CHAPTER 4

THE CONCEPT

OF PRAXIS
Chapter 4

The Concept of Praxis

Until the advent of Marxist philosophy, there was a tendency to keep philosophy apart from practice. Marx was the first to demand a unity of theory and practice; he advocated taking a look at history from the viewpoint of different classes. Gramsci writes: “a world-view is philosophical; it represents the intellectual and moral life of an entire social group.”

This Marxian concept, praxis, simply means practice. It means social activity, practicality, the union of thought and practice. In Marxist tradition, there had been many thinkers who used this concept. Gramsci, however, employed this concept in the sense which is similar to Antonio Labriola, who considered it as historical activity. Gramsci also used the concept in the same sense, where the thought and ideas are brought into activity. They are to him, a historical necessity.

---

1 As quoted in Christine Buci-Glucksmann, “Gramsci and the State”, p.357
Gramsci is emphatic in his assertion that philosophy is common to all men. While initiating a discussion on the study of philosophy, he says:

It must first be shown that all men are 'philosophers,' by defining the limits and characteristics of the 'spontaneous philosophy' which is proper to everybody. This philosophy is contained in: (1) language itself, which is a totality of determined notions and concepts and not just of words grammatically devoid of content; (2) 'Common Sense' and 'Good Sense', (3) Popular Religion.\(^2\)

Language is an important immediate tool to perceive the world and interact with the other members of the society. A limited knowledge of a standard language of a place and confinement to the knowledge of a dialect necessarily limit one's worldview as there is no exposure to wider problems of society. This implies that "'language' is essentially a collective term which does not presuppose any single thing existing in time and space. Language also means culture and philosophy..."\(^3\)

\(^2\)SPN, p.323
\(^3\)Ibid., p.349
Thus language is an important means at the hands of intellectuals for 'cultural assimilation' so as to attain hegemony of the ruling class. Though 'every speaking being has personal language of his own, that is his own particular way of thinking and feeling'\textsuperscript{4}, a social group has a public language which is nothing but the residue of the past cultures as well as influences of the culture prevalent in the particular society. A social group has a language that corresponds to the cultural level it has attained. Language, thus, represents a cultural advancement of a social group, as language embodies tradition and various cultural elements and it signifies concern over a period of time, extending from the remotest past till date. In Gramscian scheme of thought, the element of culture has an important role to play, it being an important tool of asserting dominance over the subordinate groups.

Language, thus, is the combination of various elements. Culture has an important role to play in the formation of a language. "Culture, at its various levels, unifies in a series of strata, to the extent that they come into contact with each

\textsuperscript{4}SPN, p.349
other, a greater or lesser number of individuals who understand each other's mode of expression in differencing degrees.\textsuperscript{5}

Culture of a social class enables us to know that it is homogeneous. Homogeneity of a class is not only with regard to their culture, but also their language. Language is the means of communication among the members of a social class.

In Gramsci, the culture and the environment do play an important role. The particularity attached to a being is due to the environmental situation in which he/she is brought up. Similarly, the particular personality of a philosopher, is also the result of his relationship with the cultural environment, as Gramsci writes: "Historical personality of an individual philosopher is also given by the active relationship which exists between him and the cultural environment he is proposing to modify."\textsuperscript{6} This relation, Gramsci calls as "master-pupil relationship," "one between the philosopher and the cultural environment in which he has to work and from which he can draw the necessary problem for formulation and resolution. In other words, it is the relationship between

\textsuperscript{5}SPN, p.349
\textsuperscript{6}Ibid., p.350
philosophy and history." Gramsci emphasizes on the relation between philosophy and history. In fact philosophy is based on the history of thought. In one of the earlier paragraphs, mention was made on Gramsci speaking about a true philosopher as one trying to place a situation in the history of thought.

Philosophy is the conception of the world. But the philosophical activity cannot be limited to the elaboration of systematically coherent concepts. To Gramsci, philosophical activity "is a cultural battle to transform the popular 'mentality' and to diffuse the philosophical innovation which will demonstrate themselves to be 'historically true' to the extent that they become concretely, i.e., historically and socially - universal."

Gramsci here speaks about the activities, which can be called as philosophical. He agrees with the fact that all conception of the world are philosophies, but philosophical activities are not simply analyzing the concepts in a systematic, coherent way but it is a battle of cultures, that is,

---

7 SPN, pp.350-351
8 Ibid., p.348
the sediments of the traditional, popular cultures which have provided the fragmentary frameworks of thought with the other elements of the dominant culture, but resulting in the universal acceptance of such philosophical innovations, which are proved to be true, in time (historically true) and socially acceptable. This leads to the creation of a new culture. It is only “a diffusion in a critical form of truths already discoursed, their ‘socialization’ as it were, and even making them the basis of vital action, an element of co-ordination and intellectual and moral order.” This is also a philosophical activity which finds a basis for activity, and means of intellectual advancement and basis of moral order.

Spontaneous philosophy is “simply a generic term for grouping together the set of sentiments, ways of living and thinking that are specific to the subaltern strata, and it paves the way for a new and specifically Gramscian object: a history of the subaltern strata.”

There has been a tendency among the idealists as well as some other schools to separate the philosophy of intellectuals

---

9 *SPN*, p.325
10 As quoted in Christine Buci-Glucksmann, “Gramsci and the State”, p.225
from the philosophy of masses or common sense. At any given moment of time, there are a number of worldviews existing among subaltern strata; it can be said that philosophy of an epoch does not reflect consciousness of an epoch and history of philosophy does not contain the history of subaltern strata. But yet history is to be understood as the history of class struggles. Thus, common sense assimilates the conceptions of intellectuals in an incoherent and fragmented way. Philosophical revolutions of every epoch are sooner or later filtered into the common sense. Gramsci thus says:

These systems influence the popular masses as an external political force, an element of cohesive force exercised by the ruling classes and therefore an element of subordination to an external hegemony. This limits the original thought of the popular masses in a negative direction, without having the positive effect of a vital ferment of interior transformation of what the masses think in an embryonic and chaotic form about the world and life.\(^\text{11}\)

This passage speaks of 'common sense.' For Gramsci, its most fundamental characteristic is that it is a conception which even in the mind of one individual is fragmentary, incoherent

\(^{11}\)SPN, p.420
and inconsequential in conformity with the social and cultural position of those masses whose philosophy it is. Common sense, then, is not only one's own conception influenced by religion or different other conceptions, but even the conception of the world of the intellectuals and of higher cultures, great systems of traditional philosophy, religion of the leaders of the clergy etc. These systems are unknown to the multitude and have no direct influence on them. However, there are influences of them of a different kind. They act as external force, political force exercised by the ruling classes and thus an element of subordination to an external hegemony.

Every social group has its own conception of the world. They may at times be borrowed concepts. When these conceptions are borrowed and put into activity, then their conduct is not independent and autonomous, but submissive and subordinate. The borrowed conception makes a group dependent. This Gramsci thinks of as a reason for philosophy being related to politics. He writes: "Philosophy cannot be divorced from politics." Further he adds: "The choice and the criticism of a conception of the world is also a political
This passage indicates that even the choice of a conception from the other social group which may be dominant, makes the presence of politics evident. Thus philosophy is closely linked to politics.

