MARX STILL THE BEACON LIGHT FOR 21ST CENTURY

P.GOVINDA PILLAI

The 20th century, which witnessed the victory of socialist ideals among a third of humanity and the massive liberation struggles which trounced the three centuries of Western Imperialist domination was considered the high water mark of Marxism. But the final decade of that century following the collapse of European Socialism dashed all such rosy dreams. People began to speak post-Marxism and the dawn of a post – Marxist predicament.

But surprisingly for the pessimists who mourned the unexpected turn of events and the exultant celebrators, Marxism is staging a triumphant return in the initial years of 21st Century. The reasons are not far to seek. The United States' attempt to impose a unipolar world with its might of arms and steam-rolling process it has unleashed a campaign to turn the entire world to a private fief of globalised market have set in motion a trail of war and destruction, poverty and unemployment. As was a century and half ago this all-round decline of human freedom and well being is not confined to the traditionally poor region of the Third World, the epidemic, as it were, is creeping into heart lands of traditional wealth and opulence. No other theory is available to help us to understand the perplexing phenomenon, let alone being even concerned with such problems.

Why even at the dizzy lights of scientific and technological revolution – the majority of human kind is still wallowing in poverty and squalor? He asked these questions and proposed solutions and struggle to realize them in the 19th century itself. Though there are points to be amended, insights to be added, the basics remain valid even after a century and a half. Hence the

new interests in Marx, both in academia and bookshops, and of course in fields of fast spreading popular upheavals. The rising crescendo of struggles are against War, Globalisation, Poverty and Imperialism in general. The British Broadcasting Company was recently taken aback when it saw that an overwhelming majority of its viewers all over the world recorded in survey that Karl Marx was the most outstanding thinker of the 20th Century. Another interesting report from United Kingdom tells us that some of the best sellers – now in the market are life stories of Marx and his ideas. Who was this person who thought differently from the high profile thinkers of the proverbially complacent crowd of Victorians? Who was this person as the essence of our era, its triumphs and tragedies, and left a deep impress on the history of his century and next? Who was this person at whose funeral at High Gate Cemetery is an alien land in 1883 only a dozen or so mourners cared to attend? Who was this man who was only an irritant to those of his time, but an idol for millions upon millions to read and follow for more than a century?

Karl Marx was born on 5 May 1818 in the German town of Trier (and died on 14 March 1883 in exile in London). His was a Jewish family but before the birth of Karl his father who was a prosperous lawyer of liberal convictions, left his ancestral faith to join Christianity. They had an aristocratic neighbour Baron Von Westphalen, who was a scholar well versed in the 18th century French enlightenment literature. Marx was to fall in love with his daughter Jenny and married her. A book full of adolescent romantic poems Marx wrote to his girl friend is extant. They give us interesting insights into the youthful vagaries and ecstasies of a future historical titan. For example he writes in one of his stanzas:

Never can I do in peace
That with which my Soul's obsessed,
Never take things at my ease;
I must press on without rest.

Others only know elation
When things go their peaceful way,
Free with self-congratulation,
Giving thanks each time they pray.

I am caught in endless strife,
Endless ferment, endless dream;
I cannot conform to Life,
Will not travel with the stream.

Heaven I would comprehend,
I would draw the world to me;
Loving, hating, I intend
That my star shine brilliantly.

(Feelings, Written in October- December 1836)

Jenny gave Marx seven children, four of whom died young mainly due to privation and malnutrition in the days of his exile and wanderings. Though brought up in affluent aristocratic circumstances, she was deeply in love with him and shared all his sufferings with a sense of fulfillment and revolutionary sympathy, till her premature death due to hard life and illness.

Marx was a brilliant student with varied interests in many disciplines. After his doctorate in philosophy he tried for teaching post in the same subject in Berlin University. But by the time itself his radical ideas were widely known thorough his articles and activities and his application was rejected.

1830's and 1840's were agog with the ideas of the great philosopher G.W.F.Hegel (1770-1831). Dialectics of Marx's Dialectical Materialism was

derived in rudiments from him. Marx ranged with Left Hegelians as against the Right variety. Later still went a step further after being captivated by the materialist thought of Ludwig Feuerbach (1804 – 1872) and extricated himself from the clutches of Hegelian idealism. But the Kernel of Hegelian thought was dialectics, which he kept and integrated with materialism and raised it to a new qualitative height, with collaboration of his comrade – in – arms Frederich Engels (1820 – 1845).

Marx's ideas on socialism and communism was taking shape step by step in 1840's and came to full fruition in 1848, with the writing of "Manifesto of the Communist Party" in collaboration with Engels. By the time they completed the work on the Manifesto in 1848, as basic policy document of the Communist League, with head quarters in Cologne, entire Europe was in the throes of a wild - fire bourgeois revolution, in which young Marx and Engels played a part. That led to their persecution and finally exile in London. Engels worked there in a family concern and from time to time assisted the Marx's family.

Privation and poverty did not deter Marx from his world historic mission of human liberation and socialist revolution under the working class leadership. A classless society was his unswerving dream, where man will not exploit man. He continuously wrote articles and pamphlets for various socialist groups in Europe and assisted them. A number of major books like Class Struggle in France (1850) Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte (1852) Critique of Political Economy (1859) and the monumental Capital Volume I (1867) and many others came in quick succession.

In 1864 Working Men's International Association was founded with its rules and aims written by Marx. The ideas and ideals of Marx and Engels

were spreading fast and they had a great role in inspiring the world's first socialist Revolution in 1871, viz., Paris Commune. It was most brutally repressed by the bourgeoisie, but its spirit and light were never to fade. But the fierce repression unleashed by European powers led to the transfer of the international head quarters to United States.

In 1881 Jenny died leaving Marx sick and forlorn. On 14 March 1883 Marx died leaving his daughter Jenny and Laura in the care of their husbands and life long friend and guardian Engels. They too were active Marxists. Till his death in 1895 Engels carried on the illustrious mission of his comrade and also edited and published the further Volumes of Capital.