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Nature of the State: Marxist Critique and its Divergences in Contemporary World

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Mahendra Sapkota

Abstract

This paper seeks to synthesize the scientific issues of the Marxist critique of the State. Taking insights from secondary literature, it discusses the concept and characteristics of the State in general and then specifies the contestations of the Marxist perspective on the nature of the State. The paper illustrates how classical Marxism perceives State as a unilinear product of class struggle and serves the welfare of the dominant class. However, the recent developments in Marxism have raised questions to the realist and structural perspective of the State. The Neo-Marxist and post-Marxist scholars contributed along with the concepts of ideology, changing relations of base-structure, hegemony, State apparatus, and crisis in the purist form of class. This paper concludes that these developments are unavoidable in the present-day Marxist discourse which can be theoretically levelled as multi-realist and post-structural critiques of the State. It is expected that the implication of the paper lies to foster the Marxist critique of the state, primarily in different social science disciplines including political science, international relations, economics, and development studies.

Keywords: *Marxism, Neo-Marxism, Post-Marxism, State*

Introduction

State has been considered as a core concept of political science, and it has been also an integral dimension of various social science disciplines, including international relations, sociology, economics, and development studies. The theories of the State are contested in terms of its origin, nature, and function. Most of them argue that the State is a complex social, political, and economic construction. From an ontological perspective, the State is a dialectical unity, which goes along with a series of contradictions. There is no universal definition of the State that could be unavoidably accepted; rather, it is fundamentally an unresolved contestation. According to Rodee et al.¹, there is a difficulty in answering such questions as what the State is, how it begins and develops, and what it does. Laski² proposes an organizational worldview of the State as it is the supremacy of all the institutions; a territorial society; a dividend of government and subjects; an allotted physical area; and the ultimate legal depository of social will.

As argued by Das³, various approaches of State can be seen as conceptual dualisms consisting of opposing one-sided aspects. There has been a conceptual dualism

¹ Rodee, Carlton Clymer, Totton James Anderson, Carl Quimby Christol & Thomas H. Greene, *Introduction to Political Science*, New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1983.

² Laski, Harold J. *A Grammar of Politics*, 5th edition, London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1967.

³ Raju J. Das, 'State Theories: A Critical Analysis; Science & Society', Guilford Press, volume 60: 1, spring, 1996, pp 27-57, available at <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40403532>.

about the nature of the State. The dualistic approaches can be represented along with instrumentalism vs. structuralism; capital determination of the State vs. class struggle determination; and State-centered vs. society-centered approaches.⁴ However, there are multiple arguments and counter-arguments adhered by various scholars regarding the characteristics of the State. They include liberal-democratic (Macpherson), libertarian (Hayek, Friedman, and Nozick), communitarian (MacIntyre, and Walzer), idealistic (Plato, Rousseau, Kant, and Hegel), fascist (Mussolini and Hitler), conservative (Burke), New right (Hayek and Nozick) and new left (Patemen, Macpherson, and Poulantzas), Pluralist (classical pluralists like Truman and Dahl; reformed pluralists like Richardson and Jordon; pluralist elitists like McConnell and Lowi; and neo-pluralists like Lindblom and Dahl), Social-Democratic (including evolutionary, Fabian, guild socialist, parliamentary, etc.), and the critical perspective (including Marxist, neo-Marxist and post-Marxist, critical feminist, etc.).

From the Marxist perspective, State is a historically produced ruling structure of the society. There are several issues that Marxism (and its recent developments) engages with the analysis of changing nature of the modern State, its apparatuses and hegemonic construction, dominant contradictions, its position in global and regional power order, political and social movements, the emergence of critical mass, the political economy of poverty and inequality, internal relations and its aid-dependency, changing nature of classes and elites, and the nature of political economy (either semi/feudal, pre/capitalist or semi/ colonial). These are some of the crucial agendas both in the theoretical as well as empirical research. In this context, this paper particularly situates the Marxist critiques of the State.

Methods and Materials

A critical review of literature reflects that there have been many exciting developments in the research methodology of political science.⁵ The topics and scopes of political science research have been expanded, and it has gone from the macro world view to the micro world view. The analysis of State as a methodology has thus connoted with macro outlook (State as a ruling agency, a supreme institute, a legal structure, the King and leaders) to the micro-narratives (dealing with the people's perceptions, native experiences, and social movements in the State and its fluidity in nature). Ontologically, both the Marxist and non-Marxist (largely functionalist) approaches of State belong to the first worldview of State (macro perspective), and they are struggling to be compatible to address the recent issues of post-modernism (including post-structural and post-industrial) in the studies of modern nation-States. Indeed, it goes beyond the debate of qualitative vs. quantitative or just assimilation of mixed-method approaches. It is thus realized that the big data, broader narratives, and deductive theorization are not sufficient enough to analyse what the State is and what it is not.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ David E McNabb, *Research methods for political science: Quantitative and qualitative methods*, Routledge, 2015.

The main objective of this paper is to analyze the Marxist worldview of the State from classical to neo-Marxist and post-Marxist perspectives. Along with a critical ontological position, the paper assumes that the modern States in particular have been characterized with the dialectical contradictions of people and society and the State along with its power structure, domination, resistance and movements, and the hegemonic construction. The paper is methodologically based on the secondary sources of literature for drawing insights, contestations, and arguments. Thus, no empirical data has been adopted by the author as a primary source; and globally, all the States in the world are theoretically taken as a study universe.

Debates and Contestations

State in the conventional idea

Various scholars have defined the State in different ways and there has not been a common or universal understanding. Rather, the term “State” refers to a set of diverse and overlapping concepts that are devised with the plurality of the theories about a particular political context. It has some philosophical, ideological, methodological, and empirical issues to shape the idea and definitions of the State from ancient to modern times. However, two perspectives often contrast among the scholars, i.e. the nature of the state either as means-centric or ends-centric. Max Weber and Charles Tilly have proposed means-related instrumental approaches that assume the State as a means of a legitimate violation of law and order. Weber⁶ in *Politics as a Vocation* proposes that the State “is a human community that successfully claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory”, while Tilly⁷ characterizes the State as a “coercion-wielding organization” (*Coercion, Capital, and the European States in terms of war and preparation of the wars*).