However, common and popular philosophies are only fragmentary opinions or the collection of ideas. Any conception of the world which has now become a cultural movement, faith or religion has a fundamental problem. Gramsci says: "This problem is that of preserving the ideological unity of the entire social bloc which that ideology serves to cement and to unify." The fundamental problem of the practicing of religion and cultural movement pointed out by Gramsci is that of preserving the ideological unity of the entire class. Gramsci makes mention of the Catholic Church, which makes this doctrinal unity of the whole mass of the faithful and tries to ensure that the higher intellectual class is not separated from the lower. The Catholic Church has such conception or philosophy by which it tries to unite the 'simple faithful' with the intellectuals of the Church.

---

12 SPN, p.327
13 Ibid., p.328
Gramsci speaks about the weakness of Italian idealists, especially Croce and Gentile as failing to create an ideological unity between the bottom and the top, between the 'simple' and the intellectuals. This establishment of an ideological unity depends on the following two factors: (a) interest and determination on the part of the 'simple' to attain a higher cultural level, (b) an organic quality of thought which needs to be made coherent and plain to the 'simple faithful' by the intellectuals.

However, in the case of idealistic philosophies (Italian idealism of Croce, Gentile etc.), the loophole was at the structural level, as Gramsci says: "What was lacking, however, was any organic quality either of philosophical thought or of organizational stability and central cultural direction."\(^{14}\) There was no proper direction in the system, similarly there was also no organic quality of thought and as a result of this the practical problem could not be settled. Gramsci writes: "If the intellectuals had been organically the intellectuals of those masses, and if they had worked out and made coherent the principles and the problems raised by the masses in their

\(^{14}\) *SPN*, p.330
practical activity, thus constituting a cultural and social bloc.”

Thus Gramsci proposes a ‘congenial, homogeneous space’ in which there is a contact between the intellectuals and the simple. “Only by this contact does a philosophy becomes ‘historical’, purify itself of intellectualistic elements of an individual character and become “life” Philosophy thus must be free from the elements of individual characteristics.

Individualistic characteristics are those elements, which may have influences on the way of thinking of a social class. The influential aspect of any personality is such that the various conceptions of the world of social classes may be changed and articulated, so as to serve the interest of a personality, whose characteristic has become a part of the conception of the world.

Different philosophies, conceptions of the world are, therefore, a conglomerate of different elements and sediments of the philosophy of the dominant classes. Philosophy of

---

15 SPN, p.330
16 Ibid., p.330
praxis, as classified by Gramsci as a new philosophy, involves a criticism of common sense which contains the different influential elements of philosophy, conception of the world of different classes. Gramsci writes: "it must be a criticism of 'common sense' ... but of renovating and making 'critical' an already existing activity."\(^{17}\) It is not simply the critical analysis of the conception but also of the activities in both concrete and mental. External as well and internal philosophy of praxis is not only the criticism of conception of the world, but "it must be a criticism of the philosophy of the intellectuals out of which the history of philosophy developed"\(^{18}\) Philosophy of praxis, which aims at creation of a new culture, passes through a series of critical analysis of philosophy itself, i.e. the history of philosophy, to which many individuals have made great contribution. But in order for it be a successful one, there must be a synthesis, a meeting of common sense and of intellectuals, that is, of two levels of society, higher and the lower level. Gramsci writes: "The purpose of the synthesis must be to criticizes the problems to demonstrate their real value, if any, and the significance they

\(^{17}\)SPN, p.331

\(^{18}\)Ibid., p.331
have had as superceded links of an intellectual chain, and to determine what the new contemporary problems are and how the old problem should now be analyzed." So, synthesis, emphasized by Gramsci has a practical value, i.e. to analyze the problem and to settle them.

The 'contact,' 'synthesis,' all these are certain concepts in the Gramscian scheme of thought, all of which indicates the need of a union between two, which have two different kind of characteristics. It, in fact, is a union or meeting of two levels, 'intellectuals' and the 'simple', higher level with the lower level. But how could this meeting take place? The union necessitates a homogeneity in the medium, the space in which both are intended to be united must possess something in common, a 'cultural space.' But the question still remains as to what can cause this homogeneity in the space? Gramsci writes: "The relation between common sense and the upper level of philosophy is assured by 'polities', just as it is politics that assures the relationship between the Catholicism of the intellectuals and that of the simple."20

19 SPN, p.331
20 Ibid., p.331
These are fundamental differences between the two classes in the Church.

The split between the two classes cannot be healed by raising the simple to the level of the intellectuals (the Church does not even envisage such a task, which is both ideologically and economically beyond its present capacities), but only by imposing an iron discipline on the intellectuals so that they do not exceed certain limits of differentiation.\(^{21}\)

Thus forced discipline can be a means of settling the splits between two contradictory classes in the Church. The heretical movements of the middle ages were a simultaneous reaction against the politicking of the Church and against the scholastic philosophy which expressed this. But such moves were healed by different religious orders centered on strong personalities like St. Dominic and St. Francis.

Unlike the practices of the Church and the settlement of the disputes and healing of the splits, the philosophy of praxis does not leave the 'simple', the faithful, to the level of common sense influenced by the faith. It tries "rather to lead

\(^{21}\) _SPN_, p.331
them to a higher conception of life." The new philosophy tries to raise the faithful to a higher level of understanding, but the contact that it emphasized upon by Gramsci is different. He writes: "in order to construct an intellectual moral bloc which can make politically possible the intellectual progress of the masses and not only of the small intellectual groups."  

The union is a step towards the construction of a 'moral-intellectual bloc'. This would ensure the intellectual programmes of the masses. The union is a meeting of theory and practice which is not mechanical. Gramsci writes:

The unity of theory and practice is not just a matter of mechanical fact, but a part of the historical process, whose elementary and primitive phase is to be found in the sense of being ‘different’ and ‘apart’ in an instinctive feeling of independence, and which progress to the level of real possessions of a single and coherent conception of the world.  

The unity of theory and practice is a historical process, it is, in other words establishing the practicality of the theory. This leads to a coherent conception of the world.

