

**AIJAZ AHMAD AS A MARXIST CRITIC**

Mr. Yuvraj B. Shinde  
Assistant Professor, Dept. of English  
Govt. Vidharbha Institute of Science and Humanities,  
Amaravati

**Abstract**

*This paper critically attempts to evaluate Aijaz Ahmad as a Marxist critic. His contribution to Marxist theory and practice is of great value and is very relevant in the age of advanced late capitalism. Ahmad's Marxist critique deconstructs the context of postmodernism in which 'high theory' was constructed and implanted in various domains of the discourse. For the Third world nations, Ahmad points out, postmodernism is an integral part of the capitalist universality which is responsible for their trapped subjectivity. Moreover, his labelling of globalization as new form of imperialism is highly relevant and highlights the dubious nature of the transnational capitalism. Furthermore, he vouches for cause of the periphery by propagating critical theory of the third world Marxism.*

**Keywords:** Marxist theory, Globalization, postmodernism, imperialism, transnational capitalism, discourse, subjectivity, periphery, capitalist universality.

The ever – widening domain of Indian critical theory, since time immortal, has been able to produce an oeuvre of critical theory at the vital juncture of the history which attempts to direct affairs of the contemporary society by blending insights of theory with prevalent social, political, and cultural practices. Being part of this great Indian tradition, Aijaz Ahmad's Marxist criticism deals with wide range of issues from politics of literary production to the wars of terrorism. Unlike most of the literary criticism that focusses on poetics of pleasure, Ahmad's critical production rather explores issues of subjectivity, ideology, and culture that determine the aesthetics of existence in the Global South which is a hapless victim of the Machiavellian manipulations of the dominant Eurocentric discourse. Most significantly, Ahmad's critical theory is a multidimensional theoretical resistance to different vagaries of the capitalism. Hence,

studying Ahmad's theory is an integral part of 'war of position' and has become a crucial element in decolonization of discourse.

The present research paper, limiting itself to Marxist realm of theory, endeavors to highlight Marxist strains of Ahmad's critical output in the age of advanced late capitalism. Most importantly, Ahmad, 'being child of nationalism' draws heavily from radical postulates of the Enlightenment and progressive Indian nationalism. In his critical theory, one comes across various features of Marxism such as duality of class and consciousness, deployment of dialectical materialism as method of evaluation and analysis, awareness about the revolutionary role of historical materialism, Gramscian activism, zeal for egalitarianism and theoretical deconstruction of Hydra headed capitalism and its various avatars in different contexts. In addition to these features, this paper will analyze Ahmad's contribution to the Marxist literary criticism in detail. Most significantly, in this paper, Ahmad's Marxist criticism will be compared with other notable Marxist critics to evaluate the significance of Ahmad's criticism. At the outset, this paper will focus on the theory of Marxism and its literary dimensions especially in the context of the Indian literature and theory in age of advanced late capitalism.

Before moving to Ahmad's Marxist criticism, it is necessary to understand intricate genetics of Marxism as a method of interpretation as well as a radical and revolutionary method of social change, aiming for the ultimate realization of the classless society in future. Conceptually speaking, the German political philosopher, Karl Marx, has been credited with development of Marxism as a system of thought. Unlike other philosophers, who had produced abstract theories of metaphysics in their ivory towers, Marx was a pragmatist, who was more concerned with a practical change in the society rather than lofty abstract interpretations. Most importantly, Marx had declared very famously,

"All philosophers have interpreted the world. The point is to change."

Factually speaking, the recent history of world has witnessed the grandeur of Marxist revolution in all parts of the world. In that sense, one can assume that Marxism is a social and political activism, creating a new social order in the contemporary society. In the words of Peter Singer

"Marx's impact can only be compared with that of religious figures like Jesus or Muhammad. For much of the second half of the twentieth century, nearly four of every ten people on earth lived under governments that considered themselves Marxist and claimed- however implausibly – to use Marxist principles to decide how the nation should be run. In these countries Marx was a kind of Secular Jesus; his writings were the ultimate source of truth and authority; his image was

everywhere reverently displayed. The lives of hundreds of millions of people have been deeply affected by Marx's legacy." (Peter Singer -1)

Marxist literary theory, based on Marxism, celebrates civic activism, and focuses on the deconstruction of duality between class and consciousness. Unlike other literary theories, it focuses on production of historicity of textuality. In the realm of Marxist literary theory, writers' bildungsroman is not only about the poetics of aesthetics, but also about a dialectical interaction between different social forces that determine various contours of literary productions. Conceptually speaking, production, circulation, and consumption of meaning is very important area of theoretical investigation in Marxist literary theory. Given exclusive nature of earlier theories, Marxism theory has given voice to voiceless and power to powerless, thus empowering subaltern sections of the contemporary society. In short, 'periphery' becomes the 'center' in the Marxist literary criticism.