Ends-related definitions are teleological and they lay emphasis more on the ultimate tasks and responsibilities of the State. Among them, Marxists often perceive the ends of the State. They argue that perpetuation of class domination is maintained in the State in favour of the ruling bourgeoisie class which eventually maintains a capitalist mode of production. Karl Marx (1818-1883) argues that the State exists just for serving and managing the common affairs of the bourgeoisie. Another teleological perspective is liberal thought. John Locke (1632-1704) in his classic work *Second Treatise on Government* in 1662 maintains that the goal of the State is the ‘commonwealth’ and the ‘the preservation of property’ including one’s life and liberty. Similarly, classical/liberal economists Adam Smith (1723-1790) has also raised the issue of public goods as a central function of the State⁸.

⁶ Max Weber, *Politics as a Vocation*, H. H. Gerth & M. Wright eds., *Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1949 (originally published in 1919 in German language).

⁷ Charles Tilly, *Coercion, Capital, and the European States. AD 990–1990 [Studies in Social Discontinuity]*, Basil Blackwell, Cambridge, 1990, pp. 269.

⁸ Adam Smith, *An inquiry into the nature and causes of the wealth of nations*, W. Strahan & T. Cadell, London, volume 1, 1776.

Though there are sharp debates on conceptualizing the State, scholars are less divided on defining the basic requirements of the State. Mostly asserted components include that a State must have people, government, territory, and sovereignty. The distinctive features of a state are sovereignty (with absolute and unrestricted power); State institutions (recognizably public); legitimacy (its power to make decisions, binding on all within its territory); domination (with coercive power); and territoriality (giving it a distinct and separate existence in the community of nations). Montevideo Convention has offered a commonly accepted definition of Rights and Duties of States in 1933. It maintains that “the State as a person of international law should possess four characteristic features, including a permanent population; a defined territory; government; and the capacity to enter into relations with the other States (Article 1). The Convention further urges the federal/ central States to constitute a sole person in the eyes of international law (Article 2). Since the 1990s, contentious politics has become popular that largely started to engage with the analysis of the nature of modern States in different conceptualizations. These include nation and State, nation-State, State and government, State and country, State and society, State and civil society, and State and non-State actors.

In political science, there are theoretical debates regarding the nature and origin of the State. The divine theory (advocated by most of the theological scholars and leaders) regards the State as the handiwork of God; monarchy as a divinely ordained institution; kings as the breathing-images of god; and disobedience of the State laws as a crime as well as sin. Classic readings for this approach include James I (*The Law of Free Monarchies*), Filmer (*Patriarch*), Manu (*Manusmriti*), and Kautilya (*Arthashastra*). The force theory makes power the foundation of the State; war helping in begetting the State, and the force helping in protecting and expanding it. Fundamental readings of this perspective include Oppenheimer (*the State*) and Jenks (*History of politics*). The social contract theory explores the State of the result of the contract which took people from the State of nature to the political society which was often manifested as the product of human will. Though the contract theorists differed largely, the main advocates for this approach are Hobbes (*Leviathan*), Locke (*Two Treatise of Government*), and Rousseau (*The Social Contract*). The evolutionary theory seems to be historical, and mostly argued by liberal philosophers and scholars. It believes that the State is an evolution, evolving slowly and gradually along with different social institutions/structures including social instincts, marriage, kinship, religion, economic activities, and political consciousness.

The Marxist critique of State describes the State as the result of class society, the manifestation of irreconcilable interests working in the interest of the possessing class and as an instrument of exploitation against the non-possessing one. The classic readings of this approach include Karl Marx and F. Engels (*the origins of the family, private property, and the State*) and V.I. Lenin (*The State and the revolution*). The patriarchal theory (advocated by Henry Maine in ancient law) and the matriarchal theory (argued by Morgan in *Studies in ancient society*, and McLennan in *Primitive society*) regards the State as the expansion of families which were either patriarchal (androcentric, patrilocal, patrilineal) or matriarchal (matrilocal and matrilineal) in nature.

There is a reference of the State in all the writings of philosophers since the ancient Vedic period, Greek era, and Vedanta era down to the times of renaissance, enlightenment, modernity, and post-modernity. Western philosophers seem to be more provisional and advocate for the individualism and right-based claims of the State. They include Plato (427-347 BC), Aristotle (384-322 BC), Cicero (106-43 BC), St. Augustine (354-430 AD), St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), Marsilio of Padua (1270-1343), Niccolo Machiavelli (1469-1527), Jean Bodin (1530-96), Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679), John Locke (1632-1704), Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832), Herbert Spencer (1820-1903), Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-78), Edmund Burke (1729-97), G.W.F. Hegel (1770-1831), Alexis De Tocqueville (1805-59), John Stuart Mill (1806-73), Thomas Hill Green (1836-82), Karl Marx (1818-1883), Frederick Engels (1820-1895) and Max Weber (1864-1920). The eastern philosophers in the Indian sub-continent, on the other hand, claim for the collective well-being and ideal morals to be the main purpose and characteristic of the State. Among these, the most pronounced thoughts are laid by Manu (Manusmriti), Gautama Buddha (563-483 BCE), Kauṭilya, or Vishnugupta (375-283 BCE), Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948) and Jawaharlal Nehru (1889-1964).