---

22 SPN, p.332
23 Ibid., pp.332-333
24 Ibid., p.333
Gramsci used 'philosophy of praxis' in a critical sense. He derived this sense from Labriola's usage. For Labriola, it is the concrete historical activity of men engaged in transforming the material productive forces.\[^{25}\]

Labriola (1843-1904) is regarded as the father of Italian socialism. He was brought up in neo-Hegelian ideas, and he set out to fight against the vulgarization of Marxism around 1819. 'The contributions of *Commmunist Manifesto* according to Labriola was the 'new conception of history.' It is not a scheme for change, but contains 'the minute art of understanding case by case what could and should be done.'\[^{26}\]

Labriola's view on Marx is worth mentioning here. "His politics was, as it were, the practice of the historical materialism, and his philosophy was inherent in his critique of economic relations, this being his way of dealing with history."\[^{27}\]

\[^{25}\] As quoted in Christine Buci-Glucksmann, "Gramsci and the State", p.360


Gramsci explains: "Labriola distinguishes himself... by his affirmation... that the philosophy of praxis is an independent and original philosophy which contains in itself the elements of a further development, so as to become, from an interpretation of history, a general philosophy."\(^{28}\)

Gramsci brings to light his appreciation for Labriola's expression of ideas on philosophy of praxis as autonomous and having a scope for further advancement to become a general philosophy. For both Gramsci and Labriola, philosophy of praxis is grounded in concrete historical reality: it put an end to all idealistic philosophy. They consider philosophy of praxis as autonomous, independent and original.

The section in the *Prison Notebooks*, entitled 'The Philosophy of Praxis', however deals with some practical questions, of which the most important section is 'what is philosophy?' Gramsci writes:

Until classical German philosophy, philosophy was conceived as a receptive, or at the most an ordering activity, i.e., as knowledge of a mechanism that functioned objectively outside man. Classical German

\(^{28}\) *SPN*, p.390
philosophy introduced the concept of ‘creativity’ of thought, but in an idealistic and speculative sense.  

Gramsci considered the philosophy before the advent of Marx as something which lacked practicality—there was a tendency to keep philosophy away from practice. It was rather Marx who demanded (emphasized) first on the practical aspect of philosophy with his conception of historical materialism. Gramsci writes that “philosophy of praxis alone has been able to take philosophy a step forward, basing itself on classical German philosophy but avoiding any tendency towards solipsism.” Gramsci agrees that philosophy of praxis is based on the tenets of classical German philosophy as it is creative in the sense that “it teaches that reality does not exist on its own, in and for itself, but only in an historical relationship with the men who modify it, etc.”

One of the important attributes of classical German philosophy, which is worth mentioning, is the treatment of reality not as existing on its own, but as in a historical relationship of men with men. This treatment of reality is that

---

29 SPN, p.346
30 Ibid., p.346
31 Ibid., p.346
which makes German philosophy distinctive from the earlier ones. This aspect is embedded in the Marxian philosophy of praxis.

Philosophy, to Gramsci is “response to certain specific problems posed by reality, which are quite ‘specific’ and original in their immediate relevance.” Thus each philosophy is the result of conditions prevalent in the society. It is the outcome of material conditions in which different groups of the society are placed. However, Gramsci opines that all men are philosophers. He says: “It is essential to destroy the widespread prejudice that philosophy is a strange and difficult thing just because it is the specific intellectual activity of a particular category of specialists or of professional and systematic philosophers.” This passage of Gramsci brings to light the fact that there have been a lot of prejudiced interpretations made on ‘what is philosophy’ and who are to be called as philosophers.

The view of Gramsci as spontaneous philosophy reveals that for him there is “no epistemological break between the

---

32 SPN, p.324
33 Ibid., p.323
philosophy of the masses and that of the philosophers. The distinction between the two is less qualitative than quantitative.”[^34] In *Prison Notebooks* also there is a mention of it in the similar line, especially of philosopher. “Philosophers and the rest of mankind, the difference is not one of ‘quality’ but one of quantity.”[^35] Here the term ‘quantity’ is used in a sense different from others; it indicates the greater or lesser degrees of ‘homogeneity’, ‘coherence,’ ‘logicality,’ etc.,

Talking about the distinction between a professional philosopher and other technical workers, Gramsci says: “The professional or technical philosopher not only ‘think’ with greater logical rigour, with greater coherence, with more systematic sense than do other men, but he knows the entire history of thought.”[^36]

Thus to be a professional or technical philosopher one needs to have knowledge of history, that is, knowledge of the history of philosophical thought and previous attempts to solve a particular problem he was faced with. Thus professional

[^34]: Christine Buci-Glucksmann, “Gramsci and the State”, p.226
[^35]: Ibid., 347
[^36]: Ibid., p.347
philosopher “has the same function in the field of thought that specialists have in their various scientific fields.”\(^{37}\)

A specialist of a scientific field works with knowledge of the past. The study requires precision, coherence and logicality etc. Like the field of specialist’s, philosophy also demands the same to be a professional.

Gramsci starts the search for critical philosophy through a critique of spontaneous philosophy. Spontaneous philosophy is common and popular as anyone is a philosopher. However all spontaneous philosophy cannot rise to the level of critical philosophy. One may have a conception of the world which is typical and peculiar to himself. If this ‘conception of the world is not critical and coherent but disjointed and episodic, one belongs simultaneously to a multiplicity of mass human groups.\(^{38}\) Because in “acquiring one’s conception of the world one always belongs to a particular grouping which is that of all the social elements which share the same mode of thinking and acting.”\(^{39}\) Gramsci emphasizes here that the thought process of

---

\(^{37}\) *SPN*, p.347  
\(^{38}\) *Ibid.*, p.324  
\(^{39}\) *Ibid.*, p.324
a human being is influenced by the social group in which he is living. The entire being is conditioned and influenced by the history and culture of the group to which he is associated. Thus he says: "We are all conformist of some conformism or other, always man-in-the-mass or collective man." Among the prevalent philosophies or ways of thinking of the different social groups each man is a conformist of a particular mode of thinking. One cannot have a conception of the world which is autonomous and free from the social function of influences, such as culture, tradition etc.

However, to have an analysis done of one's own conception and so as to criticize it and to let it have coherence is a stage of advancement. He says: "To criticize one's own conception of the world means therefore to make it a coherent unity and to raise it to the level reached by the most advanced thought in the world." This stage may also involve the criticism of all previous philosophy.

---

40 SPN, p.324
41 Ibid., p.324
He writes: “Philosophy cannot be separated from history of philosophy, nor can culture from the history of culture.”

In the scheme of thought of Gramsci elements of history play a great role. The influence of Croce is evident in this passage. Philosophy is the interpretation of an activity which mind creates. So history of philosophy is history of mind. Croce writes: “Man is a microcosm, not in the natural sense, but in the historical sense, a compendium of universal history.”

Croce did stress that history is based on fact and “knowledge was the end product of relationship between Consciousness, Idea and Fact and not Ideas and Fact alone.”

Gramsci accepted Crocean notion of history as a creative process. In Gramsci’s eyes, Croce represented the most advanced phase of modern thought, in as much as at the centre of Croce’s thought lay the concept that history is an ethico-political manifestation.

---

42 SPN, p.324
43 Benedetto Croce, History as the Story of Liberty (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1949) p.20
Gramsci is of the opinion that spontaneous philosophy is not free from the influence of religion or common sense. However, Gramsci says: “Religion and common sense cannot constitute an intellectual order because they cannot be reduced to unity and coherence even within an individual consciousness.” He adds: “Philosophy is intellectual order, which neither religion nor common sense can be.”

Philosophy being an intellectual activity, involves much more than faith and sedimentation of previous conceptions in the common sense; it rather is a criticism of those earlier residues.

