

SOCIAL MILIEU OF THE ABSURD

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In this paper the attempt would be made to trace out the origin and various tendencies influencing the social milieu of absurd in the development of human history. Ever since Martin Esslin coined the phrase ‘Absurd Drama’ to classify the play of Beckett, Ionesco, Adomov, Genet and others, the word Absurd has been very much in our conversation. In an ordinary sense it simply means ‘silly’ or ‘ridiculous’. In musical sense it means ‘out of harmony’. Where as absurdity in philosophical sense says Vivian Mercier implies to irrationality, confusion, the absence of meaning and purpose. But work from the French philosopher Albert Camus, gives best definition who used the word in an appropriate sense in his seminal works, the myth Sisyphus he attempts to diagnose the human conditions in the world of shattered beliefs:

“A world that can be explained by reasoning however faulty is a familiar world. But in the universe that is suddenly deprived of illusions and of light, man feels estranger. He is an irremediable exile because he is deprived of memories of lost homeland, as much as he lacks the hope of a promised land to come.” This divorce between man and his life the actor and his setting truly constitute the feeling of absurdity.” According to the philosophers and literary people, the origin of absurdity considered to be the aftermaths of two Great World Wars and two Great Revolutions. Their writings, no doubt are the reflection of these after effects and have definite bearing upon man’s condition. The Absurdists like Beckett, Ionesco and others have definitely felt gravity of seriousness about Modern Man’s predicament in this universe and brought to the lime light the results of Depression caused by the two Great World Wars. It is equally indisputable fact that patterns woven by depression had its origin in two Great Revolutions, Agrarian and Industrial Revolution.

The social structure had started disintegrating when a majority of the people who were small land owners, peasants and farm labourers were rendered into landless, Proletariat by the landed Aritocracy. Pauline Gregg in the context writes:

“The Agrarian Revolution was Economically justifiable its social effects were disastrous. Scores of thousands of peasants suffered complete ruin. The small farmers cottagir the squatter were driven off the soil and the cottages were often pulled down. The land they had worked was enclosed and became part of the park or plough-lands of a large estate.

Similar account of the social condition is given by Oliver Goldsmith in his poem The Deserted Village. He writes:

“Ill fares the land to hastin ills a pray,

Where wealth accumulates and men decay.” These conditions provided a pase for capitalism. Capitalism requires two conditions for its existence. The masses of capital and free wage labourers. The agrarian revolution thus imitated to create such a base for capitalism, which was completed in another phrase, that of Industrial Revolution, the explosive stage of capitalism. The social conditions of a country should correspond to her economic conditions. But this didn’t

happen in the western European countries where the modes of production were limited to only a fewer hands.

By the 18th century change towards large scale industry hand gain momentum it became so rapid with the road making, canal construction and with the advent of, New machinery, material and other technical devices that the handworkers were left a losing battle against machine. As the new mechanization in industry developed, the employers continue their quest for larger and large profits through the methods of production. This resulted on the one hand in the larger and larger goods and free market competition and the ruin of the small hand workers and the craftsman on the other hand. In the process they were left with no opinion to seek employment as wage earner in the factories. The masses of the people, who were workers couldn't survive the on slaughter of capitalism. Because in the process of production of larger and larger quantity of goods, the wages were kept low to earn more profits. Fisher writes in this context as;

Thus, production has outrun purchasing power. Goods accumulate for which there is no market. An economic crisis results, leading to unemployment and the wider spread failure of business enterprises. Many of the intellectuals discourage with the instability and inequalities of capitalism, join the proletariat. Meanwhile the increasing competition among the capitalists drives the weaker firms out of business. Unable to regain their markets, many of the smaller businessmen sink into the ranks of the proletariat.

Thus, more the capital concentrates into the hands of a few, the more economic and unemployment crisis leading to mass in depression. The masses feel helpless before the monster of capitalism. On the other hand to face the economic crisis and the quest for more and more profit, capitalism inevitably leads to monopolistic organization such as trusts and cartels because only these large units are strong enough to withstand the recurrent economic crisis.

As the production of commodities increased beyond the buying power of the domestic market, an outlet has to be found somewhere for the surplus commodities. At this stage the capitalists turn to foreign markets. The various capitalist nations now engage in fierce competition with each other for the world markets. Here again over production appears sooner as later, leading to world wide economic crisis. The concentration in the later years of the nineteenth century becomes so advance that it possible to make an approximately estimate of all sources of raw materials of a country or of all other countries or the countries of the whole world. Not only the estimation is made but these sources are captured by gigantic monopolists associations. Such monopolists association also made an appropriate estimation of the capacity of the world markets and divide them amongst themselves by agreement. As Lenin puts it as: 'Capitalism in its imperial stage leads directly to the most comprehensive socialization of production, it so to speak drags the capitalists against their will and consciousness, into some sort of a new social order, transitional one from complete free market completion to complete free market competition to complete socialization.

