

Justice has been, by far, the most important theme of consideration in political theory after John Rawls' masterpiece *A Theory of Justice* (1973). Rawls' work threw up two major strands of critical responses from within the liberal fold: The first criticised him for proposing a patterned and non-historical conception of Justice with deleterious consequences for freedom. The other response, known as communitarian, termed the Rawlsian conception of Justice as unencumbered and argued that our understanding and evaluations are embedded in communities and cultures. Against the privileging of right and unattached self by Rawls, communitarians valorised the good and ends embodied in cultures and identities. Rawls acknowledged the significance of this critique in his subsequent work and advanced a conception of a just political order in *Political Liberalism* (1993) taking the good and ends seriously.

Justice is a central theme in Marxism, not merely because Marxists upbraided capitalism for the prevalence of injustices of all kinds, but because Marx himself suggested that the communist society will regulate itself on a different and superior principle of justice, that is, "From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs."

However, apart from this rhetoric and value-posturing there has been little systematic reflection on the value of justice in Marxism till recently. Even when this theme was taken up for consideration, the status of Marxism as science clouded any serious engagement with it. Three developments, however, brought the issue of justice to the centre-stage of Marxist scholarship: the debate on the relation between facts and values or science and morals; the rise of analytical philosophy and rational choice theories, and the attempt by liberals to redraft liberalism with a conception of justice as their anchor. Rawls set the ball rolling for Marxists too.

The present work is an addition, a distinctive addition, to the large corpus of literature that the Marxist endeavour has spawned in the last thirty years. Undoubtedly, it displays a close familiarity with the complex developments in Marxist theory during this period and a felicity to

Book review

Justice and Marxism

JUSTICE, EQUALITY AND COMMUNITY:
AN ESSAY IN MARXIST POLITICAL THEORY

Vidhu Verma

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formulate and reflectively consider complex arguments. A single theme, the conception of justice in Marx, is consistently pursued throughout the work negotiating across allied and adversarial positions, and marking its determinations all along.

This work clearly locates itself in the conceptual framework of analytical Marxism. It interrogates the existing scholarship in this trend on their understanding of justice in Marx, criticises the liberal version of justice from the Marxist perspective, proposes a distinct Marxist theory of justice linked to exploitation, reaches out to forms of injustices in capitalist society other than those based on class exploitation and attempts to relate these injustices to this theory. Further it contends against the *Distributive Justice Approach* (DJA) and the *Beyond Justice Approach* (BJA), the prevailing theories of justice in Marxism, and defends a non-judicial conception of justice (NJA) in Marx.

We can look at the work a little closely to grasp the main line of the argument that runs across the work. It critiques what it calls as the juridical model of justice expressed in liberal formulations where a legal order upholds an abstract realm of equal rights that are, however, at odds with prevailing social relations based on exploitation and oppression. Marx, on the contrary, is seen privileging the latter over the former. Although liberals have a limited, distorted and egoistic conception of rights, Marx does not reject the appropriateness of the category of rights as such for socialism. The author claims that Marx advances a *non-judicial conception of justice* (NJA) which she contrasts with the *Distributive Justice Approach* (DJA) that emphasises the distribution of wealth, income and other material

resources, and *Beyond Justice Approach* (BJA) which argues that communism transcends justice. Her endeavour is to arrive at Marx's conception of justice which upholds an inter-linked realm of freedom and equality in a non-judicial and non-exploitative order that upholds a conception of the good society where distribution of goods is linked to the self-realisation of its members in community with others.

She interrogates two positions on justice in contemporary Marxist scholarship, the Justice Thesis and the Injustice Thesis. The Justice Thesis saw capitalism as just, judged by its own standards as there are none outside it. The Injustice Thesis argues that Marx condemned capitalism as unjust and he did it on socialist principles of justice based on a theory of morals. It criticises the Justice Thesis for ignoring the evaluatory dimension in Marx and concentrating only on the explanatory. The author has her sympathies with the Injustice Thesis but she does not want to confine Marx's theory of justice to its moral critique. She thinks that this position is not adequately sensitive to Marx's scientific endeavour; to other values such as rights, equality and morality; in relating the materialist conception to the trans-historical factors; to forms of injustice other than those based on class exploitation; and she finds that, to overhaul social relations, it basically concentrates on distribution rather than production.

The author formulates the non-judicial (NJA) conception of justice as characteristic of Marx, after locating the inadequacies of a Marxist conception of justice within the existing scholarship. For the purpose, she critiques the liberal theory of justice which she finds bogged down in legal formalism and abstract rules. She

highlights Marx's criticism of its conceptions of the human person, community, rights, rule of law, freedom, equality and associated institutions and its inability to highlight how the concentration of the means of production, class relations and power affect these conceptions. Against it, Marx proposed a theory of justice that revolved around the centrality of exploitation in capitalist society. He believed that rights can be enjoyed only in a community with others, and equality and freedom need to be related to a theory of distribution tied to the idea of good society that emphasises on self-realisation of its members. Marx did not reject liberal categories but reformulated them as an integral part of his endeavour.

