

## Marxist Explanation in Geographical Studies

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### Abstract

*Radical geographers can play a crucial role in shaping the geographical research that explains the ongoing evolving pattern of space in process of chronic capitalist development. The geographical historical material materialism (GHM), dialectics and political economy of space as Marxist tools may be contributed to geography and geographers of world in a greater way. European and American geographers have published large chunk of research papers on the issues of productive space that used Marxist methodology in explaining the dynamics of productive space. However, Indian geographers are less interested to apply these tools for their study in geographical research i.e. human and social geography. Present paper is an attempt to narrate the importance of Marxist methodology in India on issues of space, production and people that evolved in contemporary development process.*

**Key Words:** *Geographical Historical Materialism (GHM) Dialectics of space and Political Economy of productive space, Marxist Geography.*

### Introduction:

The fast moving world and its productive space entered into new reality in 21<sup>st</sup> century with many colours and landscape. The classic debate on space, colonial exploitation, power and resources have gained new dimension in its process of development. After world war (first and second) our planet earth reorganized in different way, which generated entirely new dimension in its socio-economic-cultural and political space in contemporary societies. At global level emerging exploitative reality attracted leaders and policy makers to look into the matter of inequality among different nations and to some extent its ideological explanation. Most of the anti colonial discourses are our strength in knowing about its possible interpretations. The concept of

colonial development, imperialism as highest stage of capitalism, state and revolution are the product of Marxist debate in 20<sup>th</sup> century, which has great importance till now in any development studies. However, most of the Marxist discourses have failed to interpret the ongoing development processes of state, space, resources and people deprivation during state sponsored development strategies. The mechanism of capital formation in process of integrating world and its circulation over the space and societies are the most important component in shaping and reshaping the geographical terrain all over the globe. Prior to that there are ample evidences in history which reveals the impact of mass movement and its ideological content on then society and space. The demanding space for

freedom and equality have widen over globe after 1789 when French revolution put opportunity for revolutionary constitution as guiding principle for society. This evolving movement had great importance in formulating the cultural landscape of concern region, and its impact on world.

In 21<sup>st</sup> century some have declared triumph of capitalism with end of ideology, especially Marxist ideology, and it opened new frontiers in contemporary world developmental scenario. However, it is useful to recall Marx's writing on Marxism in his writing in 'German ideology' on communism in which he declared, communism is for us not a state of affairs which is to be established, an ideal to which reality will have to adjust itself. We call communism the real movement which abolishes the present state of things" (Marx and Engels 1987). However, tentatively charting the contours of this real movement for 21<sup>st</sup> century is the challenge for the contemporary collective Marxist intellect (Erik Swyngedouw, 2009). This intellectual urgency nowadays considered by groups of geographers who believed in Marxist methodology in dealing with emerging dynamics of space. The foundation of Antipode in geographical discourses 40 years ago, were very much inspired by creative Marxism. The member of founder groups Dick Peet writes in 1st issue of Antipode as follows:

"This group is characterized by a new level of commitment to the movement for social and economic equality.... Believes in radical change... the nascent New Left in geography can contribute to the cause

in three fundamental ways. We can help design a more equitable society.... To do this we need to take *an* entirely different set of premises and built a new theories of the way things should be, the arrangements of people which are most conducive to a participatory democracy, the distribution of manufacturing and agricultural activities which lead to economic equality over space ....in short a whole new geography truly based upon the precepts of equality and justice. Our second contribution must be to the achievement of radical change.... Geographers can play particularly important roles in providing a constant barrage of criticism and proposals for change ..... Thirdly we must organize for effective action. (Peet 1969:1-3). Therefore, in a highly diversified world the social and political ideas needs change, which contribute towards about equality are needed in spatial context. It requires some radical methodology in social science research that addresses the hope of marginalized section of society.

