

Marx, Periyar and Freedom

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Terry Eagleton's elegant little monograph, *Marx and Freedom* is one of the many books published to mark 150 years of the Communist Manifesto. In a little over 50 pages he offers a reading of Marx that is refreshing, thought-provoking and enormously suggestive. Concerned above all with the meaning and content of freedom in Karl Marx, Eagleton submits Marx's well known definitions of ideology, alienation, commodity fetishism and communism to an analysis, that is as much imaginative, as it is philosophical and political. Thus, he observes, 'Freedom for Marx is a kind of creative superabundance over what is materially essential, that which overflows the measure and becomes its own yardstick. It is just that for all this to happen in society, certain material conditions are required; so that the very 'excess' of consciousness over nature which Marx regards as a hallmark of our continuity is itself, ironically, a materially conditioned state of affairs' (Eagleton, 1998: 7). Therefore, the point is not to merely interpret the world, but change it - a mandate which calls for a new attitude to knowledge and prescribes radical uses for it

Drawing on the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* to make his argument, Eagleton shows how Marx's idea of freedom was premised on a particular vision of humankind. He notes that for Marx, human nature and morality 'actually consist in this process of unfolding our creative powers and capacities, not in some law set above it or some august set of ends pitched beyond it. There is no need to justify this dynamic, any more than we need to justify a smile or a song; it just belongs to our common nature' (Eagleton, p. 19). For this unfolding to be effective, the essential dynamic of history must be grasped. For Marx, this dynamic was to be found in the changing nature of the relationships of production and it was ultimately, 'men making their own history', though 'under circumstances directly given, encountered,

transmitted from the past', who could and would create the conditions for the free and reciprocal concourse of humankind in all spheres, from the workplace to home, in politics and in civil society. This required waging an unceasing and vigilant struggle against capital, though Marx also simultaneously insisted that the energies unleashed by capitalism had to be recouped for revolutionary purposes: not just industry and labour, but also the highest achievements of the bourgeois in respect of politics, the arts and communication.

Strictly speaking, none of this is new. Yet Eagleton's reading of Marx opens up spaces, literally and metaphorically, between the lines for us to insert other voices and arguments - which is what I intend to do in this article. I intend to read the thought of E V Ramasamy Periyar for what it tells us about freedom and the new society. It seems to me that such a reading which intertwines with the central theses of Karl Marx, as identified by Eagleton, is bound to yield interesting and startling insights with regard to the future of, and possibilities for freedom in caste society.

II

E V Ramasamy Periyar's long life witnessed several and varying struggles against what he perceived as the logic of caste and the ideologies which structured and informed it. Bound as they were to context and conjuncture, these struggles expressed, in greater or lesser measure, a will to knowledge, a radical vision of human subjectivity and agency and a profoundly existential view of history and politics. Whether burning the constitution of India or breaking the Ganapathi idol, supporting Dr Ambedkar in his campaigns for separate electorates for dalits, or arguing eloquently for women's rights to marriage, contraception and divorce, Periyar acted on a knowledge that was reflexive, and yet grounded in a transparent reason; committed to human

dignity and freedom and yet remarkably open in its sense of what may actually be possible now and in the future.

Why was knowledge central to Periyar's struggles against caste? Periyar held that in caste society, a fundamental division of labour obtained: there were those who were deemed fit to labour with their bodies and those who were considered chosen to think, meditate and interpret this world and the next.

According to the Hindu creed, only a small class, the brahmins may exercise their rights to knowledge. Hindus have been enjoined not to ask for or know about the basis of their faith. ...That is, besides these brahmins, who constitute a mere two percent of the populace, all others are denied the right to put their minds to use, to enquire, to distinguish between good and evil, between what is relevant and irrelevant (Kudi Arasu (KA), 15-8-26; Anaimuthu 1974: 11)

Further, the religion of the Hindus had assigned particular forms of labour to particular groups such that they may perform these and none other. This system had been put in place through law, custom, and the coercive power of kings, who, throughout history, exercised their authority in these matters at the behest of the brahmins (KA 14-4-29; Anaimuthu 255). Periyar insisted that class divisions in caste society had to be understood in terms of this fundamental division of labour, this rigid separation and assignment of mental and manual work to particular groups of people:

