

Biography of a Blunder

Biography of a Blunder:

*Base and Superstructure
in Marx and Later*

By

Dileep Edara

Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing



Biography of a Blunder:
Base and Superstructure in Marx and Later

By Dileep Edara

This book first published 2016

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Copyright © 2016 by Dileep Edara

All rights for this book reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner.

ISBN (10): 1-4438-8810-9

ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-8810-3

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|--|-----|
| Preface | vii |
| Chapter One..... | 1 |
| Introduction | |
| Chapter Two..... | 28 |
| <i>Base and Superstructure</i> in Contemporary Academic Discourses | |
| Chapter Three | 43 |
| The Oracles of References | |
| Chapter Four..... | 55 |
| What Marx Meant? Revisiting the 1859 Preface | |
| Chapter Five | 77 |
| Archaeology of Restricted Superstructure | |
| Chapter Six..... | 107 |
| Genealogy of Heterogeneity | |
| Chapter Seven..... | 201 |
| “Base and Superstructure” and “Mode of Production”: A Paradigmatic Dilemma | |
| Select Bibliography | 344 |

PREFACE

This book is based on my PhD thesis, entitled “Base and Superstructure in Marx and Later: Towards Reconstruction of an Original Paradigm,” which forms a part of the PhD course I have done, in the department of English, University of Hyderabad. The thesis was submitted in May 2012, and in the department, it was awarded the Meenakshi Mukherjee Prize, as the best thesis, for the year 2012–13. Except for chapter 5, where I have added a few more quotations for analysis, all other chapters remained unaltered apart from some minor changes in language and content.

As the title of the book is presumed to suggest, the central thrust of the argument presented in the succeeding pages revolves around differentiating between Marx, and the later writers, in view of their understanding and use of the base and superstructure. A key contention put forward here is that Marx’s use of the metaphorical terms is not properly recognised, analysed, and appropriated by the later writers. This lacuna and the resulting distorted version of the base and superstructure is characterised as a blunder, and exploring its roots, trajectory, and the ensuing confusions inform the present study.

I am greatly indebted to Ms Victoria Carruthers, at Cambridge Scholars Publishing. Without her timely initiative, this book wouldn’t have been published now. As this book is based on the research work I have carried out in the department of English, I feel that my acknowledgments mentioned in the PhD thesis are inalienably connected with that work, and so, I reproduce these acknowledgments, as they are, in the following lines:

A candidate with a chequered academic background, aspiring for PhD research admission in the Department of English, who just qualified the entrance test, stated in the interview, orally quoting the statements of Marx that the whole concept of the base and superstructure as it is generally maintained now in the areas such as literary and cultural studies is at odds with what Marx originally said, and that he would like to do his research on that issue. It is not strange that many did not take this seriously, but it is really exceptional that some actually did. Prof. M. Sridhar, my supervisor, and Prof. Alladi Uma are the first among them, and the candidate is me. My debt and gratitude for them defy formal expressions of acknowledgement found in PhD theses.

I wish to thank Prof. Syed Mujeebuddin, a member on my Doctoral Committee, who has always been generous in offering his critical comments. I cannot be oblivious to the likely difficulty a Marxist may have in being associated with a work that is obviously sceptical about the predominant Marxist tradition. I sincerely thank Dr. Purendra Prasad, Department of Sociology, another member on my Doctoral Committee, for accepting and playing that unenviable role with equanimity and empathic insight. I specially thank all the members of the Department of English at University of Hyderabad, and above all Prof. Mohan Ramanan, whose Research Methods course has greatly helped me and whose affectionate smile has never failed in restoring confidence in me. I thank Mr. Nagarajan for his patient replies for my repeated queries seeking information about the course procedures. Also, it will be a failing on my part, if I do not mention Mr. Ganesh, and Mr. Suresh at the department, who offered me their bicycles many a time, quite ungrudgingly.

At my Department of English and Communication Skills, Dravidian University, Kuppam, I am indebted to Prof. Ch. A. Rajendra Prasad, Head of the department, who has read my "Introduction," and made helpful comments. I also owe a debt of gratitude to Prof. Kumara Swamy Raju, and Prof. Sarada, Head, Department of Kannada and Translation Studies, both of whom repeatedly reminded me that finishing my research is imperative in many ways. I also thank Dr. B. Tirupathi Rao, for lending me a few of his books, though with the unflinching injunction that they should not be photocopied, and Dr. V. Nirmala, my colleague at the department. I specially thank Dr. R. Dyvatham, another colleague at my department, who has taken great pains to procure me *The Ethnological Note Books of Karl Marx* all the way from National Library, Calcutta.

At the personal level, I remain thankful to Y. Karunakar, a long standing friend, who is the only one to take a sustained interest in this precarious project, outside the Doctoral Committee. I would also like to thank Mr. E. S. Bramhachary, another long standing friend, who always knew what I was going to write. I sincerely thank Ms. K. Ponnari Laxmi, who has been a constant source of encouragement. My special thanks go to my wife Parvathi, who has always been there with me in the moments of elation and dejection, and shared the results readily, though she hasn't got much to do with their causes, most of the times.

It goes without saying that I solely stand responsible for the drawbacks of this enterprise, whereas the sources of its strengths will be too many and too intricate to trace and catalogue here.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Marxism is still very young, almost in its infancy; it has scarcely begun to develop. It remains, therefore, the philosophy of our time. We cannot go beyond it because we have not gone beyond the circumstances which engendered it. Our thoughts, whatever they may be, can be formed only upon this humus.

—Jean-Paul Sartre, *Search for Method*.¹

Of the many problems which perforce Marx left in an ‘undeveloped’ state, none is more crucial than that of ‘base-and-superstructure’.

—Stuart Hall, “Re-thinking the ‘Base-and-Superstructure’ Metaphor”²

For a number of people whose understanding of Marxism is complacently free from the awareness of the passionate debates within and about Marxism, Sartre’s opinion might seem strange. For a majority of these people, Marxism is dead and gone, at the most a harmless nightmare of the past, and thus, does not deserve any new debate. For another considerable species of this population, which is rapidly undergoing the process of extinction, Marxism is too sacrosanct to be questioned, almost synonymous with official orthodoxy.

But somewhere in the middle of the spectrum—whose extremes are populated, on the one side by those who take Marxism for a mere placebo, and on the other side, by those who take it for a panacea—lies the rational approach towards Marxism. For such an approach, Marxism is a vibrant theoretical enterprise to come to grips with the pathologically alienated social reality and a guiding torch in the transformative endeavour towards a more humane society. For such an approach, Marxism cannot be a finished product only waiting to be appreciated, appropriated, and

¹ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Search for Method*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1963) 30.

