CHAPTER-V

CONCLUSION:
TOWARDS A MARXIST DISCOURSE ON THE STATE IN INDIA

After a selective examination of the literature on the Marxist perspectives on the Indian State as it has constituted itself in the post-colonial period, we may now proceed to pinpoint the salient features of the understanding of the Indian State by groups and individuals claiming themselves to be broadly committed to Marxist theory and practice. Firstly, the groups that can be regarded as Marxist and that have produced this literature have generated different perspectives for the obvious reason that they have been involved in different kinds of activities and inspired by different kinds of motives. Broadly, we have groups engaged in Marxist practice and thus involved in theory as part of their praxis, and there are others engaged in the business of interpreting the nature of the Indian State mostly as theoretical practice, if one can invoke an Althusserian category. But within each of these groups there are divergencies due to their specific theoretical or practical compulsions. Though the overall theoretical terrain may look bewilderingly complicated, it is possible to characterise it as loosely
and broadly Marxist discourse. This can be seen from the fact that the divergences make sense only in relation to the historical Marxism whose basic and in some sense trans-historical foundations were laid by the founding fathers, Marx and Engels. Even Lenin cannot be included in this original, classical Marxist moment in human history.

Classical Marxism itself did not produce a clear-cut or definitive political discourse centring around the category of the state. Yet, anyone who takes even a quick look at the major works of Marx and Engels, including the magnum opus, DAS KAPITAL, cannot fail to notice that no Marxist discourse on any economic theme escapes political encapsulation. Marx did not believe in such dichotomies as economic-politics or theory-practice. The main source of confusion seems to derive from the structure-superstructure distinction characterising the mode of production concept. Neither Marx nor Engels had the time to clear up in a theoretically elaborate sense the implications of this concept. But there is enough in original classical Marxism, especially in Marx's writings on France or Germany, which can be creatively used to produce a genuinely marxist discourse on the state. In fact, it would be more marxist to leave a theory unfinished since history itself is an unfinished on-going movement.

The perspectives examined have ranged from those
adhering to a narrow, one-sided and mechanical interpretation of classical Marxism, resulting in an economistic downgrading of the reality of the state and politics to those in which the state is accorded a more positive historical role in the process of its revolutionary self-destruction. In the case of the Indian State, the academic Marxists seems to have been more willing to emphasise the relative autonomy of the state and the other superstructural dimensions such as culture. The second issue raised in the literature relates to the class nature of the state, specifically the issue of which class or which combination of classes constitute the state and its power. This has involved the question of the bourgeois-democratic nature of the Indian State and ultimately of Indian nationalism itself. But moving beyond class composition, Indian Marxists of various hues have been forced to confront a society which is not a crystallised bourgeois society or "civil society". The survival of pre-capitalistic social forms and structures, especially caste and a functioning religio-feudal culture, has posed a continuing challenge to Indian Marxist theory and practice. It revolved for the communist parties, round the question of supporting the Indian Congress. In terms of state theory, the problem has been to map precisely the intricate and dialectical relationship between the surviving pre-capitalist caste and the emerging class system. The problem has been greatly complicated by the patterns of
interpretation between class and caste. Specifically, the issue has been to what extent class promotes caste interest and to what extent caste promotes class. Thirdly there has been the issue of the nature of liberal democracy in India. How genuine is it? Is it genuine enough to offer the working class even the illusion of political power? Fourthly, in a country like India with its vast peasantry, there is the role of the peasantry in relation to the state. Classical Marxism tended to dismiss the peasantry as a mere class-in-itself, with little capacity for transforming itself into a class-for-itself. How true is this of India? If true, how can there be any hope of a revolution with a minority of working class functioning as a revolutionary vanguard? Above all, how revolutionary is the working class? If no single class can promote a revolutionary possibility, as claimed dubiously for the advanced capitalist countries, what class alliances under whose leadership can keep alive the revolutionary hope in India? What about the revolutionary role of non-class groups such as the women, youth, non-wage workers or the daily-wagers?

Our conclusion is that the Marxist discourse on the Indian State has failed to address some of these issues. While academic Marxists tend to derive their theory from the West, without making allowances for the historical and existential differences, practising Marxists

-369-
seem to be clinging to a narrow and mechanistically interpreted version of classical Marxism. In short, nothing like the kind of encounter between theory and practice which produced a Lenin or a Mao seems to have taken place. What is worrying is not the differences and even tensions within the camp of Marxist discourse, but the absence of this encounter - the historical dialectic of theory and practice which is central to any Marxist enterprise.

Of course, it would be un-Marxist to claim to have an absolutist and ahistorical grasp of the nature of the Indian State. But Indian Marxist discourse, despite its great historical record of practice, seems to have nourished its praxis on a very thin diet of revolutionary theory. The established communist parties and formerly ultra-revolutionary groups seem to have settled down to make peace with the liberal bourgeois democratic Indian state. But will this do for a Marxist? As yet it is difficult to answer the crucial question whether their present compromise with the liberal state is a tactical retreat or a strategy of partial control or a desperate abandonment of revolutionary practice! Our detailed, though selective survey does not give any clear answer to this question. May be revolutions may still occur inspite of revolutionaries, as it did in Cuba! The Marxist inability to uncover the nature of the Indian state satisfactorily as
a historical category seems to point to a negative situation from a Marxist perspective. But then Marxism is not the prerogative only of those currently Marxist, and history, as Hegel and Marx saw, has its own way of resolving conflicts and contradictions.