The third chapter explores the concept of exploitation that, according to the author, constituted for Marx the core of class-injustice in capitalist society. The author discusses the three theories of exploitation: the simple theory of exploitation (STE) with its two versions based on labour theory of value (LTV) and labour-theft, the utility theory of exploitation which suggests that the entire vortex of relations in capitalist society come to be shaped by its dominant relations and Roemer's conception of exploitation that stresses on the initial unjust distribution of resources and assets. She is in favour of STE with a critical sympathy towards self-ownership (SOT) in response to the explanation of labour-theft. Finally she links up this class-based theory of justice with social movements and distinguishes their respective claims through the concepts of exploitation and oppression respectively. She rejects the applicability of STE to issues raised by peasants, women, tribals, low castes, environmentalists and oppressed nationalities. Unlike exploitation, "oppression designates the disadvantage and injustice some people suffer not because of a particular class but because of it being structural" (p 135). Unlike in class relations, the oppressed group does not, she feels, need to have a correlate oppressing group.

In the final chapter the author argues that Marx suggested a good society in which the distribution of goods is based on the need for the self-realisation of its members. She refutes

Is this statement not worth pondering? If all literature is propaganda of some ideology or the other, then what about the life experience portrayed by various writers, old and contemporary, in their writings? Is that propaganda? Values of life may be propagated but not life itself. It has to be lived, loved intensely and earnestly.

To conclude, may I say that to go

through this 'Katha Book' under review is an experience in itself. Sukrita has stated in the introduction of the book - "Ismat Chughtai became a legend while she was alive..." For an ordinary person like me, is it not difficult to comment on a book written and compiled about a legend? No doubt *Ismat: Her Life, Her Times* is one of the few books that has been devoted

to an individual woman writer, that too in such a meticulous and planned manner. Hopefully, *Katha* will bring out more such books to fulfil their promise to enhance the pleasure of reading. In the end, I wish to say, hesitatingly, an ordinary reader gets lots of information about Ismat's life and her times, but what about her writings, which made her a legend in

her own right? If some of her representative stories were to form a part of the book under review, the pleasure of reading would have become more intense and real.

The editors, Sukrita and Sadique, along with the *Katha* management, deserve all appreciation for bringing out this book.

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DJA and BJA vis-à-vis NJA and upholds the superiority of the socialist ideal of justice.

DJA has several problems. It assumes that the individual is ontologically prior to the social. It emphasises on consumption and the principles of contribution and need are deployed for the purpose. However, DJA is not sensitive to the limitations of the principles of merit and need. NJA, on the contrary, redrafts distribution principles to include the idea of equal conditions of freedom and distribution of goods according to need (p 150). It stresses on productive activity pursued for its own sake, community and relative abundance.

BJA claims that the society that overcomes the problems of scarcity and conflict is not in need of justice. Therefore communism is a form of society that transcends justice.

However, NJA argues that this is not the case. Although communism will put an end to class-based conflicts, other conflicts will remain. The distributive issue expressed in contribution/need, the ideal of self-realisation, maintenance of just distribution etc., call for the continued salience of a conception of justice. Although Marx did not spell them out, some sort of judicial and non-judicial institutions are necessary too in a communist society which could uphold such an order. In this context the author contrasts the notion of community upheld by Marx against the communitarians.

This is undoubtedly a major attempt to formulate a theory of justice by taking the issue of class-based exploitation under capitalism seriously in the context of the new issues in the horizon where old certainties can no longer call the shots.

The study has involved wading through a complex body of social and political theories in relation to which Marx's conception of justice has been formulated and defended. Further, the work has involved a rational scrutiny of Marx's position, sorting out the defensible from the indefensible and, sometimes, taking up very bold stand against the tide.

The study also avoids the 'catch all' approach whereby Marxists advanced an uni-causal explanation for everything under the sun. The author does not hesitate to suggest that Marx's theory of justice, as she has formulated, holds good only to situations of capitalist class-based exploitation and not to all situations of injustices. For instance, she feels that Marx's theory of justice cannot respond to the issues raised by the new social movements and gender injustice.