### **Spatial Dynamics and Resources**

The spatial explanation in subject matter of geography has faced many challenges to acquire a scientific orientation in dealing with the evolving pattern of production and space. Harvey described such space as," despite their antiquity, views of space held within geography have tended to follow these 'relativist versus absolute' stances (Harvey, 1969). Various scholars have tried to understand and explain space in its varying nature. Soja (1980) observed space as such objective as social, political, economic and even historical generally suggest, unless

otherwise specified, a link to human action and motivation, the term 'spatial' typically evokes the image of something physical and external to the social context and to social action, a part of the 'environment', a context for society –its container –rather than a structure created by society.(1980). On the issues of spatial dynamics Clark (1980) concluded his observations as 'spatial economy operates at different spatial level of labour, capital and market for exploitation by the core economy .The industrial scale in geographical area, he found," dependent colonies [over space] providing reserve army (labour surplus) and the process of reproduction (of that labour) has thus a specific character which inevitably involves uneven regional development (Clark, 1980). In process of spatial study Gregory (1978) highlighted the functional aspects of space and he realized this as, "there are close link between 'spatial pattern' and 'spatial structure'. In this context, Johnston (1979) theorized spatial dynamics as, "spatial pattern cannot be theorized without reference to spatial structures, but also spatial structure cannot be operated without spatial patterns on which they are enacted (Johnston, 1979)". The debate on geographical space as productive unit explained and by Harvey through Marxian methodology may be taken into account by Indian geographers. He elaborate that Marx recognized that capital accumulation took place in geographical context and that in turn created specific kinds of geographical structures, (Harvey, 1978). Harvey further advocated that Marx's outlines can be used to link up the process of capital formation with the emergence of imperialism, i.e.

the diffusion of the capitalist system from one country to another, the theory of accumulation relates to an understanding of spatial structure....and the particular form of locational analysis on which Marx provides missing link between the theory of accumulation and the theory of imperialism" (Harvey 1978).

Harvey again gave us insight that lands serve 'to provide the core (of, for example nation) with three things: a surplus of labour, a supply of surplus capital, and a market of commodities produce in core.' This observation is quite significant in any geographical study. Through Harvey contribution, we can further enhance our discussion on the issues of space in a better way. The most suitable aspects of space is," space has been shaped and molded from historical and natural elements, but this has been a political process. Space is political and ideological. It is a product literally filled with ideologies (Manuel Castells and Henri Lefebvre, 1978). The spatial studies in geographical perspective have gained new dimension after the changing face of colonial design. The colonial empire in its early phase tried to expand its territorial area through direct intervention and with physical presence constructed empire based on interest and choice. Under this situation the dynamics of space and nature of its resources won entirely different and this was quite visible in geographical study in 18th to 20th century. Most of the geographical studies in these periods were fully devoted to fulfill the needs of colonial design. The advancement in physical, land form, terrain evaluation, land use and resources appraisal studies

was mostly got inspiration from British and other European geographers . In spite of these facts colonial interest of empire in new global reality tried to refresh and reorient its design and structure to fulfill the required needs for further expansion. The changing faces of global scenario in contemporary world have put neo colonial design on global space and geographer. This ground facts need another tools in making geography as a relevant subject for spatial analysis. These emerging challenges considered by eminent Marxist geographer like David Harvey, who found, ” [neo- liberalism] is a class project, marked by a lot of neo-liberal rhetoric about individual freedom, liberty, personal responsibility, privatization and the free market. These were means, however, towards the restoration and consolidation of class power, and that neo-liberal project has been fairly successful”. (Harvey, 2009, and Harvey, 2005). The neo-liberal consequences further considered by Marxist geographer Swyngedouw as, “neoliberalization processes are accompanied political power geometries as well as the institutional modalities of governing towards a form of govern mentality that banishes the democratic supplement, resulting in more autocratic (quasi) state forms.( Swyngedouw,2005,2007). The increasing spaces of globalization, privatization and liberalization have put entirely new impact on geographical space. The developing patterns of spatial realities are changing the entire nature of geographical identity in a bigger way.

This can be classified as: 1. Ambiguity in national territory. 2. Changing pattern of

resources.3.Networking of local to global. 4. Spatial conflict. These evolving spatial features need a scientific tool to study space, development and society and perhaps for this project Marxist methodology can contribute in positive way towards the need of modern geography. On this account, an effort can be made to explain and study the new global reality with the help of Marxist tools. And for this, followings are the facts that required attention from critical geographers.