² Stuart Hall, “Re-thinking the ‘Base-and-Superstructure’ Metaphor”, *The Communist University of London: Papers on Class, Hegemony and Party* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1977) 43.

implemented, but something dynamic and verifiable through a constant process of examination and re-examination, right from the very foundations, and gets enriched in this process. From this perspective, Sartre's view about the infantile phase of Marxism is not much more than a truism.

This unorthodox approach towards Marxism has its origin in Marx himself, whose intellectual iconoclasm takes the form of a paradoxical statement wherein he states that all he knew was that he was not a Marxist.³ That Marx's formulations are potentially provisional and have faced the threat of relentless revision and reformulation by him is too well known to be dealt with in detail.⁴ When Stephen W. Hawking says, "Any physical theory is always provisional, in the sense that it is only a hypothesis: you can never prove it,"⁵ isn't it more true about the social theories where the reality always changes before the very eyes of the theorists? As can be explicitly seen from a well-known letter, Marx's views are ingrained with a scientific scepticism, especially, in the later years.⁶

He never hesitated to make his theories the objects of scientific scrutiny. And the objective of my present inquiry is to make a seemingly settled and well-established aspect of Marxism, the object of systematic scrutiny. That aspect is the theory of the Base and Superstructure. Before getting into the details of the subject at hand, some remarks about the position of Marxism in modern academia may contribute to the contextualization of the study.

Marxism and the Modern Academia

Another apparent oddity about Sartre's remark is its insistence on the nascent state of Marxism that seems anachronistic at a time when the

³ Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Selected Correspondence* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1982) 393.

⁴ I have discussed this aspect of Marx in greater detail in the chapter titled "What Marx Meant? Revisiting the 1859 Preface."

⁵ Stephen W. Hawking, *A Brief History of Time* (New York: Bantam, 1982) 11.

⁶ This is the letter dated 9th April 1863, where he writes to Engels in a poignantly nostalgic mood: "Re-reading your book has made me regretfully aware of our increasing age. How freshly and passionately, with what bold anticipations and no learned and scientific doubts, matters are treated here! And the very illusion that the result too will leap into the daylight of history tomorrow or the day after gives the whole thing a warmth and high-spirited humour—compared with which the later 'gray in gray' makes a damned unpleasant contrast" [Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Selected Correspondence* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1982) 131].

decay and the eventual demise of Marxism are taken to be a matter of common knowledge. It is widely believed that the collapse of the so-called communist regimes is the indisputable *coup de grace* delivered to Marxism. But what is not so widely appreciated is the fact that this collapse of communism as an external political threat to the developed capitalist countries also contributed to the development of an intellectual environment that is more conducive to take a fairly balanced view of Marxism. The circulation and popularity of the comparatively recent theoretical trends that are generally designated rather derogatorily as Academic Marxism and Western Marxism has a lot to do with these favourable conditions.⁷

Remarkably, Bertell Ollman, and Edward Vernoff, the editors of a book with the unusual title *The Left Academy: Marxist Scholarship on American Campuses*, published in 1982, give an interesting description of the academic situation in America:

A Marxist Cultural Revolution is taking place today in American universities. More and more students and faculty are being introduced to Marx's interpretation of how capitalism works (for whom it works better, for whom worse), how it arose, and where it is tending. It is a peaceful and democratic revolution, fought chiefly with books and lectures, with most of the action taking place on the fringes of the established disciplines. . . .

In political science, for example, four Marxist-inspired textbooks on American government have been published since 1970, whereas before that there were none. In the same period, Cambridge, Oxford, and Princeton University Presses, the three most prestigious university publishers, have among them brought out over fifteen books on Marx and Marxism, almost all of them quite sympathetic. There are over 400 courses given today in Marxist philosophy, whereas hardly any were given in the 1960s. As part of this trend, Marxism—viewed as a serious alternative approach—is finding its way into the courses of an increasing number of non-Marxists in practically every discipline.⁸

Of course, this description is not induced by any undue optimism of the writers as shown by their remark that reads like a rejoinder: “A

⁷ Terry Eagleton makes a similar point, though not in a similar tone, when he writes that “today, in the turbulent aftermath of all that, it is possible for some to find virtue in Marxist thought exactly because it can be easily enough sidelined in political reality” [Terry Eagleton and Dew Milne, eds., introduction, part 1, *Marxist Literary Theory: A Reader* (Massachusetts: Blackwell, 1996) 1].

⁸ Bertell Ollman, and Edward Vernoff, eds., *The Left Academy: Marxist Scholarship on American Campuses* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1982) 1.

renewal of McCarthyism, of which there are already some signs, is, of course, always a danger. The new Marxism is partly protected from an all-out attack by its nonparty, non-Russian, non-subversive (sic) character.”⁹ This demonstrates their awareness of the socio-political backdrop which made the uncommon condition possible.

An article from *The Economist* of December 2002, with a thought-provoking title “Marx after Communism” that is manifestly unsympathetic to Marx and Marxism, still writes:

In 1999 the BBC conducted a series of polls, asking people to name the greatest men and women of the millennium. In October of that year, within a few weeks of the tenth anniversary of the dismantling of the Berlin Wall, the BBC declared the people's choice for ‘greatest thinker’. It was Karl Marx. Einstein was runner-up, Newton and Darwin third and fourth, respectively. ‘Although dictatorships throughout the 20th century have distorted [Marx's] original ideas,’ the state-financed broadcaster noted, ‘his work as a philosopher, social scientist, historian and a revolutionary is respected by academics today.’¹⁰

In fact the responsiveness of the modern academia to Marxism is never an arcanum. Still, one should not expect that response to be consistent, either in attitude or in extent, for reasons that are obvious, like the socio-political conditions for instance. But, in spite of all the inconsistencies, the academia never seemed to have resorted to reticence, or to what Marx complained in some other context as the conspiracy of silence. In fact this responsiveness to Marxism is a major stimulus that spurred the intellectual trajectory of the modern academia. Thus, Robert J. Antonio, the editor of the collection *Marx and Modernity* writes:

Starting with Max Weber, diverse thinkers have seen Marx as a pole star of modern social theory—his challenge to capitalist modernity is so fundamental that later generations of theorists, such as today's postmodernists and other new cultural theorists, have felt compelled to situate themselves vis-à-vis his views in debates over the historical direction and ethical or aesthetic worth of Modern culture.¹¹

⁹ Ollman, and Vernoff 3.

¹⁰ “Marx after Communism”, *Economist*, 365.8304 (2002), n. pag, *The Economist*, *economist.com*, 2002, web, 20 Mar. 2011.

