
Union of Free Individuals or Political Despotism? The Paradox Confronting Marxism

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One hundred years after the Bolshevik revolution, a century and half after the publication of Karl Marx's *Capital*, Volume 1, and two-and-a-half decades after the collapse of the Soviet Union, one needs a critical understanding of the so-called "socialist experiment" which took place between 1917 and 1991. One also needs a rethinking of Marx's original critique of political economy and the philosophy of human emancipation, against the backdrop of Marx's 200th birth anniversary.

While one knows of Leon Trotsky's critique of Stalinism as a Bonapartist bureaucratic coup against revolutionary Marxism, followed by Raya Dunayevskaya, Kevin Anderson and Peter Hudis's understanding of the Soviet Union as state capitalism, a more precise and scientific understanding of this "experiment," which led to the rise and consequent fall of "hitherto existing socialism" has not yet been unearthed in detail. Even Isaac Deutscher's Trotsky trilogy and biography of Stalin, Alexander Rabinowitch's *The Bolsheviks Come to Power* and Simon Pirani's *The Russian Revolution in Retreat* have been unable to explain the mechanisms and paradoxes of 20th century's "hitherto existing socialism."

Paresh Chattopadhyay's *Marx's Associated Mode of Production: A Critique of Marxism* stands out as a unique perspective, since it outlines the epistemological mechanism to understand Marx's original repertoire, and then compares this with what occurred in 20th century history. Clearly for Chattopadhyay what he himself calls "twentieth century socialism" is actually only "minority rule" (Chattopadhyay 2016) led by a "tiny group" (p 172). According to Chattopadhyay, the "Bolshevik seizure of power" actually "destroyed ... revolutionary democracy" (p 172). In a way the leitmotif

REVIEW ARTICLE

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of the book is to rescue Marx from the Marxists. As Gustavo Cunha says, the second part of the book's title, "A Critique of Marxism," is in fact, a critique of 20th century Marxists (Cunha 2018).

Marx and the Marxists

According to Chattopadhyay, there is a clear epistemological break between Marx and his followers, whether Lenin and the Bolsheviks, followed by Mao and Che Guevara, or the academic Marxists in the form of the "market socialists." To understand this book it is necessary to understand Chattopadhyay's earlier essay published in this journal, in which he observed that the Bolshevik revolution was stamped with a "minority character," where "a single individual—Lenin—first won over his party ... and then practically imposed his own idea on the whole country" (Chattopadhyay 2016: 54). According to him there is no evidence that the Bolshevik revolution was a proletarian revolution. His thesis is that the Soviet Union was an outright state-capitalist state. This is a correct statement. The entire book is on the difference between Marx's Marxism and post-Marx Marxism, between authentic socialism and socialism that, in reality, was nothing but dictatorial capitalism. As such, this book is a critical exposition of Chattopadhyay's deep understanding of Marx's original works.

The idea of human emancipation is central to this book. While being a collection of essays that Chattopadhyay wrote over a long period of time, this work also forms a coherent whole. The central part of his argument is that "an

association of free and equal individuals ... succeeds the current capitalist society" (p 1). One must recall Marx's idea of the *Verein freier Menschen*, or the "community of free individuals—as the Moore-Aveling translation of *Capital*, Volume 1 states—or the "association of free men," in Ben Fowkes' translation. It is this very *Verein freier Menschen* that stands central to his critique of political economy and his philosophy of human emancipation (Marx 1983: 82, 1990: 170, 1993: 92).

If this union of free humanity was central to Marx's discourse, then from whence comes the ideas of the state, albeit a socialist or communist state? Or for that matter, the idea of the Red Terror which Trotsky both philosophised on and practised in the early days of the revolution, in order to ward off the White armies of Anton Denikin and Alexander Kolchak, imperialist aggression, and the encroaching revolution. Were then Trotsky and Lenin wrong in articulating a militant proletarian state led by the vanguard party, an articulation that inevitably concluded in the Stalinist counter-revolution and the consequent capitalist restoration? Thus, is there a contradiction between political Marxism and philosophical Marxism? Should we try to synthesise political Marxism and philosophical Marxism? Or should one abandon the old conception of political Marxism—with its ideas of the proletarian state, even the idea of the dictatorship of the proletariat—for philosophical Marxism? Or is there some sort of "cunning of history" that devours the project of human emancipation?

