

Introduction

INTRODUCTION

We know an individual only as a member of a society or a group or a community. The individual man is a rational animal — as animal he has impulses and instincts, but he is more complex in his impulses and desires than any other animals; as a rational animal he has a choice what to do and what not to do. There is a constant conflict between animality and rationality and through this constant conflict in the nature of man that the need of ethics arises. Man has impulses no doubt but it is within his power to control such impulses and in doing this job his difficulties arise. Man is not only an individual being but also a social being and he will have to meet the demand of the universal nature to which he belongs. He has to acquire wisdom as regards the action of social groups — the motives governing the behaviour of the individuals and groups living in a society. He should be after a wise social system where he is to encourage the purposes of all individuals to be satisfied and discourage egoism, greed, hatred or malice — its fundamental principle being — "one for all and all for one". This means that the individual attains the awareness that his life is meaningful, that he has freely adopted a noble ideal and this awareness gives him dignity and a profound sense of decency as a man and allows him to live with a class conscience.

Marxist ethics regards conscience as an attribute of man's social nature, a subjective expression of a certain social and historical imperative — it, together with a sense of duty, makes man aware of his moral responsibility towards himself and towards the other people and

the society at large. The idealist and the subjectivist thinkers hold it to be an individual affair. But this view ignores the fact that conscience serves as a vehicle for different social and class substance and that it has emerged in history in the process of man's social development. Marxist ethics takes a dialectic approach to the interaction of the sensual and the rational in morality. It does not isolate the sensual from the rational - morality fuses the rational, the emotional, the volitional elements into integral mechanisms which regulate our behaviour.

As to the solution of the key-problem of ethics — what the source and basis or foundation of moral ideal is ? - attempts are made by pre-Marxian thinkers to find a basis or source of moral ideas. It has been held by some thinkers that it lies in certain general laws and principles which exist in their own right without reference to any individual experience. They are, therefore, absolute and unchangeable. The contrary view holds that it is to be found in the results or ends or consequences of our experience and these results are relative to time and circumstances. Even those who hold the first view are not unanimous as to the locus of it. If it exists outside the human mind and is wholly independent of it, where does it exist then ? One group answers that it is in the nature of things, while the other group places it in the will of the God. Again, others, e.g., Kant, hold that it is embedded deep in the nature of human reason. Kant postulates an apriori law of reason and morality, according to him, is a question of duty — one must be guided by it regardless of and despite everything. The contrary view which insists on consequences to be of great moral significance assumes three forms, viz., hedonism, perfectionism and asceticism. The common thesis of the hedonists, either Epicurean or Utilitarian, is

that pleasure is the standard by which the goods of life are to be distinguished. Bentham regards pleasure as the highest good — it is not pleasure of the moment but of the life-time and nor the pleasure of the individual but the pleasure of the greatest number. Bentham distinguishes pleasure only quantitatively. J. S. Mill, however, admits of qualitative differences among pleasures and by his own admission of this difference Mill becomes, by implication, a perfectionist; for it introduces some other standard for right conduct than pleasure. This qualitative difference in pleasure seems to weaken the logical position of hedonism. Perfectionism, on the other hand, urges that not pleasure alone but all other capacities of man's nature constitute the foundation of morals. The hedonists, they say, are guilty of one-sidedness, of emphasising of one aspect of human experience to the exclusion of others. But here also a division crops up - Utilitarians hold that the capacities of the individual which are to be developed are to be conceived primarily in their social significance - the capacities that are to be given free play are those that are turned in the direction of attaining the interests of the society either directly through social activity or indirectly through the development of loyal individuals. Egoists, on the contrary, hold that the standard of goodness is the expression of the capacities of the individual without any regard or with any secondary regard to social consequences. Asceticism, however, is largely a theory of goodness - it seeks its standard in some form of self-denial and self-sacrifice.