¹¹ Robert J. Antonio, “Rethinking Class and Class Politics after Communism”, *Marx and Modernity: Key Readings and Commentary*, ed. Robert J. Antonio. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003) 367.

Against this backdrop it is not difficult to understand the academic scenario in America, about which Lyn Marcus writes in a book published in 1975: “Few universities in the United States do not offer appreciation—or depreciation—of Marx, in their curricula, and there is no liberal-arts speciality which does not have a professedly ‘Marxist’ faction.”¹² But notwithstanding these historical facts, for a majority of scholars in the present day Indian academia, even the mention of Marxism evokes vague recollections of antiquarian intellectual interests.

To some extent, this particular indifference is the manifestation of a wider problem of lack of interest towards all subjects that are commonly designated as humanities, which are not much career-oriented in India now, at least in a relative sense. The dismissal of the importance of humanities is no more an accidental declaration based on any private whim. It even finds a lofty official expression in the solemn speech of the governor of Andhra Pradesh, on the eve of the republic day, 2008.¹³ Seen in this light, it is not strange that some universities do not have a *de facto* philosophy department at all, due to the active apathy of the government. This presents a tragic contrast with the picture of India, generally depicted through western eyes, in which even ordinary people are philosophical in their daily life. But, fortunately, this has not been the case in all the countries, at least in the countries in which the BBC survey is conducted, as shown by the conspicuously greater importance given to a social thinker—Marx. Given the importance of Marxism, it still needs to be explained why the thesis of base and superstructure is singled out for a closer study among the other methodological tools found in its intellectual inventory. And this cannot be done without getting into our zone of engagement.

The Centrality of Base and Superstructure in Marxism

Professor Erik Olin Wright, University of Wisconsin, writes in a course book of sociology of that university, entitled *Class, State and Ideology: An Introduction to Social Science in the Marxist Tradition*:

Marxism has always been easier for non-Marxists to define than for Marxists themselves. Non-Marxists generally define Marxism as a doctrine (or worse, dogma) that defends a set of propositions about society based on the work of Karl Marx. Marxism = Marx’s-ism. Marxists, on the other

¹² Lyn Marcus, *Dialectical Economics* (Massachusetts: D. C. Heath and Company, 1975) 3.

¹³ “Gnāna Bhūmīgā Mārāli”, *Eenadu* [Telugu newspaper], 27 Jan. 2008.

hand, have engaged in endless debates over precisely what constitutes the irreducible core of that doctrine, what is essential and what is not, what aspects of Marx's work should be retained and what aspects discarded or revised, whether Marxism is primarily a "method" or a set of substantive propositions, whether Marxism is a general theory of society and history, or just a specific theory of certain properties of societies. Such debates are complex and often opaque. We will encounter them in many different guises throughout the course.¹⁴

This mention of theoretical controversies even in an introductory course book may seem to be a symptom of over-scrupulousness. Indeed, in the case of Marxism, it is inevitable because of the ubiquitous debates about almost every aspect of Marxism. But, in spite of these all-pervading debates, there is a sort of appreciable basic consensus about the central contribution of Marxism. One can see this central contribution in the changed status of the economic sphere (or the sphere of material production) from something extraneous or exogenous to the social phenomenon to something essential or endogenous. Then, what exactly is the thesis that embodies this crucial idea?

For anyone who is faintly familiar with Marxism, the idea of the base and superstructure thesis will strike immediately. Thus, "Marx's Historical materialism," writes S. H. Rigby in his *Marxism and History* "is often seen as consisting of little more than the claim that society's relations of production are the 'base', upon which is built a 'superstructure' of law, politics and Ideology."¹⁵

It is because of this central conceptual position that, whenever there is a discussion about the fundamental problems of Marxism, it typically concerns itself with the theory of base and superstructure.¹⁶ Historically,

¹⁴ Erik Olin Wright, *Class, State and Ideology: An Introduction to Social Science in the Marxist Tradition* (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 2008) 2. This course book can be accessed at the URL: <http://www.ssc.wisc.edu/~wright/621-syllabus-2008.pdf>.

¹⁵ S. H. Rigby, *Marxism and History: A Critical Introduction* (Manchester: Manchester U P, 1998) 177.

¹⁶ As this book is being prepared for publication, a debate on the philosophy of Dr. Ambedkar is ongoing, in a popular Telugu newspaper, and the concepts of the base and superstructure have a central place in this discussion, attesting the topicality of the concepts. In the debate, Ranganayakamma, a prominent Marxist writing in Telugu, deploys the twin concepts, in the most hackneyed manner: "What does Marx say about the entire society? Society has two aspects—the base and the superstructure. All the superstructural spheres are formed with the nature of the base" (My translation from Telugu) [Ranganayakamma, "Ambedkaristula Bhramalu", *Andhrajothy*, 23 Dec. 2015: 4].

Marxism has been vulnerable to the repeated accusations of reductionism and determinism. Almost invariably, these accusations touch the theory of base and superstructure and result in some modifications, or attempted refinements, beginning from the times of Engels, as can be seen in his widely-cited letter of September 21, 1890 where he explains at length:

According to the materialist conception of history, the *ultimate* determining factor in history is the production and reproduction of real life. Neither Marx nor I have ever asserted more than this. Hence if somebody twists this into saying that the economic element is the *only* determining one, he transforms that proposition into a meaningless, abstract, absurd phrase. The economic situation is the basis, but the various elements of the superstructure—political forms of the class struggle and its results, such as constitutions established by the victorious class after a successful battle, etc., juridical forms, and especially the reflections of all these real struggles in the brains of the participants, political, legal, philosophical theories, religious views and their further development into systems of dogmas—also exercise their influence upon the course of the historical struggles and in many cases determine their *form* in particular. There is an interaction of all these elements in which, amid all the endless host of accidents (that is, of things and events whose inner interconnection is so remote or so impossible of proof that we can regard it as non-existent, as negligible), the economic movement is finally bound to assert itself.¹⁷

This classic statement is not an occasional instance, but one of the earliest results of a clearly felt need for enhancement. And the tradition of the unceasing efforts of enhancement it sets up continues to this day without appreciable success. In fact, whenever a new theoretical trend emerges within Marxism, through criticism of the old, the theory of the base and superstructure generally provides the theatre of war. When Raymond Williams, the pioneer of Cultural Materialism, writes, “a persistent dissatisfaction, within Marxism, about the proposition of ‘base and superstructure’, has been most often expressed by an attempted refinement and revaluation of ‘the superstructure’”¹⁸ it is something of an intellectual confession. Thus Leonard Jackson rightly observes: “Literary cultural materialists do not see it as their first priority to explain cultural practices in economic terms; they try to distance themselves from what they see as the Marxist base-superstructure metaphor.”¹⁹ This is another

¹⁷ Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Selected Correspondence* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1982) 394–5.