1. The concept of national boundary became ambiguous and blurred in process of global integration, which initiate debate on nation–state discourse and put before us a new subject matter in political geography and its related spatial enquiry. This changing faces of globe with emergence of capitalism produced new intra-class relation and also tried to shift into intra-class relation from industrial/ commodity producing capital to financial capital that constitute a class tactics of mobilizing the state for interested class project. There is a clear shift in ‘intra-class relations from industrial / commodity producing capital to financial capital process usually referred to as financialization. While there is considerable disputes exactly over what constitutes financialization .....a condition whereby the accumulation process is increasingly sustained by the circulation of capital through all manner of financial transactions (Krippner, 2005).’ This free movement of financial capital has major impact on structure and organization of state and

its geographical identity. The ongoing process of changes is quite visible on capitalist landscape and requires some methodology to study it. The classic debate in Marxism can help to solve these emerging challenges on space.

2. The increasing level of globalization also affects the nature and pattern of resources which exist in different geographical area. The colonial expansion with its varying nature tried to explore resources in many ways. Marx observed about resources/capital, as “tension and struggle between two forms of capital {resources} i.e. between immobile versus mobile capital” (Marx.1967). The immobile capital is land and other natural resources and mobile is surplus capital, which can move from one place to another. “In past few decades, financialization has indeed accelerated the reversal of inter-capitalist relations back to a greater role of surplus generation through rent extractions of a variety of kinds. Financialization as particular form of circulating capital, premised upon transforming geographically specific, relatively fixed, and particular conditions into abstract circulating fictitious and interest yielding capital, has become a key form of David Harvey calls accumulation by dispossession. (Eric Swyngedouw, 2009). The capitalism acquired new strength through the processes of land based speculation ,the privatization of environmental commons like water, gene pools,CO2,minerals, and the like intellectual property regimes, bio-

genetic ownership, and soft ware skill. This emerging dynamics discussed by Hardt and Negri (2004) in following way.

In the final decades of the twentieth century, industrial labour lost its hegemony and in its stead emerged “immaterial labour” that is, labour that creates immaterial products, such as knowledge, information, communication, a relationship, or an emotional response.... As an initial approach, one can conceive immaterial labour in two principle forms. The first form refers to labour that is primarily intellectual or linguistic expressions. The kinds of immaterial labour produces idea, symbols, codes, texts, linguistic figures, images, and other such products, that evolved as new reality in neo colonial world. We call the other principle form of immaterial labour ‘affective labour’ ... [it] refers equally to body and mind. In fact, affects, such a joy and sadness, reveal the present state of life in the entire organism, expressing a certain state of the body along with a certain mode thinking ..... Affective labour, then, is labour that produces or manipulates affects..... A worker with a good attitude and social skill is another way of saying a worker adept at affective labour. (Hardt and Negri, 2004, 108.) . The pattern of paradigm shift of resources can be traced through Marxist tools through identification of mode of production and its relation to Geographical Historical Materialism (GHM) of a particular space.

3. Integration of space with capitalist expansion is another reality of historical development, which occurred over a geographical space. Capitalism has always required a pool of unskilled labour; ‘a disposable industrial army (Marx, 1977). In the early nineteenth century, the large chunk of labour migrated from depressed villages to industrial towns. Eric Hobsbawm described, “the great age of capital expansion in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, it is a story of market being opened up all over the world; a vast increase of manufacture and its distribution across the continents, and the expansion of British power; the somber adventure of slavery, cotton and Lancashire, the breakdown of local economies in different parts of world and their subordination to that of Britain (in India ,the decay and extinction of indigenous industries). This spatial phenomenon can be explained through Marxist approach.
4. The process of integration in an uneven world posed serious threats to spatial environment and to some extent it appeared in violent way to society and nature. The competitive and profit motive process of development has ultimately settled down on geographic space, that affects the natural and harmonious relation of our earth system. This process is quite apparent on a geographical space with its complex material. The capitalist developments produce many new things on space, society and structural *dimension for productive process. This emerging phenomenon*

*needs* serious understanding and research methodology for analysis in a given geographical space. Recently, the researches in geographical studies have used many new techniques for spatial analysis, however, the emerging dimension in spatial dialectics and its political economy remained untouched by mainstream geographers. Moreover, the challenges posed by contemporary development are more serious and it can be resolved through scientific ideology and tools. Marxist tools have potential to orient geographical studies in a rational way and also to fulfill the needs of social and spatial conflicts.