Would one, then, have to put a hermeneutic of suspicion on not merely Stalin and the manipulation of Marxism, but even on the principal works like Lenin's *State and Revolution* and Trotsky's *Terrorism and Communism*? Would these political masterpieces be privileging the

“political” over the “human?” Would Trotsky be a great writer like Leo Tolstoy, even inverting Tolstoy’s pacifism into a Trotskyite militancy, but one who forgets the humanistic aspects of Marx’s original repertoire? Or would Trotsky’s humanism be left only in his great texts like the *History of the Russian Revolution*, unable to leap into the real world? What happened that this “leap” was aborted? What happened that Lenin’s “original libertarian position of Marx and Engels”—which, in 1917, as Chattopadhyay reminds us, questioned the very idea of the state—was suddenly forgotten to create another state, more monstrous than ever imagined? (p 7). Chattopadhyay rightly informs us that it was this very idea of the state, in fact, the state as the monster—that would devour the revolution.

Trotsky appears only once in the book and that too clubbed alongside Rosa Luxemburg and Lenin (p 178). Yet, the above stated questions—relating to the idea of the state, commodity production and wage labour under socialism—were the central questions that emerge in this book. These are also the central questions pertaining to our times.

As Chattopadhyay claims

Marx’s idea of a society, infinitely nobler and more humane succeeding than the existing capitalist society, has been, for the most part outrageously deformed in its habitual representation of socialism, mostly by associating it with the socialist experience in the twentieth century in the form of Party-States. (p 1)

One must consequently look at this deformity. However, as Chattopadhyay warns, the explanation must be scientific and not a “creation of someone’s fertile brain” (p 3). Let us, therefore, look at the scientific explanation.

The Cunning of History

Reason, so Hegel claimed, is indeed cunning. And this cunning of reason, realised in history, makes history itself cunning. The term that Hegel uses is *Die List der Vernunft* (cunning of reason). What happened in the text of this cunning of reason/history is that the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution led by the great revolutionaries—Lenin, Trotsky, Bukharin, Radek, Zinoviev, Kamenev, etc—took place without them having access to the

main repertoire of Marx’s philosophy. For these revolutionaries the *Critique of Hegel’s Doctrine of the State, Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* and *Grundrisse* were completely unknown, as was the last master text dealing with non-Western societies, the *Ethnological Notebooks*.

The “Marxism” that was formed and available to the Bolsheviks, was, by and large, the Marxism of the Second International where it was basically Georgi Plekhanov who developed this form of “philosophical Marxism,” accompanied by Karl Kautsky, Antonio Labriola and Eduard Bernstein. It was only in 1927 that the *Critique of Hegel’s Doctrine of the State* was published, followed by the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* in 1932 by David Riazanov. The *Ethnological Notebooks* were published in the 1970s by Lawrence Krader. What resulted was the creation of a revolutionary political Marxism of the vanguard party (especially of Lenin and Trotsky) devoid of the philosophy outlined by Marx in the above-stated books. It is true, with the outset of the First Imperialist World War, Lenin, literally disgusted with the nationalist chauvinism of the Second International—especially Kautsky and Plekhanov—carried out a detailed study of Hegel’s *Science of Logic* in order to understand the dialectical method itself (the philosophical soul of Marxism). He said that without the understanding of the entire *Science of Logic*, it would not be possible to understand, especially, the first chapter of Marx’s *Capital*. “Consequently,” Lenin (1980: 180) lamented, “half a century later none of the Marxists understood Marx!” It is this very same statement that forms the core of Chattopadhyay’s book. Thus the question: Did 20th century Marxists really understand *Capital*?, remains central to this book.

Consequently, in order to really understand *Capital*, what comes to the fore is the understanding of the relation between the logic in *Capital* and the dialectical logic of Hegel. To have an emancipatory Marxism, one necessarily needs a dialectical and humanist Marxism, which would be impossible without immersing oneself deeply into German classical philosophy, especially as it culminated in the philosophy of Hegel.

