

**DID THE FAILURE OF CAPITALISM TO DEAL WITH THE COVID 19 PANDEMIC  
MAKE MARX MORE RELEVANT IN TODAY'S WORLD, OR DID THE  
AUTHORITARIAN REGIME JUSTIFY ITSELF THROUGH MARXISM?**

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**Abstract**

The German philosopher Karl Marx was the first to challenge the capitalist tradition. Marxism presented an alternative to the capitalist market economy. By embracing this alternative, countries like Soviet union, China, Cuba continue to confront the capitalist first world. But things changed after the disintegration of the Soviet union, the flag-bearer of communism. Capitalist and right-wing philosophers proudly declared that socialism has finally been defeated by capitalism. Gradually, the wave of democratization spreads capitalism irresistibly all over the world. With the United States at the forefront, capitalism gives birth to a unipolar world. In this triumphant age of capitalism, Marx's relevance seems to be gradually declining. But like a flash of lightning, the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020 shook the foundations of this unrivalled world empire of capitalism. It is seen that the mighty capitalism has failed miserably in preventing the pandemic. Rather, non-capitalist states are much more successful in dealing with it. In these non-capitalist States, some are socialist and some are utterly authoritarian in nature. Capitalism has always criticized socialist States as authoritarian. But in reality, it is this authoritarianism that is fighting with pandemic with great skill, be it political authoritarianism or economic authoritarianism. Is the COVID-19 pandemic the final nail in the coffin of capitalism? Is the fall of democracy imminent? Will Chinese-led communism expand globally in the near future? Will the success of authoritarianism in dealing with epidemic increase its acceptability? The following article seeks to answer these questions.

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Since the bicentennial of Marx's birth in 2018, the question has been raised again and again, is Marx still relevant today? Or has Marx lost his relevance in today's age of liberalism and the triumph of market economy, 139 years after his death? In today's world plagued by COVID -19 pandemic, the first one seems more real. This realisation is especially significant when Marxists around the world began to think that Marxism had become irrelevant after the collapse of the socialist world. The current pandemic may have brought Marx from the pages of history to reality.

The collapse of the Soviet Union marked the beginning of an era of extreme conservative thinkers such as Francis Fukoyama and Samuel Huntington. In his book 'The End of History and the Last Man' (1992) Fukoyama interprets the fall of communism differently, saying that history has come to an end. He implicitly said that western democracy has won. This is the only and final destination of mankind. In his book 'The Clash of Civilization and the Remaking of World Order' (1996), Huntington replaces Marx's notion of 'class struggle' with the idea of 'conflicts of civilizations'. Believers in the idea of capitalist democracy rejoiced in the victory. They thought that the practical application of socialism would never come back. Orthodox fundamentalists gained much importance in Huntington's theory, which made them overjoyed. The conflict between the western Christian world and the Muslim world is now the main conflict, his book lays the groundwork for this idea.

In this situation, the leftists of all denominations become more or less stunned. They were confused about the role of socialism in the history of human civilization after the collapse of the Soviet Union. After the fall of Soviet Union, the eminent postmodern thinker Jacques Derrida wrote the book 'Spectres of Marx : The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International' (1993). In it, he proudly declares that Marx's 'spirit', has become more relevant to the world since the fall of the Berlin wall and the Soviet Union.

Derrida's arguments seemed too many to be prophetic, absurd, overly optimistic, and so on. Many began to think anew about whether Marx was still really relevant. Since then a lot of water has flowed in the Ganges, Danube, Volga, Mississippi rivers and with the time the skeleton of capitalist economy has also been exposed. People were initially overwhelmed by the capitalist economy, much of which has been extinguished overtime. Global recession, rising income inequality, iniquitable distribution of capital forced people to think about the moral basis of capitalism.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Communist bloc in Eastern Europe, Huntington's description of the clash of civilization became apparent through the rise of Islamist politics. In Muslim-majority countries, especially among young people, there was a growing interest in whether Islamist politics was the only option. This interest is now on the verge of disappearing for various reasons. The crisis of capitalist politics and the failure of Islamist politics have made Marxist thought relevant again in today's world. It is pertinent to note that politics of Islamism does not reject capitalism but seeks to perpetuate it using religious suffixes.