The thesis that the standard of goodness lies external to the human mind, the view that there are absolute unchanging moral

standards involves so many difficulties. This thesis has been subjected to severe criticisms by the logical positivists who hold that the so-called moral judgment cannot be really a judgment at all, still less a universal scientific judgment. Their view that moral judgments are based on emotions has encouraged the belief in ethical relativity, for emotions not only vary from individual to individual from time to time but also even in the same situation. Ethical relativism or emotivism leads to subjectivism as they hold that ethical utterances are only emotive in nature and are used only to express speaker's moral emotions. Its chief drawback lies in the fact that it restricts itself to registering and explaining moral facts and in doing this it would acquire a formal character, lose its impact and prove unable to influence moral processes. Ethics which does not help people to become better is as useless as an ineffective medicine.

Hedonism, egoistic or altruistic, is not also satisfactory, because it tends to make goodness wholly relative to the passing experience. Again, the theory which identifies goodness with individual interests exclusively is open to question, because it fails to take into account of the society of selves of which each individual member is a part; it forgets that the welfare of the individual is intrinsically bound up with the welfare of the society. The life of each individual, as Hobbes pointed out, would be 'nasty, brutish and short' in a community where each individual seeks his own interests in utter disregard of the interests of the others. The ascetic or saint may find his station and duties away from the society but for a common man morality is a social business. Our moral ideas develop only in association of other people and are

being constantly modified by the public opinion. Altruism stands for self-sacrifice - it will also lessen the general good, for if a man neglects his own health in his eagerness to serve others, one day he will find himself unable to do things for others.

Naturalistic ethics derives morality from human nature. Moral standards are deduced not from the laws of man's social being but from the nature of man as a natural being, his needs and interests stemming from his unchangeable biological and psychological make-up and regard realisation of these needs as the main purposes of life. Evolutionary ethics founded by H. Spencer has been developed in the framework of ethical naturalism. It regards man's moral behaviour as a function of his adaptation to the environment. By and large, evolutionary ethics has serious methodological drawbacks because a biological interpretation of society and morality cannot be considered scientific. According to Moore moral concepts cannot be derived from natural concepts and to do this is to commit a 'naturalistic mistake'. The main drawback of the naturalists is the lack of a clear understanding of the basic differences between the socio-historical laws of the development of morality and those of anthropology and psychology. According to Marxism morality is a social phenomenon.

Again, as to the nature of ethics, its foundation, its goal to be attained there is a long-drawn debate between the materialists and the idealists. The materialists develop empirical doctrines in ethics and refuse to grant morality a divine status depending on the will of God and they hold an optimistic view that moral ideal can be attained even in this mundane existence — the end is practically attainable. The

idealists, however, perceive the source of morality either in the subjective or in the objective spirit. It occupies a place outside of or prior to the individual's actual existence - the ideal is beyond the ordinary person's ability to attain. The empirical ethics aims at changing the position of man in the world, the latter at changing the attitude towards the world. While empirical ethics is consequential, the idealist ethics gives emphasis on motives, attitudes and inner orientations of the individual.

All the pre-Marxist philosophers including the materialists were idealists in their understanding of social life and they were unable to overstep the narrow boundaries of relations of private ownership. Things change drastically with the emergence of Marxist ethics - morality is described as a property of man's behaviour conditioned by his social and historical existence. It is anti-idealistic emphasising social reality against social utopia, history against theology, experience against speculation, men against gods. It brings about a fundamental revolution in moral ideas and ideals. Marxist ethics is consistently materialistic in the sense that it demystifies morality - the ideals, the standards and values are interpreted as a reflection of actually existing inter-personal relations. It is also dialectical as it maintains that each of its manifestations, each standard and virtue is in perpetual motion, emerging, developing, dis-appearing, passing from one qualitative standard to another. There is a continuity in the evolution of morality.

Marxism believes that it is possible to give a scientific theoretical substantiation of moral ideas only through the cognition of the laws of history and that these ideas reflect the objective logic of the development of the society. The morality of the communists is the basis for the

formation of general human morality in a classless society. It is a qualitatively new ethical theory not only by virtue of its philosophical ground work but also due to its social class orientation. It represents the interests of the suffering humanity and opens up for men unprecedentedly broad and drastically new opportunities of moral advancement and activity.

