

Marx on India: A Revisionist Agenda

Sujit K Das

Echoing Hegel, Karl Marx said, "Indian society has no history at all, at least no known history. What we call its history, is but the history of the successive intruders who founded their empires on the passive basis of that unresisting and unchanging society." He thus blamed India for her own subjugation to the Arabs, Turks, Tartars, Moguls etc. who were identified by Marx as foreign barbarians. By this logic Marx justified India's further subjugation by the British, introduced by Marx as a superior civilization. He did so with this remark, "The question, therefore, is not whether the English had a right to conquer India, but whether we are to prefer India conquered by the Turk, by the Persian, by the Russian, to India conquered by the Briton".¹ His novel argument appeared to be like this: if barbarians could conquer foreign nations, then the superior civilization ought to have an unquestionable natural right to indulge in such barbarian acts. This is a very transparent imperialist argument. In the socialist/communist viewpoint, no civilized nation has any right to forcibly conquer another nation. Barbarian nations also do not possess that right but conquer they do and that is because they just cannot help deviate from their barbarian essence. Thus in the socialist viewpoint, the Europeans were essentially barbarians. It is difficult to forget that it was Marx who once said, "A nation cannot become free and at the same time continue to oppress other nations".² Can one then call the English a free nation? Be that as it may, Marx continued, "England has to fulfil a double mission in India: one destructive, the other regenerating - the annihilation of Asiatic society, and the laying of the material foundations of Western society in Asia".³ This destructive mission was described in detail on numerous occasions. To mention a few :

i. plunder of India. In Marx's own words,

"There cannot, however, remain any doubt but that the misery inflicted by the British on Hindustan is of an essentially different and infinitely more intensive kind than all Hindustan had to suffer before. I do not allude to European despotism, planted upon Asiatic despotism, by the British East India Company, forming a more monstrous combination than any of the divine monsters...This is no distinctive feature of British colonial rule, but only an imitation of the Dutch, and so much so that in order to characterize the working of the British East India Company, it is sufficient to literally repeat what Sir Stamford Raffles, the English Governor of Java, said of the old Dutch East India Company".

"The Dutch Company, actuated by the spirit of gain, and viewing their subjects with less regard or consideration than a West Indian planter formerly viewed a gang upon his estate, because the latter had paid the purchase money of human property, which the other had not, employed all the existing machinery of despotism to squeeze from the people their utmost mite of contribution, the last dregs of their labour, thus aggravated the evils of a

- capricious semi-barbarous Government, by working it with all the practised ingenuity of politicians, and all the monopolizing selfishness of traders".⁴
- ii. breakdown of the entire framework of Indian society.⁵
 - iii. disintegration of Indian handloom and spinning wheel.⁶
 - iv. regular transport of colossal treasures from India to England.⁷
 - v. an abominable system of taxation, regular ruinous wars, leading to permanent financial deficit in the Indian budget, stoppage of public works, and a no less abominable state of justice and law.⁸
 - vi. it was done because the English conquered India to make money out of it.⁹
 - vii. the profound hypocrisy and inherent barbarism of the British bourgeoisie were exposed in their acts of atrocious extortion in India.¹⁰
 - viii. Marx described various methods and tricks that the British employed for continued regular plunder of treasures from India, particularly the abominable system of taxation".¹¹
 - ix. Marx also touched on such issues as of destruction of Indian industry, regular production of famines over which the English developed a sort of mastery over the years etc.¹²

In the midst of all these atrocities Marx welcomed this destruction, as he firmly believed that the Indians, without suffering such destruction, could not come out of the terribly miserable life they were leading at the time. Marx went on to describe such life as a land of Oriental despotism, where unspeakable cruelties and massacres perpetrated against helpless unresisting populations being routine; generally the life of the people thrived on subsistence, economy was stagnant, a sort of undignified vegetative life ridden with casteism, slavery, superstition, with animal worship and human sacrifice being practised as a ritual.¹³ Marx predicted that this characteristic English criminal project of unparalleled destruction over the Indian people would act as 'the unconscious tool of history in bringing about' a fundamental social revolution in Asia without which mankind could not fulfil its destiny. The way to bring about such revolution was in the fulfilment of England's other mission of regeneration as Marx referred to earlier. How did the English perform in this other task? After about a century of exploitation and destruction of India, Marx had a look and said that no symptom of regeneration had yet appeared. Just after a month, however, he changed his mind and said that the work of regeneration had begun.¹⁴ Marx pointedly identified those works that the British performed such as:

- i) the political unity of India.
- ii) the native army organized by the British.
- iii) the free press.
- iv) the Zamindari and Ryotwari systems as two distinct forms of private property in land.
- v) creation of an Europeanized native group.
- vi) a combination of railways and steam vessels transport.

