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Socialist culture: A review

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Abstract

Culture, one might note, is here a descriptive and a normative term at the same time. It describes in a neutral way what must actually happen for us to survive, but it also refers to a kind of loving and is thus a value term as well. Without some culture of caring geared up to greet us we simply won't flourish. In this sense, the word "culture" leaps the gap between fact and value-between what is the case and what the case is desirably. Far from just rising shakily on our paws and licking ourselves down, we are born with an enormous hole in our natures, which culture must instantly plug if we are not to die. It is natural to us to be lacking. And since our premature birth results in an unusually long period of dependency on those human beings immediately to hand it gives rise to an unusually intense intimacy with them. This in turn results in a particularly traumatic severance from them at a later point, which is what gives rise to that curious human invention known as psychoanalysis. This paper tries to explain the concept of socialist culture.

Keywords: Social Justice, Equality, Democratic Revolution, Welfare State, Cultural Heritage, Liberty

Introduction

Socialism presents a scientific analysis of the socio-economic order and its dynamics. But it is not concerned merely with social analysis. It evaluates the interactions of social forces and directs human energies and material resources in a particular direction. It intends to achieve certain social objectives, to build up a new social order. It stands for a new social order not only because the old order suffers from contradictions and is pregnant with the new order but mainly and primarily because the old order is unjust to the toiling masses and social justice demands it to be replaced by an order which may ensure to them freedom, equality, prosperity and full facilities for the development of their personalities.

As a social movement, socialism lays stress on the influence of social milieu on human life. It maintains that man is a social being and that his personality, which is essentially a social personality, flowers in a society and needs for its proper cultivation a good society. Socialism, therefore, strives for a good society and calls upon the people to fight for it against forces that stand in its way. But socialism stands for a new society not because quantitatively the new society will be bigger and more developed than the old but mainly because qualitatively is better and more conducive to human good. Man is definitely its main concern. It setives to reshape social milieu for his sake.

Socialism deals with social dynamics. It holds that society is a changing equilibrium of social order, is a resultant of their interactions. To reshapes society, it is, therefore, necessary to checkmate reactionary forces and strengthem forces which impel the desired revolutionary change. Socialism, thus, mobilises for its objectives all types of social forces, economic, political and cultural. But it is in fact man who mobilises and it is organised human efforts which function as mechanics of change.

To socialism, man is, thus, both the end and the agent of social revolution. It is he who strives for revolution and it is for his sake that it is striven for. No revolution is worth its name which does not aim at promoting the equality, freedom, happiness and advancement of men. Even bourgeois democratic revolution is claimed to stand for these values and did to an extent promote them. It released toilers from feudal serfdom, enhanced the dignity of man, gave legal recognition to man's claims for equality and freedom, and professed to provide to all equal opportunity for promoting their happiness and advancement. It set up a political system of a democratic character which denied to feudal lords their exclusive claims to political power.

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That it did promote human freedom and progress cannot be denied. But bourgeois democratic regime suffered from contradictions which could only partially be remedied and resolved through modifications in the system.

Under the pressure of certain social tensions as well as that of organised efforts of socialists and radical democrats, the right of franchise ceased to be correlated with property qualifications and all adults were allowed legally equal share in political power. The bourgeois Police. State developed into a Welfare State and social securities began to be increasingly granted to workers from womb to tomb. They are also allowed the right of association, strike and collective bargaining as well as to function as a counter-vailing force to capitalism. All this has raised workers' stature and influence and provided them certain facilities for decent life and cultural advancement. But the community continues to suffer from social tensions and inequalities as well as from capitalist exploitation and the neglect of certain important sections of the working people. A socialist transformation of the socio-economic order is needed to ensure to the working people social justice, economic equality, full freedom and proper cultural climate and facilities for the full development of their faculties and personalities.

Socialism stands for the democratic way of life and consequently for the re-orientation of the entire social life on democratic principles of liberty, equality, justice and fellowship. It strongly holds that political liberty and legal equality, which bourgeois liberalism upholds, are by themselves insufficient to guarantee to the people full freedom and social equality and that there is no real democracy short of economic democracy. Liberty and equality must also be economic and democratic culture must necessarily be socialist. Real fellowship is possible only in a tasteless and class-less society, and justice must be founded on the principle of Lokahit (common good) instead of the principle of free competition of self-interests, which leads to social disharmony and tension and degrades and disintegrates human personality.