Marxism: Contradictions and the new world order

Marxism school of thought is a discourse with focal ideas of class struggle and revolution, ideology and dialectics, historical materialism, economic production and social relationships, and dialects of base and superstructure. However, this kind of classical Marxism has been challenged with the new contradictions of global as well as domestic political economy, including the changing nature of class; linear, deterministic, and structural interpretation vs multi-linear, relative and post-structural interpretation of history; changing nature of revolution and class struggle; and dichotomous vs continuum approach of base and superstructure, etc. Neo-Marxism and post-Marxism which characterize Marxist studies in recent years show a remarkable departure from classical Marxism. To quote Sharma:

Marxism has played a decisive role in formulating new academic discourse in western academia and also a political theory in the nineteenth century and it still plays a significant role in different spaces. However, it represents only one aspect of knowledge as no single theory can encompass the entirety of knowledge of various disciplines and domains in the present context. ...it has relevance but the relevance is to be judged with other knowledge theories.⁹

In recent years, most scholars maintain that Marxism neither can claim a deterministic and linear worldview nor as an absolute epistemology nor a mere political movement. Marxism has crossed the ideological boundary of Marx, Engels, and Lenin moving beyond the classics of the communist manifesto and class struggle. The idea of Marx encompasses a massive post-representative discourse that at times critiques its

⁹ Krishna Chandra Sharma, Foreword, In Megh Prasad Kharel, *Marxism and the new world order. A discourse of shifting global system*, Foreword, 2013, p. 2, para 3.

foundation. In this context, Kharel¹⁰ rightly proposes five arguments to illustrate the Marxist discourse and the new world order. These include Marxism and discourse on epochal shift, the paradigm shift in understanding the ideology, rethinking on the class analysis of Marx, deconstructing Marx's unilinear view of history; and dismantling the hierarchy between base and superstructure. Kharel further argues that Marxism has critical challenges to adhere multiple contradictions and the plurality of the worldviews; though there are yet equal possibilities of Marxist ideology in the new global system in terms of its dialectical worldview and the emancipatory critiques¹¹. At present, reconstructionists have been challenged to go beyond traditional Marxism, and contrary to, orthodoxy Marxists criticized this movement as being 'revisionist' and 'pro-capitalist'. Overall, Marxist studies in recent years are collectively spoken as 'neo-Marxism', 'post-Marxism' or 'post-modernism'. The tag 'post-Marxism' or 'neo-Marxism' usually evokes the idea of a critique of orthodoxy or classical Marxism; though they have been somehow buzzing terminologies and often contesting too.

The Marxist idea of the State

In the Marxist perspective, the State is the construction of the ruling class. Marxist theory possesses a critique of capitalism and the capitalist State. In the earlier writings of Marx, Marx started to criticize how the then States were exploitative and the majority of the people were perpetuated to be impoverished by its regulations. Marx¹² in *The German Ideology* viewed the State as a structure of exploitation constituted to serve the economic interests of the ruling class (i.e. bourgeoisie). Two years later, Marx and Engels¹³ expounded the idea in the *Communist Manifesto* which reflected 'the executive of the modern State is nothing but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie'.

The Marxist idea of State theory is based on the economic deterministic approach as laid in the philosophy of materialistic interpretation of history. For Marx¹⁴, there is the class struggle throughout history among the haves and have nots to access and control the means and forces of production. It is the class struggle that ultimately determines peoples' production relations and all other relations, including the political and economic (*The German Ideology*, Ch. 1 & 3). In this theory, the State is an instrument of class rule where it serves the welfare of the ruling class. In doing so, the State is not permanent, eternal, and harmonic. It becomes functional only with the uneven

¹⁰ Megh Prasad Kharel, *Marxism and the new world order. A discourse of shifting global system*, Oriental Publication, 2013, pp. 4, 42, 65, 75, 86.

¹¹ Ibid, pp. 91-93.

¹² Karl Marx & Friedrich Engels, *A Critique of the German Ideology*, 1846, first published in 1932, available at https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/Marx_The_German_Ideology.pdf.

¹³ Karl Marx & Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, Chapter I, Bourgeois and Proletarians, Workers' Educational Association (*Kommunistischer Arbeiterbildungsverein*), 1848, available at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/Manifesto.pdf>.

¹⁴ Karl Marx & Friedrich Engels, *A Critique of the German Ideology*, 1846, first published in 1932.

production relations in society. The production relations are often built in favour of the bourgeoisie as the means of production (including land, industries, labour, and natural resources) are also controlled by this class. The bourgeoisie control the economy (base), therefore, they control the State (base and superstructure as a whole).

Then, it seems a critical question as to whether the nature of class society changes the nature of the State or not. Classical Marxism is less engaged with this contested question, and it only views the history as a product of class struggle that happened between Haves (the richer minority class, bourgeoisie, the ruling ones i.e. the capitalists) and Have nots (the poor majority class, the ruled ones, i.e. the proletariat). For Marx and Engels, the classes are economically deterministic, and they are categorized as the means of possession of economic resources. They have often argued that ultimate goal of communism is a classless society which would be possible with ‘withering away’ of the State itself, to be maintained only by the ‘administration of things’. In this context, Engels in part 3, chapter 2 of *Anti-Dühring* concludes:

The interference of the State power in social relations becomes superfluous in one sphere after another and then ceases of itself. The government of persons is replaced by the administration of things and the direction of the processes of production. The State is not “abolished”, it withers away. (German: Der Staat wird nicht „abgeschafft“, er stirbt ab., meaning-- ‘The State is not “abolished”, it atrophies.)’¹⁵

As reflected in the theory of historical materialism, the classless society will exist only in a working-class State which can be brought about only by overthrowing the bourgeois State through a revolution. As it would be, whereas the bourgeois State requires to be smashed, the socialist State will ‘wither away’ to reach into a ‘communist state’. In Marxism, therefore, the ideas of ‘abolition’ and ‘withering away’ of the State are not synonymous. The repressive mechanisms of the State as maintained by capitalistic mode of production would not be required at the communism which is previously used as the means of the exploitation of the working classes and service of the ruling bourgeoisie. To reflect Engels:

State interference in social relations becomes, in one domain after another, superfluous, and then dies out of itself; the government of persons is replaced by the administration of things, and by the conduct of processes of production. The State is not “abolished”. It dies out...Socialized production upon a pre-determined plan becomes henceforth possible. The development of production makes the existence of different classes of society thenceforth an anachronism. In proportion as anarchy in social production vanishes, the political authority of the State dies out. Man, at last, the master of his form of social organization, becomes at the same time the lord over Nature, his own master – free.¹⁶

¹⁵ Friedrich Engels, *Institut für Marxismus-Leninismus beim ZK der SED (ed.), Herrn Eugen Dührings Umwälzung der Wissenschaft; Karl Marx – Friedrich Engels: Werke (in German)*, 20, Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1962, p. 262.

