs, in other words by the method of production. A methodical improvement in social organization presupposes a detailed study of the method of production, in order to try to find out on the one hand what we may expect from it, in the immediate or in the distant future, from the point of view of output, and on the other hand what forms of social and cultural organisations are compatible with it, and, finally, how it may itself be transformed. Only irresponsible human beings can neglect such a study and yet claim the right to domineer over society; and, unfortunately, such is the case everywhere, as much in the revolutionary circles as among the ruling classes.'<sup>11</sup> Now Marxism is regarded as the 'concrete analysis of concrete conditions' is bereft

of any revolutionary content, as mere analysis does not automatically give way to Marxian politics. Althusser in his recent book *Machevelli And Us* says 'a contradiction in reality cannot be removed by thought but only by reality i.e. by formulating and thinking about the problems politically'.<sup>12</sup>

Now politics is working as its own mask; it time and again resorts to its own jargon, and ritualistically pays homage to the social and political concerns of the people, which seem to be beyond their comprehension and instrumentation. Modernity and modern conditions of production and distribution have come to the full circle. The overarching concern of modernity, and its universal operations also led to the subordination of different cultural and knowledge systems of the world which became indirectly the sources of rise of fundamentalist movement in various parts of the world. Now, men and women are loners in the multitude, aspiring to throw away the yoke but capitalist work ethics and conditions of modern production do not allow them to do so. Division of labour is paramount and all encompassing, leaving the executioner of work at the mercy of coordinators i.e. specialists, who have their own logic of operation, and working in the service of economic warfarist world. Ruthless operation of finance capital can be seen all over the globe. The exhaustion of modernity can also be seen in the sense that now transnational capital is not coming in production sector but overwhelmingly in financial markets and real estate sector. Bubbles are created in the economy and busted at will; mergers, acquisitions and joint ventures characterise the new epoch of capitalist development. Fichte's 'interior borders' are melting and losing their significance in transnational joint ventures of economy and polity. Necessities of various structures present in the society and their need for survival under the operation of Corporate Capitalism has led to the militarisation of economy and vandalism of politics.

The repressed humanity constituted of atomised individuals finds itself helpless against this oppression, and the individuals constituting it becoming seductive and militarised. This seductive militarisation of modern individuals is the result of its oppression as well as of its pent up feeling raised by various marketing strategies of industry. These pent up feelings, anger and frustration against this oppression are released via juicy sex scandals of the persons at the top, stories of individual sacrifice and heroism, unearthing disjointed corruption cases, advertising the capacity and precision of the weapons of mass destruction, and by creating imagined enemies and villains through

the repeated display of their images. The 'present day miseries', as Bauman remarks in his book *In Search of Politics*, about them 'are not synchronized, to each door catastrophe knocks selectively, on different days, at different hours, apparently unconnected. And disasters are not misdeeds of an enemy whom the victim can name, point at with their fingers, write against, stand up together and fight back.'<sup>13</sup>

Now freedom is taken care of by market through, to quote Bauman again by 'sensual joy of eating, pleasant smelling, soothing drinks, relaxing driving, or the joy of being surrounded by smart, glistening, eye caressing objects. In such gratifying duties, who needs rights?'<sup>14</sup> The way in which care for individual freedom and autonomy is presented is chequered one. Individual is repeatedly presented as a 'self contained entity' is only a half-truth, another half-truth which is not discussed is that his or her not being 'self sufficient' in the society. By this mode of reasoning first an individual is segregated from the society, atomised and then sliced into pieces to tell that these pieces are really not individual as a whole relating and mediating in society. It is here the 'expert' enters the scene to cure the incurable individual; incurable because his image of the self is based on half-truths. Thinking of public space around them and their offices, the 'lynch mob' of these experts tries to console and give tips to atomised repressed individuals 'how to remain in good shape'. Experts suggest that what seems to be incurable should be surgically removed; and it is no coincidence that political managers following the advice of these experts resort to surgical operations, may it be the 'bottom' of their own society or those states, which are not falling in line. The force of externalities is all encompassing. A kind of 'Biologism' is being applied to the political matters.

Now as Balibar suggests, we are living in the conjectures of three afters, 'After the end of "totalitarianism", after the beginning of the crisis of "welfare state", and after the "return of war".'<sup>15</sup> The social, political, cultural and economic operations of the society functioning in these conjectures have been attempted above. What remains to be attended to is the so-called revolt against modernity, which is mysteriously not against the operations of late capitalism. Now 'multiplicity of truths' is supposed to exist without any centrality or centre, denying any universality to any idea or theory, in other words rejecting the meta-narratives of modernity. The 'local' is celebrated which modernity has subjugated in its universal operations. But these propositions seem to be more in tune with 'feel at home' marketing

principles of capitalism, retailing itself worldwide. What post-modernists seem to be celebrating is the outcome of marketing strategies of cultural industry, which they are mistaking as freedom.