As Marx reflects on Hegel in *Capital*, Volume 1, “I therefore openly avowed myself the pupil of that mighty thinker, and even here and there, in the theory of value, coquetted with the terms peculiar to him” (p 25, note 10). Chattopadhyay also says that Marx, in the second volume of *Capital*, refers to Hegel as his “master.” Thus, in this philosophical rendering of *Capital*, the “unknown Marx” of the *Critique of Hegel’s Doctrine of the State, Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* and *Grundrisse* becomes known. In order to understand Marx it is important to understand dialectics and the theory of alienation. Consequently, this book considers the following fundamental elements:

First is the relation between the Hegelian and Marxist dialectic and the method that inverts (*umstülpen*) Hegel, allowing one to discover (*entdecken*) the “rational kernel” that lies hidden beneath the “mystical shell,” in order that the scientific materialist dialectic is produced (p 15, note 10; Marx 1983: 29; Marx 1993: 27). In this epistemic terrain, a rigorous methodology in terms of the scientific method of inquiry and method of presentation are developed (Marx 1983: 28). Here, one understands how commodities are produced, how value and surplus value are created and how the global accumulation of capital takes place. For Chattopadhyay, there is no commodity production in socialism, just as there can be no state in socialism.

Second is the theory of alienation in modern capitalist society, where the logic of the accumulation of capital is directly related to the theory of alienation (pp 13–29). Chattopadhyay states that alienated labour is the basis of capital (pp 19–21). In fact it is not merely a theory of alienation that stands central to Marx’s critique of political economy, but a larger theory of alienation–reification–fetishism that forms the core of Marx’s repertoire. His ideas of the fetish character of capitalism—especially in his celebrated section “The Fetishism of Commodities and the Secret Thereof”—of the “metamorphosis of commodities” and of the production of reification of consciousness, can only be understood in this new problematic (Marx 1983: 76–87;

106–15). For Chattopadhyay, just as was for Marx, the proletariat's "historical profession [*Beruf*] is to revolutionize the capitalist mode of production and finally to abolish all classes" (p 4). But this *Beruf*, or mission of the proletariat cannot be understood devoid of the philosophical basis which Marx had outlined in the early 1840s. One has to abolish alienation something, 20th century Marxism in the Soviet Union or China, could never achieve (pp 21–23).

Chattopadhyay rightly says that "Marx's theoretical quest for emancipated human society started with his 1843–44 critique of Hegel's political philosophy," which led to the "critical revision of the Hegelian philosophy of right" (pp 4–5). We are thus informed of the truth of Marx's statements: "The state is an abstraction" and "the political state disappears in a true democracy" (p 5; Marx 1992: 85; 88) But if this is indeed the case, if Marxism is essentially anti-state, from whence came the so-called "socialist state"? Was 20th century Marxism then, anything but "true democracy"? Is not the state simply the "engine of class despotism" and the "national war engine of capital against labour?" (Marx 1975b: 285–86). Is it nothing but an "illusory community" having an "alien power" and thus a product of collective alienation involved in collective punishment? (Marx and Engels 1976: 52–53).

Consequently, in introducing the theory of alienation to understand Marx's critique of political economy and the theory of the state, Chattopadhyay brings in the idea of concrete unity of Marxist philosophy and the critique of political economy and the state that Dunayevskaya first seriously highlighted. Further, this theory also brings in a fresh understanding of Marx's statement: the economic base determines (*bestimmte*) the ideological superstructure, into a new statement: the reified economic base determines what Marx once called the "estranged mind" (Marx 1982: 129).

The Socialist State

This humanist reading of the critique of political economy not only displaces the mechanical and positivist rendering of historical materialism of the Second

International, but also locates the situation of the irony and cunning history, where the "dialectic of negativity" that Marx talked of in his *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* as the "moving and generating principle"—Chattopadhyay calls it "creating principle"—leads to this humanising of history (p 15; Marx 1982: 132). Further, since Lenin talked of a "state socialism," which for Chattopadhyay forms essentially the basis of "anti-emancipatory character of twentieth century socialism," the original Marxist humanising of history has to necessarily be recovered (pp 221–27). One has to thus transcend both the Old Socialism as well as capitalism with its "werewolfish hunger for profit" (p 105). Both are caught in the trap of alienation and the dehumanisation that follows. One has to transcend this site of alienation.