Being inspired by lofty values of the Enlightenment, Ahmad's criticism deals with issues of periphery and marginality. Most importantly, in his writings, one can observe that periphery has transformed into center in the realm of discourse. Given Ahmad's subjectivity which was determined by logic of the capitalism, Ahmad was very vocal about the issues of the global south. Having been denationalized during India's partition, Ahmad was an ardent follower of the third world Marxism. By using analytical tools of Marxism, he has attempted to decipher challenges in front of third world countries in the age of advanced late capitalism. Like millions of faceless victims of the colonialism, Ahmad was a victim of colonial policy of 'divide and rule.' Therefore, for him, like feminist critics, 'personal is always political'. To state factually, critical analysis of capitalism has been recurring motif in his writing over course of time.

To Ahmad, the country like India has been a victim of vagaries of capitalism since heydays of the industrial revolution. Hence, he attempts to analyze the genetic link between industrial capitalism and advanced late capitalism, paving way for critical analysis of capitalism's literary manifestations such as postcolonialism and postmodernism. What is important about Ahmad's Marxist criticism is that his original diagnosis of reactionary politics in the contemporary society in the disguise of often touted developmentalism. In his criticism, Ahmad throws light on western project of 'development of underdevelopment' in the global south. Indeed, his criticism shows his commitment to civic activism which is very important feature of Marxism.

To Ahmad, postmodernism is nothing but Americanization of the world.

"As it emerged as clear leader of the capitalist countries after the Second World War, at a moment when European empires were being dissolved in Asia and Africa, the US developed the

largest, best funded , richest academic establishment ever known to mankind , and systematically set out to bring key intellectual strata from the newly decolonised countries into its own academic institutions, across the diverse fields of physical and technical sciences , social sciences and humanities , arts, diplomacy , jurisprudence and so on” . (Ahmad: 55)

Most significantly, America, due to revolutionary change the production system, is a leader of the capitalist system. Moreover, since the end of World War II, it has played very important role in the containment of the socialism all over the world. Furthermore, by manipulation of Cold War, it has played a vital role in disintegration of USSR, which was an existential crisis for all Marxists because of their profound faith in revolutionary potential of the socialism. For any Marxist, of any country or region, class is unity is of paramount importance.

Without class unity, conceptually speaking, Marxism is nothing but chimera. Hence, in the parlance of Marxism, class unity is a strategic necessity in the war of position which has been waged to establish a utopia of classless society in the future. Along with invocation resistance in the ideological battle against all elements of capitalism in all spheres of life including literature and theory, the development of class consciousness among subjects of the discourse is an essential condition in the socialist manuals that are designed to thwart manipulations of ideological state apparatus.

Opposed by the capitalist system due the existential threat of socialism, class unity has faced many obstacles in its march towards egalitarianism. As far postulates of poststructuralism are concerned, meaning is free floating signifier in decentered linguistic universe. Linguistically speaking, meaning is artificial entity and it is always postponed. In simpler terms, poststructuralism has challenged very epistemological foundations of European civilization and moreover, it has ultimately led to retreat of the progressive politics that was against of accumulative capitalism. Taking due benefits of this theoretical chaos, the discourse of capitalism has midwived the trope of identity politics to decimate the existential threat of socialism. Like other Marxists, Ahmad holds identity politics accountable for the decline of progressive politics of socialism which has envisaged a radial future for the wretched of earth of the global south.

“The further displacement of the politics of Equality by the politics of Identity, the fracture of the unity of the exploited and oppressed into countless little oppositional claims, so that resistance seems to be everywhere but nowhere in particular”. (Ahmad: 23)

Given social and political situation in India, identity politics has prospered in the India which has tremendous kind of heterogeneity. In opinion of Ahmad, identity politics, like any other reactionary method or creed of indoctrination, is wrapped in deceit and opposes the revolutionary values of progressive Indian nationalism.