The transition from capitalism to socialism is marked by a moral turning point in the relations among people. Inheriting the valuable experience of mankind in general it fosters humane incentives for man's and society's moral improvement - there being no class inequality and no oppression of man by man. Free development of the individual is no longer a mere phrase but it becomes a reality. Thus a new morality emerges which declares man the supreme value, promotes the all-round development of each person and enrichment of human relations. It rests on comradely mutual assistance, co-operation, friendliness, honesty and sense of duty - all men are friends, comrades and brothers. This Communist humanism demands equal justice, equal right, equal freedom, equal opportunity for all keeping in mind that each man and every member of the society has a equal right to happiness. Its ideal is to fight for man for his free and harmonious development. Not violence but love is the key-note of the Communist society. Violence is justified only when it is unavoidable - it is not an end in itself, for it deprives us of our manhood. The Communist social ideal will make it possible to put an end to all kinds of exploitation, oppression, poverty, famine and open new prospects for moral evolution. Moral problems are to be solved with humanistic outlook, a more humane type of consciousness. Thus

a qualitatively new stage of moral progress will begin with the emergence of a new type of man, a harmoniously developed socialist type of the individual. It indicates a major milestone on the road of humanity's moral advancement. The transition from socialism to Communism indicates more harmonious development of personality. There will be no hankering after wealth. The main objective of human activity is not to obtain material wealth but a man's life for the good of all - a life aimed at most fully developing the creative potential, original talents and abilities of each member of society. It is at this stage that man becomes the supreme value, the goal of historical and social development.

With the formation of classless society state power would lose its function and the state would 'wither away'. The victory of socialism radically changes the character of the working people - they can no longer be called proletariat - there will be no distinctions among men. The passage from socialism to Communism is based on the gradual obliteration of essential distinctions among workers, peasants and intelligentsia. It establishes truly humanistic relations based on the principle that man is to man a friend, comrade and brother. It steers the colossal ship of the society against the natural currents and storms of history to the shore of living creative humanism.

The passage from Hegelian dialectical idealism to the Marxist dialectical materialism, from Hegelian concepts or notions to the Marxian ideas as class struggle consists in the transformation of ideals into ideologies, economic determinism, of nationalism into internationalism, of philosophical mysticism into a new profoundly scientific outlook. But

the so-called Hegelians of the left-wing or the young Hegelians, a radical wing of Hegel's philosophical school, thinkers like D. Strauss, Feuerbach, B. Bauer and Ruge represent the link between Hegel and fully developed Marxism. They saw the essence of man as the one and only universal and supreme subject matter of philosophy. They advocated humanism and in this respect they facilitated the establishment of Marxism. But the bankruptcy of the young Hegelian movement is seen most clearly in its under-estimation of the role of the masses in the history. The ideas of class struggle, the objective laws of social development and of the role of economic relations in the life of the society are alien to them. The task was fulfilled by Marx and Engels when they arrived at a radically new understanding of social development — the theory of dialectical materialism. The term materialism here has a polemic meaning - it is directed against Hegel's absolute idealism. In a complete reversal of Hegelianism, the interpretation of history and of all forms of human life moves from below to above, from feet to head and not from above to below, from head to feet. The individual being is regarded as economic and social being. Dialectical materialism is a determined and irreconcilable enemy of all conceptions of supernatural essences shrouded in mystery, no matter what garb they are clothed in by religion or idealist philosophy. Marx and Engels drew up the famous *Manifesto of the Communist Party in 1848* which outlined a new world conception, consistent materialism which embraces the role of social life, dialectics as the most comprehensive and profound doctrine of development, the theory of class struggle and of the world-historic revolutionary role of the proletariat — the creator of a new, communist society.