Every social stratum has its own common sense and its own good sense which are basically the most widespread conception of life and of man. Every philosophical current leaves behind a sedimentation of common sense; this is the document of its historical effectiveness. Common sense is not something rigid and immobile but is constantly transforming itself.

For Gramsci, importance of a particular philosophy can be known from the effect it has on the society.

---

45 SPN, p.326
46 Ibid., p.325
If it is true that every philosophy is the expression of a society, it should react back on that society and produce certain effects, both positive and negative. The extent to which precisely it reacts back is the measure of its historical importance, of its not being individual 'elaboration' but 'historical fact.'

In one of the earlier paragraphs, it was mentioned that every philosophy is born out of a situation, meaning it tries to explain a particular situation by suggesting a solution. Even if the solutions are not suggested, it still becomes a philosophy because any explication of a situation or human nature can also be considered as philosophy, though, it does not attain the status of critical philosophy, unless and until certain practicality is arrived at. It has to leave an impression on the society and on the common sense of the individual members about its effects either positive or negative. Its importance can be to such an extent that it might even be an historical fact.

He writes: "one could say that the historical value of a philosophy can be calculated from the 'practical' efficacy it has acquired for itself, understanding 'practical' in the widest

---

48 *SPN*, p. 346
sense." Gramsci suggests a particular criterion with which the historical importance of a philosophy can be measured or assessed, that is, its practicality. The practical aspect of a philosophy can be understood as its capability to solve a situation and thereby having an effect on the society.

This understanding of philosophy, in his opinion, has an application in the field of politics. He writes: "Philosophy must become political, practical if it to continue to be philosophy."^50

Philosophy of praxis thinks of itself in historical manner, that is, as a transitory phase of philosophical thought, is not only implicit in its entire system, but is made quite explicit in the well known thesis that historical development will at a certain point be characterized by the passage from the reign of necessity to the reign of freedom.\(^^51\)

Though both Karl Marx and Gramsci, emphasized on this 'movement of necessity to freedom', there is a difference of expression in them. While Gramsci develops the notion in terms of the free movement of thought, Marx was stressing on

---

49 *SPN*, p.346
50 Christine Buci-Glucksmann, "Gramsci and the State", p.344
51 *SPN*, p.404
the economic basis, i.e., the contradiction at the world of production itself. In *Capital*, Vol. III, Chapter 48, Marx says:

"The true realm of freedom... can blossom forth only with this realm of necessity (the appropriation from nature of man’s material wants) as its basis."

In Gramsci, the notion of necessity was more on the mental arena rather than on the economic base as argued by Marx. It was rather a process of movement of thought which necessitates contradiction. He says: "All hitherto existing philosophers (philosophical systems) have been manifestations of the intimate contradiction by which society is lacerated."\(^{52}\)

Thus social contradictions are historical facts, which are explicated by the philosophical system.

"Consciousness of being part of a particular hegemonic force (that is to say political consciousness) is the first stage."\(^{53}\) In the movement of thought, the first point or stage is being aware of the part of a particular hegemonic force. The critical awareness is the next stage. "Critical understanding of self takes place therefore through a struggle of political

\(^{52}\) *SPN*, p. 404

\(^{53}\) *ibid.*, p. 333
'hegemonies' and of opposing directions, first in the ethical field and in that of politics proper, in order to arrive at the working out at a higher level of one's own conception of reality."

When a critical analysis is done on the conception of world present in one's mind, there takes place a struggle of various forces: first in the ethical field and then in the field of politics. The struggles are, however, not the end. It also leads to attainment of one's own conception of reality. This passage also reveals the influence of Croce on Gramscian scheme of thought.

However, Gramsci is of the opinion that philosophers of praxis are in a disadvantageous situation, when they take the help of imagination to create utopia. Concretely, he says, the philosopher of praxis can do nothing other than making a generic affirmation: "The philosopher of praxis can only make this generic affirmation and can go no further; he cannot escape from the present field of contradictions; he cannot

\[SPN, \text{p.333}\]
affirm, other than generically, a world without contradictions, without immediately creating a utopia.\textsuperscript{55}

However, it should not be taken to mean that utopia cannot have a philosophical value. It has a political value and every politics is implicitly a philosophy. Thus the philosophy of praxis which affirms the contradiction, the fact of reality, has its own value.

There are two important tasks in the new philosophy, that is, philosophy of praxis: (a) to overcome the pure ideologies so as to let praxis prevail over the other, and (b) to impart education to the masses who are still in the medieval culture. He writes: "The philosophy of praxis had two tasks to perform: to combat modern ideologies in their most refined form, in order to be able to constitute its own group of independent intellectuals and to educate the popular masses, whose cultures were medieval."\textsuperscript{56} Gramsci refers here to a medieval culture which had no capability to combat the ideologies of the fundamental classes. The second task is to be understood in relation to subalterns who are in the midst of a culture which is

\textsuperscript{55} SPN, p.405

\textsuperscript{56} Ibid., p.392
being dominated by the supreme classes. In fact the prevalent
culture among the subalterns is to be given away with, as it
lacks proper guidance. The ideologies which are the guiding
force behind it are in reality the ideologies of the dominant
class. Gramsci writes:

the new philosophy was combined into a form of culture
which was a little higher than the popular average (which
was very low) but was absolutely inadequate to combat
the ideologies of the educated classes. And yet the new
philosophy was born precisely to supersede the highest
cultural manifestation of the age; classical German
philosophy, and to create a group of intellectuals specific
to the new social group whose conception of the world it
was. 57

The task of educating the masses, thus, becomes the
responsibility of the group of intellectuals who would have a
common conception of the world. It, thus, leads to the creation
of a new culture, a modern culture which is a step in a higher
level than the German classical philosophy, which emphasized
on creativity. As Gramsci writes: “the philosophy of praxis

57 SPN, pp.392-393
has been a 'moment' of modern culture. To certain extent it has determined or enriched certain cultural currents."^58

The philosophy of praxis also has important elements of epistemology. This element lies in men acquiring the knowledge of structural conflict on the level of ideologies. It is not just a psychological aspect. The consciousness of this conflict among different ideologies of the social classes, for Gramsci, is of great importance in the philosophy of praxis. He writes:

Men acquire consciousness of structural conflicts on the level of ideologies should be considered as an affirmation of epistemological and not simply psychological and moral value. From this, it follows that the theoretical-practical principle of hegemony has also epistemological significance.\textsuperscript{59}

Philosophy of praxis believes in the ‘practicalization’ of the theory. In other words, it emphasizes on the materialization of the theory. For this to happen, one has to organize practical elements which are essential for the theory to be realized. Gramsci writes: “The identification of theory

\textsuperscript{58}SPN, p.388
\textsuperscript{59}Ibid., p.365
and practice is a critical act through which practice is demonstrated rational and necessary, and theory realistic and rational.\textsuperscript{60} The process of identification of theory and practice is a crucial act, by which theory is demonstrated as ‘realistic’ and ‘rational’ and practice is considered rational and a necessary one. In fact, every conception of the world has this problem of identifying itself with the practice. He writes:

it is worth searching for, analyzing and criticizing the various forms in which the concept of the unity of theory and practice has been presented in the history of ideas, since it appears without doubt that every conception of the world and every philosophy has been concerned with this problem.\textsuperscript{61}