**Marxist approach on space and development:** Marxist theorization of development always considered dynamics of mode of production as an effective component for process of historical development. Regarding spatial development, Thompson ( 1961) considered, “a conception of the economic, not as a regionally separate sphere which is somehow material as opposed to social, but rather as itself irreducibly social –indeed ,a conception of the material constituted by social relations and practices ....The place is the kernel of human relationships embodied in the mode of production . . .”. In fact, all developmental activities lies on a specific geographical space which itself representing a comprehensive and dynamic impacts on its material appearance. Productive forces construct possible condition for betterment in its process through deconstruction of old and inferior mode of production over a concerned space. The establishment of capitalist development came to existence

through interactive process of diverse nature of productive forces. Marx tried to find out a scientific knowledge and historical routes about these forces that have spatial relation on a terrain of development. The industrialization and process of capital formation in a capitalist economy are a reflection of class contradiction with its local environment and geographical space. The dialectical approach towards this on a space is suitable for contemporary spatial and development analysis by geographer in a scientific way. The phenomenon occurred on space through temporal changes always represent its material position in a specific geographical location, and that can be explained by three basic tools of Marxism. These tools are: 1. **Historical materialism:** historical (GHM) enquiry of problems like, poverty, inequality, deprivation and environmental degradation. 2. **Dialectics** of nature: conflicting forces of development and 3, **Political economy:** role of state in perpetuating problems. These aspects are very much relevant in contemporary geographical study, which may be used by geographers in following ways.

**Historical Materialism in a geographical context:** The Marxist theory in social science gives us insight to analyses social problems as a product of material condition of historical development. This approach creates background for scientific inquiry to ongoing process of spatial development and its related problems. The Marxist historical methodology considers materialist aspects of development, which evolved through scientific orientation in any social sciences enquiry. Marxist materialism distinguishes between pre- capitalist and

capitalist societies precisely on the grounds that in the former surplus labour is pumped out of the direct producer by various forms 'extra-economic' domination, the specification of those 'extra-economic' forms must from the first enter into the definition of the 'economic base' (Ellen Meiksins Wood, 2007). Marxist methodology evolved on the basic formulation that the various forms of 'extra-economic' social power –political, juridical, military-can play a constitutive role in definition of the economic and produce a wide variety economic formation. This process of development prepared ground for social formation on a specific space- that is geographical location. Its technical called as "Geographical-Historical-Materialism (GHM). GHM starts from premise that things (as objects and phenomena) exist, but that these object or phenomena are the embodiment of ( they interiorize ) relationship ; things become the outcome of process that have themselves ontological priority." (Eric Swyngedouw, 2003). Actually, GHM reveals the dynamic relationship in between existing phenomena and its routes of historicity.

**Dialectical Approach:** The development processes in its continuation produced many contradictory elements that have created complexities on surface of earth. Marxist methodology in social sciences tried to identify these complexities in a scientific way through applying dialectical approaches in spatial analysis. The method lies in the fact that, while focusing on the specificity of 'every economic formation, it also obliges us to look for principles of motion from one to another not simply in some trans historical and universal moving force nor only in