At this stage of capitalism, the monopolist association resort to the civilized struggle for organization through various methods as by stopping supplies of raw material, by stopping the supply of labour by means of 'alliances' i.e. agreements between the capitalists and the trade unions by which the latter permit their members to work only in cartelized enterprises, by stopping deliveries, by closing outlets, agreements with the buyers, by which the latter undertake the trade only with the cartels; systematic price cutting i.e., to ruin outside firms, which refuse to submit to the monopolists, by stopping credits and finally boycott. In this connection Lenin quotes an economist, who writes;

“Even in the purely economic sphere a certain change is taking place from commercial activity in the old sense of the world towards organization speculative activity. The greatest success no longer goes to the merchant whose technical and commercial experience enables him best of all to estimate the needs of the buyers and who is able to discover and to speak, ‘awaken a latest demand; it goes to the speculation genius, who knows how to estimate or even only to sense in advance the organizational development and the possibilities of certain connections between individual enterprises and the banks ... what means by Kestner’s statement is that the development of capitalism has arrived at a stage where although commodity production still reigns and continues to be regarded as the basis of economic life, yet the profit goes into the hands of financial manipulation.

At this highest stage of capitalism, where monopoly is one of the important characteristics banks have an important role to play. At first they serve as middlemen in making the payments but a banking develops and becomes concentrated in a small number of establishments, their role shifts from mere a middle men into a powerful monopolies having at their command almost the whole of money capital of all the capitalists, small businessmen and also the larger part of raw material in any one country or a number of countries. In the process where banks roll as middlemen shift to monopoly organizations, the small banks are not squeezed only by the big banks, but also annex (added) them, subordinate them, bring them into their own group or concern by acquiring holdings in their capital by purchasing or exchanging shares by a system of credit etc. Thus like industries, banking system also breeds monopoly.

The formation of this banking and industrial monopolies has changed the relationship between banks and Industrial enterprises. Banking monopoly now does not confine to providing credit they penetrate into industry by buying shares and lending them money against securities and participate in the organization of new Industrial enterprises. So, is the case with industry. Industry also penetrates into banking by purchasing shares in big banks or sometimes by opening their own banks, resulting in the close tie between industrial and banking monopolies. This interweaving of bank and industrial capital leads to the formation of finance capital. Lenin defines finance capital as, “... finance capital is the bank capital of a few very big monopolist banks, merged with the capital, of the monopolist associations of industrials...” The emergence of this new type of mobile and flexible capital, interknit at home and internationally and particularly impersonal and divorced from production proper leads into itself to concentration and holds dominant position in the capitalist countries.

Under capitalistic conditions, the surplus capital will never be used to develop the living standard of the people. If it does so that means a decline in the profit of capitalist, which he never allows. On the other hand, it would be used for the capitalist countries had purpose of increasing profits by exporting capital arises from the fact that in a few countries capitalism has become over ripe and capital cannot find profitable investment. Thus, in these backward countries, profits are usually high, for capital is scarce, the price of land is relatively low, wages are low and raw material is cheap. In such countries, the possibility of exporting is done by drawing numerous backward countries into international capitalist intercourse through railways and by creating an elementary conditions for the development of Industries.

Thus, the investment of surplus capital, raw materials, capturing of more markets for great profits led to the colonial expansion and rivalry among the various nations of the world. Their urge for imperialism and rivalry aggravated the situation by causing more depression which resulted in the great World War I. The economic explanation of the urge to imperialism is usually taken to mean that the basic motives were also political, religion, on more idealistic

excuses might be made the real impulse was always on of the capitalistic greed for cheap raw material, advantageous markets good investments and fresh fields of exploitations. Thus, the economic hop root of imperialism in Hobron's view was the excessive capital in search of investment was coming from over saving made by unequal distribution of wealth. The only remedy could have been the internal social reform and equal distribution of wealth. He further opines, "if the consuming public in this country raised its standard of consumption to keep pace with every rise of production powers, there could be no excess of goods or capital clamorous to use imperialism in order to find markets." It further testifies the fact that the lucrative yet secure oversea investment played a great part in the European urge to acquire colonies. According to Lenin in Imperialism the Highest stage of capitalism to emphasise current importance of finance capital rather than industrial, and the priority of the desire to find new outlets for investment rather than new markets, under these circumstances, Europe was led to international anarchy. David Hompson writes, "The accumulation and release of so much concentrated power proved to be not only more destructive of human life and material than any previous wars, but also to be more uncontrolled in its consequences, and completely in calculable in the aftermath". Undoubtedly, the financial cast as well as the lives cost of war as compared to the previous wars proved to be more burdensome. The livelihood of most of the peoples of Europe had come to depend upon a stabilized social order and economic system geared to flow of World trade, but not this fabric of per war civilization was violently disrupted and destroyed. What had taken generation to create, including condition of commercial confidence between nations, could not be restored at the command of even most powerful governments after the Great First World War. There was lack of capacity and will to made a fresh start.

