



Post-modern marxism and youth spirit of protest

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Abstract

Marx, Gramsci and other such revolutionaries proposed an idea of class conflict and the issues of capitalism. This paper explores a post-modern perspective on marxism to evaluate its relevance in today's time. Further, a concept of 'spirit of protest' is introduced by the author as a means to counter the exploitation of workers. A survey is conducted of urban youth law students to check whether such a spirit of protest is present within the current generation. The conclusion is derived that while some level of recognition is there, a personalised and individual level of revolutionary spirit is lacking.

Keywords: Marxism, post-modern, spirit of protest, urban youth

Introduction

You are manipulated. Naukri, Pati, Makaan, these are your ideals. Your main source of entertainment is the digital orifice to a bloodstream of algorithmic propaganda. Your preferences are brainwashed. Your behaviours and personality are reduced to categorised profiles. Your choices are artificial. Why do you need that new Macbook? Why do you yearn for a well-paying job? Why are there no individual experiences? Why is everything a trend? You are a customer.

Karl Marx spoke about a class division in society: the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. The former referred to capitalist employers and the latter consisted of middle-class workers. His theory suggested that employment was exploitative. The solution for the same was proposed to be gaining class consciousness i.e. an understanding that the suffering is universal and a shared experience and then orchestrating an elaborate violent rebellion. This enlightenment was to lead a violent revolution usurping the capitalists to eventualise into a primitive ideal communist society.

Further, the idea was provided by Gramsci of 'capitalist hegemony' wherein the influence of the bourgeoisie is so pervasive that it extends to the mind. One's culture, dreams, ideals become decided by the advertisement, governance and declarations of the capitalist state.

When we dive further into the readings of Marx, Gramsci along with other marxist and neo-marxist philosophy, we understand a proposed timeless concept of class conflict. I believe, today, we do in fact continue to see a maladapted version of the class antagonisms with a top 1% of billionaires and a large mass of common people. Moreover, it becomes a burning question: is the youth of today capable and spirited in the protest our times so desperately need?

Research Objectives

Corresponding to the aforementioned, we may derive the following aims for this paper's research:

1. **Literature review:** Analysing and understanding the existing marxist and neo-marxist ideologies. The paper will be especially focussing on the 'Communist Manifesto' by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels to

comprehend the concept in its most true and authentic nature.

2. **Post-modernist marxism:** Developing an idea of relevant and inspired conflict theory for the 21st century. The paper will attempt to attribute and translate ideas of the bourgeoisie and proletariat into the 'manipulator' and the 'manipulated' respectively.
3. **Spirit of protest:** Conducting primary research on the youth to determine whether the leading generation of the 21st century fulfill the criteria of a class-conscious proletariat group which can achieve rebellion.
4. **Comparative analysis:** Further, the paper will understand the characteristics of this common youth and conduct a comparative analysis to the proletariat of the past and that of the present.

Methodology

The goal of this study is to provide a novel theory of post-modern marxism relevant to the 21st century with a special focus on the rebellion aspect. In elaboration, the paper will attempt to measure the spirit of protest among the upcoming generation. For the above-mentioned objectives, I will first use a doctrinal approach to conduct a systematic review of literature from established books on existing Marxist theory. After establishing a foundation, I will conduct primary research to understand the perspectives of the urban youth through in-person interviews. To clarify, I will individually interview 9 young adults in the age group of 18-20 years old, residing in Mumbai, Maharashtra, India, chosen through personal affiliation. Moreover, though there is a set number of questions prepared for the interview, the questions will be open-ended so as to allow the interviewee to elaborate as much as they wish. The responses will then be analysed against the backdrop of existing literature to deduce whether we are in-fact moving towards a classless society or the conditions are the same as the 20th century and before. This bimodal qualitative research is meant to provide thorough and crystal clarity and therefore, a learned position to this paper.

Literature Review

The Communist Manifesto talks about the idea that the basis of society is the structure of its economy. Correspondingly, the entirety of history has been a history of class struggles between the exploited i.e. dominated and the exploiting i.e. dominating at various stages of social evolution. However, with the dawn of capitalism, a new stage has been reached wherein the proletariat can no longer emancipate itself from the bourgeoisie without fully ridding the society of the concepts of exploitation, oppression and class struggle. Therefore, a communist i.e. a marxist is an individual who rejects political revolution to be a sufficient means of change and demands total and complete social change.