There is a great relationship between history, philosophy and politics as envisaged by Gramsci in the philosophy of praxis. He insists that the history of philosophy cannot be studied apart from the class struggle. The Crocean view is derived from Hegel that philosophy is history. The only living concrete reality is thought and in order to comprehend the whole of the world, it is necessary to understand the history of thought or of philosopher’s philosophies. For Gramsci, this is

\textsuperscript{60}SPN, p.365
\textsuperscript{61}Ibid., p.364
a sectarian view. For him, the conceptions of leading groups, the world view of broad popular masses and the interconnections between these, marks the philosophy of praxis. Philosophy then is a “cultural struggle seeking to transform the popular mentality and diffuse the philosophical innovations that prove historically effective”. Thus, philosophy becomes a moment in the theory of superstructures. It is the translation into the terms of a realistic historicism of the subjective conception of reality. History of philosophy is thus a history of conflict among classes having different world views. Hence philosophy is politics and politics, as already mentioned above, is a science.

The philosophy of praxis is also concerned with the question of knowledge and its objectivity. Praxis is “the concrete historical activity of men” for “transforming a definite organized matter”. The attempts by mechanists to replace the ‘idea’ of Hegel with ‘matter’ and then to arrive at Marxism is a wrong strategy. The relationship between subject and object, men and nature does not postulate a dualism

---

62 As quoted in Christine Buci, “Glucksmann Gramsci and the state”, p.356
63 Ibid., p. 236
between phenomena. For Gramsci, a human history should be viewed as the history of nature. The philosophy of praxis cannot be broken into parts of economics, politics and philosophy.

Men become conscious of structural conflicts at an ideological level in an epistemological affirmation. The unity of theory and practice is also of importance for the theory of knowledge. Moreover, the striving for hegemony is also epistemological in so far as it gives rise to a new ideological field. It is a reform of consciousness and of methods of knowledge. This analysis of Marx’s ‘preface’ to the critique of political economy led Gramsci to evolve a concept of ideology that is novel and needs careful scrutiny. Gramsci’s concept of ideology evolved out of a critique of Croce’s concept of ideology as an illusion and Bukharin’s concept of ideology as a ‘system of ideas’. According to Gramsci, Croce misunderstood Marx by reading ideology as a direct influence of structure and yet distinct from it. It limited efficiency to change the world even when it thinks it is capable of this task. As against these negative concepts, there is a positive connotation of the world (ideology) to be analyzed historically in terms of philosophy of
praxis as a superstructure. Marx considered ideologies as having objective and active criteria, as it is the social reality which creates ideologies.

The concept of 'ideology' has a long history. It is generally agreed that the term ideology was first used by the French in the early Nineteenth century. Most of the evidences indicate that it is Louis Claude Destutt de Tracy who probably first used the word. The term 'ideology' has been associated with political and social life from the very beginning. Therefore a political connotation is implicit in the term ideology.

The characteristics that can be identified in the concept of ideology are:

(a) It contains an explanatory theory of more or less comprehensive kind about human experience and the external world,

(b) It lays out a programme in generalized and abstract terms of social and political organization,

(c) It conceives the realization of this programme by means of a struggle, and
(d) It addresses a wide public but may tend to confer special role of leadership on intellectuals.

While the term is used in a wider sense, it may mean any kind of action oriented theory or any attempt to approach politics in the light of a system of ideas. It can be rather understood as a comprehensive pattern of cognitive and moral beliefs about men, society and the universe in relation to men and society. Ideology is a conglomerate of various ideas/beliefs held by a group of individuals, which according to them, can govern and regulate the activities of the society and the state and also the behavior of the individuals. It, in other words, is a worldview, a vision of the whole of varying activities in the society and in different arenas of the state.

In order to understand the Gramscian concept of ideology, there is need to take a preliminary survey of the formulation of the same concept in Marxian philosophy, where it is nothing other than the 'false consciousness' which does the function of covering up the true nature of the social reality, the reality of contradictions. Thus, in Marxian usage, ideology has a negative connotation.
Ideology plays a crucial role to resolve contradictions. There can be no solutions to contradictions other than by way of practice. Such attempts to solve contradictions are in fact negations of contradictions rather than affirmation of them. This also amounts to concealing of contradictions. Thus, ideology plays a crucial role of concealing and necessarily negating contradictions. As Poulantzas puts it, "ideology has the practice function of hiding the contradiction and of reconstructing on an imaginary land a relatively coherent discourse which serves as the horizon of agent's experience."^64

Marx affirms that ideology arises from what he calls as 'limited mode of production, the limited material mode of activity' which is actually responsible for both the creation of contradictions and a distorted projection of reality in the form of ideology. Marx finds the origin of ideology as some kind of practice, namely, the practice of limited mode of production, which is the origin of both contradictions as well as ideology. Marx says that ideology cannot be "dissolved by mental criticisms... but only by the practical overthrow of the

---

actual social relations which gave rise to this idealistic humbug..."\(^6^5\)

The only way is to overthrow the actual social relations which give rise to ideology. Marx says that the overthrowing can be done by another type of practice, namely, the 'revolutionary practice'. Revolutionary practice can do this by solving real contradictions as only contradictions give rise to ideology. "The real, practical dissolution of phrases, the removal of these notions from the consciousness of man's will... be effected by altered circumstances, not by theoretical deductions."\(^6^6\)

For Marx, ideology is a distorted consciousness. This distorted consciousness has two negative functions in the Marxian scheme. In the first place, ideology negates and conceals contradictions, and secondly, it hides contradictions in the interest of the dominating class. Marx says that this had been the business of ideology throughout history. In pre-capitalist societies, class differences were justified by giving philosophical theories of hierarchical conception of the world.

\(^{65}\) Marx and Engels, The German Ideology, pp.58-59

\(^{66}\) Ibid., p.52
In capitalism, class differences are concealed by way of reconstructing a world of freedom and equality in consciousness. Thus in both the periods ideology concealed social contradictions and legitimized them. Thereby Marx calls ideology 'false consciousness.'

To eliminate ideology —false consciousness— Marx advocates 'practice'. Thus all understandings of the social phenomena point to one direction— revolutionary practice. Antonio Gramsci, as a thinker, assumes importance here. Marx suggests that revolutionary practice depends much on yet another type of ideology, which may be called as scientific or revolutionary ideology. The Neo-Marxists, especially Gramsci, treat the concept of 'ideology' in a positive connotation as operating in a constructive manner, to a definite constructive goal. The evolution of the concept of ideology is an integral part of the Marxist concept of historical necessity.

Both Lenin and Gramsci understood history as a kind of evolution. It is an evolution of social formations, in the sense that one form of society gives rise to another and another yet another. Such process is often called a historico-natural
process. For history to evolve, evolution has to be spontaneous with the progress in time.