So post-modernists seem to serve Fukuyama, by not rejecting his economic principles, while the 'end of history' master accommodates post-modernist concerns under the stated nature of liberalism itself. Under these conjectures, the earlier stated formulations regarding Marxism and liberalism are to be viewed. Marxian method of analysis and inquiry is profound and may be used as a guiding principle of analysis, while retaining the recognition of the necessity of the 'inherent rights' of man and women propounded by the liberal politics. However, these inherent rights are to be dialectically conceptualised, mediated and harmonised by politics of our time. This can be done as Sartre says by 'throwing away the baggage of history' along with 'reforming the tradition from inside' as Balibar puts it.<sup>16</sup>

### CONCLUSIONS

This Balibar's 'inside' may be applied to every institutions, structure, idea and ideology; if a new lease of life is to be given to the society and to the politics. 'Baggage of history' can be thrown away by abandoning orthodox reasoning. It requires to reject some institutions, structures, ideas and ideologies as something given, and as if those which just cannot be done away with.

Practical propositions for political practice can be stated clearly as to what can be done, what should be rejected and what can be sustained on the basis of concrete understanding of society applying the knowledge and technology available at hand. Let us come to the grip of the political agenda from the standpoint of political economy, availability and sustainability of natural resources we have at our hand, and from the standpoint of environmental concerns. From these standpoints, it is the responsibility of any socially concerned human beings to look at the projects of modernity whether it can survive and be sustained. Given the state of known sources of energy which we derive from the nature, the current momentum of 'development' cannot be sustained without keeping a large part of humanity in the state of antiquity. It is almost perfectly calculable, how much natural resources we have, and how they can be utilised in sustainable manner. A large part of these resources are consumed for privatist purposes instead of public use. Even in the domain of



public use it requires reorganisation of public products, institutions and services on rational basis. Take for example, the use of petroleum resources in private and public domains. Within the limit of this paper, it can be stated that use of these resources for private individual transport, and in cosmetic industry is wasteful and socially undesirable. Private cars are not really required either from the standpoint of ecology or political economy, and it creates privatist consciousness among the people in the society. The same is true about the beauty industry. The use of exhaustible petroleum resources in public transport can be minimised by alternative organisation of society and its institutions. The movement of population for earnings of living can be reduced. The health hazards of chemical fertilizers in human food cycle, uselessness of chemical fertilizer industry and resources in consumes have been proved beyond any doubt. Introduction of organic farming and nutrients preserving crop rotation pattern in agriculture may provide better and sustainable alternatives. The same can be applied to the weapon industry and its associated enterprises which consume lot of natural and social resources, and which is absolutely not desirable. In this way, the productivist-scientific logic of economy and entrepreneurship can be challenged by setting chain reactions and creating radical ruptures. The political mediations in the process will tear asunder the unholy networks in the society. In this process a sense of community can be created where men and women in league with their fellow human beings will be able to decide democratically what is socially needed and what is not. Recognition of this necessity constitutes the sense of freedom today and working towards it politically is the responsibility of every human being. Deficiency in this regard, as present trends indicate will lead the society towards a perfect technocratic fascism.

#### NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. This point is elaborated considerably in Althusser, Louis (1999), *Machiavelli and Us*, London: Verso.
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3. Adorno, Theodore W. and Horkheimer, Max (1973), *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Allen Lane quoted in Adorno, Theodore W. (1991), *The Cultural Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*, Routledge Classics, 1991.
4. Weil, Simone (2001), *Oppression and Liberty*, Routledge Classics, p. 39.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 40.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 40.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 40.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 42.
9. *Ibid.*, pp. 42-43.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 38.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 44.
12. Althusser, Louis (1999), *Op. cit.*, p. 80.
13. Bauman, Gygmunt (1999), *In Search of Politics*, London: Polity Press, p. 53.
14. Bauman, Gygmunt (1997), *Freedom, World View*, New Delhi, p. 73.
15. Balibar, Etinne (1994), *Masses, Classes and Ideas: Studies in Politics and Philosophy Before and After Marx*, London: Routledge, p. 206.
16. *Ibid.*, Preface, p. VIII.