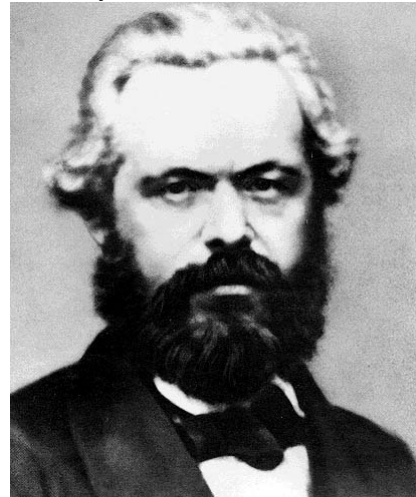


## **Down with Marxism, Long live Karl Marx**

The writings of Marx and what we know today as this or that school of Marxism are two very different things, often standing in opposition to each other. Perhaps no author has ever been subject to so much of misinterpretation by his critics and admirers alike as Karl Marx (1818-1883) was. Such a phenomenon shouldn't appear a paradox either, especially to a person who is conversant with a famous dictum of 17<sup>th</sup> Century political theorist Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679), often quoted by Marx himself that if geometrical axioms affected human interests attempts would certainly be made to refute them. As a matter of fact if the debate centring round what Marx said or didn't say still remains alive, nay grows in its loudness from day to day, and that too notwithstanding the dissolution of Soviet Union and the Socialist States of Eastern Europe in early 90s, its prime reason can but be traced to some kind of organic bond, that exists unaffected to this day between the original works of Marx and a vast multitude of human interests, which he treated with the transcendent vision of a prophet, ruthless dispassion of a scientist and the fervent passion of a revolutionist. No doubt Marx produced a stupendous volume of works and correspondences, and that too covering a vast array of subjects falling under both natural and social sciences besides metaphysics- a fact which led some people to ascribe all-time greatness to him. But they are badly mistaken. In fact, several authors among whom some had come before, and others after Marx, produced more in quantitative terms than Marx. For instance, G.F.Hegel (1770-1831) whom Marx considered his teacher in dialectics had authored a mountain of tracts, which could by far outweigh the totality of Marx's works in terms of sheer volume. Despite the lasting relevance, mostly academic in nature, of some works of Hegel like those on logic and dialectics, the philosopher Hegel has long back been disposed off by the intellectual world never to return in the sense in which Marx returns today with all his analytical wit and millennial vision. Even V.I.Lenin (1870-1924), famously known as the greatest flag-bearer of Marx and Marxism wrote and spoke much more than what Marx did. But as irony would have it, with the collapse of Soviet camp, the works of Lenin were shelved too.



Not that there didn't appear authors and thinkers and even revolutionists before, during or after Marx, each offering his or her supposedly unique school of social engineering with its resounding impact felt on the course of world history. There were in fact plenty of them. For instance, John Maynard Keynes (1883-1946) who wrote 'General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money' in 1936 in response to Great Depression of 1929-30 and advocated therein the case for state intervention in the free market economies, soon labelled as the theory of 'Welfare State' remained a celebrity in the subsequent decades up until the mid-1970s for his supposed discovery of an ever-lasting anti-dote to the recurrent cycle of crises endemic to world capitalism which was predicted by Marx in the previous century. But as is today too well-known, following the onset of globalisation in the wake of the deflationary outbursts of late 70s Keynes is no longer the pet theorist of the capitalist world. Strange but true, as

the current wave of globalisation, after consuming up the ex-communist lands of Soviet Union and Eastern Europe in its irresistible and everwidening sweep, makes its headway towards new terrains, Keynes once the God-send saviour of capitalism is being as blissfully forgotten and dismissed as Marx, once the sworn adversary of capitalism is being consciously appropriated and re-evaluated.

When the rebellious masses of erstwhile Soviet Union and communist States of Eastern Europe pulled down the statues of V.I.Lenin (1870-1924), Joseph Stalin (1878-1953) and several other Red heroes along with those of Karl Marx and Fredrich Engels (1820-1895), they did it out of a sheer rage accumulated over time and consciously directed against a totalitarian and dehumanising regime, of which these long dead figures of history appeared as its celebrated scions and icons of the first order. But retrospectively speaking, little did the infuriated multitude in their libertarian euphoria think then that the actual progenitors of 'Marxism' were not Marx and his collaborator Engels, but their sworn progenies such as Lenin, Stalin & Co. Now that a new generation of young people, with their fresh experience of freedom and exposure to the world at large have come on the scene in the post-communist territories of Soviet Block, they have started distinguishing the grain from the chaff, the progenitors from progenies and precisely speaking, Marx from Marxism.

Strange may it seem, even London the megapolis which once presided over the world-wide colonisation drive as minutely depicted by Marx in his numerous writings and where Marx had died and was buried unnoticed and unsung about 124 years back in its High Gate Cemetery, was all poised to make a radical atonement for its brutal neglect of the man during his lifetime, when a BBC Survey of 2005 declared Marx as "The greatest thinker of the last 1000 years".