In Marx we have seen that revolutionary practice is a remedy to ideology which masks the reality. Lenin also is fond of speaking of practice. Practice in Lenin is something which stands qualified. Here practice is a conditioned practice, which is conditioned or determined by economic structure. The class structure of a society is primarily due to economic structure. Man's consciousness is also conditioned by the socio-economic structure in which he lives. Therefore, we can say that practice and consciousness are instruments of what may be called as structural determinism. Thus, for Lenin, economic determinism is the root of all things in the world.

Spontaneous consciousness of the working class reflects bourgeois ideology. Lenin says that "the bourgeois ideology is older than the socialist ideology; so it is more developed, and possesses more means of dissemination." The presence of bourgeois ideology in the working class consciousness also has a logical character. It is logically necessary for the bourgeois

---

67 V. Lenin, *What is to be done?* (Peking: Foreign Language Press, 1975) p.50
ideology, to be present in the consciousness of the proletariat for it to be that ideology. This is precisely what makes it the bourgeois ideology; otherwise, it may be nothing.

Making a difference between ‘base’ and ‘superstructure’, and finding the place of ideology in superstructure, can be said as superstructure playing an important role in determining working class consciousness. True to its nature, bourgeois ideology mediates in the negative sense. It functions as concealing reality to working class and diverting the true nature of the problem or contradictions into spurious direction. Bourgeois ideology stands in between proletarian consciousness and reality. On the other hand, scientific ideology mediates in a positive sense. It not only makes working class aware of reality but also removes the hang over of ideology of the bourgeois.

In the work of Lenin, *What is to be Done?*, practice appears as the instrument of consciousness. Whether it appears as bourgeois ideology, or it appears as science, here ideology represents class interests. In this work there are abundant usages of socialist ideology, as against bourgeois ideology.
The concept of ideology now is equipped with new meaning, encompassing both meanings, distorted consciousness as well as true form of consciousness. As a result of this, ideology does not have any negative meaning now. Question of falsity of bourgeois ideology is not due to anything intrinsic in the concept of ideology. On the contrary its falsity is due to the source of the origin of the ideology of the bourgeois. Gramsci finds that ideology as a superstructure is compatible with ideology as the ideology of a class. When ideology makes a transition from ideology to 'class ideology', it undergoes a drastic evolutionary change, a kind of reconstruction in its meaning and connotation. Due to this move to the class ideology, it loses its original negative meaning which Marx and Engels gave in 'The German ideology' and acquires a new meaning which is positive in the sense that ideology stands to make the working class conscious of contradictions instead of concealing them. For Marx, ideologies stand for concealing contradictions in the interest of bourgeois.

But one may ask the question what makes an ideology valid or invalid? What makes an ideology valid or invalid is not its source of origin, but the class to which it stands for and
functions. It is the class interest that an ideology represents and the class in whose interest it functions makes it valid or invalid. For example, an ideology may have its origin in bourgeois class but it may truly represent proletariat class interest and may stand for the working class. To this extend it would be ridiculous to call that ideology not valid simply due to the fact that it originated in the bourgeois class. Mao and Gramsci have argued that a strategy of revolution should begin and unfold from the ideological superstructure. Gramsci discovers the revolutionary starting point in the ideological superstructure and advocates the necessity of creating a revolutionary brand of intellectuals who are to be assigned the responsibility of educating the masses in proletarian ideology to fight until they destroy the hegemony of the ruling class ideology. Speaking about revolution, Gramsci says that an intellectual revolution is not performed when one philosophy is confronted with another. It is not just ideas that require to be confronted, but the social forces behind them and more directly, the ideology these forces have generated and which have become part of what Gramsci calls 'common sense.'
It is only natural that the ruling class ideology becomes a part of 'common sense'. It is natural and psychological that any prevailing ideology is taken for granted because of its familiarity. History shows us that most of the people accept things on the basis of familiarity. Gramsci says that "in acquiring one's conception of the world one always belongs to a particular grouping which is that of all the social elements which shares the same mode of thinking and acting. We all are conformists of some conformism or other, always man in the mass or collective man."^68

Assuming the importance of the role of the intellectuals in revolution, Gramsci asserts that it is the business of 'philosophy of praxis' to create a brand of intellectuals who would educate the masses in proletarian ideology. But he also recognizes the magnitude of the task. In the first place, philosophy of praxis itself must stand firm because for it the challenges are from many directions and are powerful. Secondly it has to deal with age old beliefs and 'convictions' which got rooted into the minds of the masses. Recognizing the difficulty in creating an organic group of intellectuals,

^68 SPN, p.324
Gramsci says that philosophy of praxis 

"... is still going through its populist phase: creating a group of independent intellectuals is not an easy thing; it requires a long process with actions and reactions, coming together and drifting apart and the growth of very numerous and complex new formations." 69

It is further difficult because people are unable to go beyond a limit. They are unable to go beyond and comprehend reality due to various compulsions under which they exist. Gramsci says that they are unable to go beyond certain point because there 

"... still remains below the level of the possession, the state and of the real exercise of hegemony over the whole of society which alone permits a certain organic equilibrium in the development of the intellectual group." 70

Thus, the task of creating a group of intellectuals becomes very challenging. Only a society which has an organic equilibrium and does not have the hegemony of the ruling class ideology is conducive in creating a revolutionary brand of intellectuals. On the other hand creation of organic

69 *SPN, pp. 395-396  
70 Ibid., p.396
intellectuals is aimed at educating the masses in proletarian ideology, so that the hegemony of the ruling class ideology should be destroyed.

Organization of the mass depends on yet another aspect, which Gramsci calls a theory-practice nexus. In many places in 'Quaderni', Gramsci is found speaking of the unity of theory and practice. And for the theory-practice nexus what we need again are the intellectuals. Gramsci says that there can be no organization of the proletariat "...without the theoretical aspect of the theory practice nexus being distinguished concretely by the existence of a group of people 'specialized' in conceptual and philosophical elaboration of ideas." Thus it is of utmost importance to create the group of people who are specialized in conceptual and philosophical elaboration of ideas. They are none other than the intellectuals. Creating a revolutionary brand of intellectuals, therefore, becomes absolutely inevitable. The question is, how to create a revolutionary brand of intellectuals? Gramsci assigns this task of creating a revolutionary brand of intellectuals to nothing less than philosophy of praxis itself.

---

71 SPN, p.334
Further Gramsci assigns one more task to the philosophy of praxis, that is, educating the popular masses. To quote him:

The philosophy of praxis had two tasks to perform: to combat modern ideologies in their most refined form, in order to be able to constitute its own group of independent intellectuals; and to educate the popular masses whose culture was medieval. This second task was fundamental, given the character of the new philosophy, has absorbed all its strength...

... And yet the new philosophy was born precisely to supersede the highest cultural manifestation of the age, classical German philosophy and to create a group of intellectuals specific to the new social groups, whose conception of the world it was.\(^{72}\)

Thus, creation of revolutionary brand of intellectuals either for combating the sophistication of bourgeois ideology or combating hegemony, or organizing proletariat to march towards a revolution, becomes one of the important tasks of the philosophy of praxis.