This work also presents many problems some of which are just indicated here: The concern with the discrete and the palpable, a legacy of analytical Marxism, makes the author to not engage with larger issues and relations. The relation between classes and the state which would have helped to relate issues of justice and exploitation is simply side-tracked. The state figures in only when the narrow boundaries of distribution have to be transcended. This sidelining of the state also leads the author into major traps such as the inability to relate exploitation of the workers with other oppressed sections and overtly emphasise on production, without seeing production, circulation, exchange and distribution as different moments of capital. While the study is full of references to Marx's *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, it is not

surprising that it does not refer at all to the worker-peasant alliance which Marx suggested there. Further, she does not think that the non-proletarian bloc of the oppressed needs to be disaggregated. There are some forms of oppressions, to use her term, that are closely interwound with class exploitation, particularly given the expanding horizons of capital, while the other forms are not so.

The above failure to grapple with complex relations and mediations, and perceive their linkages with the political is called *economism*, in the good old language of Marxists. One of the crudest manifestation of *economism* is an attempt to explain social processes by confining oneself to the factory floor of production. The author makes a promising beginning against such a tendency when she attacks the Justice Thesis and highlights the salient features of the Injustice Thesis. However, there is no evidence to show that the ensemble of a social formation as a whole with their autonomous trajectories and reinforced insinuations holds aloft the author's imagination. In a lighter vein, can one say that the pursuit of the non-judicial has led to the erasure of the superstructures?

There are several issues on which the work does not offer adequate clarity. Why not attempt to construct a theory of justice linking it to alienation as suggested by Lukes? The relation between values and norms on one hand and science on the other is not clarified adequately although it is important to the sustainability of the work as a whole. There seems to be a lot of arbitrariness and ad-hocism about what are the defensible interpretations of Marx and what are not, and which passages of Marx have

to be shelved and which should not? If that is all there is to it, why invoke Marx at all?

The study has a big problem about handling human agency and rights, the great issue that Rawls attempts to come to terms with in *Political Liberalism*. Marxism highlights a conception of the good, however hedged in it might be, by taking into account a myriad of other considerations. What warrantee is there that self-realisation, a central feature of the theory she unfolds, should necessarily be in congruence with such a good, particularly in the longer run?

Converting large issues and great theories into scarecrows may not payoff. Can Rawls be said to be upholding juridical approach to justice or even Dworkin for that matter, although the latter works much more within the framework of jurisprudence? Does mainstream communitarianism subscribe to 'gender-coded, race-coded and class-coded' communities? To what extent is an unqualified statement, such as "Marx does not view loyalties, or communal attachments, which identify individuals as members of a class, sect or community as surviving in any form under communism" (p 182), tenable? Analytical Marxism may like to shed its attachments to lineages of thought. However, can Marxists afford to say that let Hegel and Aristotle be with communitarians and Kant with Rawls and Marx alone suffices for us? Conversely, can one seriously engage with Marxist theory of justice without bringing to the fore issues that Rawls and the communitarians raise?

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Participation is today an oft-repeated terminology in development circles. It has come to represent anything and everything from empowerment of disenfranchised people to a cliché necessary for development funding. The number of books in the market on this topic is amazing since its circulation among professional developers seems to far exceed its practice in spirit. Much of this proliferation is perhaps well intended. However, it is important to note the ideological assumptions that drive such essays on participation. For instance, there is no denying that communication is essential for any form of participation, but is it sufficient as the book under review claims? If only we could solve or ignore so easily the entrenched historical, political and economic power and politics that pervades societies!

Shirley White's edited collection on the art of facilitating participation begins attractively with a foreword by

Book review

Participatory Communication as Panacea

THE ART OF FACILITATING PARTICIPATION:
RELEASING THE POWER OF GRASSROOTS COMMUNICATION.

Editor Shirley White, Sage Publications, New Delhi.
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one of the pioneers of participatory research, Robert Chambers. He points out four aspects of good facilitation: 1) being sensitive to who participates, 2) willingness of the facilitator to unlearn, 3) giving up control or letting go, and 4) personal commitment, appropriate attitudes and behaviours. While these terms or notions are found in all the essays in this book, the practical utility of these essays ranges from dismal to excellent. The notion of 'community'

is often used uncritically in many essays of this book, and the 'deep divisions' noted by Chambers in the foreword are ignored for the most part. Where they are recognised, the good intentions of the facilitator and good communication tools seem sufficient to overcome these divisions. Essays in the book that are based directly on a particular field experience, where the authors share the mistakes they have made and the lessons learnt from

failures, are brilliant. But the majority of the theoretical essays abound in rhetorical clichés and problematic assumptions. I will first point out some examples of the latter and then focus on the few chapters that are most useful.

The assumption linking many of the articles in the book is that "communication is the foundation of participation" (p 18). This collection of nineteen essays explores the art of facilitation from three points of departure: activation (six chapters), technique (eight chapters) and community building (three chapters). These are also seen as a series of phases in the process of participation, where people are activated in the first phase, various techniques or approaches are employed to enable participation in the second phase, and the third phase is that of community-building.

Shirley White and K. Sadanandan Nair put forth the idea of a catalyst