¹⁶ Friedrich Engels, *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific, Revue Socialiste*, (Later published in 1970 by Progress Publishers), 1880, pp. 79-83, available at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1880/soc-utop/index.htm>

Nevertheless, Marx and Engels had less engaged in the particular theorization of the State, the State has been the core component of the Marxist interpretation of history. In their Collected Works, Marx and Engels addressed past or then extant State forms from a historical point of view. Marx's early writings portrayed the bourgeois State as parasitic. He maintains that the nature of the State is often mirrored with class relations in society in general, acting as a regulator and repressor of class struggle, and as a tool of political power and domination for the ruling class.¹⁷ Following this, Flint & Taylor¹⁸ conclude that Marxism perceives the State to be just 'a committee' for managing the common affairs and rituals of the dominant ruling class.

Following this, Smith (2013) highly appreciates that the theoretical approach of Marxist State analysis can provide useful tools for understanding contemporary political developments¹⁹. Nevertheless, there is no single "Marxist theory of State", several different "Marxist" perspectives have been developed by adherents of Marxism.²⁰ The Marxists often believe that the State is contradictory construction itself. It is neither natural, moral and divine institution nor it is produced as a result of social contract or popular will. Rather, it is the product of specific circumstances in a particular context of history when society was divided into different classes whereby the classes were struggling with each other for their sake of existence. In the given structure, exploitation of one class by another is the driving force of the State. For the Marxists, State is essentially an instrument in the hands of the ruling class. The State tries to keep and manage the class struggle in balance by resolving the conflict and bringing harmony among the different classes. Yet, the State cannot end the class struggle irrespective of its reformist strategies. Since the State is a class State, the role and functions of the State also depend upon the nature of the class struggle and the purpose of the ruling classes. Thus, Marxism regards the State as an institution whose function is to maintain and defend class domination and exploitation. The theory of historical materialism clearly articulates this contradiction of the state in different historic junctures.

Ontologically, the Marxist perspective of the State rejects the liberal view of the State. The rejection is based upon the Marxist view of society as a product of class struggle where the interests of different classes are fundamentally contradictory and exploitative. To sum, as per the different readings of Marxist philosophy, the State can be summarized as the following five-folded characteristics (See Marx & Engels, 1848²¹; Engels²²; and Arora, 2011²³):

¹⁷ Bob Jessop, "State." *The Marx Revival: Key Concepts and New Interpretations*, edited by Marcello Musto, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2020, pp. 266–284.

¹⁸ Colin Flint, & Peter J. Taylor, *Political geography: World-economy, nation-State and locality*, Routledge, 2018.

¹⁹ Mark J Smith, & Mark J. Smith, *Rethinking State theory*, Routledge, 2013 (first published in 2000).

²⁰ Clyde W Barrow, *Critical Theories of the State: Marxist, neo-Marxist, post-Marxist*, University of Wisconsin Press, 1993, p. 4.

²¹ Karl Marx & Friedrich Engels, 'The Communist Manifesto', *Workers' Educational Association (Kommunistischer Arbeiterbildungsverein)*, 1848, available at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/Manifesto.pdf>

²² Friedrich Engels, 'The origin of the family, private property and the State', *Verso Books*, 2021 (First published in 1884), available at https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/origin_family.pdf

²³ Nathalie D Arora, *Political Science*, Tata McGraw-Hill Education, 2011, s.3.11.

- a) The economic factor is the sole guiding factor in the development and understanding of history and the modern State.
- b) Society and State are two distinct realities, the type of society explains the type of State, the society; the society thus furnishes the basis over which superstructure of the State is constructed.
- c) The State is not independent of society. The State is a means for the fulfillment of the ends of those who control the means of production in society. The slave-owning society serves the masters; the feudal society serves the feudal lords and the capitalist society serves the capitalists. This 'service' of the beneficiary class is eventually institutionalized in their respective States.
- d) The class society produces a State that serves the economically dominant class to exploit the weaker classes. The State thus is an instrument of class oppression and plays a dual role of destruction and reconstruction in any society.
- e) The abolition of private property is necessary for a classless society. The dictatorship of the proletariat is not the abolition of the state. The State works for the welfare of the proletariat and preparation for a classless society. The State withers away in the communist society.

Neo-Marxist and Post-Marxist idea of the State

As classical Marxism was engaged with economic theory and politics of class struggle, Marxism after World War II started to follow the concerns regarding relations of base-superstructure, changing nature of capitalism, class struggle, and the nature of movements. The analysis of State is also not exceptional to this. The contemporary reconceptualization of the State in Marxism has been a reasonable accommodation to the rise of postmodern and postindustrial thinking which is further coupled with the decreasing glamour of modernity and the crisis of classical Marxism, particularly since the early 1980s. Before the fall of the Communist regime in Russia in 1991, there was a popular trend and intellectual movement in terms of Critical Theory in Europe and North America, which gradually attracted intellectuals from Latin America and Asia as well. Indeed, critical theory is plural in itself, and some of the scholars of this tradition emerged as neo-Marxist. The critical theories of the State are engaged in the Marxist orientation of the political economy.