I understand the antonym 'rich-poor' to mean one that exists between one who does not work with his hands for a living, that is one who holds it sinful and wrong to labour thus and considers it his right not to labour, and one who is condemned to work and who considers it his 'right' to work and who suffers physical distress on that account (Pagutharivu, 9-12-34)

Such a division between mental and manual labour meant that knowledge, being entirely divorced from quotidian life, labour and production was fundamentally and constitutively the product of an alienated consciousness. It was and could not but be speculative, abstract, involuted and its truth claims rested chiefly on normative values and arguments which were internal to thought. For Periyar, the cunning of this knowledge lay in its suffusing presence. Though alienated from life processes, this knowledge had staged a return into social life through the agency and power of the brahmin's religious lore and rituals. The material and secular power enjoyed by the brahmin, as priest, honoured citizen and thinker, imparted to his religious scriptures a veracity and authority which could not be easily countenanced. Available as story, legend, rule, rite and law, the brahmin's knowledge marked and inflected common sense in subtle, complex ways, that often the brahmin's agency in the making and perpetration of this knowledge was likely to be overlooked. So self-evident seemed the nature of these beliefs and practices.

Writing of the play of this religion in caste society, Periyar observed that it determined everything the hindu did - what he ate, how he dressed, his behaviour in public places, his social relationships, in short all aspects of his existence, from the sacred to the profane, the contingent to the transcendent were informed by a religious sensibility. (KA, 9-11-46; Anaimuthu 1197-98)) This was not to be wondered at since social life and relationships in Hindu caste society were inseparable from religion, which in turn was not separable from brahmins and none of these were easily to be dissociated from a God to whom all of them in one way or the other referred. As Periyar observed in a tone of resigned exasperation:

Though I have endeavored all along to abolish caste, as far as this country is concerned, this had meant I carry out propaganda for the abolition of God, Religion, Shastras and brahmins. For caste will disappear

only when these four disappear. Even if one of these were to remain, caste will not be abolished in its entirety... because caste has been constructed out of these four ...only after man had been made a slave and a fool would caste have thus been imposed on society. One cannot abolish caste without instilling a taste for freedom and knowledge [in the people]. God, religion, the Shastras and Brahmins make for the growth and spread of slavery and folly and strengthen the existence of caste (Periyar: Ninety-third Birthday Souvenir 17-9-71; Anaimuthu: 1974).

For Periyar, the existence of all knowledge in caste society within the matrix of a brahmin-controlled religion and religious world view proved highly problematic. For one, brahmin thought was opaque, self-referential and adroit in its expressive energy. It enjoyed a varied and protean existence, contingent on place and time and amenable to change at every opportune moment but strictly in 'accordance with brahmin power and the gullibility and indignity tolerated by non brahmins'. Essentially this was a knowledge which refused to surrender its epistemological privileges or abdicate its spiritual and intellectual authority. On the other hand, it possessed a winning flexibility:

Brahminism and Hinduism are that which work, produce results. Today brahmins do not mind losing anything as long as they claim the status, title and influence which accrue to only the highest caste. To possess this status, they do not mind doing anything, will behave in any which way and yet consider such acts the highest forms of dharma.

Thus,

Rajaji will eat a panchama's house, Shankaracharya will bathe on seeing a panchama, some will bathe if a panchama's shadow falls on them, others if a panchama touches them. Yet others will marry a panchama, man or woman - but all of them will still remain brahmanas... Brahmin orthodoxy in 1940 was of a different kind than

what obtained in 1900. After 1940 this orthodoxy has changed form again (Viduthalai (Vi) 4-3-69; Anaimuthu: 1392).