All these, in Marx's expectation, were to bring about regeneration and "that once fabulous country will thus be actually annexed to the Western world".¹⁵

1.1 Why Marx wanted such utter destruction and intolerable misery upon the innocent Indian people who never did anything against the English? It was because Marx had a misguided theory of his own that made him believe that without total destruction by the English, the unfortunate Indians wouldn't be able by themselves to proceed towards the path of prosperity, because the Indian economy suffered from a peculiar Asiatic Mode of Production which made it a stagnant, unproductive economy, and until that economy is destroyed, to be replaced by bourgeois mode production India was doomed to misery forever. But he added, "The Indians will not be able to reap the fruits of the new elements of society scattered among them by the British bourgeoisie, till in Great Britain itself the now ruling classes shall have been supplanted by the industrial proletariat, or till the Hindus themselves shall have grown strong enough to throw off the English yoke altogether".¹⁶ What is so special about English plunder? Why this peculiar insistence of Marx that plunder by no other country could do the trick? On this question Marx wrote elsewhere that the European bourgeoisie after conquering the barbarian nations, did compel them "to adopt bourgeois mode of production; it compels them to introduce what it calls civilization into their midst i.e. to become bourgeois themselves ...so it has made barbarian and semi-barbarian countries dependent on the civilized, nations of peasants on nations of bourgeois, the East on the West"¹⁷. Frankly, it appears to be plain and simple fantasy and wishful thinking on the part of Marx against all aspects of social reality. Nowhere the European bourgeoisie has undertaken such suicidal project of establishing bourgeois mode of production in any colony before, during and after Marx. Moreover, during the period of European conquest of colonies, there was no bourgeoisie in Europe, and by largely depending on the surplus plundered from the colonies, the Europe itself became dependent on the so-called barbarian nations for its survival, growth and development. Had Marx not been rendered insensitive by racial chauvinism and Orientalism, he would have clearly seen that actually the West had become dependent on the East. Driven by their own selfish material interest the West employed all, including violent means to prevent the East from adopting a bourgeois mode of production as it would have been suicidal for themselves if they were such fools as to create competitors of themselves. Marx made another major faux pas by certifying the plundering country Britain as an "unconscious tool of history in bringing" Indian revolution, being carried away wide off the track of reality and reason. England rather consciously acted as a thoroughgoing agent of counter-revolution in India as did the other European imperialists in their own colonies, ever since the notorious Columbus started it in 1492. While Marx had never witnessed or known of any such revolution in his own lifetime, there were many examples of counter-revolution for him to notice. All the non-white, non-Christian nations in the colonies had been injured and maimed to such an extent by the white, Christian Europeans that all their avenues of progress were crushed and closed - in Asia, Africa, America everywhere. What the so-called European bourgeoisie brought in there is now known as the development of underdevelopment. So, this erroneous, racial

and harmful theory of ultimate beneficial effect of imperialist destruction is to be rejected lock, stock and barrel and banished forever.