If pre-war period was a glorious period in the history of Europe in general and England in particular, the post war years were an absolute collapse of prosperity. Thompson in his book Europe Since Nepolean writes: There was so much optimism in the 1920's that was harshly dispelled by the crashes and crises of the 1930s, so many fair hopes of peace and prosperity were dashed by the collapse of the new world hostility fabricated after 1918, that events suggested a sort of political mechanism – a battle between forces of good and evil which culminated in yet another orgy of slaughter and destruction". The first sector of the world's economy to feel the effects of the coming blizzard of the post war effects was, significantly, American and Canadian agriculture and throughout the North American Continent agricultural prices began to fall abruptly after 1926. Moreover, the collapse of the New York stock market brought with it the final collapse of agricultural prices in America. The collapse on government finances and on industry ran parallel to the devastating blow to producers of food and raw materials. Thus after the crash falling prices spelled ruin for the growers of consumption commodities. The ruin was so large that if further led to drop the demand for all the goods which these people could now no longer afford to buy. The general prices dropped further and the crisis spread from one sector of the world economy to another and the world trade which shrank rapidly. With the result bankruptcies occurred, and factories slaved down production or went out of business and millions of workers were thrown out of work. And the decline in their purchasing power lowed still more the effective demand for goods. Thompson puts, "arose the haunting paradox of poverty a midst plenty, the destruction of stocks of food because too many were too poor to eat it.

The dislocation caused by the crash was as great as that of a war. In the United States which was the supreme creditor nation after World War Ist the Steel Industry was working at one tenth its capacity. World prices of raw material were half what they had been five years earlier.

Under such circumstances, to extricate themselves from large masses were unemployed and in which huge stocks of goods were accumulating unsold, when ever where mankind wanted employment and needed goods, what the world needed, as a tonic was recovery of faith itself. “People and Governments found themselves in a nightmare world where civilization was choked with its own power to produce abundance, where plenty had actually produced poverty, and where men starved because these was too much wealth. To a commercial crisis, the shrinkage of international trade, had been added a financial crisis.

These crisis had definite consequences, the abruptness of the change bred a mood of disillusionment and be wilderment, a moral and psychological crisis that was the most serious of all crisis because even more then the experience of war or of the immediate aftermath, it shattered the ideals and codes of behaviour on which the older order had rested. In 1919 the World War had still been left with a certain faith in the liberal values of personal freedom and equality of rights by a revival of confidence in capitalism and a generous spirit of social improvement, by a fervent belief that civilization could progress in peace. But after 1934, all thse faith were shattered again and Europe lay exposed to the disruptive forces of brutal and in human ideologies. Perhaps the foundation of this moral crisis was an almost universal sense of helplessness, of loss of direction and subjection to blind, impersonal forces beyond the control of men or nations. In most countries after 1929 the relenders growth of unemployment, uncontrolled shrinkage of international trade, implanted similar feelings among the working classes. Mass unemployment added to the chronic uncertainty and instability of economic life. And a society in which thousand of skilled men of the older generation were compelled to spend years in idleness, rejected by the economic system. And behind this social and economic crisis of European civilization lay the more ultimate moral crisis which was also and intellectual crisis. The first World War was an effort to maintain the zeal of Nationalism even at the sake of liberty and prosperity. But wars aftermath were disillusionment and produced real heart searching doubts. Moreover the age of wide over pace and bounders opportunities of limitless expansion and dynamic productivity had come to an end. For these evil old days of thought, and their correlated institutions of liberal democracy and competitive capitalism, could afford no remedy.

The defenders of liberal democracy and competitive capitalism have justified on the round that they provided self-regulating mechanism. They rested their dispensation that the greatest freedom of speech and criticism would elivit truth; that universal suffrage and free representative institutions would ensure and guarantee the liberty of the individual. By 1914, all the self-regulating mechanism had only evidently broken down. Free investment and speculation had led to the collapse of 1929, free competitive enterprises had led to the chaos of 1931, the low of supply and demand had failed to prevent over production; the free interplay of political parties had led to the dictatorship of Mussolini in Italy and dictatorship of Hitler in Germany. Similarly, in this way international relations the world crisis reached its climax and its most devastating effects, directly led to the second World War. Spenher in his book *The Decline of the West* writes, “European culture and civilization were on their way down and out. We no longer believe in the power of reason over life. We feel that life rules over reason.

This was the state of affairs prevailing in every sphere of life out of which the feeling of absurdity took birth. Such was the fate of the European culture after two world wars, betraying all the symptoms of nervous shock. The shattering of traditional values and established beliefs which occurred in wars and revolutions was accompanied by a wholeshed abandonment of traditional taste and technique.

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