¹⁸ Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: OUP, 1986) 81.

¹⁹ Leonard Jackson, *The Dematerialization of Karl Marx* (London: Longman, 1994) 246.

acknowledgement of the centrality of the base-superstructure theory, though in a negative form.

No wonder that the tremendously influential Althusserian Marxism has a lot to do with the base and superstructure theory. As Jackson writes again, in connection with Althusser's theory:

What the theory does is to give much more theoretical scope to the superstructure than the Stalinist theory it superseded—almost as much as the humanist European Marxisms with which it was competing—and to encourage the development of a much more elaborate theory of the superstructure itself.²⁰

Jackson's recounting of the influential role of Althusser's Marxism in determining the trajectory of the theory from Raymond Williams to Terry Eagleton is also worth quoting in view of the interesting delineation it offers to the present day reader:

Possibly the most savage criticism Raymond Williams encountered during his lifetime came from a student and long-time admirer of his, Terry Eagleton, in *Criticism and Ideology* . . . There was much more to this savagery than a mere Oedipal attempt to overthrow an admired intellectual father, acknowledged as such within that very book. Eagleton was at that moment a passionate Althusserian, and arguing from the point of view of a rigorously theoretical Marxism. His rebuke of Williams was more than personal; it was generational, and representative.²¹

Thus, in any genuine exposition of Marxism, the base and superstructure theory occupies the most strategic position either in a positive or in a negative way. The relevance of this theory of base and superstructure continues even with the modern theoretical trends, in the era of fashionable post-isms such as post-Marxism, albeit in a negative sense. As Stuart Sim observes in his *Post-Marxism*:

Western Marxism is in general characterized by a greater interest in philosophical and aesthetic matters than political and economic. . . . and this shift can be seen to have post-Marxist implications. For a start, it calls into question the dominance of the base over the superstructure (more or less an article of faith in classical Marxism) and even reverses this on occasion.²²

²⁰ Jackson 178.

²¹ Jackson 217.

²² Stuart Sim, Ed., *Post-Marxism: A Reader* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh U.P., 1998) 4.

Thus the theory of the base and superstructure occupies a central place not only in Marxism, but also in the later theoretical reactions in it.

A Persistent Ambivalence in Marxism

There has been a deep-rooted and a longstanding ambivalence in Marxism about the concept of the base and superstructure in spite of its evident centrality. For instance, S. H. Rigby, whose words cited earlier refer to the importance of the concept of base and superstructure, writes a few lines after those words, in the same book, *Marxism and History*:

Base and superstructure is an architectural metaphor which Marx uses in order to persuade the reader that a certain perspective is useful. Unfortunately it has become a dead metaphor, so that Marxists sometimes ask which elements are included in each, as if the two actually existed. In fact the superstructure does not exist.²³

On the one hand, the concept of base and superstructure is acknowledged as central to Marxism, but on the other hand the very existence of superstructure is denied. This ambivalence in Marxism is symptomatic with regard to the concept of superstructure.

The first sentence in the chapter “Base and Superstructure,” in Raymond Williams’ *Marxism and Literature* reads: “Any modern approach to a Marxist theory of culture must begin by considering the proposition of a determining base and a determined superstructure.”²⁴ Paradoxically, the conclusion of that chapter says:

Thus, contrary to a development in Marxism, it is not ‘the base’ and ‘the superstructure’ that need to be studied, but specific and indissoluble real processes, within which the decisive relationship, from a Marxist point of view, is that expressed by the complex idea of ‘determination’.²⁵

This is another characteristic manifestation of the same persistent ambivalence. The acknowledged centrality is simultaneously counteracted by reluctance towards the concept of superstructure that sometimes borders on repugnance. Though it seems bizarre, this ambivalence is not baseless, in a way. Some perceivable reasons for this persistent theoretical repulsion are:

²³ S. H. Rigby, *Marxism and History: A critical Introduction* (Manchester: Manchester U P, 1998) 178.

²⁴ Williams, *Marxism* 75.

²⁵ Williams, *Marxism* 82.

1. The Metaphor of base and superstructure is obviously structural or, to use Edward Thompson's expression "constructional." And the intriguing question is to explain how this constructional metaphor is compatible with the organic model that Marx often uses when analysing the social phenomenon.
2. An all-encompassing category as it was, (excepting the economic base) the concept of superstructure presents many problems with its obvious implications of wholesale reductionism and determinism that defies any attempts at theoretical sophistication or diversification.
3. By referring to issues like law and politics that inform the essential features of the state, in the same breath, along with the predominantly cultural fields like art, morals, etc., the concept of superstructure tends to blur their defining differences and runs counter to any analysis worth the name.
4. This crude reductionism can lead to grossly grotesque conclusions when applied to the delicately intricate issues such as literature, philosophy and morality, the discussions of which are intrinsically more nuanced and complex.
5. An attendant problem with the concept of all-encompassing superstructure is the question of the mutual positions of its motley constituents. This mutual positioning is not even hinted by Marx (since the very question does not arise with his version of superstructure, as we shall see later). As a result, this mutual alignment is derived from elaborate exegetical exercises that are based more on the creative visualizations of the theorists than on the analysis of Marx's texts.
6. As it traditionally holds a central position in the organically linked theoretical framework of Marxism, the base and superstructure thesis, with its inherent lapses in its present distorted form will affect other aspects of Marxist theory. For instance, as it is often taken as a variant formulation of the materialistic thesis, the conceptual confusions endemic to the base and superstructure theory can prove epidemic by contaminating the other propositions of Marxist materialism.

I have enumerated only half a dozen conceptual problems attendant with the base and superstructure thesis, and these are by no means exhaustive. The chequered history of Marxism is interspersed with an array of such complaints regarding "this now universally reviled

paradigm,²⁶ to borrow the words of Terry Eagleton. And these complaints understandably result in attempts at refinement. Thus the base and superstructure thesis that is so central to Marxism has become highly vulnerable to the whimsical visualizations of different theorists and when one starts investigating what the base or superstructure is, Marxism(s) offer(s) explanations that are not only copious but capricious as well.