- 1.2 Before giving expression to his own prejudiced viewpoint about cruelty, massacre, casteism, slavery, superstition in the Eastern societies, Marx would have done better to compare what he had supposedly observed in the East with the cruelty, massacre, racism, slavery and slave trade, Christian superstitions that the so-called civilized Europeans routinely committed and suffered for centuries, of which Marx himself was more thoroughly aware. In that case, he would have thought twice before calling the European societies civilized. But this may well appear wishful thinking on our part, since Marx himself appeared so much immersed in typical European racial prejudice that he contradicted himself very often. At one time, he stated that India was a poor country with subsistence economy since antiquity, and next he told us of India was a fabulous country! He did not, however, disclose how a poor country turned into a fabulous country. He described an England that was a plunderer, pirate, thief, and barbarian, and at the same time declared that it would be the pinnacle of progress for India to imitate the West. So, it appears rather prudent to reject what Marx said on this score.
- 1.3 Regarding Marx's certificate of 'superior civilization' to Britain, it is relevant to explain that Marx, in his entire works, never disclosed his parameters of evaluating or measuring a civilization superior or inferior, or say, civilized or barbarian. Though Marx himself, on many occasions, recorded numerous barbarous atrocities committed by the white, Christian Euro-American nations, he liberally handed out certificates of such nature to them without explaining why the Euro-Americans ought to enjoy a birthright to commit barbarity? Self-contradictions were, however, everywhere in the Marxian narrative. About the very same superior civilization, British, Marx wrote, "The profound hypocrisy and inherent barbarism of bourgeois civilization lies unveiled before our eyes, turning from its home, where it assumes respectable forms, to the colonies, where it goes naked. ... Did they not, in India, to borrow an expression of that great robber, Lord Clive himself, resort to atrocious extortion, when simple corruption could not keep pace with their rapacity? ... Did they not, in order to make money out of the pilgrims streaming to temples of Orissa and Bengal, take up the trade in the murder and prostitution perpetrated in the temple...?"¹⁸ In contrast to such characteristics of the civilized specimen of humanity i.e. English, another Marxian description, this time of the poor Indians may be placed for comparison. In the same article Marx described the Indians as 'gentle natives', "whose submission even is counterbalanced by a certain calm nobility, who, notwithstanding their natural languor, have astonished the British officers by their bravery, whose country has been the source of our languages, our religions and who represent the type of ancient German in Jat and the ancient Greek in the Brahmin". Still, Marx held these Indians as semi-barbarians.²⁰ In view of the foregoing it is customary to ignore altogether such Marxian certificates.
- 1.4 Regarding the factors that Marx enumerated and predicted to act as instruments of regeneration of India, it was not difficult to see that here also

wishful thinking played its due role. Political unity under the foreign guns can hardly serve the purpose of politics of the subjugated people of India. Marx himself had seen that it was not effective during the Sipahi uprising of 1857. In Marx's time, there was no free press even in Europe. The Zamindari and Ryotwari systems were widely practiced in pre-British India, when private property in land did effectively operate but in the new English system, the property rights of the peasants were abolished and the Zaminder and the state were made the sole proprietors. On the railway system Marx himself remarked that it was useless to the Indians. The Europeanised native group, true to British expectation acted, in the main, as the obligatory comprador class which was a necessary instrument for imperialist exploitation in all colonies as in India.²¹

2. Marx, however, provided the semi-barbarian history-less India with a piece of history of his own making. Presenting the socio-political structure, Marx said that Indian society was composed of geographically distinct but almost identical self-sufficient village communities. "Those small and extremely ancient Indian communities ...are based on possession in common of the land, on the blending of agriculture and handicrafts, and on an unalterable division of labour, which serves, whenever a new community is started, as a plan and scheme ready cut and dried...each forms a compact whole producing all it requires ...the land is tilled in common, and the produce divided among its members. At the same time, spinning and weaving are carried on in each family as subsidiary industries". Other manufacturers and service-givers included the Chief inhabitant who was judge, police and tax gatherer; the book-keeper accounting for production; public prosecutor also looking after security; border-guard; irrigation manager; priest; schoolmaster; astrologer; smith; carpenter; potter; barber; washerman; silversmith; poet. Politically this organization resembled a corporation or township and it operated like a municipal government by means of common democratic practice. But the ruling power of the country at the top was an absolute despot, the real owner of all lands, collected the rent of land in kind from each village community as a unit. If the rent was paid, each community was allowed by the alleged despot to exercise freedom and autonomy in its internal political and economic administration as each community had its own organization of police, judiciary and necessary service-givers. The ruling power might be changed frequently as a consequence of conflict in the upper political sphere but that phenomena never affected the autonomy of the village community as Marx claimed, "The inhabitants gave themselves no trouble about the breaking up and divisions of kingdoms; while the village remains entire, they care not to what power it is transferred; or to what sovereign it devolves; its internal economy remains unchanged". To this Marx added, following Francois Bernier's travel account that there was no town in the proper sense in India; what was described as towns was "being properly speaking nothing but military camps" of the ruler whenever he was moving in a campaign. Marx further claimed that this political structure was constituted in remotest antiquity and had been continuing intact up to the British arrival.²²

2.1 On review, it would be easy to find that Marx himself had admitted on several occasions existence of towns of varying sizes in India.²³ It has also been disclosed by an Indian scholar S Naqvi that there was a reasonable doubt to hold that Marx did not read Bernier's account in full and he was extremely careless in collecting his facts, and that Bernier himself admitted existence of towns in India, having populations more than 5,00,000. Moreover, various accounts by both Indian and European historians were available in Marx's time to contradict the notion of absence of towns in India; Akbar's empire alone contained as many as 120 big cities and 3200 townships.²⁴