This combination of cunning and power, resilience and adaptability had ensured the survival of the brahminical world view in the face of fundamental historical changes. Here, there was no question of history forcing a radical rupture in consciousness or of consciousness bursting asunder its own dictates and responding to the call of history. Periyar pointed to the nationalist moment in history and observed wryly that in contrast to other 'modern' nations which were striving hard to leave their pasts behind, India held on to its traditions and sought to revive them in all their imagined original glory. In fact the idea of nationalism had come to acquire a veritable sanctity and invoke in its adherents the same response which words such as 'god', 'salvation' and 'heaven' invoke in the believer. Over time, these specifically religious terms had been subject to endlessly flexible interpretations and used to exploit the poor and the gullible. Likewise, at present the rhetoric of nationalism was being used and re-used in different ways to mystify the play of self-interest and that trade in ideas and sentiment which lay coiled at the heart of nationalism (KA 19-5-29; Anaimuthu: 3713-72). Echoing Periyar, and making explicit the seamless links which bound an ideologically protean brahminism to an unchanging will to power, S.Gurusamy, a prominent self-respecter observed: 'Brahminism could taunt you with the mask of nationalism ... flaunt itself as Ramana Maharishi, seduce you with its invocations of Saivism, implore your attention as Vaishnavism...It could assume the countenance of a rishi and demand the thumb of the communist Ekalavya'. (Vi, 23-8-47).

However, the power of the brahmin's knowledge was not only on account of the brahmin's tremendous will to intellectual supremacy and authority. These latter were made possible through the appropriation of a vast amount of intellectual and spiritual surplus from those labouring communities who were condemned to labour or servitude by the brahmin's scripture and ordained

social practices. Born to labour, these communities could not claim the right of knowing; and being denied that right they could not know of or escape their condition of being labourers. Their productive labour power thus remained captive to a social order which alienated from them, both, the fruits of their labour and a knowledge this labour enabled into existence. The alienation from knowledge was in effect an estrangement from material reality, since the latter now appeared reified: in the form of rituals, rites, beliefs, superstitions, strictures and stories, which regulated and directed the life and consciousness of all labouring communities.

For Periyar, the most visible symbol of a reified knowledge was the brahmin's sacred thread. He pointed out how the thread conferred normative worth and power on the brahmin child, irrespective of its actual and material character. That is, even if a brahmin child were to be born into poverty and destitution, it does not lose access to its exalted status, whereas a child from another community, even if 'clean' and 'pure', is denied access to that self-same status. It was not even a question of the brahmin trusting to the symbolic power of the thread. Whether he wore it or not or performed the rituals a wearing of it required, the fact that he was worthy of the thread, proved central to his sense of the self. On the other hand, even if a non brahmin were to seek the thread through acts of piety and learning, he would not be allowed to gain possession of it (KA, 27-12-25). The thread was all powerful, since it contained within its fragile existence, the congealed labour and oppression of an entire society. It marked the gulf between living and self-knowledge in caste society, and in the denial it sanctioned and perpetrated lay the source of that collective alienation which estranged the working communities from a common and shared humanity.

The power of this reified knowledge was such that it transmuted the manifest energy of work into its symbolic equivalent. Remarking on Gandhi's Khadi campaigns, Periyar noted that the economics of Khadi was being cleverly and adroitly subsumed in rhetoric of religion and the nation. Not only was the spinning of khadi construed to represent a penance and a sacrifice; but the

labour of the weavers was being extolled for its traditional, and therefore, exalted origins. Periyar was convinced that this successful recasting of the language of labour into the language of sacrality was but another instance of the superbly expressive energy (and power) of the brahmin's knowledge, as faith, ideology and practice:

Who benefits by this extollation of traditional ways? By the revival of tradition? None but the brahmins who deceive the people and lead lazy lives themselves; the rich who reap the labour of the poor; the educated who wish to lead their lives without the least physical effort. (KA 7-6-31; Anaimuthu: 1657-58)

In essence, knowledge in caste society was like a fetish, a mysterious thing which had successfully transmuted the labour expended in its production into ideas and principles which then assumed an autonomous power and validity of their own. Opaque, almost impenetrable in its mystique, this knowledge, like property under capitalism, was theft, but a theft which involved not merely the expropriation of the labourers of but an expropriation of their human identity as well. For, in the final analysis, what marked human beings in the caste order was caste itself. Thus, neither capital nor labour were determinate or binding on identity. As far as the rich were concerned, their wealth did not render them any more automatically worthy of the right to knowledge: As Periyar observed:

Raja Sir Annamalai Chettiar is a crorepathi. Sir R.K.Shanmugham Chetty possesses immense wealth. They are both men of property. But they will both admit that they do not possess those common rights which even a brahmin beggar assumes as due to him. Even a lowly brahmin does not suffer from want of comfort and wealth, because he is privileged by birth. ...without working for it, without investment, because he is especially privileged, he can educate his son to enter the ICS, make him a zillah Collector, a zillah

judge, why, even a high court judge, a Shankaracharya or a seer (KA 25-3-44; Anaimuthu: 1712).