The Necessity of Systematic Research

As everybody knows, Marxism is a theory with great practical implications that are political and economic. And the way it has changed the trajectory of world politics is too well known and too broad a subject to be dealt with in detail. In contrast, the predominant interest in Marxism, in the modern times, is mainly cultural. The explanatory link between these seemingly dichotomous aspects of Marxism has been the base and superstructure paradigm, which apparently defines the theoretical nexus between the two constitutive facets. Thus it occupies a unique and central place in the Marxian body of thought. As we have seen above, this central status has never rescued that concept from being the object of the most haphazard surmises. Consequently, if there is any concept in Marxism that allows umpteen ways of formulation, it is the concept of superstructure. Everything about the concept of superstructure is inchoate and chaotic—regarding both what elements constitute superstructure and how (in what way) they constitute it.

The very first words of Chris Harman's essay "Base and Superstructure" are remarkable in this respect as they elaborately ponder upon the perplexing laxity of the views on this subject:

There is a confusion at the very centre of Marxism. . . . Every pronouncement of the 'death of Marxism' by bourgeois ideologues has been proved wrong within a decade or so by a new range of Marxist studies of society, the economy and history. Yet when it has come to spelling out what exactly is the Marxist approach there has been enormous confusion, with 'Marxists' saying apparently contradictory things.

The confusion centres around the couplet 'base' and 'superstructure'. . . . What is the 'base'? The economy? The forces of production? Technology? The relations of production? What is included in the superstructure? Obviously the state. But what about ideology (and revolutionary theory)? The family? The state when it owns industry?

²⁶ Terry Eagleton, "Base and Superstructure Revisited", *New Literary History*, 31.2 (2000): 237, *JSTOR*, web, 27 Mar. 2009.

Finally, what is the relation between the ‘base’ and the ‘superstructure’? Does the base determine the superstructure? If so, what exactly is the nature of the determination? And does the superstructure have a degree of ‘autonomy’—and if so, how can this be reconciled with talk of ‘determination’ (even if it is only ‘determination in the last resort’)?²⁷

Such troubled territory is obviously a fertile ground for an inquisitive researcher. This desperate disparity is to be found not only between the views of different writers, but even between the statements of one and the same writer. Lenin, for instance, whose views are generally marked for their clarity and incisiveness, writes, “Their [i.e. Marx’s and Engel’s] basic idea . . . was that social relations are divided into material and ideological. The latter merely constitute a superstructure on the former,”²⁸ as if the base and the superstructure thesis is a mere paraphrase of the materialist theory. But this does not prevent him from writing incisively as follows: “Political institutions are a superstructure on the economic foundation. We see, for example, that the various political forms of the modern European states serve to fortify the rule of the bourgeoisie over the proletariat.”²⁹ Still, he does not seem to be conscious of any discrepancy between the two versions.

The endemic persistence of vagueness and vagaries in formulating the concepts of the base and the superstructure is further evinced by the fact that even the modern, analytically oriented attempts are not much comforting when it comes to this chronically confounded issue. G. A. Cohen, in his *Karl Marx’s Theory of History* that is celebrated as a path-breaking study for the standards of rigorousness it has set itself, in formulating Marx’s theories, writes concisely: “Marx gave no definite demarcation of the superstructure. Does it include ideology? We shall suppose that it does not . . . We take the superstructure to be a set of non-economic institutions, notably the legal system and the state.”³⁰ But, this does not prevent him from writing elsewhere in the same book, “the superstructure consists of legal, political, religious, and other non-economic institutions,”³¹ inexorably extending his aforementioned, concise superstructure with only two elements in its conceptual compass.

The example of Cohen is not any random choice, but intended as a representative case in the best sense of the word, because he genuinely

²⁷ Chris Harman, “Base and Superstructure”, *International Socialism*, 2:32 (1986): 3–44, *Marxists’ Internet Archive*, marxists.org, 2003, n. pag, web, 3 Mar. 2011.

²⁸ V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, vol. 1 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977) 151.

²⁹ V.I. Lenin, *Selected Works*, vol. 1 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977) 46.

³⁰ G. A. Cohen, *Karl Marx’s Theory of History* (Oxford: OUP, 1979) 216.

³¹ Cohen, *Karl Marx’s Theory of History* 45.

represents the best-known attempt at a rigorous formulation of Marx's theories. If even that attempt is not very comforting, the root of the chronic confusion has more to do with a deep-rooted presumption about the theory of the base and the superstructure, than with any inherent weakness of his approach. That presumption, at least partly, lies in the established belief that the thesis of the base and the superstructure is an all-encompassing theory of society. This belief is so deep rooted and so widely accepted that even the need for explicitly formulating it is never felt, as it happens in the case of the things that are too obvious to be explicitly stated.³² The central concern of the present research is to problematise this presumption and to dismantle the notions based on this unfounded idea and thus to dissolve a historically constructed dogma that has gained an axiomatic status, by bringing out the specific significance of base and superstructure thesis as a theory that conceptualizes the relation between production relations and the state, with its political and legal dimensions.

This concisely defined view of the thesis runs against the popularly held notion of it as an all-encompassing theory, which, understandably, is inherently extendable in proportion to the breadth of the conceptual span of a commentator in whose hands it happens to find itself. Such precarious position tends to result in notional inconsistencies. And the inconsistencies could be found not only between the ideas of different critics, but also between different versions of the same critic which is not so common in other areas of academic activity.

This demonstrates the extent of theoretical laxity that is traditionally tolerated in the studies of Marxism, especially in this regard, as if what matters in formulating the twin concepts is only the exegetical fecundity of the commentators and not the analytical fidelity to the basic texts in which Marx originally formulated the concepts, disregarding how he is thought to have formulated them. The basic principle that Marx's view of these

³² Bukharin, Stalin and Terry Eagleton are some of the exceptions in this regard. The first two are discussed in the chapter "Genealogy of Heterogeneity." Regarding Terry Eagleton, John Dupré rightly observes: "One important consequence of this [Eagleton's] definition is that it clearly does not constitute base and superstructure as exhaustive categories. Eagleton notes that a literary work can be studied infrastructurally, as part of material production, or superstructurally, as collusive with dominant power. And there is also the possibility of reading it neither way. . ." [John Dupré, "Comments on Terry Eagleton's 'Base and Superstructure Revisited'", *New Literary History*, 31.2 (2000): 241–5]. However, all the three of them neither pursue this line of reasoning much further, nor do they realise the restricted version of base and superstructure, which plays a pivotal role in my arguments.

concepts should be derived primarily from the study and analysis of his own writings is ignored in practice.³³ In this connection, I envisage my study not as another commentary endeavour that enriches the existing cornucopia of interpretations, but as an exploratory effort to find out the meaning of Marx based on a rigorous study of his own works, to borrow Raymond Williams' expression "the long, massive, unfinished, often contradictory work which we now call Marx."³⁴