2.2 The tale of common ownership in land that had been attributed by Marx on all Asiatic and some non-Asiatic societies was collected by him from a report of select committee of the British Parliament, known as the Fifth report. In 1853, Marx wrote, "Bernier rightly considers that the basic form of all phenomena in the East - he refers to Turkey, Persia, Hindustan - is to be found in the fact that no private property in land existed. This is the real key, even to the Oriental heaven".²⁵ Marx repeated his discovery ad nauseam whenever he happened to write on the East. But in 1858, referring to the great disputes and controversy on the land tenure system in India Marx wrote, "It is agreed that in India, as in most Asiatic countries, the ultimate property in the soil rests [with] the Government; but while one party to this controversy insists that the Government is to be looked upon as a soil proprietor, letting out the land on shares to the cultivators, the other side maintains that in substance the land in India is just as much private property as in any other country whatever - this alleged property in the Government being nothing more than the derivation of title from the sovereign theoretically acknowledged in all countries, the codes of which are based on the feudal law and substantially acknowledged in all countries ...Admitting, however that the lands of India are private property, held by as good and strong a private title as land elsewhere, who shall be regarded as the real owners"?²⁶ In any case, S Naqvi comments that the same Fifth report, contains numerous other accounts, directly contrary to that description quoted by Marx. "And yet", continues Naqvi, " We find Marx confining himself to just this one report, accepting it as a valid basis for a generalized characterization of the Indian rural structure and making absolutely no reference to other divergent reports. Here again the question arises, did Marx read the Fifth report at first hand or did he get this particular account from reproduction"? The Fifth report, as well as Marx's other source, *Modern India*, a book by George Campbell, who also quoted from the Fifth report, mention, " a large number of other reports and memoirs, which refer to the existence of private property in land, right of alienation of land through sale, gift and other forms of transfer etc. ...The alienation of land, by sale or otherwise was unrestrained. Nothing but gift, or sale, non-payment of rent, could take it from the owner. If he absconds with balance standing against him, it transferred to another person; but if he or his heirs returned, at ever so distant a period, it was restored ... No crime in the proprietor could extinguish the right of the heirs to the succession. ... The report goes on to tell us that the ownership was not affected even if the owner rented out part of his holding to

be cultivated by a tenant". Thereafter, Naqvi comments, "It is significant that Marx does not refer to any of these other reports, which at least show that communal ownership of land and absence of private property were not necessarily the normal or typical form of land relations in pre-British India, even in the south and that in some of the areas private property in land and the right of alienation was also known and exercised...That Marx perhaps never consulted the Fifth report, in original, seems to be further confirmed by the fact, that neither in Capital, nor in any of his other writings or letters, do we find a single reference to this source." Thereafter Naqvi has shown that another source, "Historical Sketches of the South of India" by Lieut-Col Mark Wilkes, mentioned by Marx (Capital-I, p. 338,f.n.), as well as Campbell did not mention this contrary fact of the Fifth report. Further, Campbell did not mean what Marx meant about "village community" which, Campbell said, was present only in North-West India. Campbell mentioned two types of village community - Aristocratic, operated by the state bureaucracy, and the other Democratic, operated by tribal organization. Campbell also reported that right of alienation of land existed and was exercised, in the rest of North India, among other areas, the Zamindari system had already been in existence, at least since the Mughal period together with the differentiation between landlords and tenants. And yet Marx did not note any of these features reported by Campbell. All these signify that Marx might not have read even Campbell in full.²⁷ It is therefore held that since the theory of lack of private property in land falls, all other speculations of Marx on India deriving from it are unacceptable and forgettable.