Identity politics, Ahmad strongly believes, has genetic ability to hide areal interest. Like the civilizing mission of colonizer in the discourse of colonialism, identity politics presents itself as an agent of liberation and reformation, promising a new dawn of hope. But in the reality, it is nothing but another strategic tool in weaponry of transnational capitalism to be deployed against weaker sections of the society. According to Ahmad, identity politics is not reformative but reactionary, perpetuating the hegemony of the capitalism. What is important in Ahmad's analysis of identity politics is his staunch opposition to normalization and naturalization of identity politics in the liberal frameworks of democracies of the global south that are bleeding in the process of globalization.

According Ahmad, capitalism, due to its inherent nature of accumulation, faces resistance all time and hence it attempts to fragment the resistance of the progressive forces. Being part of the capitalist universality, identity politics has successfully fragmented resistance to the capitalism. For Ahmad, most of problems of the contemporary society, are logical outcome of unhindered expansion of capitalism. To solve these problems, one has to diagnosis the root cause. In his opinion, identity politics tries or at least pretends to solve problems in the paradigm of the capitalist universality. On the contrary, it is tactic of diversion, leaving no room for the real solution for the problem. Like other ideological state apparatuses, identify politics is most lethal weapon in the discourse of the capitalism. Hence, in the war of position against advanced late capitalism, one must denaturalize the very naturalization of identity politics by highlighting its complicity in hegemonic dominance of capitalism. Being Marxist critic, Ahmad is against identity politics. For him, humanity's salvation lies in egalitarianism of socialism not in predatory capitalism.

For Ahamd, globalization is not empowering or liberating phenomenon as it has been claimed by votaries of the globalization. According to Ahmad,

“The term globalization functions simply as a euphemism for imperialism and seeks to conceal the intensifying cruelties of the system by representing it as the creation of a global interdependence through the benign freedom of the market”.

(Ahmad:50)

On the contrary, he locates globalization in realm of the capitalist universality. What is important about Ahmad's critique of globalization is his pro-labor stance which is very important to understand very structural duplicity of globalization. In simple words, globalization vouches for the free movement of the transnational capital and has scant regard for national boundaries. Comparatively speaking, this liberal approach is missing when it is dealing with the issues of the labor. To state factually, Multi-National Companies are welcomed with red carpet though they have predatory intentions and the free movement of labor is curtailed by enacting strict immigration policies. Therefore, Ahmad points out anti-labor approach of the globalization. In this great game of global politics, third world nations are hapless victims because of their strategic location. Most importantly, the lack of development compels native citizens to migrate to western nations in search of better livelihoods. Unfortunately, the very social mobility has been denied to them by the duplicity of globalization. Most significantly, like their predecessors during the phase of classical colonialism, people from native nations are trapped in manipulations of the advanced late capitalism. Hence, Ahmad's critique of globalization is an outcome of his socialist leanings. He, being groomed in theories of classical Marxism and dialectical materialism, can understand the duplicity of globalization. Most importantly, there is, in his opinion, no difference between neo colonization and globalization as per se as both formulations are an intricate part of the capitalist universality. In its latest avatar of globalization, capitalism has managed to commodify every aspect of human life, creating the sense of alienation for the large section of the humanity.

Ahmad, being Marxist critic, has many valid reservations against the discourse of globalization. In his opinion, globalization is new form of the Imperialism. He argues,

“Imperialism has been with us for a very long time, in great many forms, and constantly re-invents itself, so to speak, as the structure of the global capitalism changes”. (Ahmad: 43)

The tactical alliance between transnational capitalism of west and reactionary forces in developing nations is one of major elements in his criticism of the globalization. For some people from global south, transnational capital is harbinger of the prosperity but they fail to comprehend the predatory nature of the transnational capital. To Ahmad, transnational capital is not the agent of progressive forces but of reactionary forces.

The direct colonial rule is not feasible nowadays due to the changed nature of the global governance. As Marx had rightfully predicted the genetic mutation inherent in the capitalism and this mutation of capitalism is strikingly visible in former colonies of the global south. To follow

predatory logic of the capitalism, transnational capitalism has busy establishing puppet governments all over the world. In this process of normalization of puppet governments, transnational capital often needs the help of reactionary forces of the respective country. Both phenomena bolster each other and play complimentary role for each other.