As far as the working people were concerned, they were as bound by the dictates of caste. Here the weaver, agricultural worker or blacksmith, however equal in their labouring status, wished to upgrade their caste status, than assume the identity of a class that can express its common and shared concerns. Thus, "if a blacksmith or weaver attempted to brahminize himself, an artisan would attempt to outdo him and covet the status of a "rishi" (Vi 16-2-40; Anaimuthu: 1748-50). Besides, the labour which the workers expended was not calculated to enable them experience a measure of active self-knowledge. As Periyar noted with great sorrow, in a society organised around varnadharma, labour possessed no inherent worth or dignity. Even if necessary for survival, it was perceived as demeaning, since one could only labour at this particular task and not any other, and to make matters worse, the privileged refused to work and insisted on living on the fruits of another's labour (KA 14-6-31; Anaimuthu: 1658-60).

To Periyar, it was this estrangement of human beings from knowledge of themselves, of their species-being, so to speak, that seemed most pernicious about the caste system. How was one to transcend this condition of alienation? Obviously knowledge had to be recovered, expropriated from the expropriators. But this was not easy or even possible, within the terms of the knowledge that was available, since this latter was constitutively incapable of rounding on itself and figuring the historical ground on which it stood. Knowledge had to therefore be created anew.

For the new to emerge, though, certain fundamental transformations had to be effected: the division of labour into mental and manual spheres and the rigid separation of social groups to these spheres had to go and secondly, the human body transfigured to represent the source of social and creative life that it is. Periyar was unequivocal in his opposition to varnadharma. He was

scornful of its pretensions to functional efficiency and noted sarcastically that the assignment of particular sorts of work to particular groups was unwarranted, since one could choose to be 'a carpenter by day, a merchant in the evening and a teacher by night' (KA, 11-1-31; Anaimuthu: 1603). What was required, then, was a critical deconstruction of the principles of varnadharma, both in theory and practice. This deconstruction however had to proceed from the old, that is, it could not claim a utopian counterpoint and instead had to necessarily begin in time, in history. Yet its direction could only be determined by a vision of the future. Thought had to thus mandate new ethical and political acts which in turn were to create the conditions for the further evolution of thought. The new knowledge then had to one that arose in that point of intersection between history and thought, between a particular moment in time and an idea which is instrumental in comprehending or responding to that moment. For Periyar, thus, knowing and acting, thought and action became seamlessly linked, such that an idea, because it sought to intervene in history became a crucial aspect of the changes he and his self-respecters wished to usher in.

Reason, that ability to critically comprehend the world and which trusts nothing but its own objective and impartial workings and which was ever conscious of the fact of its eventual supersession, in another time and place, came to constitute the core of this new knowledge. Periyar did not imagine that his particular use of reason was necessarily the most relevant or intelligent, and nor did he credit it with any particular epistemological weight. As he was wont to entreat his listeners (and readers), all that he asked of them was that they examine and think through the arguments he had outlined. If they found these persuasive, coherent and appealing, they could go with him; or, if they did not, essay their own choices. Reason was thus not a final arbiter, and instead had to redeem itself in practice, and in terms of the ethical choices one made or failed to make.

For Periyar, the claiming and assumption of reason was as important as the knowledge it made available. He did not seek to merely effect a change in consciousness, but saw such knowledge as he claimed in the name of the so-called shudras and panchamas as literally re-creating the caste persona. If the so-called untouchable and unclean castes were to reason out the terms of their existence and the principles which justified their degradation, they would not only revolt against their condition, but claim themselves anew. What was at stake here was both the mind and heart of the caste-damned human being, her soul and body.