2.3 Marx used the word 'Oriental despotism' rather frequently to presumably denote the political character of the Indian society, but never gives anywhere any hint as to what it actually was or what did he mean by it. He also used words like 'European despotism' or 'English despotism' and characteristically kept his readers in dark as to their meaning. Hence, all these words are also forgettable. But later, other commentators including Marxists explained that by 'Oriental despotism' Marx substantially meant an absolutely despotic central ruler and a peculiar system of economy named 'Asiatic Mode of Production' (AMP), operating in India from immemorial times till the British started conquering India; Oriental despotism and AMP are synonymous.²⁸ But the political character of the central ruler as characterized by Marx was not at all despotic; in fact it could be interpreted as reasonable, if not benevolent. An ancient Indian ruler is satisfied with only the land rent and thereafter allows the ruled autonomy and freedom in their internal political and economic activities, unquestionably deserves the title 'benevolent'. Despotism is always arbitrary, injurious and destructive, and never lawful, democratic and constructive; despotism never voluntarily allows freedom and autonomy to subjects. It is hardly believable that such rulers existed in ancient times and that is one of the reasons why Marx's description and characterization are not believable.

2.4 Marxist historians of both Indian and Soviet origin later testified that private property in land, state property in land, money economy, and Zamindari

- system as well as open class-struggle were all eminently prevalent in pre-British India. Common property in land was not a noticeable feature.²⁹
3. On the political body constituted above, Marx innovated a very un-Marxist AMP or Oriental despotism and claimed that it was an ancient mode of production still prevailing in a large number of countries in Asia, Africa and Europe. Firmly repeating once again the lack of private property in land, he said that the autonomous village community possessed and used the land by varying modes of labour e.g. collective or individual labour where the labourers were also co-proprietors by dint of being members of the community. The same cultivators' families manufactured industrial utilities, signifying union between agriculture and industry. The entire production was engaged in producing use-values for self-consumption (and not commodities, since even the neighbouring communities had no exchange relations between them). The surplus was handed over as rent to the state. The community produced all it required and it is a self-sufficient subsistence economy. The allotment of the package of land to the community by the state was a function of politics. Specifying the economic function of the state, Marx stated, "There have been in Asia, from immemorial times, but three departments of the Government: that of finance or the plunder of the interior; that of war or the plunder of the exterior; and finally, the department of public works. Climate and territorial conditions, especially the vast tracts of desert, extending from the Sahara, through Arabia, Persia, India and Tartary, to the most elevated Asiatic highlands, constituted artificial irrigation by canals and waterworks the basis of Oriental agriculture. ...Hence an economical function devolved upon all Asiatic Governments, the function of providing public works. ...However changing the political aspect of India's past must appear, its social condition has remained unaltered since its remotest antiquity, until the first decennium of the 19th century. ...These two circumstances - the Hindu, on the one hand, leaving like all Oriental peoples, to the central Government the care of the great public works, the prime condition of his agriculture and commerce, dispersed, on the other hand, over the surface of the country, and agglomerated in small centers by the domestic union of agricultural and manufacturing pursuits - these two circumstances had brought about, since the remotest times, a social system of particular features - the so-called village system, which gave to each of these small unions their independent organization and distinct life." These 'small semi-barbarian, semi-civilized communities', as Marx called them, "had always been the solid foundation of Oriental despotism, that they restrained the human mind within the smallest possible compass, making it the unresisting tool of superstition, enslaving it beneath traditional rules, depriving it of all grandeur and historical energies. ...We must not forget that these undignified, stagnatory, and vegetative life, that this passive sort of existence evoked on the part, in contradistinction, wild, aimless, unbound forces of destruction..."³⁰ That was why Marx earlier said that the key to unchangeableness of Asiatic societies was lack of private property in land, the dominant means of production, which posed an insurmountable obstacle to any attempt to production and marketing of

commodities for accumulation and extended reproduction. It is now obvious that such an economy operates without forming classes among the economic population and thus there is in the society, no question of class-struggle, which, according to the Marxian theory of historical materialism, is the primary motive force of social change. It is for these reasons most commentators have called this AMP a most un-Marxist theory!

3.1 In the context of this un-Marxist theory of Marx, Naqvi puts up a host of contradictory evidence. He has again shown that Marx's own source, Campbell had told an entirely different story:

- a) The quantity of land-holding among the individual land-holders were different; this differential was a determining factor in the appointment of the village chief and other offices.
- b) Money was power in all communities, indicating prevalence of money economy.
- c) There were bankers and mercantile inhabitants, indicating accumulation, commerce, banking etc.
- d) There were carpenters, blacksmiths, weaver, oilmen, sugar maker, priests etc, and a large number who did everything labourious except actual agriculture and were sometimes employed to assist in that - all these were classed as "kameens" or inferiors, and received an annual allowance of grain for their services. Thus, here we have the elements of a class of craftsmen and labourers that were missing in Marx's model, and no reference to any unity of crafts with agriculture, as posited by Marx.