The charm of liberal democracy is too seductive but this democratic seduction comes with very high cost. According to Ahmad, America, being the leader of the transnational capitalism, has been playing very instrumental role in the formation and preservation of such kind of puppet regimes. America, due to financial and military, helps directly or indirectly the reactionary forces to gain power in the respective country. Otherwise, convenient, and suitable dictatorships are formed and supported to loot the natural resources. If natural resources are not available, then markets are targeted to advance accumulative interests of advanced late capitalism. In the opinion of Ahmad, all these leads to bleeding of the global south and disempowerment of people from the periphery. Therefore, it is no surprise that advanced capitalist countries are always talking about the trope of the regime change. Conceptually speaking, this regime change has been entrenched in capitalist universality and Ahmad tries to establish the organic relation between transnational capital and reactionary forces by highlighting pervasive power of advanced late capitalism. As the history of world shows, the transnational capital is governed by the accumulative logic of the capitalism. To state matter of fact, this accumulative capitalism in alliance with reactionary forces from the global south have created a mighty challenge in front of progressive forces. Due to changed global conditions and revolutionary change in means of production, there is strategic retreat of the progressive forces. In his opinion, this retreat is the main cause of decline of the socialism.

Ahmad's Marxism is not inspired by orthodox Marxism, which gives paramount importance to economic determinism. Unlike orthodox Marxist critics, he values the revolutionary role of the human agency in making of the classless society. Most importantly, his Marxism is not trapped in the binary of first world and second world as envisioned by the contemporary Marxist critic like Jameson. Though he has been analyzing different dimensions of advanced late capitalism, he never forgets the ground realities of the third world nations. Therefore, it seems that there is a touch of nativism to his Marxism. Considering all these stated facts and assumptions, it would be apt to label him as a third world Marxist critic. Historically speaking, Marxism, as revolutionary method of interpretation, has been passing through various stages of theoretical evolution. From to the classical Marxism of industrial revolution to the critical Marxism of the advanced late capitalism, Marxism has been very consistent in war of

position against capitalism. Conceptually speaking, Ahmad's third world Marxism is the part of evolving Marxist universality that attempts to create alternative system to the contemporary social order.

Ahmad's third world Marxism is more evident in his critique of Jameson's Rhetoric of Otherness and the National Allegory. Being rooted in the first world, Jameson is unable to escape his own subjectivity even though he is Marxist critic. Having part of this literary production system, Jameson arguments unconsciously follow an essentialist logic of the binary opposition. Though it is hard to believe that critic of great stature like Jameson could make sweeping generalizations about the literary production system in former colonized countries bypassing the immense of heterogeneities that are inherent in these literatures. Most significantly, Ahmad argues,

“There is no such thing as a ‘Third World Literature’ which can be constructed as an internally coherent object of theoretical knowledge’. (Ahmad:96)

To state simply, like the idea and practice of east in discourse of orientalism, the idea and practice of Third World Literature is an artificial theoretical construction which is far away from the ground realities of these literatures. In his opinion, it is a wishful thinking on the part of Jameson to create unified theory for all these literatures by applying rules of western universalism which has been rejected vehemently by these literatures. Most importantly, Ahmad points out the trope of premodern reductionism in Jameson's logic. He explains,

“A literary theorist who sets out to formulate ‘a theory of the cognitive aesthetics of third- world literature will be constructing ideal types, in the Weberian manner, duplicating all the basic procedures which Orientalist scholars have historically deployed in presenting their own reading of a certain tradition of high textuality as knowledge of a supposedly unitary object which they call the Islamic civilization.” (Ahmad:97)

Ahmad's critic of Jameson shows his fidelity to the idealism of critical Marxism rather than banalities of orthodox Marxism. Devoting to the cause of the periphery, his critical analysis is loyal to the lofty ideas and ideals of Enlightenment. Alternatively, he has envisioned new aesthetics which is free from essentialism, reductionism, and western universalism.

His critical analysis includes revolutionary zeal of Marxism to create alternative system of political and literary governance. Most importantly, his analysis goes beyond of armchair activism and it is based on the civic activism which is the heroic legacy of the critical Marxism. By looking at his critical output, one must accept without hesitation or doubt the immense potential and relevance of Marxism as method of the interpretation.

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