III

How can reason claim for the despised caste person her or his body? How was the human body to be remade, prised from the matrix of caste and returned to its fundamental sensuousness?

Periyar held that Hindu religious lore and the brahmin's interpretation of it had deformed both the body and spirit of the Hindu person, mutilated either into postures of either arrogance or servility, into assertions of the will or, alternately, complete and willed self-abnegation. In one of his earliest pronouncements on the nature of caste society, Periyar observed how, 'in our country no one is spared the horrors of untouchability, unseeability, unspeakability and unapproachability. It is customary for a caste to consider the one below it [in the hierarchy] to be untouchable and unseeable, whereas the same caste is viewed as untouchable and unseeable by the caste above it' (KA, 21.6.25). In such a society, there could be no mutuality, only an eternal warring of interests: 'while one class is constantly looking to advance its claims through any means whatsoever, other classes are anxious to avoid being victims of deception' (KA, 6.12.25). For Periyar what seemed most distressing was that self-loathing which seemed to hold captive the hearts and minds of those consigned to the lowest levels of the caste system.

Addressing adi dravidas at an untouchability abolition meeting, Periyar upbraided them thus:

smell Why must you address other castemen as Swami? The sense of being a low caste person seems to have mingled completely with your blood. But you must endeavour to change this. Whenever you see a person - of another caste- you must ask yourselves if in reality there exists any difference between him and you. ...If your clothes are dirty and you appear unwashed, who is responsible for this state of affairs? When you do not even have access to drinking water, how can you bathe? It is not as if you were born smelly and dirty ... If mahants and shankaracharyas were denied access to water to bathe, wash their clothes and brush their teeth and were to be locked up in a house for days, would their clothes remain spotless? Would their bodies fragrant? (KA, 25.4.26)

If this self-loathing was to be destroyed, then its basis, religious lore had to be questioned and cast away. Arguing that it was the existence of religion which mandated the need for a movement to attain self-respect, Periyar's young friend, S.Gurusamy defended his and his mentor's atheism. He noted that they wished to see all religions destroyed to their roots, all churches, temples and temples converted to factories and hospitals (Puduvai Murasu 2-2-31; K.Velu: 255-57). This proved to be a recurrent theme in self-respect writings, as many amongst the self-respecters urged the creation of these institutional support systems which would enable the poor and the deprived work and live with dignity. The point then was not that atheism be adopted as a philosophy, but that it be turned to productive social uses. For Periyar, the negative critique of religion was not an end in itself. He wished to propose in and through that critique an enabling and creative alternative. As he wrote of his qualified support of temple entry campaigns, he supported and participated in these because they represented a righteous claim on a public space, but this did not mean he would give up entreating adi dravidas

to desist from worshipping at temples. To him, worship signified foolishness and he did not wish adi dravidas to exchange degradation for foolishness, but to give up either (KA, 2, 22-1-32; 30-10-31; 20-11-32) Atheism was thus to be a crucial adjunct of one's sense of the self, a critical measure to one's consciousness, not as a dogma.

The self was to look to other radical measures as well. Caste names were to be renounced, religious names given up for more secular ones (Periyar named babies brought to him after the big cities of the western world, symbols of reason and progress, radical thinkers and leaders), and most importantly, masculine and feminine identities re-thought. The renunciation of caste names and identities was to not only help relocate the self in a realm of practical ethics, rather than a normative one; it was also to serve as a reminder that it was useless to want to move up in the caste ladder. The spurning of religious names and symbols was undertaken to prove the point that names were indicative of one's beliefs and preferences and if the self-respecters wished to propose an alternative system of living and thinking, they had every right to proclaim these, through the adoption of new and startling names.