Karl Marx (1818-1883) was not a proletarian by birth or by his way of living. His open mindedness, his profound sense of facts, his ardent desire to make man the master of his own social environment, his sympathy for the working community, his aim to give men more freedom, more equality, more justice and more security, the burning desire to help the poor and oppressed and genuine feeling for the whole mankind — all these made him one of the world's influential fighters against hypocrisy and all kinds of exploitation prevalent in the society. His humane appeal, the humanistic basis of proletarian movement appeals to many honest members of the society. For this Marx left no stones unturned and he devoted immense labour to forging what he believed to be scientific weapons for the fight to improve the lot of vast majority of man.

Capitalism Marx hated because in this system labour power is made a commodity - that means that men must sell themselves on the market. This system resembles slavery, it does not grant dignity of man as man. His main work. '*Capital*', contains a profound scientific analysis of the economic laws of the movement of capitalism and proof of its inevitable demise and the victory of the Proletarians in forming communist society. His work '*Capital*', is not only 'the greatest work on political economy of our ages' as Lenin calls it, but also, in fact, largely a treatise on social ethics and by implication it contains his ethical ideas, It reveals to us the secret of exploitation and encourages people to build up a new, scientific, socialistic society in transforming socialism from utopia into a science.

The critics, however, accuse it of neglecting the role of the

individual as the subject of morality. Marxist ethics, they say, by its exclusive concentration on the social sources of morality, makes man feel that he is an obedient tool in the hands of 'social will' which is entirely alien to his wishes and initiative.

But each new stage of social progress to which mankind arises is costly, often even costlier than was believed to be at the outset. To build up a new society is not an easy task - it is an Herculean task which cannot be fulfilled without persistent endeavour and selflessness and doing this job people rise to new heights of moral maturity. Keeping in mind the ideal of humanism, the lofty ideas of duty and responsibility and taking reason as '*Ariadne's thread*' in hand they start their journey and after combating insurmountable difficulties in their way to cherished goal they will find out the right road leading to the land of human values by avoiding blind alleys of egocentricism, indifference, malice and egoism.

The work to realise communist ideals of humanism, collectivism, internationalism is hard and has many facets. As Lenin wrote : "the most complicated part of revolutionary change is the building of a new society, not dismantling the old one. Essential here is a clear idea of what one wants to achieve, persistence, enthusiasm and staunchness."

It cannot be denied that Marxism has an astonishing moral and intellectual appeal. Marx's contribution to philosophy as a whole is of immense importance. If we go through the contents of his writing we shall see how forcefully they impress upon us a particular, distinct notable trend of thought under the official stamp of 'Marxism'. So it is very interesting to note how Marxist ethics takes its rise and has been

developed into a distinct discipline of mind, an organic system of moral philosophy nurtured by his compassion and love for the suffering humanity and scientific rational outlook. This explains its tremendous influence.

In his Ph. D. thesis on "*Difference Between the Democritus and Epicurean Philosophy of Nature*" (1841) Karl Marx drew a very atheistic and radical conclusions from Hegel's philosophy. For an understanding of the ethical background Marx's doctoral thesis, his critique of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*, and his Economico-philosophical manuscripts are very important. "*Theses on Feuerbach*" written by Marx in the spring of 1845 were published by F. Engels in 1888 as an appendix to his work "*Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy*". In these eleven theses Marx formulated the cardinal principles of his new philosophy, viz., dialectical and historical materialism. '*The Holy Family*', '*The German Ideology*' and '*The Communist Manifesto*' were also written by Marx in collaboration of Engels. In '*The Holy Family*' they (Marx and Engels) arrived at a major idea in the materialistic understanding of history. In '*The German Ideology*' they criticised the idealism of young Hegelians and the limited nature of Feuerbach's materialism. They expounded their philosophical outlook and developed the theory of scientific communism. The "*Poverty of Philosophy*" was an early work of Marx in which he set forth the fundamentals of socialism. It gave an analysis of the capitalist mode of production and laid the foundations of Marxist political economy. '*Capital*', the main work of Marx, is the fundamental substantiation of communist world outlook. Volume I of '*Capital*', prepared by Marx himself, was published in 1867; subsequent three volumes of '*Capital*' were published after his

death. *'Capital'* develops Marx's theory as a whole in the unity of all the three component parts : (a) Philosophy - dialectical materialism, (b) Political economy, (c) Communism.