One must further overcome this irony and cunning of history by necessarily transcending the anti-emancipatory character of 20th century socialism, termed so, since people are considered "hired wage labourers of the state," a view that Chattopadhyay rightly claims is central to Lenin's *State and Revolution* and totally alien to Marx (p 228). Lenin's idea of socialism is in actuality state capitalism where the so-called "socialist state" functions as a "single state syndicate," or "single factory" (p 225). Here "all citizens' are transformed into 'hired employees of the state' with equality of labour, equality of wages" (p 225). If indeed, for Lenin the "state syndicate" is central to Lenin's idea of socialism, it is certain that there is an unbridgeable gap between Marx and Lenin. In this sense, Chattopadhyay is correct that 20th century socialism was essentially anti-emancipatory.

However, if 20th century socialism is anti-emancipatory, so too is capitalism. Chattopadhyay is certainly not a Francis Fukuyama who sees liberal democracy as the "end of history" and the capitalist as the "last man." Capitalism not only produces commodities, it also produces famines. As Marx states, the "money famine continues" (1983: 138). And since capitalism has taken the form of gambling (Marx 1983: 106, 1986: 478)—where finance capitalism is "increasingly separated from the real process of production" (p 105), and

where real governance is by what Marx calls "paper duplicates" (1986: 477)—what we get in capitalism is the government of duplicates. Chattopadhyay notes Marx's observations that finance capital (as interest-bearing capital) operates "independent of the movement of real capital" (p 106).

What one has to note is that this idea of "independent," is equivalent to the idea of "alienation" (Marx and Engels 1976: 53). One cannot, in any way, understand Marx's *Capital*, the theory of value and surplus value, and the process of global accumulation of capital, without understanding the theory of alienation, in fact, the theory that fully appears in Marx as the theory of alienation–reification–fetishism. In this sense while it is true that the 20th century communists were revolutionaries in the highest sense of the term, since this theory of alienation–reification–fetishism did not fall within their epistemic lens, it would be this very alienation–reification–fetishism that would devour them.

Not only did the state that they created and fashion devour them, but the very act of commodity production also devoured them. In this sense there was not much epistemic difference between Trotsky, Stalin and Mao, for whom both the state and commodity production could exist in socialist societies. How wrong they were in thinking that there could be some form of "socialist commodity production," just as they were deluded into imagining that there could be anything called a "socialist state," Marx's *Verein freier Menschen*—the union of free humanity—would not allow either commodity production or the state. Both commodity production and the state are essentially against human freedom. This irony and cunning of history would then turn out to be the greatest tragedy of history. In this sense Trotsky was not Tolstoy, but the writer of the greatest tragedy, greater than even the tragedies written by writers from Homer to Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn.

Tragic History to Human History

In the preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, Marx says that with the closing of the chapter of capitalism, all class histories would end.

In his own words: “The prehistory of human society accordingly closes with this social formation” (Marx 1978: 22). To understand this, one must take into account the very idea of history that Marx outlined, a very different type of history, not the unilinear idea of history governed by some mystical “iron laws.”

One must note that it was György Lukács, Antonio Gramsci and Dunayevskaya, followed by Kevin Anderson and Peter Hudis, who insisted that this theory of “iron laws of history” was at best some sort of fable created by a positivist reading of Marx, a reading that generations of Marxist thinkers developed, from the reading of Engels. In this sense one must try not merely to differentiate Marx from Lenin and Trotsky, but also from Engels. There is no magical equivalence between Marx and Engels. True they were great friends and comrades. However, current understandings of Marxism stemming from critical readings of Marx’s *Capital*—especially after the *Marx–Engels–Gesamtausgabe* (MEGA) project went to Amsterdam following the collapse of the Soviet Union—point to the new critical and humanist interpretation of Marxism. Hassan Mortazavi’s 2008 Persian translation of *Capital*, is one example of these new humanistic translations and renderings of Marx’s magnum opus.