So, it has been shown that Campbell's book, Marx's own source, tells us that there was nothing akin to AMP, operating in India. Instead, there were private property in land, income differential, accumulation, commerce, division of labour, class division, money economy and what not. Isn't it rather peculiar that Marx missed all these in his own source?³¹ In this context, have a look at what Marx said elsewhere, and what would make one suspect that Marx forgot all about his AMP when he wrote these.

- a) "From immemorial times, Europe received the admirable textures of Indian labour, sending in return for them her precious metals"; this cannot happen in a subsistence producing, non-commercial, non-accumulating AMP. Also to note that the then Europe had no commodity of his own, that would be acceptable in the East in return for her 'admirable textures'.³² So, these precious metals.
- b) "Efforts were made at every epoch of the removal of the charter, by the merchants of London, Liverpool and Bristol, to break down the commercial monopoly of the company, and to participate in that commerce (with India), estimated to be a true mine of gold".³³ It tells the same story as above; India could offer various on-demand commodities and commerce with India would be terribly profitable. Surely such an India was without AMP.
- c) "During the whole course of the 18th century the treasures transported from India to England were gained much less comparatively insignificant commerce, than by the direct exploitation of that country, and by the colossal fortunes there extorted and transmitted to England. ...India, the great

workshop of cotton manufacture for the world, since immemorial times”.³⁴ So, now India was meeting the world demand of cotton textiles, storing ‘colossal treasures’ for the civilized English to plunder throughout the 18th century, all by means of her AMP producing only use-values for self-consumption, since immemorial times! No more comment should be necessary. In any case, all these Marxian self-contradictory comments clearly reveal that Marx was quite aware of the evidence that there was no subsistence economy or AMP, but pre-British India had a rather flourishing surplus-producing production system so much so that India, from the remotest antiquity, had an inland trade as well as an export trade serving all over the world. If the producers themselves had to lead a poverty-stricken life, that was surely due to class exploitation, not for any want of necessary goods. Today’s India also has millions of people who lead a poverty-stricken life, some die of starvation. That does not make India a poor country or a country with AMP, does it?

- d) The Indian weaver was far more skillful than the contemporary English craftsman. “It is only the special skill accumulated from generation to generation, and transmitted from father to son, that gives the Hindu, as it does to spider, this proficiency”.³⁵
- e) Naqvi further comments, “If Marx and Engels had only read the travel accounts of even a few of the hundreds of European travellers and merchants who had recorded their experiences, often ranging over several decades and covering large parts of the country, they would have been able to roughly reconstruct Indian social and economic conditions in different periods, from the 14th to the 18th centuries”. They would then have learnt that the king had, below him, a hierarchy of feudal chiefs with private armies of their own; there was brisk internal trade with a vast and effective network of communication by road and water, with thousands of economically active cities and towns e.g. in the year 1600, Mughal empire alone had 32 urban manufacturing centers; there was a class of affluent merchants, shippers, money-lenders etc; there were recurring conflicts between traders and corrupt feudal class; there occurred numerous peasant uprisings with varying results; there was monetisation of the economy, growing agricultural and non-agricultural production, and accumulation of capital. Naqvi adds, “Firstly, in the main, agriculture in India, in all history, as now, has been monsoon-oriented”, a very small part of India being arid or desert requiring irrigation. “Secondly, even in the case of irrigation-oriented agricultural areas, the main sources of water supply, apart from annual river overflows, were wells and small tanks, which could easily be dug and maintained by individual cultivating households, and larger tanks and dams on small streams were perhaps excavated and maintained by the combined labour of the entire village or most of the cultivating households. Naqvi concludes :
 - i) The fact is that Marx and Engels were completely misled with regard to the actual course of Indian history in general, and the situation on the eve of the British take-over in particular, into formulating a peculiarly un-Marxist

theory of particularism and exceptionalism of Asian and Indian society and the laws of its movement.