In this context, Pierson²⁴ has identified certain important post-Marxist propositions about the nature of the State from the following perspectives:

- 1) *The State does not function unambiguously in the interests of a single class.*
- 2) *The State is an 'arena of struggle' constituted/ divided by quite opposing interests; thus it is not a centralized-unified political actor.*
- 3) *The proper subject of study in modern nation-States is their historical and international particularity as a general and comprehensive analysis of the capitalist state is simply impossible*
- 4) *The State is an essential institution to any developed society. The overcoming and withering*

²⁴ Christopher Pierson, 'New theories of the State and civil society: Recent developments in the post-Marxist analysis of the State', *Sociology*, volume 18:4, 1984, p. 67.

away of State is empirically invalid.

- 5) *The State is not an instrument that can be 'occupied', nor its power is seized. A gradual and partial transformation of the State may be profound rational.*

Lowi and Harpham²⁵ have summarized Marxist theory of State which eventually adhered to the neo-Marxism as well. They maintained that the neo-Marxist theories of the State are built directly upon the class view of society. The State is not an impartial umpire balancing the demands of various groups in society but the vehicle by which one class maintains its rule over another". Empirically, however, how the class relations distorted over the last decades and the socialist movement became weaker is less answered. In recent years, the free market economy is being encouraged as a way of the development of individuals' freedom and acceleration of economic growth. It is particularly after the crisis of socialism in former communist countries including in Russia and the emergence of the neoliberal global economy. It also has changed the mode or technique of exploitation, manner of bargaining between the workers and capitalists, nature, and functioning of the free-market economy.

In this context, classical Marxism went into crisis and it started to struggle with But it is believed that the free market economy "is simply another arena in which the exploitation of one class by another takes place". However, the nexus of market economy with globalization and the pairing of globalization with the new capitalist economy are some of the contradictory questions which are directly related to the nature of modern States. This is very critically reflected in different kinds of literature. To quote Gamble:

Marx always predicted that the development of capitalism as a social system would be punctuated by major crises, which would become progressively deeper and broader until the system itself was swept away. What he could not have foreseen was that the development of Marxism as a theory would also be marked by crises, both of belief and of a method, which has periodically threatened its survival.²⁶

There is another trend of realization that the State still plays as an instrument of exploitation though the exploitation is not as grave and harsh as it was centuries ago. Human rights, electoral democracy, and participatory practices have become the characteristics of modern States. So, the State is not exploitative to the extent that the classical Marxists have argued so far. Rather, a majority of the Marxist scholars (including neo- and post-Marxists) analyze the State as to be morally good, unavoidable, and class coordinating. It is also argued by the liberals that the State in a class society performs some welfare and socio-cultural reforms and changes. Though, Marxist critiques maintain that all these reforms are done not because it is the rationality of the

²⁵ Theodore J. Lowi & Edward J Harpham, 'Political Theory and Public Policy: Marx, Weber, and a Republican Theory of the State', in Kristen Renwick Monroe (eds), *Contemporary Empirical Political Theory*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 2020 (first published in 1997), pp. 249-278, available at <https://doi.org/10.1525/9780520313248-014>.

²⁶ Andrew Gamble, 'Marxism after communism: beyond realism and historicism', *Review of International Studies*, volume 25: 5, 1999, pp. 127-144, available at <https://library.fes.de/libalt/journals/swetsfulltext/14965939.pdf>.

State, but a conditionality of exploitative State structure. Along with the performance of these functions, the State would disguise its essence as a coercive instrument for the subjugation of the oppressed classes. Even then, the coercive and oppressive nature of the State becomes apparent in critical hours when the basis of its power is challenged²⁷.

Some scholars critically question the Marxist analysis of the State as it is withered away in the classless society. Is it? As argued by Oladipo²⁸, social power antecedes the appearance of the State as a public power over society, then, "it will continue in one form or another even after the State disappears." So, metaphysics of power and domination is less analyzed in classical Marxism, though neo-Marxist and post-Marxist scholars were also less entertaining to this question. Another sharp response to the critics has laid by Onimode²⁹, who engages with the question of the neutrality of the State between social classes amongst the diverse interests of society as a whole. In his words,

*How can an institution established, manned, and controlled by the most powerful class be indifferent to the direction and outcome of the class struggle? This is impossible. Yet, this neutrality of the State is required as a camouflage in the false consciousness of masking true class interests, which is an integral part of bourgeois ideology. State neutrality is ideologically apologetic.*³⁰

Some Unsettled Questions

Antonio Gramsci (Hegemonic approach)

Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937)³¹ has contributed to enriching classical Marxism towards a new theorization. From the Gramscian perspective, the base/ superstructure model is inverted. The 'economic structure' is the primary and subordinating one, while the superstructure is the secondary and subordinate one. For Gramsci, it is the opposite. The State is an instrument of socialization and cultural transformation where there are different disseminating worldviews and ideologies. Hence he argues that 'the entire function of the State has been transformed; the State has become an educator'³². Gramsci has proposed the idea of cultural hegemony. The hegemony serves as a means of maintaining and legitimizing the capitalist State. Moreover, the Gramscian worldview is a mix of a post-Marxism of relations in production, and a future Marxism of relations in ideology³³.

²⁷ Olusegun Oladipo, 'The Marxist Theory of the State', *Readings in Social and Political Philosophy*, volume I, 1991, p. 172.

²⁸ Ibid, pp. 172-173.

²⁹ Bade Onimode, '*An Introduction to Marxist Political Economy*', Zed Books Limited, London, 1985.

³⁰ Ibid, p. 204.

³¹ Gramsci is an Italian Marxist political thinker, who is best known for his theory of culture and hegemony. His major publications include *Pre-Prison Writings*, *The Prison Notebooks* (three volumes), and *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*.

³² Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, International Publishers, 1971, available at ISBN 978-0-7178-0397-2.

³³ Albert Bergesen, 'The rise of semiotic Marxism', *Sociological perspectives*, volume 36:1, 1983, pp. 1-22.

