

M. A. Sociology Semester IV, Paper I

Unit I – Neo-Marxist Thinker-George Lukacs

Topic – Concept of Reification

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Question- Write a short note on the concept of Reification (Given by George Lukacs)

1- The concept of Reification was developed by George Lukacs in his book- History and Class Consciousness. (1923)

2- ‘ Reification’ is the English word used for German word - ‘ VERDINGLICHUNG’.

‘ Verdinglichung’ means- Consideration of an abstract thing as if it were concrete.

3- In his book- History and Class Consciousness(1923),Lukacs dedicated a chapter entitled- ‘Reification and the consciousness of the Proletariat’ to explain-Reification.

4- A Dictionary of Marxist Thought- defines Reification as - The act of transforming human properties, relations and actions into properties (objective things) , transformations of human beings into ‘ thing like beings’, which do not behave like humans but according to the laws of the – ‘ thing-world’.

5- J. H. Turner in his book- The Structure of sociological theory has written- “Lukacs employed the term ‘ Reification’ to denote a process by which social relationships become objects, that can be manipulated, bought and sold”.

6- Many theorists are of the view that Lukacs concept of ‘ Reification’ is an extension of Karl Marx’s ideas of ‘Fetishism of Commodities’.

7- Fetishism in anthropology refers to the primitive belief that Godly powers can inhere in inanimate things. (eg. totems). Karl Marx’s borrows this concept to make sense of what he terms – Commodity Fetishism.

8- George Lukacs blended Karl Marx’s idea of ‘Fetishism of Commodities’ and Max Webers views on ‘Penetration of rationality in all spheres of modern life’ to explain-Reification .

9- He is of the view that in modern capitalist societies relations among people are dominated by rational calculations. The reliance on moral standards in social relations which was dominant in traditional societies is replaced by rational calculations in social relations.

10- Social relations are more and more governed by their “ exchange values” and people start seeing each relations as “ things”. Social relationships become “ thing like objects which can be bought and sold”.

11- According to Lukacs, the nature of a modern capitalist society is such that ‘ Commodity fetishism’ extends to all the fields of human activity (the state, the law, the economy) including “ consciousness” itself. Human beings literally appear as “ things” rather than active agents of economic activity and historical change.

12- Lukacs wrote in – ‘ History and Class Consciousness’.

“ As traditional societies change, there is less reliance on moral standards and processes of communication to achieve societal integration; instead, there is more utilization of money, markets and rational calculations. As a result, relations are coordinated by exchange values and by people seeing each other as- things”.

13- Will this ‘ Reification’ take over the society? How much rationalization people will endure ?

Lukacs on this question becomes “Young Hegelian”. He writes-

“ There is an inner quality in Human subjects that keeps rationalization from completely taking over.....”

This emphasis on – ‘ the process of consciousness’ is very much part of early critical theorists who borrow much from early Marx.(especially Marx’s ‘ The Economic and philosophical manuscripts of 1844’).

References

1 – The Structure of Sociological theory by Jonathan H Turner.

2 – Dictionary of Critical Theory by David Macey.

3 – Agarni Samajshastri Evam Adhunik Samajshastriya Siddhanta- Dr. Sangeeta Pandey