Marxist philosophy became widespread in the U.S.S.R. with the victory of great October Socialist Revolution in 1917. In 1922 the first Marxist Philosophical journal appeared. In 1925 *'Dialectics of Nature'*, an unfinished work of Engels, was first published consisting of key - problems of dialectics of natural science. "Philosophical Notebooks" by Lenin (i.e., Lenin's notes on Philosophy) were published in 1933. *'On the question of Dialectics'* Lenin gave an exposition of the materialistic dialectics. The leading journal "*Voprosy filosofii*" (Questions on Philosophy) has been published since 1947. It pays special attention to the fundamental principles of dialectical and historical materialism, Marxist-Leninist ethics along with other related problems. The Soviet philosophers, e.g., A.F. Shishkin and others attach great importance to the problems of ethics. Soviet philosophers generally worked out philosophical problems in Marxist line. The emergent communist parties of other countries regarded dialectical and historical materialism as their philosophical banner. Reformists, mainly the right social democrats, continued their revision of dialectical and historical materialism from the viewpoint of ethical socialism. Rejecting Marxist Philosophy, the followers of Kant, e.g., Cohen Hermann of Germany and others tried to marry socialism to Kant's moral philosophy.

Marx himself did not, of course, write any treatise bearing the title 'Ethics'. His ethical ideas are only the by-products of the social and historical development. Prof.K. R. Popper writes :

"..... Capital is, in fact, largely a treatise on social ethics,..... ethical ideas are never represented as such. They are expressed only by implication, but not the less forcibly on that account, since the implications are very obvious", (The Open Society And Its Enemies - Vol. 2, P. 199.)

Marx and Engels also wrote : "The Communists do not preach morality at all.... They do not put to people the moral demand : love one another, do not be egoists, etc.; on the contrary, they are very well aware that egoism, just as much as selflessness, is in definite circumstances a necessary form of the self-assertion of individuals". (The German Ideology-collected Works, Vol. 5, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1976, P. 247). So a student or a researcher wishing to tackle Marx's ethical theory seriously will come across insurmountable difficulties in their way to do justice to the subject. Often the writers of high repute consciously avoid a serious undertaking of Marx's ethical theory with a view to developing it into a coherent view of Marxist ethics. Later Marxists have been failed to develop an original and comparatively coherent view of ethics. Many writers avoid discussion of Marx's ethical theory under the title "Marxist Ethics", for they think that such a title would have been misleading.

Soviet scholars, Marx's disciples and other writers wrote books on Marxism, on its various aspects — dialectical materialism, political economy, socialist humanism etc. but many of them, except a few ones, did not approach the subject of Marxist ethics with a view to developing it into a logical and coherent system so that it may find its natural logical place in the history of the ethical thought, so that it can be regarded as

a great and grand theory like utilitarianism or Kantian ethics.

In the 20th century the ideological struggle between the communists and the anti-communists enhances the importance of morality. Scholars, e.g., Sydney Hook, K.R. Popper, Paul Tillich and others have considered Marx's view on socialism, on morals. Karl Popper, e.g., calls Marx's ethical theory a historicist moral theory and advances arguments why this theory is untenable. In *"Marxism AND Ethics"* E. Kamenka has made a critical survey of Marx's positive ethics of the 'truly human' man freed from alienation and Marx's materialist critique of moralities as classbound ideologies. According to him, Marxism has conflated a number of ethical propositions - the ethics of self-realisation, utilitarianism, ethical relativism, evolutionary ethics.