Sociology states that Marx's historical materialism considers society to divide itself into antagonistic classes due to its inherent primitive tendency towards production of bread. These classes are determined by their relation to the means and modes of production and consequently form the basis (economic infrastructure) of society and the 'superstructure' (law, politics, education, etc). The chief source of the disparity is profit i.e the imbalance between the labour put into production and the price at which the product is sold. Additionally, social change is noted to stem primarily from social deprivation such as stratification which can be seen in the class-conflict theory and demands a revolution.

An Introduction to Sociology maintains that 'economic determinism' was a core concept for Marx and its consequent exploitative class conflict leading to alienation and finally resolved by mass violent revolution. In addition, social change is characterised to be universal, communal, varied in speed, temporal, inevitable, unpredictable, exhibiting chain-reaction, resulting from many factors, modificatory and objective.

Contemporary Sociology mentions how Marx strongly proposed dialectical materialism stating the idea that life is not determined by consciousness, but consciousness by life. Marx provides 5 phases of society on the basis of modes of production: primitive communism (communal ownership), ancient slave production, feudalism (serfdom), capitalism (bourgeois exploitation of wage earners) and classless society (no private property, no distinction between controllers and the controlled). He also suggests that the class of dominant material force in society is at the same its dominant intellectual force. Moreover, the bourgeoisie sees in his wife a mere instrument of production and therefore, a unit to be exploited.

Post-Modern Marxism

Despite all the critique and questioning Marx received in his time and Engels received in his succeeding time, I believe Marxism is more relevant today than ever before. In the capitalist present, each individual has been reduced to a unit of exploitation. Exploited for unfair profit and mindless labour, children are taught to aim for a 9-5 as if it is a dream come true. Why is the ultimate goal a job which pays less than my labour is worth, a family which I must spend most of my time away from and a mind which not only accepts but also glorifies and desires to support and become one of the top 1%.

A labourer was defined as someone who must sell themselves piece-meal, who is a commodity. Someone who lives only as long as they find work and is constantly exposed to the vicissitudes of competition i.e. the fluctuations of the

market. Further, the work of such a labourer was entirely alienated as all individual character was eliminated through fordism and machine-made mass-production. What is the difference between the marxian proletariat of the 19th century and a corporate slave of today?

Dogmatic philosophies such as law, morality, religion became just bourgeois prejudices, as they were suggested to only exist to serve the upper-class interests. Jurisprudence was declared as but the will of the bourgeoisie made into law for all, determined by the economical conditions needed for the existence of that class. Today, tax policy favours the rich, the law is moulded to let off white-collar crimes, prayers to the divine entail capitalist success and the social norm remains a goal to earn big money in a regime of surrendered exploitation.

The ruling ideas of each age have been proposed to be the ideas of the ruling class. A part of the upper class is willing to redress and fix social issues in order to secure the continued existence of itself. The ruling class, therefore, also act as thinkers, as producers of ideas. They justify the power and the privilege of the ruling class by allowing a false sense of conscious choice in picking one's employer and choosing their path of career. This is seen today as students get freedom to choose their living but are coerced into the same sheep-race of oppressive Kota factories.

The intriguing aspect becomes that white a capitalist society keeps a labourer alive only as long as she produces and raises more capital, a communist society maintains capital to serve the interests of the labourer.

Marx and Engels stated that the proletariat needs to abolish the mode of appropriation in order to become master of the productive forces. Moreover, there is nothing for a labourer to lose or secure; in fact, the mission becomes to destroy all individual property and its insurances. This is because the proletarian movement is the self-conscious, independent movement of and for the masses.

Spirit of Protest

I propose that the same revolutionary spirit is needed today more than ever. Wars are being fought left and right to only serve the interests of the top minority. Residential communities are incorporating marketing technology. The young and the old, alike, seek greater and greater capital success under the assumption that their success is within their control when really all is dominated by the presiding minority. Correspondingly, a spirit of protest becomes mandatory in rebellion to these manipulating forces.

What does a 'spirit of protest' truly entail? I propose it inculcates the following understandings:

1. Change is needed.
2. Change is, indeed, achievable.
3. Change can be achieved through protest.
4. Protest entails disciplined sacrifice and determinate defiance.