Gramsci departs with Marxism as not understanding the State in the narrow sense of the government or the ruling executive. Instead, he divides it between political society and civil society. The political society represents political institutions and legal constitutional control comprising of the police, the army, and legal system, etc. Civil society represents the private or non-State sphere comprising of the family, the education system, trade unions, etc. These two societies are not purely divisive, rather are overlapping in some context, and the civil society mediates between the State and the economy³⁴. Unlike classical Marxism, Gramsci claims the capitalist State rules through a binary structure, i.e. force plus consent, where political society is the empire of force and civil society is the jurisdiction of consent. This is how the bourgeois hegemony is reproduced and maintained again and again in the State.

Gramsci rejects the instrumentalist approach of the State arguing that under modern capitalism the bourgeoisie can maintain its economic control by addressing certain demands of trade unions, social groups, and political parties. Thus, the bourgeoisie engages in a kind of passive revolution (movements such as reformism), which in consequence, maintains the forms of its hegemony to change. Moreover, he disagrees with the Marxist idea of State withersness, arguing that the “withering away of the State” is the full development of civil society’s ability to regulate itself as a public sphere³⁵. In doing so, the proletariat’s historical task is to create a regulated society through a ‘counter hegemony’, where political society (forceful ruling) is diminished and civil society (consensual ruling) is expanded.

Nicos Poulantzas (Structural Approach)

Nicos Poulantzas (1936-1979)³⁶ is perhaps one of the greatest neo-Marxist political theorists. As a structural Marxist, he attempted to update the Marxian conception of State working within a broadly Althusserian framework³⁷. He beautifully merges the components of ideology, politics, and economics into his thesis. He agrees that class struggles traverse and constitute the State. To him, the State is not an instrumental depository (object) of power as ever occupied or held by the dominant classes. Poulantzas observed that the capitalist class though often focuses on its profits and short-term gains, also tends on maintaining the class’s power and control as a whole. Capitalism, despite its divisive nature, could coexist with social stability. The coexistence seems to be vital for the bourgeoisie to reproduce power in the State itself in the long-run³⁸.

³⁴ Antonio Gramsci, ‘Selections from the Prison Notebooks’, *International Publishers*, 1971, p. 160, available at ISBN 978-0-7178-0397-2.

³⁵ Anne Showstack Sassoon, ‘Civil Society’; Tom Bottomore et al., *The Dictionary of Marxist Thought* (Second ed.), Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 1991, pp. 83–85, available at ISBN 0-631-16481-2.

³⁶ Poulantzas represents the structural school of Marxist analysis of the State. His popular works include *Fascism and Dictatorship: The Third International and the Problem of Fascism* (1974); *Classes in Contemporary Capitalism* (1975), *The Crisis of the Dictatorships: Portugal, Greece, Spain* (1976); *Political Power and Social Classes* (1978); and, *State, Power, Socialism* (1978).

³⁷ James Martin, *The Poulantzas reader*, Verso Publication, 2008, pp. 432, available at <http://ecocritique.free.fr/poulantread.pdf>.

³⁸ Amy Beth Bridges, ‘Nicos Poulantzas and the Marxist Theory of the State’, *Politics & Society*, volume 4:2, 1974, pp. 161-190, available at <https://doi.org/10.1177/003232927400400202>.

The dialogue of Poulantzas with L. Althusser, A. Gramsci, Miliband, G. Deleuze, and M. Foucault seems to be of a historical implication in the wider spectrum of Marxism, ideology, and power. As of Gramsci's idea of hegemony, Poulantzas argued that the State doesn't preferably repressive to the movements or demands of the oppressed. Rather, State power is resumed with the consent of the oppressed. The modern States are doing this job very strategically through class alliances (as of making different sub-classes) and alliances (of dominant and subordinate groups). Employing its *isolation effect* on class struggles, the capitalist State provides the dominant classes with a unique mechanism, the national-popular State, capable of constituting their political interests as general interests and organizing their hegemonic power over the masses. In his last book, *State, Power, Socialism* (1978), Poulantzas refined and explored his previous theories more systematically. He now defined the State as a product of social relationships where there its relative autonomy is laid with a function of class struggle. As the class struggle is dynamic, its production, i.e. the State is always in a flux of contestation. As such, no one class could have complete control, though the function of the State is to saturate the interests of the dominant classes³⁹.

Ralph Miliband (Instrumental Approach)

Ralph Miliband (1924-1994)⁴⁰, a popular left ideologue, supports the Marxian view of the State as to be its institutional nature. He has observed the State not as a thing but as a system that constitutes an interaction among several particular institutions. Miliband⁴¹ urges that it is essential to study the institutions which collectively constitute the bourgeois State. Miliband also calls these institutions the different elements of the State System. The elements are the government, the administration, the military, the police, the judicial branch, sub-central government, and parliamentary assemblies. The bourgeoisie is quite conscious of its problem and it utilizes every institution to solve the problem and meet the requirements. It also influences, in various ways, the institutions so that their interests are in no way endangered. Miliband in his noted work *The State in Capitalist Society: the Analysis of the Western System of Power*, says:

There is one preliminary problem about the State which is very seldom considered, yet requires attention if the discussion of its nature and role is to be properly focused. This is the fact that "the State" is not a thing that it does not, as such, exist⁴².

³⁹ Nicos Poulantzas, 'State, Power and Socialism', New Left Books, London, 1978, p. 132.

⁴⁰ A British sociologist who belongs to the idea of instrumental Marxism. His notable works include *Parliamentary Socialism: A Study of the Politics of Labour* (1961); *The State in Capitalist Society* (1969); *Marxism and Politics* (1977); *Capitalist Democracy in Britain* (1982); *Power and State Power* (1983); *Divided Societies: Class Struggle in Contemporary Capitalism* (1989); and *Socialism for a Sceptical Age* (1994).

⁴¹ Ralph Miliband, 'Class power and State power', *Canadian journal of political Science*, Verso Editions, London, 1983.

⁴² Ralph Miliband, *The State in Capitalist Society: An Analysis of the Western System of Power*, New York, Basic Books, Inc. 1969, p. 292, available at ISBN 0-7043-1028-7.