A typical example for the near ubiquitous practice of confounding Marx with the later writers is provided by S. B. Smith, in his article bearing an apparently pertinent title for my project, "Considerations on Marx's Base and Superstructure." Despite the title that speaks of "Marx's Base and Superstructure," the very first lines confess that "this paper will be devoted to examining the character of various second-order accounts of Marx's base and superstructure model of society." Here, he studies three versions of this thesis 1) Fundamentalist Thesis 2) Internal Relatedness Thesis 3) Overdetermination Thesis.³⁵ But it is only in the first version that he tries to substantiate his arguments with the statements of Marx, though, here also, he mentions Plekhanov, Kautsky, and Bukharin as the principal proponents, later considering the "sophisticated defense"³⁶ of this position by G. A. Cohen, which he has managed to digest only partly.³⁷ After

³³ William H. Shaw made a similar point when he wrote that "While the study of Marx has grown more sophisticated over the years, high standards of scholarship have not always been maintained, and a slackness persists which one imagines would not be tolerated in other fields. The complex causes of this need not be sought here, but Marx has clearly been difficult to examine dispassionately. The requirements of the book trade have, in addition, encouraged rather one-sided, 'novel' treatments of Marx. In any case, where patient examination has been required, individual flights of fancy have been indulged; where reasoned and close exegesis has been needed, textual infidelity has triumphed" [William H. Shaw, introduction, *Marx's Theory of History* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1978) 2].

³⁴ Raymond Williams, *Marx on Culture* (New Delhi: Critical Quest, 1989) 6.

³⁵ See S.B. Smith, "Considerations on Marx's Base and Superstructure", *Karl Marx's Economics: Critical Assessments*, ed. John Cunningham Wood, vol. IV (London: Croom Helm, 1988) 315.

³⁶ Smith 317.

³⁷ For, Smith says that "Cohen's argument ends by giving more weight to the technological base than it can be made to bear" [page 318]. His statements about Cohen betray that he did not properly appreciate Cohen's rigorous exclusion of technology and productive forces from the concept of base. In fact, Cohen offers a long list of critics, in a footnote to his book, who wrongly include productive forces in the base. See G. A. Cohen, *Karl Marx's Theory of History* 29. Smith seems to be bent on unwittingly extending the list further by including Cohen himself.

considering Lukács and Ollman as regards the second version and Althusser in the case of the third, he states in his “Conclusion,” that “all three variations on this theme exist side by side within Marx’s writings and sometimes even within the same text.”³⁸ But, to assert this, he doesn’t see any need to go beyond the self-avowed “second-order accounts.” Thus he concludes his “Considerations on Marx’s Base and Superstructure” without troubling himself with any direct engagement with Marx.

In fact, more than a few writers setting out on a study of Marx would indulge in such analyses of versions when it comes to the base and superstructure thesis. For Melvin Rader, to take a fairly reasonable example, there are three such versions as shown in his *Marx’s Interpretation of History*: 1) fundamentalist version 2) dialectical version and 3) organic version. In fact, a central concern of his book is to argue for the organic version.³⁹ Though Rader deploys more than usual care to analyse the mutual merits of these alternative versions, the problem with such a procedure is that it has an unmistakable subjective ring to it, making it seem that the whole issue is the facility of the critic in choosing the best version among the available, facile alternatives. Evidently, such a method has no room for any trace of scholarly rigour, especially when the purpose is the study and appraisal of the specific thesis of a theorist— Marx, in the present case.

But this malleable intellectual milieu will be an ideal breeding ground for the mushrooming of secondary scholarship. As a result, the commentary output on Marx has grown so overwhelmingly massive and pervasively popular that it now seems rather rude and drab to deal with Marx directly and to take him for what he says,⁴⁰ thus reaching beyond the sedimentary sclerosis of exegetical accretions. Such disinterring interrogation informs the central core of my engagement with Marx that takes his concise, restricted formulation of base and superstructure at its face value, with its unique potential to do away with the deplorable, undue dependency on the interpretive conjectures, as the very necessity does not arise in its case.

³⁸ Smith 327.

³⁹ See Melvin Rader, *Marx’s Interpretation of History* (New York: OUP, 1979) xix–xxiii.

⁴⁰ Thus Shaw’s statement about his own work may sound like a platitude, but is indispensable in this backdrop: “A principle underlying this essay is that, generally speaking, Marx means what he says: there is no need to explain this in terms of some alleged ‘underlying’ philosophy or a unique use of words” [Shaw 9].

The Departure My Work Proposes

The simple but rigorous departure proposed here is that the theory of the base and the superstructure is not an all-encompassing paradigm that explains away all the social spheres in reference to the economy, as it is widely believed to have done, but a conceptual model to explicate the inextricable connection between the production relations (the base) and politics and law (superstructure). This proposal is based on the undeniable fact that Marx explicitly speaks only about the “legal and political superstructure,” in the 1859 preface to his *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, the preface regarding which, G. A. Cohen aptly observes: “In attending to the ‘Preface,’ we are not looking at just one text among many, but at that text which gives the clearest statement of the theory of historical materialism.”⁴¹ Though Marx mentioned “definite forms of social consciousness” in the same breath here, he excluded them explicitly from the label of superstructure and stated that they only “correspond” to the base.⁴²

Though the importance of this preface is widely accepted and copiously written about, this restricted use of the concept of superstructure is never acknowledged properly, let alone explored in its theoretical implications. Initially, I too had ignored this obvious restricted use until I fortuitously faced the fact that Marx’s use betrays a flagrant contrast with the prevalent panoramic version of the superstructure. And when I took up the same problem as the object of my research, what looked initially like a serendipitous, strange deviation of Marx from what he is customarily supposed to have said had assumed the proportions of a nagging intellectual dilemma awaiting solution in the course of research. The research, when completed (if researches could ever be completed in a sense) has yielded the assessment that Marx’s restricted use of the base and superstructure thesis is found not only in the 1859 preface, but in many of his works written before that and thereafter, with a remarkable consistency, demanding critical consideration and analytical attention. Although he deployed these metaphorical terms, in a few other instances, to elucidate some other aspects of his theory, when he is engaged with elucidating the relation between different social spheres through the use of the metaphorical terms, this is what he stated precisely.

⁴¹ G. A. Cohen, “Reply to Elster on ‘Marxism, Functionalism, and Game Theory’”, *Theory and Society*, 11.4 (1982): 484.

⁴² References for Marx’s passage and an elaborate discussion of it could be found in my chapter titled “What Marx Meant? Revisiting the 1859 Preface.”