From this we should not conclude that Marxist ethics is peripheral to Marxism or to Marx's own thinking about society, rather it occupies a central position in Marxian philosophy. For Engels moral development does not stop at a particular point, it progresses with the social progress through successively higher stages until it reaches the ultimate rational truly human condition and Engels proclaims that proletarian morality is the ultimate, highest, truly human morality and is destined to become the morality of all mankind. If morality is dialectical why should it stop with the coming of communism or when the classless society will be established ? Hence his philosophical writings are not free from inconsistencies. Karl Marx was too able and subtle a thinker to fall into Engel's flagrant inconsistencies.¹ "Marx admits that there is scope for 'social evolution' even after the communist society is established". (Religion and Society -Radhakrishnan, p. 34). It is evident that Marx

worked for the coming of communism because he saw it ethically higher than other forms of society, even as first truly ethical society. He was against all kinds of exploitation, slavery, fetishism, division of man into classes but not against the exploiters or classes themselves. The individual, Marx adds, cannot be made responsible for conditions of which he is the creature.² In general terms Marx's view implies that systems, not people, are the objects of moral judgment. This unbiased attitude of Marx is undoubtedly praiseworthy from the ethical point of view. So a gap has been created between the real teachings of Marx and what others consider to be his real teaching.

Among the various types of ethical theories from the Greek age to the modern age, Marxist theory of ethics can be ranked as a type of ethical theory beside utilitarian ethics, ethical intuitionism, existentialist ethics. It is the philosophy, the only philosophy which takes science seriously and makes man the supreme value. The necessity arises to understand Marxist ethics in its true colour and genuineness as the writings of Karl Marx have had an enormous practical and theoretical impact on modern man. In our humble attempt to do this our study bears the simple title - "**MARXIST ETHICS - AN EVALUATION**".

1. "I do think, however, that it should be frankly admitted that intellectually and especially as a theorist he stood far below Marx. We cannot even be sure that he always got the latter's meaning. His interpretations must therefore be used with care" - Joseph A. Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*, 4th edn., London, 1959, P. 39).

2. (Preface to the 1st edn. of *Capital*, vol. I).

In our examination of Marxist Ethics we shall consider the following questions :

1. What are the main stages in the evolution of Pre-Marxist ethics and what are their features ?
2. What is dialectical materialism ? How does it originate as a polemic against Hegel's Absolute Idealism ?
3. In what sense Marxian ethics is dialectical and materialistic?
4. What determines the contents of moral standards in society?
5. What are the main tenets of Marxian theory of ethics ?
6. Does the evolution of morality stop with the establishment of a classless society ?
7. What will be the place and function of morality in a classless society ?
8. Are moral codes and principles derived genuinely from human activities and human and social demands ?
9. What is the standard by which an action to be judged as right or wrong, good or bad ?
10. What is the ideal or the end to be achieved ? Is it an utopian ideal or a practical end ?
11. Is Marxian view of ethics justifiable ? If so, what is its place and function in a modern society ?

In our examination of Marxist ethics other relevant questions may crop up and we shall try our utmost to solve such questions.

The morality of a classless society of the future embracing lofty humane ideal is a hypothesis which can be put to test to determine its validity. It may prove to be correct or incorrect. In any event, it leads to an empirical test. Whatever the outcome, the hypothesis is a question put in such a way that an answer of some kind can be forthcoming - if it does not stand with empirical verification, we have every right to refuse it. This is true of Marxist ethics too. Thus Marxist ethics stands or falls with the empirical test it is subjected to. But its genuine feeling of social responsibility, love for freedom and humanistic moral appeal to all mankind must survive for ever.

In the first chapter we shall consider the pre-Marxian ethics in general with the empiricist and the idealist trends in ethics, We shall also examine two views, intuitional and teleo-logical, concerning the criterion of conduct by which we judge an action to be right or wrong in the development of ethical thought.

In the second chapter we shall consider the basic tenets of Marxist ethics - the emergence of a new humanitarian morality in a classless society which declares man the supreme value and promotes the all-round development of each individual in an environment of humane relations within a collective society.

In the third chapter we shall consider how dialectical materialism has been evolved as a polemic against all kinds of idealism, relativism in ethics and especially dialectical idealism of Hegel and how forcefully it impresses upon us a distinct notable trend in ethics under the official

stamp of Marxist ethics.

In the fourth chapter we shall consider and examine Existentialism as one of the main trends in the 20th century ethics.

In conclusion we shall sum up our findings and try to indicate, in brief, our own estimate of Marxist ethics.