Another surprising revelation is the fact that Marx is now more fondly read, analysed and discussed in the United States, the wire-puller of current wave of capitalist globalisation than anywhere else. In proof of this truth, a long extract from Prof.Randhir Singh's seminal talk in 2001 on Creed of the New Millennium under the title 'Return of Marx' is worth reproducing:

*"Towards the end of eighties, as the communist regimes collapsed in Eastern Europe, the New Yorker, 'an upmarket magazine' in the United States, celebrated the occasion with an article by Robert Heilbroner entitled 'Triumph of Capitalism', whose argument reverberated worldwide, setting off a new round of hosannas for capitalism and renewed pronouncements of 'the death of Marxism', ..... less than a decade later, towards the end of 1997, in a bout of futurology, bringing together a series of articles around the theme 'what next?', the same New Yorker went looking for the 'next most influential thinker', and the article, written by an Englishman Davies who is no Marxist, now or ever before, was entitled, 'The Return of Karl Marx'! (Davis felt persuaded to write the article when a friend, having reached the highest positions in the US corporate world told him that it was just as Marx had it). The article had concluded: 'His (Marx's) books will be worth reading as long as capitalism endures'. Davies is right. I will only underline that none has studied and analysed capitalism better than Marx and that he has*

*indeed been prophetic in his analysis of capitalism. Hence his continuing relevance for our time and the need for us to turn or return to Marx for a viable creed for the new millennium”.*

Now let's come to the moot question of our times: why Marx is being revived by the very States and peoples where he was treated as an intellectual outcaste until the other day, and more so when the major bastions of official Marxism have already fallen away with a few remaining communist States, such as China and Cuba maintaining a tongue-in-cheek approach to Marxism as such. Since Marx and Marx alone, not Lenin, nor Stalin nor Mao Tse Tung (1893-1976), nor Leon Trotsky (1879-1940) and nor even his closest comrade Engels, rather in contradistinction to the whole lot of them is being resurrected without any organised effort being made by any particular State or Party, the answer to the question must be traced out from the works of Marx himself. There must be a sober 'other Marx' which lay overshadowed beneath the eye-catching 'standard Marx'. Were not this 'other Marx' proficient enough to address to the mind-boggling posers of our time, there was absolutely no chance for summoning, let alone re-installing him, especially when the whole band of militants who swore by his 'holy' name were getting disbanded or disparaged all over. What are those imponderables of the contemporary world, which none else but Marx and Marx alone can illuminate:

- How come the 'moribund stage of world capitalism' (to use Lenin's expression from his 'Imperialism- the highest stage of capitalism') produced the 'third scientific and technological revolution' which far surpassed in its sweep and creativity the previous two, namely the first Industrial Revolution of 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the second Industrial Revolution of early 20<sup>th</sup> century? Going by Lenin's prognosis, capitalism would have stood by now on its last and tottering legs. But the cruel fact is that capitalism not only survived a long series of intermittent crises small and big, but also reconquered by no effort of its own (since the Soviet Block collapsed under its own contradictions) the territories lost to the so-called anti-capitalist socialist States. How to explain it?
- How come Keynesian prescriptions that worked wonders for several decades ensuring the recovery and stabilisation of capitalist system in the post-World War-II period failed to respond to the challenge of regenerative potential of capitalism marked from the late 70s of the last century. In fact Keynes was a brilliant crisis manager, and as such he couldn't look beyond a pathological state of capitalism. Rather his theoretical tools came up as a formidable stumbling block before the very strident drive of capitalism to open up, a phenomenon which is now called 'globalisation' i.e. opening up the countries of the world to each other for both common and competitive exploitation of the global resources. The question arose, if the current phenomenon of globalisation or in other words, the extra-ordinary boom of capitalism world-wide couldn't be explained by Keynes, how to explain it?
- How come the socialist economies which were promised by their protagonists to remain free from internal crisis of any sort, showed increasing vulnerability to crisis of every sort, the net result being all-round impoverishment of common,

average man. Initially the people acquiesced in the loss of their political freedoms on the assurance by the regime-that-be of enough bread for everybody. But at long last, the people found themselves to have been robbed of both bread and freedom. How to explain the failure of socialism to take root in the countries where it was introduced following some or other sort of political revolution ?

Since Lenin provided the theoretical foundation to the upbuilding of these so-called socialist States, he and his writings were soon identified as 'socialism miscarried'. How to explain the failure of socialism, nay boomranging of 'socialism' against its avowed actor the 'proletariat' as already witnessed in Soviet Block countries? Whether the word 'socialism' needs to be redefined? Whether there is any model of thought within the camp of socialism itself, that can adequately explain the unintended and unrecoverable reverses of 'socialism'?

Yes. There is one such author and his model, that can more than adequately explain the above imponderables. He is Karl Marx and his model is not the well-known *Das Kapital* (1867), but what is contained in his more than 1000-page manuscripts called *Grundrisse der Kritik der Politischen Ökonomie (Outlines of the Critique of Political Economy)* or simply known as *Grundrisse* (1857-58), which was discovered about 50 years after his death. The *Grundrisse* in fact contains a detail description of the very method and results of enquiry substantiated by a vast wealth of theoretical tools and empirical data that enabled Marx to present his salient findings in *Das Kapital*. The quintessence of *Das Kapital* can't be grasped without a study of *Grundrisse*. And on reading *Grundrisse*, one discovers an altogether different Marx, who holds the unfailing key to the imponderables of our time. What is that key constitutes the subject-matter of a separate and elaborate discourse.

It is befitting to quote again Prof.Randhir Singh,

"It is ironic that at a time when the world is behaving, so to speak, in a most Marxian manner, all sorts of wise men have taken to proclaiming the obsolescence of Marxism. Far from being obsolete, Marxism has become all the more relevant today for those in search of a viable creed for our times." (*Professor Randhir Singh in course of his Lecture 'Return of Karl Marx' delivered at the Foundation for Social Responsibility as part of the lecture series on Creeds for the New Millennium, 2001*).

I agree with the spirit of the above statement of Prof.Singh only except a single difference. In place of the word 'Marxism' he should have used simply 'Marx'.

**Chitta Behera**

**28 December 2006**