This is, perhaps, because people were more or less dependent on not the 1872–75 French edition of *Capital* (the one that Marx himself preferred) but on the 1890 German edition, edited by Engels. Engels claims in this edition that he “made some further additions to the German text ... after again comparing the French edition and Marx’s manuscript remarks” (Engels 1983: 35). However, whether “Engels really did so” has been contested. According to Kevin Anderson (1983), the changes were not actually made by Engels.

This question can apply to Chattopadhyay as well. Does Chattopadhyay—with his deep critical sense of a committed Marxologist able to go deep into Marx’s repertoire thus see the critical relation between the theory of alienation and capital accumulation—actually chart a new chapter for human emancipation

for the 21st century? Or is he, like Trotsky, caught in the same tragedy that he tries to avoid?

Unilinear Historicism?

At the outset one must state that Chattopadhyay is against the idea of unilinear historicism (pp 173, 179). There is a finesse of a Marxist scholar that will not allow this. For instance, he talks of the “passage from the ‘pre-history of human society’ to humanity’s history through revolutionary transformation of the old society” (p 157). He denies a teleological model, saying that if it signifies that developments are due to some sort of predetermined design in history, then “Marx’s conception of history is certainly not teleological” (p 179).

Yet, one has to ask the question: Despite this denial, is Chattopadhyay a unilinearist? This merits question, because Chattopadhyay does not talk of the alternative to the linear model of history: from primitive communism via slave society to feudalism and socialism. He does not talk of the Asiatic mode of production as a separate mode that interested Marx, nor does the question of caste appear in this book. Unlike Marx’s *Grundrisse*, which theorises on “clan community” (*Stammgemeinschaft*) and the way “Oriental despotism” extracted surplus product (Marx 1973: 472–73, Anderson 2010b: 156–57), the argument that there is an alternative to the European idea of history is never questioned.

In fact, Chattopadhyay says that this unilinear model is the materialist conception of history. He calls this the “general position of Marx” (p 190, note 14). Capitalism becomes some “ideal type” for him when he says that capitalism is “the most revolutionary mode of production” (p 179). According to him, one has to wade into the muddy waters of capitalism in order to achieve socialism. Further, he does not talk of how capitalism came to India. In this sense Chattopadhyay does not critique colonialism and the coming of colonial capital in the non-Western world.

In Chapter 7 titled “Marx on the Global Reach of Capital,” Chattopadhyay touches upon “capital’s spatial dimension” (pp 98–100). Here, there seems to be

some sort of unilinear historicism where he quotes the following excerpt from the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*:

The need of a constantly expanding market for its producers chases the bourgeoisie over the whole surface of the globe ... All old-established national industries have been destroyed or are being destroyed ... [Capitalism] compels all nations, on pain of extinction, to adopt the bourgeois mode of production; it compels them to become bourgeois themselves. In one word, it creates a world after its own image. (pp 99–100)

Likewise, in the 1867 preface to the first German edition of *Capital*, Volume 1, we read the following statement from Marx:

The country that is more developed industrially only shows, to the less developed, the image of its own future. (1983: 19)

What is this “image?” How can developed capitalism of the metropolitan centre be duplicated in the periphery nations of capital accumulation? Would this imply that the whole world has necessarily to follow the path of West European nations? Is this also not a Eurocentric reading of history? Unlike Anderson, who as a serious Marxologist goes deep into the diverse texts and letters of Marx, Chattopadhyay seems spellbound by this “general law of history.” Anderson—going into the debates of the Russian comrades before the 1917 revolution—quotes from Trotsky’s *History of the Russian Revolution* that it was

The Russian Mensheviks ... [who] took this conditional statement of Marx unconditionally. Backward Russia, they said, ought not to push ahead, but humbly follow the prepared models. (Anderson 2010b: 178)

In this context, can Chattopadhyay be considered a Menshevik?