some *dues exmachina* nor merely in the removal of fetters and obstacles, but within the dynamics of each social form itself. Marx never completed the project he set himself in the Grundrisse; but he did begin to construct a new explanation of the transition from feudalism to capitalism in vol. 1 of *Capital*, where he sketched out the processes by which peasant producers, especially in England, were expropriated, creating, on the one hand, a class of capitalist tenant farmers subject to market imperatives and, on other, a proletariat of agricultural labourers obliged to sell their labour power for a wage (Ellen Meiksins Wood, 2007).<sup>7</sup> In the same way the geographical reality in contemporary world is very much complex and interlinked to capitalist development with conflicting social class. These evolving patterns create challenges to space and various problems for geographical locality that need from and geographer to explain such spatial reality with carefully and meaningful insight. In this regards, the tools of geographical enquiry like mapping, data analysis, remote sensing and GIS, are not sufficient, but, needs deeper understanding of world that could explain the inner dynamics of social and economic progress. For this, Marxist methodology should be used by geographers and by doing this geographical explanation may prove its utility to focus emerging problems of present day spatial and development studies.

**Political economy approach:** Political economy is science which studies the social relations that evolve between people in the process of the production, distribution exchange and consumption of the material benefits. Political economy is a component of Marxist-methodology. It appeared as

a science during the emergence of the capitalist mode of production. Its name comes from the Greek words '*politikos-state*', social, and *oikonomia*-managing the household economy (from *oikos*-house, household, and *nomos*-the law). Political economy has always been a class science. Its representatives have always expressed the interests and ideology of a definite class and have tried to justify the economic policy corresponding to its interests and protecting them. The first systematic attempt to understand the economic phenomena of the nascent capitalist system and to justify the state's economic policy was mercantilism, which expressed the interests of the bourgeoisie, above all the commercial bourgeoisie. However, the mercantilists limited themselves to analyzing the process of circulation and thus failed to disclose the inner laws of the capitalist mode of production. Representatives of classical bourgeois political economy (see political economy, classical bourgeois), William Petty, F. Quesnay, Adam Smith, David Ricardo shifted their analysis from the sphere of circulation to the sphere of production. (Volkov, 1985) The political economy of Marx and Engels consistently expresses the interests of the working class which coincide with the vital interests of all working people and the progressive development of the productive forces. This enables it to combine strict scientific approach and consistent commitment. Capital, the central Marxist work of political economy, comprehensively explained the immanent laws of development of the capitalist mode of production. Based on his theory of the dual character of labour creating a commodity, Marx disclosed

the inner contradictions of the capitalist system. A great achievement of Marxist political economy is the theory of surplus value, which helped to show the inner processes of capitalist production, tearing off the shroud veiling the secret of capitalist exploitation. Marxism did not limit itself to a comprehensive explanation of the system of the economic categories and laws of the capitalist mode of production. It created political economy in the broad sense as a science of the conditions forms in which production and exchange are carried out in various societies, and how products are distributed (see Frederick Engels, *Anti – duhring*). Marx and Engels elaborated the basics provisions of the political economy of the primitive communal, slave-owning, and feudal modes of production, revealed the laws governing the transition from capitalist to socialism, and formulated several fundamental provisions of the political economy of socialism. The method of political economy is the sum total of the methods of cognizing production relations and reproducing them in a system of economic categories and scientific laws. The method of Marxist political economy is dialectical materialism, which studies the general laws governing the development of nature, society and human thought. Research into production relations also makes use of more concrete methods, such as analysis and synthesis, induction and deduction, the unity of the historical and logical, and qualitative and quantitative approaches. The development of scientific method for study of production relation to social organization can be achieved through concept of Marx and Engels

**Spatial explanation- Marxist perspective:** The contemporary debate in development studies and nature of spatial production has become a serious and challenging task in geographical research. The emerging dialectics in between local vs. global have posed entirely different criterion for new emerging productive space and dynamic of its social and cultural landscape. Contemporary Marxist geographers have debated long on these issues in a perspective of new emerging spatial reality. Noted geographer Smith (1984) studied about the geographical implications of capitalist mode of production and observed, "capitalist eventually look for new location where they are able to produce more profitably. Uneven development thus emerges as a systematic –rather than incidental –aspect of capitalism." Smith further insisted that Marx's theory is profoundly relevant to nature. Smith theorized this as, "with the progress of capital accumulation ... this material substratum (geographical space) is more and more the product of social production, and the dominant axes of differentiation are increasingly societal in origin ... the immediate appearance of nature is placed in historical context, the development of material landscape presents itself as a process of the production of nature" (Smith, 1984). Economic geographers are examining the function of a productive space and capitalist economy which evolved the dynamics of space & society that challenged the many established theory of development study. Many Marxist geographers have translated Marxist economics in spatial explanations in economic geography. (Harvey, 1982, Smith, 1984, Storper and

