Introduction

A principal theoretical concern of the Marxist philosophical tradition has been the rescue of philosophy from the idealist discourse and its restoration to history. With Marx's theoretical labour a debate was borne—one that went to the very heart of the struggle between the concrete and the abstract, one which exposed the contradictions between the materialism of life as it is actually lived and the idealism of the bourgeois Weltanschauung. It is no exaggeration to state that the supreme function of bourgeois philosophy has been and continues to be to mystify contradictions and furnish rationalizations for the established order to continue. The questions—'What is philosophy for?' and 'For whom is philosophy?' are not too old or hackneyed for the re-asking. Our daily history is one long, appalling commentary on the harsh realities of a society deeply contradiction-ridden, where, when compared, the forces of repression multiply and outnumber year by year the forces of resistance. One constant factor in this history has been the refusal by most practitioners of philosophy to use philosophy as a weapon in the theoretical and political struggle of the working class. And for those (a tendency predominant in Western Marxism) who declare that
'Marxism is dead; Marxist theory is obsolete', the reality of acute contradictions in our (Third World) societies obviously does not exist. They have banished it from their domain as much as idealists negate the finite via the activity of the Idea. The 'end of philosophy' was a call for the demolition of a long philosophical tradition which viewed philosophy as an activity-in-itself and not to philosophy as such, as has been the popular interpretation. However, the breakaway from the traditional philosophical problematic has been far from complete, considering that within Marxian philosophical literature there has been a significant revival of idealist epistemologies and tools of analysis which blunt the examination of the contours and content of class relations. How do we build a philosophy that materialistically reveals this reality for what it is and becomes in itself a class struggle in theory? The practice of organizing and fighting for a resolution of contradictions is in the final analysis the only teacher and unless and until revolutionary theory recognizes this as its only raison d'être it fails to perform the very task it is theoretically supposed to i.e. to determine and sustain a revolutionary course in history. 'Divorced from revolutionary practice,
all revolutionary theory is transformed into its opposite'. (Ranciere). Autonomous of practice, theory creates its own speculative ambit. It begins to thrive on itself and either freezes the dialectic of theory and practice or has a retrogressive effect on political practice, a line, because of its refusal to return to practice for an assertion of its validity or a refutation of its correctness. Mao's reminder that "we must get rid of this habit of only criticizing after the event", does not by any means imply that historical events do not require an appraisal but, it emphasizes the need for the immediate and direct theoretical and political practice of intervention during the course, during the process of the event itself. It has often been alleged that theory has far 'outstripped practice' in Western Marxism. This is posing the question falsely. The point is that theory has been laboured at in a marked absence of political aims which serve labour's struggle against capital. And, this is not a situation peculiar to only Western Marxism. It is this very lack which has engendered the fact that instead of understanding a genuine political crisis e.g., the question of imperialism which would require them to sharpen their theoretical tools for an analysis of class and the export of capital,
most Marxian philosophers have developed within Marxian philosophy an anthropological content which is speculative as well — a futurology almost. Without attempting a materialist reading of history they end up ultimately serving the interests of the State ideological apparatuses. They perpetuate a form of theorising which acts as a fetter on theory's dialectic with the life of a movement. And for those Marxists for whom philosophy is the final instance politics and revolutionary politics is that which prompts their theoretical labour the task is not an easy one. They are faced with the tedious job of producing critiques of all existing idealist, theological tendencies in past and present Marxism, of waging a polemic in all ideological areas and of a theoretical vigilance that Marxist theory develops as science and does not degenerate into dogma. I am reminded of Engels's letter to Marx, November 19, 1844. He wrote:

"Each word that one wastes on men, each line that one has to write or read against theology and abstraction, or against vulgar materialism, angers me. Nonetheless, it is quite another matter when, instead of all these chimeras — for unfulfilled man is himself a chimera until he fulfils himself, one concerns oneself with real and
living things, with historical developments. At least that is the best there is, so long as we are reduced to the use of the pen alone, and so long as our thoughts cannot be immediately realized by means of our hands or, if necessary, our fists”.