The importance of this resulting position can be properly appreciated, when we remember that some major theorists⁴³ have observed the restricted use of Marx in the first instance in the preface, but wrongly thought that Marx later generalized the concept of superstructure in the same preface. This notion is refuted in my analysis of Marx's preface, which unequivocally unveils the restricted use of superstructure in the preface and stresses its unacknowledged rigour. My stance also contends that the unwitting substitution of this rigorous, restricted superstructure with its presently popular, all-inclusive avatar is perhaps the biggest blunder befallen during the later intellectual transformations that defined the polymorphous phenomena called Marxism, hence my title.

Of course, it is possible to argue that the concept of superstructure also includes ideology by interpreting superstructure as a conglomeration of all the elements that could be derived from the writings of Marx, written at different times, irrespective of their mutual incongruities. This, in fact, is the way the modern all-inclusive superstructure came to be maintained. But the tacit methodological commitment betrayed by this sort of argument is hardly tenable, as it endeavours apologetically and reverentially to retain all the formulations of Marx intact, disregarding their apparent disparity, instead of analysing and sorting out the differences between these formulations, both conceptually and chronologically, and embarking on a critical estimation of the relative validity of these formulations as the notable stages of Marx's intellectual evolution. Considering Marx's proclivity for relentlessly revising and reformulating his theories, this indiscriminately agglomerating methodology is scarcely plausible.

The uniqueness of my approach lies in considering Marx's apparently anomalous but consistently restricted use of superstructure as a deliberate deviation and not as a fortuitous aberration. The latter approach constitutes the unacknowledged methodological basis of many critics who observed Marx's restricted use fortuitously, but never thought it could be worthy of sustained critical attention. In fact, this approach itself is fortuitous and unfortunate in spite of its unchallenged popularity. The salient feature of my approach lies in the simple and highly probable understanding that Marx's restriction is the result of his desire to bring out a nuanced discrimination in the concept of superstructure by confining it to politics and law, which have a close nexus with the production relations (i.e. the base) and by leaving out other spheres which are not so intrinsically connected with the base, so as to make the concept of superstructure more

⁴³ See G. A. Cohen, Footnote, *Karl Marx's Theory of History* (Oxford: OUP, 1979) 216; and Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: OUP, 1986) 76.

rigorous and compact.

Though it is patently different from the widely believed panoramic superstructure, the restricted version is not difficult to appreciate, for the simple reason that the close nexus of politics and law (which form the most essential organs of the state) with the production relations (which are mostly, but not exclusively, class relations) is a well-known idea in Marxism. Engels—in whom I found the first, elementary source of the popularly believed, panoramic superstructure—is also well aware of this intrinsic connection and he offered one of the most lucid explanations for this connection in his *Housing Question*.⁴⁴ This implies that in the base and superstructure thesis Marx offers a formal theoretical model, to define these twin social aspects (politics and law), with their well-known dependence on the production relations in terms of a metaphor that is strikingly suggestive of such a relation. Thus, despite the semblance of conceptual deviation, Marx's restricted superstructure has a great potential for bringing out immense rigour to his conceptual framework and could do away once for all with the endless array of exegetical acrobatics. In a way, Marxism has been groping for satisfying answers for the questions which are already solved by Marx long ago.

However unconventional this proposal may seem, the central argument that Marx mentions only a restricted superstructure in his 1859 preface is not actually unknown in the Marxist tradition. On the contrary, it is well-known that both in his preface and in the first volume of *Capital*, his *Magnum opus*, Marx mentioned only the “legal and political superstructure.” But these words of Marx are never taken at their face value, not because they are less known, but despite the fact that they are well-known in their unusual form that is evidently incongruent with the widely believed all-inclusive version that has consolidated itself through the later developments in Marxism. Hence, these words of Marx are described as his “purloined letters,” in the last chapter of this book, after the title of a story written by Edgar Allan Poe.

There is another aspect to the issue. When the concept of superstructure is thus dethroned from the over-arching, all-inclusive status, a struggle for paradigmatic primacy ensues from it: What thesis of Marx holds the overall central place now? My analysis of the preface, leads me to the conclusion that the mode of production thesis is to be enthroned in this coveted status. This brings about a paradigm shift, in the literal sense of the phrase, in the popular view of Marxism. Besides being not easily

⁴⁴ See Frederick Engels, *The Housing Question* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1979) 88. The text could be found in the chapter “Genealogy of Heterogeneity”, where I discussed the views of Engels' elaborately.

susceptible to reductionism, the mode of production thesis, with its conspicuous emphasis on the centrality of human activity, has many advantages in theorizing the totality of social reality without entailing stultifying, unidirectional determinism. But, again, the received understanding of the concept of mode of production in Marxism is not free from its own problems. Clearing these inherited confusions and figuring out its notional specificity and tracing out the theoretical consequences of this paradigm shift in Marxism inform the course of this study.

A Note on Chapterisation

A sketchy explanation of the structure of the study will help easy comprehension of the central thrust of its argument. The study takes off in the second chapter (the present “Introduction” being the first chapter) entitled “*Base and Superstructure* in Contemporary Academic Discourses,” with a consideration of the pragmatics of the terms “base” and “superstructure” as they are used in the present day academic articles. In this attempt to take stock of the current use of the concepts, no discernible regularity is observed in the deployment of the concepts in overwhelmingly varied fields of study in these articles. Then the zone of engagement is shifted to reference works like dictionaries and encyclopaedias, which generally enjoy a reverential status in the academic world, in the third chapter “The Oracles of References.” Though the use of the said concepts in this solemn realm is not so facile, as in the previous case, it doesn't exhibit the usual rigour we generally expect in reference works.

After noticing the commonly held conceptual coverage of base and superstructure, in a wide range of reference works, some of which are specifically devoted to Marxism and communism, as well as taking cognizance of the repeated references these tomes make to the 1859 preface of Marx, the study proceeds to the analysis of the preface, in the chapter “What Marx Meant? Revisiting the 1859 Preface,” wherein, among other things, the restricted version of base and superstructure, and the importance of “mode of production” as the holistic thesis of Marx are recovered. The task of a comparative study of this restricted formulation in the 1859 Preface, with the various other statements of Marx at different instances, and the appreciation and appraisal of their mutual deviations and uniformities is taken up in the chapter “Archaeology of Restricted Superstructure,” in which the restricted base and superstructure thesis emerges as a prominent dimension of Marx's thought, endorsed in many of his other works with remarkable consistency.

Upholding this radically different version of base and superstructure, as the view of Marx, entails the responsibility of tracing the transformation of the thesis into its present heterogeneous form, and this is attempted in the chapter titled “Genealogy of Heterogeneity.”

