

Marxist Methodology for the Study of Comparative Government and Politics

Marx never defines the term 'class' except in the third volume of capital where he says, 'The owners merely of labor power, owners of capital and land-owners, whose respective sources of income are wages, profit and ground rent, in other words, wage labourers, capitalist and landowners, constitute the three big classes of modern society based upon the capitalist mode of production.'

Still, 'class' makes up the base of his discussion— individuals are dealt with only to the extent that 'they are personifications of economic categories, embodiments of particular class relations and class interests'. Even though no one agreed with Marxist's model of politics, you can identify, very reasonably, a few methodological themes: search for social bias in social 'facts'; efforts at being rigorously scientific without pretending to be value-free; explanations of human activity, partly in terms of affirmed purposes and conscious interactions and partly in terms of a given moment in historic time; emphasis on the necessary determinacy of economic elements in the social structure with recognition of reciprocal interaction of the political, social and cultural elements; search for contradictions as a key constituent in social dynamics; use of the concept of 'class' as vital in social development; recognition of technology as an important variable; and finally, recognition of a careful distinction between possibility, causes and symptoms

of capitalist

crisis. This theory not only reveals the dependence of social realization and the entire

social structure, but also observes the totality of social relationships, structures and

institutions. It is done by probing existing productive forces of society and resultant

productive relations and the ideological superstructure that is built on them.

Now, let us observe how you can apply the Marxist theory in the field of

comparative politics. First, one can make inquiries into the nature of property relations in

different political systems. In this attempt, though, one should remember that property

relations do not simply mean relation between the 'haves' and the 'have nots'. Then

again, one should also keep in mind the difference between 'possession' and 'ownership'.

It is, in effect, the latter on which the focus is more. Second, to what extent does the

social division of labour distinguish different political systems? Although Marx speaks of

different types of divisions of labour, he gives emphasis to the division of labour as

leading to exchange, communication and introduction of techniques, practices and

consequently, ideas. Yet again, division of labour may be found in a family, in a village

and so on, but our main focus should be on the division of labour in society. Third, in

order to compare different levels of political development in various countries, you ask

this question: What is the stage of economic activity in a particular society?

According to

Marx, there are different types of state– society relationships, which are based on the diverse stages of development in different societies. In a feudal society, regardless of the feudal lord being both the owner of the means of production and of the political authority in his sphere of influence, his exploitativeness over the peasants remains ‘ veiled by religious and political illusions’ , but this is no longer true in a capitalist society where the ‘ state and society become abstracted from one another’ . Thus, through the comparison of different stages of economic development of various political systems, both the nature of political authority as well as the extent of ‘ freedom’ that is enjoyed by the people can be made. Fourth, the nature of the political system and its direction can best be explained only when you place it against the background of its past development. Neither the systems theory, nor the structural– functional theory lays any stress on the historical procedures. The Marxian approach is undoubtedly better than them in this respect. Fifth, you have already argued that in both systems, the structural functionalist theorists have transferred their social values and institutions into a theoretical framework which they have claimed to be universal. As a result that political reality in the Third World