Unlike Chattopadhyay, Anderson (2010b: 178) critiques this idea of “iron necessity.” He says that in the French edition of *Capital*, Volume 1, Marx rewrote the statement as:

The country that is more developed industrially only shows, to those who follow it up the industrial ladder, the image of its own future. (Anderson 2010b: 178)

Chattopadhyay does not deal with these issues. As a serious Marxologist, he does take into account the various editions of *Capital*, Volume 1, including the French edition, but he ignores the changes. He ignores that those societies

not yet embarked upon “the industrial path,” such as Russia and India, were now explicitly bracketed out, leaving open the notion of alternative possibilities for them (Anderson 2010b). Devoid of this concrete setting there emerges an ahistorical understanding of capital accumulation. Chattopadhyay further states

Surplus value created at one pole necessitates for its realization the creation of surplus value at another pole. As capital tends, on the one hand, to create surplus value continuously, it tends on the other hand, to create complementary poles of exchange that is, fundamentally to call forth production based on capital and thus propagate the capitalist mode of production across the globe. (p 100)

What then happens to the non-capitalist world? How would pre-capitalism deal with the coming of global capital? Most importantly, is pre-capitalism simply to be written off as “feudalism,” or should one consider the inherent anti-capitalist, anti-colonial character of certain sectors of pre-capitalist societies to be essentially revolutionary, as Marx (1977) notes in his 1881 letter to Vera Zasulich?

Likewise in chapter 10, “Marx on Dialectical Progression towards Socialism” (pp 157–95), one notices seeds of a form of unilinearism in Chattopadhyay. When he talks of socialism as “the offspring of capital” (pp 157–61), the question of whether pre-capitalist societies can directly herald socialism can be raised, along with a parallel question of whether one has to necessarily go through—to borrow a term of Marx—the “dreadful vicissitudes of capitalism” (Marx 1977: 153).

The Unique Russian Question

For Chattopadhyay, the “Russian question” that Marx mentions in his 1881 letter to Zasulich is only a “unique situation,” which “automatically excludes its generalization into some kind of ‘law’ applicable to the backward peasant societies” (p 163). Thus,

The singularity and “uniqueness” of the Russian case ... [is] sufficient to exclude any generalization of this case (as a prototype) to the pre-capitalist peasant society anywhere else in the world. In this sense, this unique example naturally does not affect Marx’s general position. (pp 167–68)

What is this general position? It can be elaborated as

[T]he development of labour as social labour and a high development of the productive powers of labour could not be generated by the “original unity” between the labour and the conditions of production as manifested in the different forms of natural “communism” (and small family mode of production). (p 168)

Here Chattopadhyay mimes the reductionist thesis of forces of production acting as the master narrative of all history. He says that Marx’s reflections of Russia only refer to a “hypothetical situation” (p 171). He differs with Dunayevskaya and Teodor Shanin on the possibility and necessity of revolutions in “backward countries” (p 170–71). According to Chattopadhyay, one has to read Marx “non-ideologically.” Here, he is most certainly right. But what is this non-ideological reading of Marx? It is a reading which claims that Marx’s “texts contain no reference to a ‘proletarian’ or ‘socialist’ revolution in Russia ... it is always a question of the ‘Russian Revolution *tout court*’” (p 171).

Thus for Chattopadhyay, the proletariat has to necessarily be present for a successful revolution (p 171). In this sense he does become a reductionist. Revolutions in “backward,” or to be precise, peasant societies “had not been foreseen by Marx and Engels” (p 192, note 21). However, when one talks of the necessity of the proletariat, it also implies the necessity of capital. Such an argument becomes an apologia for capitalism.

In contrast to this, it is necessary to bring in Anderson’s (2010a) phrase: “not just capital and class” which matters in the context of revolutions in the non-Western world. After all, there are resistances to capitalism (and colonialism) that are overdetermined as thus “complexly-structurally-unevenly-determined,” to borrow a term from Louis Althusser (1969: 209). The argument that capitalism has to “progress” also implies that colonialism has to enter non-capitalist societies.

Chattopadhyay thus talks of

the competitive zeal among the European nations, to seize Asiatic products and American wealth through the colonial system, in destroying the feudal limits of production. (p 103)

A critic could say that one should not talk of the “competitive zeal” of the European colonialists, but the plain plunder and murder instead. This narrative of the plunder and murder of colonialism is seemingly absent in this book. To recall Marx

If money, according to Augier, comes into the world with a congenital blood-stain on one cheek capital comes dripping from head to foot, from every pore, with blood and dirt. (Marx 1983: 711–12)

Chattopadhyay further says that

while the sudden expansion of trade and the creation of the world exercised a predominant influence on the downfall of the old mode of production ... this happened, conversely, on the basis of the already existing capitalist mode of production. (p 103)

He then goes on to quote from *Capital*, Volume 3: “The world market itself forms the basis of the capitalist mode of production” (p 103). However, the life and the death struggle that Marx mentions in his 1850s articles for the *New York Tribune* and his analyses in the *Ethnological Notebooks* have not been considered in this book.