In contrast to the capitalist state system, Marx wanted to build an egalitarian society by abolishing the exploitative state system that includes all classes of people regardless of country, race, caste, religion or creed. Inspired by Marxist thought, those who wanted to materialize the dream of building such a classless society in different countries thought that the state had to be authoritarian in order to do so. As a result, every state that took the initiative to actualize Marx's dream became authoritarian or dictatorial. From Joseph Stalin in Russia to Fidel Castro

in Cuba, from Hugo Chavez in Venezuela to Kim Jong Un in North Korea, everyone is a perfect example of the above statement. Although, a small section of leftists who hold Marx's thought have always said that the idea of an authoritarian state is completely contrary to 'Marx's conception of the state'. However, they did not get much attention in the in the mainstream of power.

Although there is disagreement among the leftists as to whether an authoritarian state is needed to reach communism, what everyone agrees on is that a free market economy can never establish an egalitarian society. In order to establish an egalitarian society, first of all, an authoritarian economy is needed. There may be differences in the level of authority, but there must be control over the economy. Until an egalitarian society is established, the state will have the responsibility to control the economy. The point on which all Marxists generally agree is that the welfare of people cannot be achieved without state control over the economy.

A look at history shows that in all countries where the leftists and the Communist parties came to power, they always established authoritarian States. While this has established state control over the economy, it is undeniable that it has also eroded people's democratic rights and freedoms. The main goal of bringing the economy under the state control is to ensure education, medical care, housing and employment for all people. According to Marxists around the world, these four rights are the basic human rights. They think that the state should take the main responsibility to fulfill these rights. They say the state has no right to survive as an institute if it fails to fulfill these rights. Whether socialist states succeed or fail in ensuring these human rights is another matter. But in addition to those socialist countries, many capitalist countries in the west, except the United States, recognise the right to education and medical care as a fundamental human right and make it the responsibility of the state to ensure it. Corporates are also given less opportunity to do business in these two sectors. All of these countries pursue political authoritarian economic policies without leaving economic management entirely in the hands of market. By imitating the socialist states, the authority of the over the economy is also established there. It is pertinent to note that Marx's followers believe that the market economy is in fact an economy controlled by a few individuals in the name of the market.

With the departure of the socialist system from the Eastern European states, including Soviet Union almost all of them left the two sectors of education and medicine under the management of the state without leaving it to the commercial sector. As a result, people in all these countries can get free education and medical service just like in the socialist era.

Although China has relaxed state control over the economy and led country to capitalism under the leadership of communist party, it has not turned education and medical fields into profit making sectors. China believes that education and medical care are fundamental human rights, and that is the responsibility of the state to ensure that these rights are met.

When the first corona virus outbreak was reported in Wuhan, Hubei province, China, there was a great deal of excitement in the Western world. The Western world began to think that China had finally been found to be in disarray. The Western media then begin to proudly propagate in various ways that China's economic rise was in fact on a weak foundation. Some have been speculated that the outbreak of the corona virus could destroy China's economy and lead to the overthrow of the Communist party.

But in reality, China soon become very successful in dealing with the pandemic. Before the virus could spread, China locked down the city of Wuhan. Since the COVID-19 vaccine has not yet been discovered, this Chinese lockdown model is recognised worldwide as the only way to prevent corona virus from spreading. China quickly locks down cities through the policy of state authoritarianism and at the same time succeeds in providing the food security to the countrymen. During the lockdown period, China guaranteed food, jobs and salaries to its citizens, successfully implementing its economic authoritarianism policy. Since the state did not lack anything for the citizens during the lockdown, there were no incidents of dissatisfaction among the Chinese citizens.

The overarching success of the lockdown policy allowed China to contain COVID-19 only in Wuhan province. Health workers, including doctors and nurses (numbering about 42 thousand) were sent to Wuhan from other parts of China to prevent the virus from spreading across the country. Government offices were converted into hospitals overnight to arrange the treatment for a large number of COVID patients. In addition to the administration, volunteers from the Chinese communist party were involved in this huge undertaking.

After China, the corona virus began to spread to countries in East and Southeast Asia. All these countries also succeeded in controlling the pandemic to some extent following the model of China. Although some of these states are authoritarian and some are democratic in East and Southeast Asia, they are more or less authoritarian in economic nature. People have medical and economic guarantees in these countries other than the Philippines. These States rely on economic authoritarianism to deal with the epidemic without looking at the markets and profits. And in this they also get enough success. Confucianism, Laoism, Taoism, Shintoism and Buddhism are also influential throughout south-east Asia. There is a touch of social authoritarianism in all these thoughts or philosophies. It teaches them to obey orders or laws without asking questions. These small things helped the governments of these countries to quickly quarantine the people as soon as the virus spread. Apart from social and economic authoritarianism, the issue has so far played a major role in preventing the spread of corona virus in East and Southeast Asian countries is the ability of governments to make quick decisions. The most commendable thing is that the governments of these countries did not adopt a 'wait and see' policy like the European and American governments in dealing with the epidemic.