He says that “The philosophy of praxis presupposes all cultural past... the Philosophy of praxis is a crowning point of

\(^{72}\)SPN, pp.392-3
the entire movement of the intellectual and moral reformation, made dialectical in the contrast between popular culture and high culture... It is a philosophy which is also politics and a politics which is also philosophy." 73

Speaking about the unity of theory and practice, he says that "in the most recent developments of the philosophy of praxis the exploration and refinement of the concept of the unity of theory and practice is still only at an early stage. There still remain residues of mechanicism, since people speak about theory as a "complement" or an "accessory" of practice, or as the handmaid of practice." 74

Gramsci considering Croce and Gentile as pure intellectuals who had no element of practice in their contribution, accuses them in the following manner: "One of the greatest weaknesses of immanentist philosophies in general consists precisely in the fact that they have not been able to create an ideological unity between the bottom and the top, between the "simple" and the "intellectuals." 75

73 SPN, p.395
74 Ibid., p.334
75 Ibid., p.329
While accepting many innovations of Croce, Gramsci also finds that his mistake was grave. The gap between intellectual elites and the common folks could never be bridged. To ensure the mobilization of the masses, one has to ensure the active participation of the masses in the intellectual exercise, directly or indirectly.

Gramsci’s conception of ideology is often called as ‘historicist conception of ideology’ by most of the intellectuals. Thereby an understanding of Gramscian concept of ideology is an understanding of the historicist conception of ideology. Both Lucacs and Gramsci are using the concept in the same way. Therefore, Gramsci’s understanding of what history is, is an important aspect in understanding his concept of ideology.

Gramsci says that “philosophy of an age is not the philosophy of this or that philosopher, of this or that group of intellectuals, of this or that broad section of the popular masses. It is a process of combination of all these elements, which culminates in an overall trend, in which the culmination becomes a norm of collective action and becomes concrete and
complete (integral) "history." The philosophy of an age is a combined form of different philosophies belonging to that age encompassing both intellectual groups and masses. This results in a trend or worldview of the societies, which eventually leads to objective action on the part of societies. This becomes history. Further, he speaks of something such as 'historical bloc'. By 'historical bloc' Gramsci means the inseparable participation of history and philosophy into one another. He says that "history and philosophy in this sense are indivisible: they form a bloc."

Gramsci finds that ideology plays an important role in changing the world. He says that the history of philosophy is the "history of attempts made and ideological initiatives undertaken by a specific class of people to change, correct or perfect the conceptions of the world that exist in any particular age and thus to change the norms of conduct that go with them; in other words, to change practical activity as a whole."

---

76 *SPN*, p. 345
77 Ibid., p. 345
78 Ibid., p. 344
Gramsci is found speaking of ideology as that which attempts to change the world of the given particular time. The changes envisaged are so drastic and complete that it aims at changing practical activity as a whole. He is also prescribing a test to ideology. Agreement or non-agreement of the mass in a given ideology becomes the test for him. In other words, if the mass is convinced in a given ideology, then such an ideology can be said to have been qualified and if not, it should be condemned as not qualified. To quote Gramsci: “Mass adhesion or non-adhesion to an ideology is the real critical test of the rationality and historicity of modes of thinking.”

About the mobilization of the people for revolution and acceptance of the ideologies by the people, Gramsci says: “If a social group is formed which is one hundred per cent homogeneous on the level of ideology, this means that the premises exist one hundred per cent for this revolutionizing: that is that the “rational” is actively and actually real.” Further, he says that “only a totalitarian system of ideologies gives a rational reflection of the contradiction of the structure

---

79 SPN, p.341
80 Ibid., p.366
and represents the existence of the objective conditions for the revolutionizing of praxis."^81

Ideology, for Gramsci, is a part of superstructure. That is why he is talking about contradictions at the structural level. Contradictions at the level of structure or base should be understood and rationally reflected by revolutionary ideology which is at the level of superstructure. But Gramsci cautions by pointing out one of the problems which any conception of the world or philosophy may face. He says: "This problem is that of preserving the ideological unity of the entire social bloc which that ideology serves to cement and to unify."^82 The ideology has a task of taking care of the ideological unity of all the strata of society (intellectuals as well as common people) which he calls a social bloc, like a Church which has two strata of people and their faith to face with, and preserve, one is the intellectuals and the other the common mass. These two strata have two different kinds of requirements from the Church. What the common people require, may not satisfy the intellectuals and the requirements of the intellectuals, may

---

^81 *SPN*, p.366
^82 Ibid., p.328
appear as atheistic and ungodly to the common people. A Church requires to protect and maintain the requirements of both the sections of its members.

Gramsci makes an analysis of the term ideology itself. The word ideology means a science of ideas. Science means analysis; analyzing a complex phenomena into its simpler components in order to facilitate comprehension. Hence, science of ideas could mean analysis of ideas. Analysis of ideas would amount to investigating into the origin of ideas. Such an investigation shows that ideas were primarily sensations. And thus ideology was an aspect of sensationalism to 18th century French materialists.

Philosophy of praxis makes distinct and definite advancements from such views. Though the term ideology contained a negative value judgment in Marx, Gramsci says that “ideology itself must be analyzed historically, in the terms of philosophy of praxis, as a superstructure.” Gramsci maintains a theory of base and superstructure. While base consists of contradictions, superstructure consists of

---

83 SPN, 376
everything else. Ideology and even philosophy of praxis belongs to superstructure. To quote him: "Structures and superstructures form an "historical bloc." That is to say the complex, contradictory and discordant ensemble of the superstructures is the reflection of ensemble of the social relations of production." The historical bloc is nothing other than this: "the conception of historical bloc in which precisely material forces are the content and ideologies are the form, though this distinction between form and content has purely didactic value."

Superstructure is the reflection of the base, but the contradictory and discordant appearances of the base is due to the contradictions in the relations of production. There is also a reciprocity existing between superstructure and the base, and Gramsci calls this reciprocity as a necessary one. To quote him: "the necessary reciprocity between structure and superstructure, a reciprocity which is nothing other than the real dialectical process."

---

84 SPN, p.366
85 Ibid., p.377
86 Ibid., p.366
Gramsci was a man of action, and he was always for concrete solutions. And it is this aspect that makes him very popular among the Neo-leftists all over the world. The praxis aspect is explicit in his following passage:

It is a philosophy that has been liberated (or is attempting to liberate itself) from any unilateral and fanatical ideological elements; it is consciousness full of contradictions in which the philosopher himself, understood both individually and as a entire social group, not only grasps the contradiction, but posits himself as an element of the contradiction and elevates this element to a principle of knowledge and therefore of action.  