Rethinking the Idea of ‘Progress’

Chattopadhyay considers Marx a “rethinker of progress” (pp 172–87). In this sense, he contradicts his propositions that have been mentioned in the previous section of this book. In the earlier section, he worked under the ambit of the “laws of history” and the “laws of motion governing capitalism,” while in this section, when mentioning the “early” Marx, he brings out the humanistic part of Marx’s repertoire. The problem is that he is unable to theoretically reconcile this contradiction, that is, the laws of history vs humanistic intervention. What is important to note is that 20th century Marxism—especially as reflected in the discourses of academic socialism, be it Louis Althusser and the “structuralist problematic” or the historicist and humanist Marxism that developed since Lukács, Gramsci and Karl Korsch—has been grappling with this contradiction.

Chattopadhyay rightly speaks of understanding progress through the ambit of the materialist dialectic. Historical movement is dialectical in the sense that

there is, as he quotes Marx's *Poverty of Philosophy*, the "coexistence of two contradictory sides and their fusion into a new category" (p 174). And it is this "dialectic of negativity," as mentioned earlier, that is the soul of Marx's dialectical materialism (pp 156–57).

Capital thus, "through its inherent contradictions, creates the conditions of its own demise as well as the elements for building a union of free individuals" (p 156). And capitalism as a stage in human history is "superior," since it creates the "universal development of the productive powers of labour, a basic condition for building the new society" (p 173). Only the capitalist mode of production creates the "necessary subjective and material conditions for building a 'union of free individuals'" (p 179).

This is based on a humanistic idea of history where truth is not to be understood as a Hegelian automation, where humans follow this automation (pp 179–80). Instead Chattopadhyay quotes from *The Holy Family* where Marx and Engels (1980) described history as "nothing," but "the activities of the humans following their

objectives" (p 180). Thus Chattopadhyay breaks free from the teleological idea of progress. There is "no blind fatality" in Marx (p 187), "no teleology in his conception of history" (p 194). The "society of freely associated producers" will simply not allow this (p 188).

Chattopadhyay denies that Marx was ever a Eurocentric thinker (p 179). In this sense his repertoire is different from that of Anderson, who sees, at times, forms of Eurocentric ideas in Marx, especially in the *Manifesto* and in the articles written for the *New York Tribune* (2010b: 9). In Marx's 1853 writings on India, Anderson finds "qualified support for colonialism," with Marx even discussing in "glowing terms what he considers to be the modernizing effects of British colonialism on Indian society" (Anderson 2010b: 11–22).

Likewise, Chattopadhyay critiques what is seen as Marx's "patriarchal bias" (pp 75–77). He denies that women's labour has been ignored by Marx, instead recalling the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* where the "immediate, natural, necessary relation of the human

to the human is the behaviour of the *man* to the *woman*" (p 76). This further shows, "to what extent the natural behavior of man has become human" (p 76).

Chattopadhyay further recalls Marx's 1868 letter to his friend Louis Kugelmann:

Anyone who knows something about history knows also that great upheavals (*Umwälzungen*) are impossible without the feminine ferment. Social progress is exactly measured by the social status of the beautiful sex (the ugly ones included). (p 76)

Conclusions

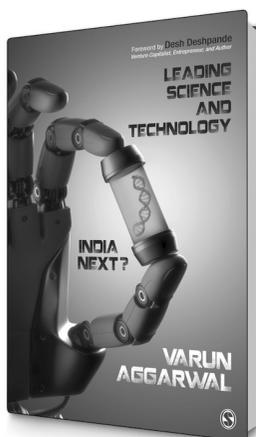
Marx's Associated Mode of Production is indeed a classic of a master Marxologist steeped in the original works of Marx. Marx's *Ethnological Notebooks* are now widely discussed and related to the historical materialism of *The German Ideology*, where the family is related to the mode of production, and the sexual division of labour is brought to the forefront. One can now form pertinent arguments for a more creative understanding of modes of production. Thus, the reality of "family labour," the "traditional family ties," the "worker family," "domestic