Miliband–Poulantzas Debate

The Miliband–Poulantzas debate was a debate between Marxist theorists Ralph Miliband and Nicos Poulantzas that is based on the debates regarding the nature of the State and changing characteristics of capitalistic societies⁴³. The implication of the debate lays in its theoretical as well as empirical insights of the Marxist critique of State which was to be reviewed during the time of the cold war. The debate is found in a harmonic exchange of letters and publications which were published in the *New Left Review*. It first appeared with Poulantzas’s review of Miliband’s 1969 work, *The State in Capitalist Society*⁴⁴. Most of the scholars have characterized this debate as being between the instrumentalist model of the State proposed by Miliband and the structural model advocated by Poulantzas. Yet, few scholars (including Bob Jessop) also warn that this account is misleading⁴⁵.

In *The State in Capitalist Society*, Miliband presents his theory of how the State functions to serve the capitalist interests of ruling-class elites⁴⁶. The State in the class societies is primarily and inevitably the guardian and protector of the economic interests. The function of the State is to ensure their continued predominance, not to prevent it⁴⁷. Poulantzas disagrees with Miliband’s approach, adopting a structural position on the nature of State. He concludes that the State is ‘objectively’ capitalist, and it works for just a single purpose of preserving the capitalist mode of production. To mention Poulantzas (1969):

*The relationship between the bourgeois class and the State is objective. This means that if the function of the State in a determinate social formation and the interests of the dominant class coincide, it is because of the system itself: the direct participation of members of the ruling class in the State apparatus is not the cause but the effect.*⁴⁸

Instrumental vs. Structural debate

Instrumental and structural worldviews of State are prominent contestations in Marxism, though it was not witnessed in the earlier Marxist scholars. Instrumental

⁴³ Clyde W. Barrow, ‘The Miliband–Poulantzas Debate: An Intellectual History’, in Stanley Aronowitz, Peter Bratsis (eds.), *Paradigm Lost: State Theory Reconsidered*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1st edition, 2002, p. 3–52, available at ISBN 978-0-8166-3293-0.

⁴⁴ Nicos Poulantzas & Ralph Miliband, ‘The Problem of the Capitalist State’; in Robin Blackburn (ed.), *Ideology in Social Science: Readings in Critical Social Theory*, Pantheon Books, New York, 1972, pp. 238–262.

⁴⁵ Bob Jessop, ‘Miliband–Poulantzas Debate’ in Keith Dowding (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Power*, Thousand Oaks, SAGE Publications, California, 2011, pp. 416–417, available at doi:10.4135/9781412994088.n230; ISBN 978-1-4129-2748-2.

⁴⁶ Ralph Miliband, *The State in Capitalist Society: An Analysis of the Western System of Power*, New York, Basic Books, Inc. 1969, p. 292, ISBN 0-7043-1028-7.

⁴⁷ Ibid, p. 22.

⁴⁸ Nicos Poulantzas, ‘The problem of the capitalist State’, *New Left Review*, volume I:58, 1969, p. 73, available at <https://newleftreview.org/issues/i58/articles/nicos-poulantzas-the-problem-of-the-capitalist-state>

Marxists (notably Miliband, as discussed earlier) tend to view the State (and its byproducts including law, ideology, economy) as ultimately an instrument or tool which are used for service of the economically dominant class. It would in turn maintain economic exploitation while winning ideological assent to a continued hegemony. Thus, the instrumentalist position is that the institutions of the State are under the direct control of the capitalist class who are in the ruling positions of State power.

On the other hand, however, the proponents of structural Marxist (including Althusser and Poulantzas) don't view the State as the ultimate servant of the ruling bourgeoisie. Similarly, the structuralists argue that the State institutions must function to ensure the viability and stability of capitalism collectively. Thus, the State is not necessarily coercive or class antagonistic, rather it is harmonic and consensual in parallel as well. To sum, State institutions must produce (and reproduce) capitalist society as a whole. In the literature of Marxist thought, in particular after the 1960s till 1980s, the debate between structural and instrumental Marxists was characterized by the Miliband-Poulantzas debate between instrumental Ralph Miliband and structural Nicos Poulantzas⁴⁹.

Louis Althusser (Structural/ Apparatus Approach)

In contrast to other forms of Marxism, Louis Althusser (1918-1990)⁵⁰ claimed that Marxism is a science aiming at the objective examination of the structures of State and society⁵¹. His analysis is historical and phenomenological. Althusser does not reject the Marxist model of the State; however, he is largely focused on ideology. For him, 'ideology has no history'⁵², and all the ideologies constitute a 'subject' of the ruling. The ideology is more pervasive and more "material" than previously acknowledged by classical Marxism as in the dichotomy of base and superstructure⁵³. Althusser (1971) has enhanced the Marxist theory of the State by articulating two types of the apparatuses⁵⁴: the repressive State apparatuses (RSA) and the Ideological State Apparatuses (ISA). Ontologically, the RSA is hard power, while the ISA is constituted with soft power. The RSA consists of the government, army, the police, the judiciary, and the prison system. It operates primarily using mental and physical coercion and violence as derived with the

⁴⁹ Nicos Poulantzas & Ralph Miliband, 'The Problem of the Capitalist State'; R. Blackburn (ed.), *Ideology in Social Science: Readings in Critical Social Theory*, NY, Pantheon Books, 1972, pp. 238–262.

⁵⁰ A popular Marxist philosopher and structural theorist of the State and ideology. The classic readings of Althusser include *For Marx* (trans. 1969); *Reading Capital* (trans. 1970); *Politics and History: Montesquieu, Rousseau, Marx* (trans. 1972); *Philosophy of the Encounter: Later Writings, 1978–1987* (ed. & trans. 2006).

⁵¹ Louis Althusser, 'On the Reproduction of Capitalism: Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses', *Lenin and Philosophy and other Essays* (Translated from the French by Ben Brewster), 1971, pp. 121–176, available at ISBN 0-902308-89-0.

⁵² *Ibid*, p. 150.

