CHAPTER III: CRITIQUE OF HEGEL AND MARX

1. Hegel

Hegel's philosophy dominated the thought of Europe for several decades. But the two elements of his metaphysics, viz., the Absolute and the Dialectics have always appeared as incompatible, difficult to reconcile. If the ultimate structure of the universe remains static and immutable, as the idea of Absolute would suggest, the dynamicity of individual thought becomes purely subjective without any objective effect. The apparent diversity which the universe exhibits is equally dead and static. Neo-idealists like Croce have resolved this contradiction by eliminating the Absolute at the back of the changing reality and concentrating on the dialectical process. Reality, according to them is not thought but the process of thinking.

Whatever might be the logical validity of the Hegelian system his historical perception and political philosophy have some drawbacks which have been revealed with the progress of historical knowledge and political experience. Hegel's theory of history and knowledge of Oriental states were formed at a time when Oriental studies had not yet made sufficient progress. It is not a fact that the Eastern civilizations produced no personalities. In philosophy, religion, literature and art, in the arts of government, in industrial production and organization, in village administration much creative work was done in India and China which would not have been possible without individuals freed from the shackles of convention and tyranny. Hegel's world historical individuals are all conquerors and rulers. The Orientals produced prophets, reformers, philosophers, scientists and writers and he does not see any greatness in them. The cultural achievement of a weak state is no progress according to Hegel's yardstick.

Like Plato, Hegel developed a utopian conception of state. History belies the verdict that the state is the root of all progress.
Progress is possible in a weak state centering round its cultural attainments or individual personalities as was in the case of India and China. Neither does history admit that the leadership of the king or of the aristocratic class can help to develop an ideal state. This has very often led to despotism. The theory of state as the absolute, wherever applied in practice, has resulted in the denial of individual rights. Of course, if the state can resolve the conflict between the individual and the society, the individual may not feel suppression. But the point is whether any state has ever actualized this utopia. There is some truth in Russell's hit that Hegelian freedom has been converted into the right to obey the law.

Hegel's theory of world-historical nation, that in every stage a leading nation appears with its absolute right of being the vehicle of this present stage in the world mind's development, has a leaning towards racial imperialism. The nation as the ethical substance has the right to acquire the form of the state even by force and wrong. The same consideration justifies civilized nations in treating as barbarians and bringing under subjugation those who lack the essential moments of state. This is an ominous hint towards imperialist aggression and war. The supreme nation theory offends against peace. It also militates against the patent fact of growing international cultural fellowship.

These defects, however, have not outmoded the conceptions of dialectics and rational progress in history and the organic evolution of state which are positive elements in Hegelian philosophy, and survive in various forms in current political thought.

2. Marx

Marx's philosophy is founded upon the twin principles of dialectical materialism and historical materialism. The former states that matter proceeds dialectically, i.e., by means of contradiction of

1. See ante, pp. 11-12
opposites and that matter is the source of all motion. Historical materialism states that history proceeds dialectically through class struggle and that the motive force of this process is the material contradiction of life. From this premise Marx goes on to the further derivation that within the framework of material environment the system of production is the ultimate determining factor of the cultural and spiritual superstructure.

In fact, historical materialism of Marx is not concerned with the question whether the phenomena of nature are made of material particles and motion or of something else. Its only concern is to establish that material condition is the decisive factor of social change. Obviously, this is not a necessary outcome of dialectical materialism and one does not follow from the other. Dialectical or metaphysical materialism is not compatible with historical materialism only; it is equally compatible with the view that religion, race, climate or sex is the decisive factor of historical change. For, if matter is the primary source of everything it is the source of economic motive as much as of other psychological and spiritual motives. Thus, there is no necessary connection between dialectical and historical materialism.

Like all monistic schools of social science historical materialism tries to explain all historical events in terms of actions of one kind. There is a continuity between the phases of historical development and all arts and sciences have arisen from the stream of social life. As social life is, in the last analysis, determined by the system of production so also every outcome of social life is economically determined. In this way, Marx introduces the mode of production as the fundamental conditioning factor of all the general characteristics of a culture.

Marx and his followers have tried to establish this thesis by means of a sweeping analysis of the different phases of history and by citing a host of illustrations. But so have done the advocates of other monistic schools who have variously set forth copious instances from history to prove that religion, race, geography, sex or indivi-
individual genius is the determining factor of human progress. The Marxian analysis of history may lead to certain broad generalizations. These generalizations are claimed as 'laws.' On the strength of these 'laws' Marx claims to have reduced history and sociology to a science. The fund of historical knowledge and positive data is yet too poor to substantiate this claim. So long as man is the observer of the drama in which he himself is the actor the observation is never objective and complete. That is why events cannot always be explained and appear like accidents.

The dialectical theory both of Hegel and Marx tries to explain all major social changes by means of the law of transformation from quantity to quality. Like water accumulating heat and changing into vapour at temperature 100°, matter, according to Marx, changes into life and mind at successive quantitative levels of combination. Society also changes from one system to another with the accumulation of a certain degree of productive force. Such a unilinear measurement of progress is unhistorical because besides the material there are psychological and spiritual factors which cannot be measured and quantized.

Of course, Marx and Engels admitted a formal element in addition to the economic factor. This element, appearing in political and legal forms, theories and ideas sometimes acquires a strength of its own and even preponderates in determining the forms of struggle. But the economic situation at the base finally asserts itself as necessary. In other words, human mind, spiritual forces, power of leadership, etc., are active but only within the bounds set them by the productive structure. The 'formal element' is thus reduced to a virtual non-entity.

The idea of a classless society and of the socialist revolution being the last of revolutions in history is a departure from the law of social dialectics. Marx and his followers believed that the proletarian revolution would establish a state which, after abolishing the classes, will wither away. History has never shown that a government established by force has prepared its own end. Rather, there is reason to fear that a class, or a section acting on behalf of a class,
controlling the resources of the country and exercising undisputed power will turn into a new class of exploiters and perpetuate the authority of the state. The proletarian dictatorship leading spontaneously to classless and stateless society is a utopia where 'scientific' socialism yields to the dream of a revolutionary and brings the zeal of an idealist in the social war.

With all these lacunae Marxian analysis of capitalist society and the dialectics of class struggle remain substantially correct and have been largely accepted by almost all shades of socialist thought.