Allow me to clear out some terminology. Change, herein, means a parivartan, an improvement in society. Of course, this 'improvement' may be subjective to each individual but a spirit of protest remains devoid of morality. It is simply a search for a scenario different from that of the present. In other words, it may be a good change or a bad change. Disciplined sacrifice, herein, refers to a decided and implemented loss on part of the protestor i.e. the rebel. Finally, determinate defiance, herein, specifies a stubborn and superseding prioritization of one's demand for change

despite obstacles. These obstacles may take a variety of shapes. It may be as small as a failure to achieve immediate change or as big as complete ostracisation from society for pursuing an alien cause.

Findings and Observations

On the basis of the above theory, I have conducted a series of interviews of the urban youth residing in Mumbai, Maharashtra. A variety of 14 questions were asked to determine whether the proposed post-modern Marxist theory can be maintained in today's time and whether the required spirit of protest has developed among the upcoming generation. The questions can be categorised as follows: understanding of success, acknowledgement of manipulation and the spirit of protest.

Understanding of success

Questions for this category were:

1. What is your goal in life?
2. What does success look like?
3. Do you think there is a connection between preferences and your goals?
4. Do you seek to accumulate as much wealth as you can?

Primary responses to the first question were focussed on happiness. For many respondents, this happiness translated into satisfying relationships and attaining success. Secondly, success looks like satisfaction with one's career and being financially free. Thirdly, it was accepted that preferences and goals are related. Fourthly, the majority wish to accumulate a decent amount of wealth to be comfortable and have security.

Acknowledgement of manipulation

Questions for this category were:

5. Do you think social media shapes your preferences?
6. Do you think society is equal or exploitative?
7. Are you the master/decider of who you are and what you want?
8. Do advertisements and media depictions affect your way of thinking?
9. Do you believe the top 1% of the economy dictates the way the world works?

Fifthly, the majority either do not acknowledge that social media influences them or they believe that social media has a positive impact. Only a few recognise a negative manipulation of their goals and ideals. Sixthly, society is considered to be prima facie exploitative, indeed. Seventhly, people consider themselves as masters of themselves and their choices with a few taking parental advice and environmental upbringing as minor influences. Eighthly, there is a mixed response. Half of the chunk believe there is absolutely no effect of media on their thinking while the other half is insidiously aware of the deceptive brainwashing media can do. Ninthly, most of the respondents agree with the existence of a concentration of power and money.

Spirit of protest

Questions for this category were:

10. Do you think there is a need for change?
11. Can change be achieved?
12. How can change be achieved?
13. Is protest futile?
14. What does protest look like?

A unanimous agreement is given to the need for change. Moreover, there is a hope that change can be achieved. Methods for the same include baby steps, speaking up and collective power. Protest is deemed as essential and impactful in most cases. It takes the form of strikes, boycotts, public demonstrations, etc.

Reflection

What can be understood from such data is firstly that there is certainly a materiality to the goals and preferences of most individuals. Pati, Naukri, Makaan are indeed the preferred end destinations for most individuals, even at the young age of fresh adults. Furthermore, there is failure to recognise the individuals as those who are manipulated despite being of educated urban background. At the same time, there is a recognition of class divide and exploitation present extensively in society. Fortunately, a spirit of protest can be found to a great extent; however, this paper has not considered the practical implementation of this philosophy. Another thing to note is that the proletariat of today is much more enlightened than the proletariat of yesteryear. This is in the sense that the youth understand to some extent the manipulation that occurs in society; nonetheless, their understanding is extremely abstract and very lacking in accountability. This further translates into a lack of a class-for-itself reality wherein individuals of the proletariat class recognise their commonality and develop class consciousness. Since the respondents do not consider themselves individually responsible but only have abstract third-person attributions then groupthink is unlikely to manifest. We must also note that the proletariat considered herein is not of the working class as they are mere students; therefore, their standardisation of goals is minimal yet visible already. Moreover, these respondents have already witnessed success of protest and are able to develop faith in the same, unlike the preceding class which was merely facing dreadful quadrupedal alienation during the Industrial Revolution.

Conclusion

The aforementioned demonstrates to us that today's society continues to show class antagonisms in a more subtle, refined manner. Correspondingly, the paper suggests a theory of spirit of protest to be present among the younger generations in order to counter the class division. Primary research illustrated that despite more enlightenment and information of the system in comparison to the 18th century proletariat, the youth continue to hold brainwashed ideals and lack a concrete sense of class consciousness. Fortunately, a spirit of protest can be seen among the youngsters; nevertheless, practical implementation of the same might be lacking. Further research on this topic is required to conduct a more extensive interview to get more elaborate results.

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