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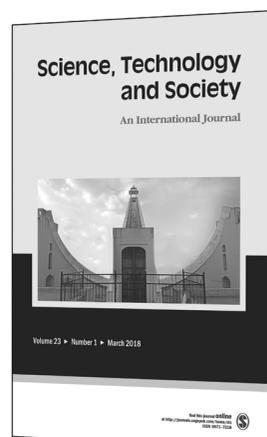


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economy” and “domestic labour,” are understood in their respective perspectives (p 80). In this sense, Marx becomes the original feminist. Not only is Marx the original feminist, for Chattopadhyay, Marx has to also be understood as a socialist humanist where:

The standpoint of the old materialism is “civil” society; the standpoint of the new is human society, or socialized humanity. (Marx 1975a: 30)

It is this desperate quest for socialised humanity that refers to “Twentieth century socialism” as an “illusion of the epoch” (pp 215–35). Twentieth century socialism did not “socialise,” either in Russia, China or Cuba. Merely nationalising property does not lead to any form of socialism. Rather, it only leads to illusions of socialism, which more often than not, come dressed as dictators and Oriental despots. In such a scenario, one can only expect to be haunted by the ghost of the counter-revolution, and the ghost of the “illusion” of 20th century socialism.

The best way to exorcise these ghosts is to critically expose what happened in the 20th century. Chattopadhyay’s book has to be read alongside the recent classics: Paul Le Blanc’s *Marx, Lenin, and the Revolutionary Experience*, Alexander Rabinowitch’s *The Bolsheviks Come to Power*, Alan Woods and Ted Grant’s *Lenin and Trotsky: What They Really Stood For* and Lars T Lih’s *Lenin Rediscovered*. Chattopadhyay’s statement that Lenin’s arguments “in favour of socialist revolution in Russia in 1917 were a radical revision of the materialist conception of history” (p 223), has to be seen in the context of real history. For Chattopadhyay, Stalin’s infantile and murderous insanity was rooted in the terrible father, Lenin. Both Lenin and Stalin in this rendering, could only appear as in Ivan Turgenev’s *Fathers and Sons*. Thus the tragedy that would follow was inevitable. What one forgets in this tragicomic rendering of history is that Lenin’s idea of the party, people, humanity, the national question, etc, was totally distinct from that of Stalin. The main issue, that Stalin feared the revolution, while for Lenin, the “sublime enthusiasm” (to borrow a phrase of Žižek) of world revolutions formed his corpus, is never considered.

Chattopadhyay does not mention Lenin in reference to the national question, the party, the question of the relation between philosophy and political economy and the importance in having the most modern theory for the building of communism. He refers only to Victor Serge and R V Daniels to support his arguments against Lenin and the Russian revolution. With regard to the Civil War and the White Terror he says nothing. Instead, real history, the history of imperialist wars, revolutions and counter-revolutions are converted into stories of self-emancipation.

For Marx, the question is of relating philosophy (thus the philosophy of human emancipation) with real history (Marx and Engels 1977: 253–54). It is true that 20th century Marxism as “really (non) existing socialism” is passé (p 31). We cannot repeat it. For this a rigorous philosophical understanding of Marxism is necessary. But then we cannot live in the “world of pure thought” and “sanctimonious illusions” (Marx and Engels 1977: 254).

This is where one differs with this otherwise excellent book. One cannot substitute real history with the “idea” of history. Chattopadhyay’s argument however rings out: Go back to the originals! Otherwise instead of the ghosts of 20th century socialism coming back to haunt us, it will be the ghosts of the global fascists.

This is the real problem, especially with the Left in India that refuses to read the originals, or deal with real history. We then do not become revolutionaries, but are converted into the estranged Romeos and Juliets in love with parliamentary democracy in front of liberalism, fascism, Stalinism and all the tinpot dictators of the world.

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