- ii) Indeed, we are constrained to have to say that the understanding of Marx and Engels of the fundamental basis of the socio-economic structure of India and the process and stages of its evolution, was entirely wrong and based on unrealistic and arbitrary premises and assumptions, uncritically taken over from a handful of English writers of the late 18th and early mid-19th centuries.³⁶

3.2D D Kosambi was perhaps the first Indian Marxist who firmly criticized Marx by actually naming him, breaking the convention of absolute loyalty to Guru. Kosambi was a true practitioner of historical materialism, applied it to interpret Indian history. He said in 1956, "The adoption of Marx's thesis does not mean blind repetition of all his conclusions (and even less, those of the official, party-line Marxists) at all times ... what Marx said about India cannot be taken as it stands".³⁷ Kosambi disagrees with Marx's thesis of the small unchanging and self-sufficient villages produced only what they required and not commodities for exchange. Kosambi finds this analysis "misleading", and said, "Most villages produce neither metals nor salt, the two essentials that had mostly to be obtained by exchange, hence implied commodity production..." The villages did not exist "from times immemorial". The advance of a plough-using agrarian village economy over tribal India was a great historical achievement by itself. Secondly, even when the size of the village unit remains unchanged, the density of these units play a most important role; the same region with two villages, or two hundred, or twenty thousand cannot bear the same form of superstructure nor be exploited by the same type of state mechanism. ... Change of quantity ultimately means change of quality. Similarly, we cannot let pass without challenge Marx's statement that "Indian society has no history at all ... what we call its history, is but the history of successive intruders who founded their empires on the passive basis of that unresisting and unchanging (village) society". In fact, the greatest periods of Indian history, the Mauryas, Satvahanas, Gupta, owed nothing to intruders; they marked precisely the formation and spread of the basic village society, or the development of new trade centers.³⁸ There are, of course, many others who also categorically rejected Marx's opinion on India without naming him. The point is that the fantastic concept of the Indian village society, theoretically unchanging and unchangeable, actually existing from antiquity till the British arrival, defies wildest daydreaming and it is hardly possible for any thinking person to swallow it. But Marx and Engels had unbreakable lifelong belief in their concept; Engels even went so far as to declare existence of 'primitive communism' in India.³⁹ Hence the discussion on this bizarre concept, which, frankly, does not deserve serious discussion.

3.3The Marxist scholars, Barry Hindess and Paul Q Hirst have examined AMP strictly on only theoretical premises, avoiding scrupulously the empirical considerations, to see, "whether or not it is possible to construct a concept of the AMP, that is, a concept which corresponds to the general definitions of mode of production in historical materialism and which is distinct from any

other mode of production". "Concepts", they said, "are not produced by generalising from the description of any set of 'given', 'real' conditions-concepts are not derived from or confined to any particular set of observables. The limits of the construction of a concept are not whether a reality corresponding to it exists. The concept AMP can only be constructed if there is a space for it in the theory of modes of production, if it is a possible mode of production according to the concepts of that problematic. These are its conditions of existence as a concept. They are secured solely within the realms of knowledge, nothing which has happened or has existed, in Asia or elsewhere, can alter that". On the basis of such theoretical analysis, they conclude: "From the foregoing sections of this chapter it will be obvious that we do not support or agree with Marx's position on the AMP". Their finding is that the concept of AMP is not theoretically compatible with the general theory of modes of production in the Marxian fundamental theory of historical materialism.⁴⁰

4. Not only India, Marx's lifelong unshaken belief in European racial superiority, all round backwardness of the East, inherent progressive role of Capitalism, inevitable task of the European bourgeoisie to install capitalism everywhere in the world, natural right of the Europeans to violently conquer and plunder the non-white nations etc led him to an eventual belief in such a fantastic theory of imperialism's ultimate beneficial role in the colonies as to bring about regeneration after destruction. Eventually he persuaded himself to designate counter-revolution as revolution. He propagated this theory on relevant occasions, and this baseless theory misled communists all over the world, particularly of the colonies, forever, since the communists never looked at the Marxian narrative critically. It should now be obvious that, like this one, many other such theories of Marx will have to be revised, in order to construct a coherent theory of Indian politics and economy of both past and present, by applying historical materialism on believable facts so that an overdue renewal of the communist movement may not again end in failure.

4.1 Just like he talked on India, Marx talked in the same casual vein on revolution brought about by England of China.⁴¹ By such revolutions Marx meant armed destruction and plunder of the Chinese and occupation of Chinese land by the British. Any destruction brought about by the European countries on the non-white nations, without any noticeable sign of regeneration, was eventually branded by Marx as revolution. Such an explanation is a derivative of the same theory of eventual benevolence of imperialism. Since criticism of Marxian narrative is a taboo in the communist world, this led to the establishment of a lopsided view of revolution in the communist thought.

All said and done, it is deemed prudent to reject all the views and comments of Marx on India.

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