It was with this perspective in mind that I began this examination of the philosophy of 'praxis' and its implications to Marxism since the term 'praxis' seemed at its very core to contain the problematic of a theory-practice nexus. However, a survey and analysis of Marxian literature on this subject revealed an absence of a concept. It appeared more to be an expression per se but what is more important it was an expression of a tendency in Marxian philosophy. An anthropological problematic e.g., the question of man's relation to nature replaced a critique of political economy as the core of Marxism. A philosophy of man and a theory of consciousness were the principal concerns. Invariably the resultant philosophy retained older idealist elements — elements of agnosticism, the Feuerbachian replacement of the philosophy of Geist with a philosophy of Man, the pre-Marxist phenomenological paradigm of subject-object dialectic displacing a dialectics of class. To my mind a philosophy of praxis represented a theoretical impasse
and showed up a developing lacunae in Marxian philosophy in the last few decades. I was left with two options - either to attempt a critique of all those in whose work this term is widely used or to examine the epistemology and politics of this term in an earlier system where it was given a theoretical status, to explicate the content and method of an idealist reading in idealism proper and to explore the implications theoretically of a philosophy of praxis to Marxian in some of the vital existent debates. I decided on the latter since the former would have resulted in the replacement of questions of theory and their political implications with that of an interpretative reading.

Therefore, in the first chapter I have attempted an expository and historical-political study of the concept of 'praxis' as it figures in Aristotle's philosophy. This is based on two of his treatises - 'The Nichomachean Ethics' and 'Politics'. This chapter consists of a conceptual clarification of the term, a close analysis of the status accorded to theory and practice in his epistemological categories of the Theoretical Sciences, Practical Sciences and the Productive Sciences; and the dialectic between this epistemology, the existence of
slavery, and Aristotle's analysis of the household economy. The second chapter falls into two sections. The first one details the dialectic between labour, human 'nature' and the Absolute in Hegel's social philosophy. A few sections from the following texts have been utilised - 'Systemfragment' (1800), 'System of Morality' (1802), two courses on 'Realphilosophie' (1803-4 and 1805-6) and the Master-Slave dialectic in 'Phenomenology of Mind' (1807). In the second section I have taken up the Marx-Hegel relation and the question of the 'inversion' and a materialist dialectic since a materialist reading is necessary to Marxian philosophy. The third chapter is a critique of 'praxis' positions by way of an examination of their interpretation of Marxism as Humanism. The 'Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts' for which the object the discourse is private property a theoretical dislocation is shown to occur when the concepts used in analysis belong to a humanist discourse of generic essence, alienation and the individual as units of analysis. I have developed the argument that a proletarian class viewpoint is not conjoint with a humanist viewpoint by way of examining the relation between science and ideology in Marxism, and, for a deeper elucidation of the theory-practice problematic. In the latter half of this chapter commodity fetishism has been examined as it
provides a problematic where the issues of Marx's scientific method and ideology become central. The scientific method and the fetishistic discourse are articulated in the Trinity formula of Capital/Profit, Land/Rent, Labour/Wages. It becomes possible to explain why essences take on the appearances that they do when the social hieroglyphic contained in a conception is deciphered. The fourth chapter concerns issues regarding the epistemological question of the thought-real relation, the necessity for drawing the distinction between scientific and philosophic practices in Marxism, the necessity for a materialist theory of knowledge and a vigilance against all idealist, speculative modes of analysis in Marxian philosophy. A materialist epistemology assumes importance in the struggle against both the empiricist tradition and the Hegelian idealist reduction of the relation between the real and thought about the real. In the conclusion I have discussed the politics of a Marxian philosophy and the question of an active theory-practice nexus. To substantiate the view that praxis positions belong to a Marxian pre-history it was necessary to pose the problem of the struggle between idealism and materialism, the relation
of a Marxian philosophy with the science of history and how a materialist epistemology would complement the method in Marx. The Yugoslav 'Praxis' attempt has been used to examine the dialectic between philosophical positions, political aims and practice. The articulation of a philosophy that is a political instrument and simultaneously an appraisal of historical materialism is the dominant theoretical problematic of this dissertation. I have tried to show that a philosophy of praxis is inadequate to this task, with its tools of analysis and its regressive effect on scientific knowledge and revolutionary practice, this due to a number of reasons which I have elaborated on in the various chapters.