The role that the philosophy of praxis ought to play has been very clearly stated in the above passage. Philosopher of praxis is conscious of contradictions and on the basis of this complete awareness of contradictions, the philosopher becomes himself an element of contradiction. Further, he makes this element the principle of knowledge and makes everyone else aware of this knowledge. There is only one thing for him to do, that is, to go for concrete actions to remove these contradictions. Gramsci says that all philosophies of the past

---

87 SPN, p.404-405
were manifesting contradictions. It is difficult for us to understand this because taken individually we cannot see or feel any element of contradiction in philosophical theories. Gramsci says that we must look at the ensemble of various philosophies. We must take them together in order to understand their manifestation of contradictions. Taken together we can find that they conflict with one another and contradict one another. Conflict between different philosophical systems at the level of superstructure is due to contradictions at the level of base which are social contradictions.

Gramsci finds the starting point of praxis in what he calls ‘Cathartic’ movement. By Cathartic movement Gramsci means a passage from purely economic to the ethico-political movement. This implies the superior elaboration of the structure into superstructure in the minds of men. It also implies passing from ‘objective to subjective’ and from ‘necessity to freedom.’ As a result of this Catharsis, structure ceases to be an external force dominating man. It changes and creates a new ethico-political form and aims at emancipation. Gramsci says that “to establish the Cathartic moment becomes
... the starting-point for all the philosophy of praxis, and the cathartic process coincides with the chain of syntheses which have resulted from the evolution of the dialectic." 88

From the relationship of a state and ideology, Gramsci deduces the concept of hegemony. Hegemony is understood to be the ability of a class to dominate by assuming moral and intellectual leadership without resorting to coercion. Referring to the political development of the concept of hegemony, Gramsci says: "the political development of the concept of hegemony represents a great philosophical advance as well as a politico-practical one." 89

Therefore it becomes absolutely necessary on the part of the working class to abolish bourgeois hegemony. To overthrow bourgeois hegemony, the working class must achieve ideological hegemony. Towards that purpose, in the first place, the working class must realize the hegemonic apparatus of the state. To quote Gramsci: "The realization of a hegemonic apparatus, in so far as it creates a new ideological

88 SPN, p.367
89 Ibid., 333
terrain, determines a reform of consciousness and of methods of knowledge."

The proletariat must be conscious of the hegemonic apparatus. It is only on the basis of this consciousness that the proletariat ideology could become erected and can stand effectively. Being conscious of hegemony is rather the first step towards proletarian consciousness. To quote Gramsci: "Consciousness of being part of a particular hegemonic force (that is to say, political consciousness) is the first stage towards a further progressive self consciousness in which theory and practice will finally be one."91

It is not only that proletarian ideology depends on being conscious of hegemony, but also consciousness is a prerequisite of theory-practice unity. Gramsci says that every conception of the world and every philosophy had been concerned with the problem of unity of theory and practice. Gramsci, however, believes in the importance of party in this aspect. For him the parties are "the crucibles where the

---

90 SPN, p.365
91 Ibid., p.333
unification of theory and practice, understood as a real
historical process, takes place."

Thus, Marx had been primarily concerned with ideology as false consciousness, and the intellectual endeavour of both Marx and Engels was to envisage concrete social conditions by which it becomes possible for man to get rid of this age old malady of false consciousness, which fills human imagination – a spurious phenomena that conceals the true nature of reality, which is contradiction. For Marx, ideology hides the reality of contradictions and builds up an imaginary world of imagined entities that are smooth and comforting to man's imaginations, befitting to his passions and gives him the feeling of having solved his problems or the feeling that everything is fine or in order. However, Gramsci uses the term in a positive sense, unlike Marx and his later followers who used it to refer to false consciousness which performs the function of concealing the true nature of the reality – social conditions. For Gramsci ideology is a part of superstructure which does the function of unifying two strata of people. Both ideology and philosophy of praxis belong to the superstructure. Unlike Karl Marx who

92 SPN, p.335
was of the opinion that what conditions the consciousness is the economic relations prevalent, Gramsci holds that class consciousness can be determined by the superstructure which comprehends the ideology and the culture.

Another important question which Gramsci has dealt with in *Prison Notebooks* in the section, 'Philosophy of Praxis', is that 'what is man'? Gramsci opines that it is a relative question in the sense that through this query “we want to know what are and what can we become,” and the extent to which man can make himself. The answer of these would be that man is the ‘process of his actions’.³ He further claims that “there does not exist historically a way of seeing and acting which is equal for all men”,⁴ that is, biological equality or law of nature are not applicable in philosophy. Catholicism and past philosophies stumble when they conceive ‘man’ as limited to spirit. The practice of Catholicism reveals that contrary to its professions, only men with some property or economic facilities were given political rights or the right to transform the society. Man is a social being, and a society of many

---

³ *SPN*, p.351
⁴ Ibid., p.352
presupposes the human society. 'What is man' is a question pertaining to 'man in general' or to 'human nature'. If a man is related to his social, economic being, then there cannot be 'man-in-general' and human nature is therefore an 'ensemble of relations.' Human nature is, thus, quite specific and historic and can be located 'in the entire history of the human species.' There can never be uniformity in human nature that can be related to history, as it is manifested in the idea of becoming. The socio-economic equalities in history exist to that extent of which men are conscious. The striving of men towards these socio-economic equalities is measured in the length of 'progress' or 'becoming'. Progress is an ideology, whereas becoming is a dialectical and historical movement. The extent of the state of becoming, that is, extent to which man dominates his environment is the yardstick of the comparison of human nature. The mastery of external world or material forces is the means to achieve human nature. Common sense regards all men as equal on biological grounds and has the residue of Catholicism. In fact, human nature is the unity of theory and practice.
Material elements or the aspect of economics is not the only angle from where 'men' and his relations with the other members of the society can be perceived (the reality as understood in Marxism). It is this ensemble of relations that is the beginning of the entire process in Marxian scheme of thought. Gramsci breaks away from the basic tenet and maintains that society and social change can be brought not entirely on the basis of the material aspect (what is called base) but that other super structural elements, such as ideology, culture, morality etc. have a role in it. Thus, ideational culture can have a causative role in social change.

Marxism, which had its foundation in the basic tenets of classical German philosophy, aimed at having a unity of the base and the superstructure. This is quite evident in the conception of historical bloc, where different sets of social relations had a meeting point. The more comprehensive and extensive the historical bloc, the more integrative the state becomes. 'Philosophy of praxis,' the section in the *Prison Notebooks*, deals with an important question, 'what is philosophy?' The answer to this question is arrived at through a long discussion by removing the wrong interpretation many
thinkers had of philosophy. The critical philosophy is the one where there is an analysis and critical examination of the various conceptions which remained as sediments in the minds of people. Spontaneous philosophy is, however, what is done by anyone, as everyone is a philosopher.

The unity of the 'simple', the common mass and the intellectuals is a novel attitude in Marxism. There is a need of a meeting place, a space of commonness. This has to be developed and it requires some amount of homogeneity. Ideologies, culture, morality etc. which form the superstructure, do not remain within a metaphysical sphere in Gramsci. Society cannot be simply defined in terms of economy alone but the items of superstructure have a great role to play in it.