Western European States, including Italy, Spain and Germany, have not shown sufficient promptness in dealing with the corona virus since the beginning. Moreover, they were also reluctant to adopt the Wuhan model because of their contempt for socialist China and Asia. Due to the indifference and procrastination of these States, the corona virus spread rapidly. The situation is similar in the Middle East including Iran.

Russia, like Western Europe or the United States, did not delay in taking the necessary steps to prevent the spread of corona virus. Despite its long border with China and close economic, commercial, military etc. relations the rate of corona virus spread in Russia is relatively low. As a former socialist state Russia is in a much better position than Western Europe due to its quick decision making in pandemic situation. While arch-rival Russia has been able to control the spread of the corona virus the United States has been plunged into an unprecedented crisis.

The United States has no experience dealing with external forces, wars, famines, epidemics etc. Apart from this, there are signs of mismanagement, indecision, delay in making decision are evident in this country. The United States is now the epicentre of covid-19 in North and South

America as a whole. The richest state in the world now lacks adequate infrastructure to serve corona patients. The number of hospital beds per head in China is four times that of the United States. With such a large population, China's medical facility is undoubtedly commendable. On the other hand, United States, the world's largest economy, does not even have enough kits for COVID-19 patients.

Last year the US military budget was 730 billion. This is more than the combined military spending of all the states in the world. The United States is spending heavily on the military while handing over healthcare to corporates. The US health sector is actually controlled by insurance companies. People's diseases, grief, elements are the sources of their profit. The American people today are the victims of the profit oriented healthcare sector and the extreme mismanagement of government. As a result, the United States has had to take authoritarian steps to deal with the crisis, even though it was hesitant to do so in the first place.

Following the Wuhan model, cities in the United States are being cordoned off, as well as free corona virus testing is being arranged. The government is now forced to do so because corona testing is so expensive in corporate-managed US hospitals that it is beyond the reach of the general public. However, it is too late for the United States to take this step. By then COVID-19 had spread to all US states. When the first corona positive patient was identified in the city of Seattle, following the Wuhan model immediately would not have caused so much spread.

Experts say the spread of the corona virus has exposed the weaknesses of the US capitalist market economy. As a result of the collapse of the stock market, many people have lost everything and gone bankrupt. People are terrified of losing their jobs even after everything is over. In order to deal with the crisis, the state has to intervene in the economy again, again the state has to stand by the side of the people. The invisible hand of the market described by Adam Smith is failing to protect the people.

If the state fails to provide financial security to the people, then in third world countries like India, people cannot be locked down if necessary. Fascinated by the dream of high GDP growth, the reality of India is that many people still do not have access to food if they cannot work one day. The lockdown will only succeed in the third world countries if the state can take responsibility for feeding the low-income people during the lockdown. From communist China to the advanced capitalist states of the west, all of them have implemented their lockdown system by providing various benefits to the people during the crisis. The state that have carried out the lockdown have had to ensure minimum economic security for the people before the lockdown began. Providing financial security to the people during a lockdown is the primary duty of government, be it right wing or left wing. No state has completely relied on the market for lockdown or left the treatment of corona virus victims in entirely in the hands of corporates. The fact is that all States have to rely more or less on economic authoritarianism to deal with COVID-19.

However it has been observed that socialist states as well as social authoritarian and right wing authoritarian countries in the Middle East (except Iran) are in a better position to deal with COVID-19. But, the examples of Canada and Israel show that while economic authoritarianism is needed to deal with the crisis, state authoritarianism is not so important.

In the process of reaching Marx's egalitarian democratic society, many Marxists think that this state authoritarianism is an obstacle. They believe that in order to establish an egalitarian society,

it is necessary to have a controlled economy as well as the continuous development of science to meet the challenges of the age. The biggest challenge of the present time is to invent corona vaccine. And countries like United States, United Kingdom, Russia, China, India, Thailand and Israel are playing a leader leading role in tackling this challenge.

Corona virus pandemic shows that financial strength alone cannot be the measure of everything. Today, many of the world's leading countries in terms of annual income are not participating in the ongoing wartime effort to invent the corona virus vaccine (for example the rich countries in the middle East can be mentioned). As Marx said, it is not only the philosopher's job to point out problems, but also to change the world, now it is the time to reach the pinnacle of medical development and find a cure for the corona virus. Just as the continuous development of science will eliminate all forms of discrimination among human beings and build a classless society, so science will also help people to overcome adversity by its own innovative power. The whole world today is looking at the antidote to corona virus, another step forward in science.

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