The last chapter, “‘Base and Superstructure’ & ‘Mode of Production’: A Paradigmatic Dilemma,” concerns itself with a discussion of the theoretical complications and implications involved in disinheriting the holistic status to the base and superstructure thesis and reinstating the mode of production thesis as the legitimate claimant for that position.

An inquisitive reader may be interested in knowing the chronological order of writing the above-mentioned chapters. The actual beginning happened to be in one of the middle chapters (chapter 4),⁴⁵ analysing the 1859 preface of Marx, the text in which the research problem presented itself to me initially, when I squarely faced the glaring discrepancy between what is actually present in the preface and what it is generally purported to have presented (with due apologies to the most-modern-minded post-modernists). The next chapter that gropes to gather together the other instances of Marx's fertile formulations and venture to make a critical comparison of them is also the next in the order of time.

Then I started working on the next chapter with the aim of tracing back the contemporary distorted version of the thesis, but this was interrupted in the middle due to the suffocating suspicions regarding the contemporary status of my topic. Chances are that a study of the contemporary discussions about my subject may pose problems of relevance for the whole research project, if the present position of the subject is more advanced than the departures I propose; on the other hand, I could not dispel the vague apprehensions about the unenviable prospect of redundantly rediscovering a well-known thing—the only common point between these dreaded possibilities is that I could not say which is worse.

The second and the third chapters are the result of the work undertaken to settle accounts with these nagging anxieties about the contemporary status of my topic, only after completing which, I could finish my retracing chapter, “Genealogy of Heterogeneity,” which was decelerated in the middle. After the precarious period of the present and retrospective comparisons and counter-checking are over, at least in a relative sense, the last chapter that was actually written is the last chapter, “‘Base and Superstructure’ and ‘Mode of Production’: A Paradigmatic Dilemma.”

⁴⁵ The fact that “the method of presentation must differ in form from that of inquiry” is well known to Marx and he has some interesting things to tell about this. See Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1986) 28.

Toward Situating the Study

Any study of this kind will have some inevitable limitations. To begin with, treating Marxism as an academic subject is itself a limitation, as it involves an abstraction from its programmatic aspect. Thus Terry Eagleton remarks in his *Marxism and Literary Criticism* that is intended only as an introduction to the subject:

I have spoken of Marxism as a ‘subject’, and there is a real danger that books of this sort may contribute to precisely that kind of academics. No doubt we shall soon see Marxist criticism comfortably wedged between Freudian and mythological approaches to literature, as yet one more stimulating academic ‘approach’, one more well-tilled field of inquiry for students to tramp. Before this happens, it is worth reminding ourselves of a simple fact. Marxism is a scientific theory of human societies and of the practice of transforming them; and what that means rather more concretely, is that the narrative Marxism has to deliver the story of the struggles of men and women to free themselves from certain forms of exploitation and oppression. There is nothing academic about those struggles, and we forget this at our cost.⁴⁶

This passage rightly warns us against a possible misunderstanding about the subject at hand. But from the researcher’s point of view the political tone and tenor of a majority of Marxist writings present a problem of a different type.

Unlike the speculative thinking, in which, according to Hegel “the interests which move the lives of races and individuals are hushed”⁴⁷ Marx’s thoughts have mobilized the actions of humanity on a world scale. As a thinker, Marx is extremely sensitive to the contemporary social problems and consequently we find his theory in the form of a passionate polemic striving to develop a liberative theory based on a down-to-earth understanding of the social reality and not in the form of a dispassionately dressed academic discourse. This passionate tone may be hard to cope with for an academic, especially so when the researcher does not share the concerns of the subject pursued or when the researcher’s interests are not consonant with the subject of study. This study, in its earnest concern to make out the original sense of Marx, has never treated his political sympathies as extraneous to the subject of study, though a deliberate

⁴⁶ Terry Eagleton, preface, *Marxism and Literary Criticism* (London: Methuen, 1987) vii.

⁴⁷ G. W. F. Hegel, *Science of Logic*, trans. A.V. Miller (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1969) 34.

restraint is observed diligently, not to indulge in those aspects when the issues examined do not call for them.

On the negative side of the political passions, we can say that, ironically, it is not only a prejudice against Marxism that impedes an objective research of it but also its enormous influence and popularity. Raymond Aron's statement that "it is really no more difficult to present Marx's leading ideas than those of Montesquieu or Comte; if only there were not so many millions of Marxists,"⁴⁸ may sound paradoxical but not altogether unfounded. Again, it should not be ignored that the predominant reason for this is frequently political.

The seamy side of political tendentiousness presented itself starkly, when I discovered to my dismay, that a book with a title, remarkably pertinent to my topic, *Marxism-Leninism on Basis and Superstructure* is actually a hopeless apology for Stalin's theory of base and superstructure, besides being uniquely uninformative either about Marx or about Lenin.⁴⁹ Another book-length study with a strikingly pertinent title *Ideology and Superstructure in Historical Materialism*, by Franz Jakubowski⁵⁰ need to be mentioned here. The parallels between my project and Jakubowski's are apparent even in the titles. For one thing, the keyword "Superstructure" is common in both titles. For another, Jakubowski's book, his only major work, is also based on his doctoral thesis, though it is published in Poland in 1936, and republished in English in 1970. But there ends the similarities.

The overwhelming concern for Jakubowski is not the focused analysis of the twin concepts his title announces, but to defend the then subversive theories of Lukács, presented in his *History and Class Consciousness* and of Karl Korsch, in his *Marxism and Philosophy*. A personal friend of

⁴⁸ Raymond Aron, *Main Currents in Sociological Thought*, vol. 1 (New York: Doubleday, 1989) 145.

⁴⁹ At the very beginning of his book, Chesnokov mentions Stalin's booklet on Linguistics, *Marxism and Problems of Linguistics*, and says that it "...is one of the most important events in the ideological life of the party. Comrade Stalin's work enriches and further develops Marxist-Leninist theory. Comrade Stalin has given in his work a complete and finished Marxist theory concerning language and has worked out most important principles of Marxism on the question of Basis and Superstructure" [D. I. Chesnokov, *Marxism-Leninism on Basis and Superstructure* (Bombay: PPH, 1952) 1]. It doesn't need a great flair for imagination to surmise what Marx, the ruthless critic, would have thought of this sort of according a "finished" status to his theories.

⁵⁰ Franz Jakubowski, *Ideology and Superstructure in Historical Materialism*, 1970, *Libcom.org*, web, 20 Mar 2011. <<http://libcom.org/library/ideology-superstructure-historical-materialism-franz-jakubowski-1936>>