Walker, 1989, Sheppard and Branes, 1990; Swyngedouw, 1992; Webber, 1996; Webber and Rigby, 1996). The stuff of economic geography has been the geographical variation in what firms produce, how they produce it (and thus their linkage to other firms) labour relations and access to finance. As a result of complex spatial division of labour” (Massey, 1984)- these emerging realities need fresh inquiry by geographers with knowledge of Marxist tools. Actually, geographers have long highlighted the ways in which the forces of “capitalist economic development –competition, the drive to accumulate profits, the evolution of technology and labour process, the tendency towards the concentration and centralization of capital –generate spatially differentiated outcomes, in terms of growth, prosperity, and employment. Those forces in turn both forge and are forged by a complex matrix of institutions. Thus to understand the capitalist space and economy, geographers need to understand the role, impact, and evolution of the institutions of capitalism” (Ron Martin, 2003). The emerging issues in geographical inquiry, such as uneven spatial development, socio-economic inequality, financial crises, geopolitical tension, conflict, human right, people movement and environmental degradation can be solved through applying Marxist analytical perspective of political economy. “Under capitalism, which is a historically and geographically specific forms of social organization, the individual and collective forms of this transformation (metabolism) social and physical nature is characterized by a fundamental social division between those owning the means of production (capitalist), and those only

owning their labour, which they need to sell as labour force to capitalist in order to secure their own short-and medium –term survival. The dynamics of these social class relations take particular geographical and ecological forms and lead to a series of processes, contradictions (tension), and social struggles that render capitalism geographically and historically dynamic, but inherently unstable ( Erik, Swyngedouw, 2003).” The unstable space in neo-liberal development process has posed threats for stability to geographical space in its natural forms. It needs an alternative approaches in economic and social geography that conceptualized the evolutionary process of economic and social landscape.

#### **Alternative explanation in geography:**

In Indian geography we are heavily loaded with colonial mindset that restricts us to adopt scientific orientation in explaining the ground reality of society. In physical geography geographers developed scientific tools and methodology that have been narrated various geomorphological evolutionary stages in a rational way. In case of human geography it reveals poor and irrational explanation about social, economic and cultural activities that occurred on space. We are doing hard works on mapping, SPSS analysis, GIS but ignoring spatial reality, i.e. historical linkages to its social & spatial formation, conflict, deprivation, linkages towards its politics, economy, culture- that needs attention by young geographers. On this account, “Marxist scholarship and activism, much of which was acutely aware of and sensitive to space and to geographical dynamics and condition of everyday life under capitalism” (Brewer, 1980) may be

proved its utility in present day geographical study. Marxist methodology offered us insight about why, where, and how deep and perverse injustice and inequalities persist. Globally Marxist geographers now are the most quoted and referenced scholars that attract academics; however, it has invisible impact on Indian geography and geographers. Indian spatial situation is full of deprivation, injustice, gender gap, poverty, people movements and lack of human rights in social structure that require attention from human geography and geographers. The previously discussed elements of Marxist tools may be useful for present day geographical inquiry. “Marxism still has a place not just in maintaining geography as a vibrant and exciting discipline, but-perhaps most importantly –in contributing to the production of a truly humanizing geography” (Eric Swyngedouw, 2003). Harvey (2000) emphasized that Marxist geography and geographers still have an important contribution to make. This contribution lies not only in a permanent critique of the conditions and dynamics of capitalism, but also in pushing the frontiers of the imagining of geographical trajectories in which difference, heterogeneity, and the unrepressed expression of desire coincide with a just and inclusive socio- economic and political order.” This is equally more true and significant for Indian geography and geographers. We may conclude that young geographers should move in this direction for a noble cause that promotes – geography, geographers for better and just society.

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