⁵³ Steven B. Smith, '*Reading Althusser: An Essay on Structural Marxism*', Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1984.

⁵⁴ Louis Althusser, *On the Reproduction of Capitalism: Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses, Lenin and Philosophy and other Essays* (Translated from the French by Ben Brewster), 1971, pp. 121–176, available at ISBN 0-902308-89-0.

political power (claimed to be legitimate). In parallel, the ISA constitutes different legal, political, and cultural systems of society including family, media, religious organizations, and education system. It is operated with the propagation of many ideologies injected with the aforementioned apparatuses.

The ruling class controls the RSA because they also control the powers of the State. The bourgeoisie of the ruling class create and use RSA to dominate the working class⁵⁵. The basic function of the RSA is to secure the politics in favor of the interests of the ruling class. For that, the subordinate social classes are repressed either with violent or nonviolent coercive means. Similarly, Mills and Domhoff have empirically identified the growing importance and formidable influence of the ruling elite class over the State administration. Barrow (1993) provides more extensive methodological assumptions and key hypotheses of Marxist, Neo-Marxist, and Post-Marxist theories of State into five distinct approaches. They include Orthodoxy/ plain Marxist school (instrumentalist) (p. 13); Structuralist neo-Marxist (p. 51); Derivationist of capital logic school (between neo-Marxism and post-Marxism) (p.77); System analytic approach of the State (p. 96); and Organizational realist (p. 125).⁵⁶

Discussion and Conclusion

In the preceding analysis of this paper, an introductory critique of the Marxist theory of the State has been presented. It is concluded that the Marxist perspective of the State is opposed to the liberal world view which opposes the class analysis of the State. The non-Marxists often take the State as a neutral force that was established in the society to maintain the general well-being of people; for that law, order, and stability are the pre-conditions. This implies that the State has emerged with (and now functional too) as an objective organ instituted for the collective interests of all citizens wherever they belong to a class or the relations of production. The Marxists contest this world view as to be an ideal, non-materialistic, and historical. The Marxist view of the State often claims the State as essentially an instrument/ structure of the class relations; where exploitation and domination of one class (the ruled working class or the proletariat) by another class (the ruling capitalist or bourgeoisie) is its operational mechanization.

However, this binary structure of class has been criticized by critical theorists as there is no more purity in the class. For the neo-Marxists and post-Marxists changing nature of class, class relations, modes of production, and the hegemonic apparatuses are the prime concerns for the analysis of the modern nation-State. In the same way, the post-1970s debate of Marxism largely engages with the critique of the classical Marxist interpretation of State, including the idea of the great revolution, the dictatorship of the proletariat, and the ultimate “withering away” of the State. Changing relations of

⁵⁵ Vincent B. Leitch, *The Norton Anthology of theory and criticism*, New York, W.W. Norton and Company, 2001, available at pp. 1483–1496.

⁵⁶ Clyde W. Barrow, *Critical theories of the State: Marxist, neo-Marxist, post-Marxist*, University of Wisconsin Press, 1993.

base and superstructure have itself led to contestations in Marxist analysis in recent years where the form and nature of base and superstructure have been distorted, somehow overlapping and contested too.

In the 1960s and 1970s, the scholars of the Western world, in particular, contributed to Marx's political ideas of history, philosophy, and economy. Meanwhile, debates arose on the concept of State and this resulted in a reformulation of the theory of State. It has some historical contexts both in terms of theory and practice as well. Indeed, it was the era that some scholars realized as of crisis of modernism and crisis of Marxism as a grand narrative. The new scholarship on Marxism got renovated along with the failure of modernization theory and rise of dependency theory and world-system approach, and the crisis of liberal and monopolist capitalism. The emergence of post-modern and post-structural ideas continued scholarship of critical theory and the rise of neo-Marxism and post-Marxism, and new left schools are also remarkable milestones for this. However, it seems unfortunate that after the death of these scholars (Miliband in 1994 and Poulantzas in 1979), including Althusser (1990) and Foucault (in 1984) the Marxist scholarship got weakened. This was indeed a peak hour of the crisis of Marxism that began after the collapse of Russian communism in 1991 and the emergence of a unipolar world thereafter with the global hegemonic exploration of capitalism.

It must be concluded that no particular theorization of the State is possible that would saturate contesting claims of different approaches within Marxism. Indeed, one of the more significant derivations is that the nature of the State is changing, though coupling with its attributes, institutions, and structures. As to Althusser and Gramsci, the power of ideology and hegemony has become more important in modern nation States. From the post-positivist critiques of ontology, therefore, Marxism (instrumental, structural, post, and neo-Marxist) does not (and cannot) encompass the entire range of the proliferation of knowledge and socio-political changes in new contexts. In this context, the State theorist should encompass the foundationalism of Marxian theory, as well as recent developments in the world as witnessed in the realm of the capitalist economy.

Empirically, on the other hand, it is also important to analyze the nature of states in the contemporary world where the left power or communist parties once led the government and maintained the political system as such. Though the purist form and essence of the Marxist-Leninist State is debated with the Marxists and beyond them, the rationality of different models of socialist/ communist States are critically important to analyze and theorize. In this context, it is worthwhile to engage the study of the plurality of the State systems which are assumed/ claimed to be motivated by Marxist, Leninist, and Maoist ideology. They include People's democratic State, people's republican State, national-democratic State, socialist-oriented State, and socialist State. Moreover, some of the important agendas for studying Marxist State approach in modern context include:

- 1) Political systems of government (governance, separation of power, and people's representation in the state);
- 2) Legislature (structure, functional characteristics, and representation);

- 3) Military (control and structure);
- 4) Party system (the legal status, movements, position of ruling party and oppositions);
- 5) Economic systems (production relations, industrialization, agrarian changes, distributive justice, foreign aid, employment and poverty, and dependency syndromes);
- 6) Judicial system (constitution, rule of law, and civic engagement); and
- 7) The issues of international political economy (particular state's position in global capitalistic world power order).