Evolution for which socialism stands is essentially ethical in character. While it negates outmoded norms of hierarchical character and rejects class morality, it preserves enduring human values, affirms higher ethical values and ensures to man such conditions of living and human relationship as may provide him with the means of decent life and fully facilitate his moral evolution. Ethical ideals which it affirms are rooted in human experience, needs and urges and are evolutes of principles, the fullest realisation of which is adjudged by humanists of all ages as essential for the realisation of the ends of life.

Cultural potentials of socialist ethics are definitely much richer than those of any other ethical system. Socialist culture will be free from the snobbery of birth and wealth, from the social evils of serfdom and class distinction, as well as from hedonism implied in supra social pursuits of individual self-realisation. Socialist morality stands for human fellowship on the basis of full equality. Only those who contribute most to social good are honoured as first among equals. And even they, free from any superiority complex, are to respect the dignity of their fellow-beings. Man is required to seek the development of his personality, his own self-perfection, in association with others, as a constituent of social good.

Human labour is honoured most in socialist culture. While it is valued as a creative force of human personality, the dignity of human labour is enjoined as an inseparable constituent of the dignity of human personality. Unlike many cultures of the world, the socialist culture upholds the unity of culture and labour.

Socialism is definitely opposed to such cultural norms and forms and socio-economic conditions as deny to the tribal peoples and the producing masses opportunities and facilities of cultural advancement. Genius exists in all parts of society. There is no race or class of humanity capable of assimilating the cultural heritage of mankind. Human peace, progress and happiness definitely demand the provision of adequate facilities for the cultural advancement of all. Special attention is, therefore, to be paid in a socialist society to the cultural advancement of the tribal peoples and the producing masses.

Socialist culture also insists on equality of sexes, treats motherhood with consideration, regards child and maternity welfare as joint responsibility of the family and the community, and acknowledges women's equal right to education and participation in the cultural life of the country.

In a socialist society culture, happiness and joy will, thus, cease to be a monopoly of the privileged few. Every one shall have to means to decent cultural life and be entitled to happiness and joy in association with others. The development of each shall be the condition of the development of all. Man's creative genius shall have free expression. Artisans and artists shall be equally encouraged to add to human happiness and joy. Art treasures shall cease to be private property. They will be nationalised and made accessible to all for study and enjoyment. All economic enterprises will be required to provide houses of culture for, and facilities for the cultural advancement of, their workers. Adult educational institutions shall be established for peasants, workers and other producers close to their homes and places of work. These institutions will make provisions for vocational training as well as for general cultural advancement. While education shall be provided to all through common schools, special correspondence courses shall be instituted for the education of those engaged in production.

Socialist culture can claim to be the most cosmopolitan of all cultures of the world. It taboos exploitation of man by man of nation by nation, stands for world fellowship in conditions of full equality, and stresses most universal values of life such as human consciousness and human fellowship, respect for human personality and the dignity of labour, national freedom and international peace, social justice and universal good, individual liberty and free democratic co-operation, the progress of humanity and the integrity of personality, as well as the spirit of public service and the sense of responsibility, the courage of conviction and the strength to stand against social evil under all circumstances. While almost all other cultures suffer from certain inhibitions which deny necessary facilities for full cultural advancement to a large section of society, socialist culture militates against such inhibitions and pulls down all barriers to culture. Universalisation of knowledge, culture and happiness is its basic principle. It extends all these to all, including the members of the old privileged classes, provided they wish to have them in free and equal association with others.

The socialist culture and morality, founded on democratic fellowship and Lokahit, differ fundamentally not only from the bourgeois culture and morality, founded on competitive co-operation and utilitarianism, but also from the Communist culture and morality, founded on principles of democratic centralism and monolithic authoritarianism which allow the individual to be submerged in a totalitarian regime, require art to submit to the fiat of the government, subordinate the entire life to Communist dictatorship and deny to workers industrial freedom and subject peasants to discriminative treatment.

Socialist culture and morality, no doubt, deny the ethical validity of the caste system and caste privileges, negate norms and modes associated with the hierarchical structure of Indian society, stand for casteless society and do not favour the idea of self-realisation through contemplation and tapasya in isolation. But they bear considerable affinity with the universal human ideals of Samatva and Lokahit, upheld necessary for spiritual development by ancient sages and saints and embodied in the doctrines of Karma Yoga and Bodhi Sattva. What socialism proposes to do is to uphold these high moral ideals and to work for their realisation on a social plane through the reorganization of social and economic life. It is hoped that thereby the antagonism that prevails today in our ideals and social behaviour will be resolved and it will be possible for us to have such social conditions, facilities and incentives as are necessary for the building up of our life on universal human ideals which the nation has cherished for centuries.

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