The question of male and female selfhood was raised and sought to be resolved in a much more complex fashion by Periyar. Here what was central to his thesis was the bold and startling idea that male and female identities were structured along three intersecting lines of force: private property, caste and sexuality. He observed that only after man sought to secure property did he bring woman into his household as his wife. Not only did this enable him to enlist her services to protect his property and supply him with progeny, but it also allowed him to lay exclusive claims to her person. Woman was valorised as wife and mother and in her turn she learnt to value herself thus, securing thereby her insubordination and the unequal social system which allowed some to hoard wealth and forced others to work at producing this wealth. Periyar uncovered yet another dimension to motherhood in caste society as well. He noted that the desire to have children for the inheritance

of one's name and wealth would not have assumed such significance in Hindu society if it had not been for the religious reasons that were advanced to justify this desire for progeny: 'After it had become the norm for people to want children to safeguard property, brahmins who had invented fictions of heaven and hell to keep the poor from robbing the rich and to amass some of this wealth for themselves now argued that ... man must have a [male] child who would keep alive his name after death and perform his yearly obsequies' (Vi, 11.10.48). Thus even as the real reason for wanting children faded into the recesses of communal memory, the fictitious reasons invented by brahmins came to take hold of the Hindu male imagination. Motherhood came under increasing pressure for now it was deemed significant for the reproduction of an unequal social order in this world, as well as the next!

The inscription of female sexuality within the terms of private property and caste, argued Periyar was reified by the institution of marriage. '... just as how Brahminism condemns a very large portion of the working population to shudrahood, so it has condemned women to the servitude of marriage. ...To the extent that a woman lives up to the norms of a chaste and ideal wife, to that extent she accepts and revels in her slavery' (Vi 28.6.73). Marriage, for Periyar, regulated and disciplined women's familial and reproductive labour, even as it actively denied their desires and rights to a self-respecting life of their choice. Of whatever caste or class, the bond of marriage, he argued, invariably rendered woman a property and slave of her husband. After all, men's sexual happiness and notions of intimacy need not be and often are not fulfilled within the terms of marriage.

To Periyar, marriage was a problematic social arrangement as such, and he was convinced that unless this was re-thought, men and women would remain trapped in loveless relationships. Speaking at a self-respect marriage in the 1930's he noted that the problem with the existing practice of marriage was the sacrality it was meant to embody, and which sought to set itself up against mortal humanity. Thus, marriage, considered a spiritual union

between man and woman, served to alienate, dislocate and finally elide love and sexual desire from their natural matrix and to restrict and control those pleasures and freedoms which belong to and become us as mortals living in a natural universe. Periyar observed:

The term divinity is commonly used to refer to our state of ignorance about many things. As for spirituality, it is used to describe the nothingness that may not be known through sensual apprehension. It is clear that these useless words have been imposed onto an existence whose importance and philosophical meaning inhere in the natural experience of pleasure. The only purpose of such an imposition is to render men lifeless, and to enslave them thereafter.... (Quoted in Viramani, 1997, p. 32)

For Periyar, then, desire and freedom were inalienable aspects of a natural order of things, and he held sacrality and divinity to be subversive of and opposed to the very substance of mortal, human existence. As he wrote on another occasion, criticising the non-availability of divorce provisions for those who wished to separate honourably:

To discipline love and desire and direct it along particular channels and orient them towards particular persons does not seem to us to have any justification. To desire is human. To control it is to practise a kind of slavery (Anaimuthu: 153).

It is clear that for Periyar, the remaking of male and female selfhood was contingent as much on transformed attitudes and relationships as it was on changed institutions. He aligned desire and pleasure with freedom and ignorance and an enslaved and repressed existence with, alternately, death or a primitive, bestial and low sort of existence. In this complex of ideas, death is associated with a denial of the body and a concomitant devotion to

matters of the spirit and soul. For him, bestial existence is less a natural state than an unevolved one, where the play of reason is absent and freedom and dignity are as yet unavailable to the human person. Nature, in this scheme of things, is a humanised Nature, and therefore not essentially antithetical to reason. Paradoxically, bestiality and spirituality are brought into a homologous relationship to each other. It is in the name of such a mortality, alive to life, freedom, desire and pleasure and naturally inclined to a life of reason and dignity that Periyar spoke to women and entreated them to abjure their enslaved lives and walk out into a free, autonomous existence.

In all of these instances where Periyar desired men and women to lay claims to reason and remake themselves, we find him reverting to notions of self-worth, love, desire, dignity and mutuality. In other words, his vision of the future demands a commitment to sensuousness, to the happy mingling of peoples, ideas, work and love. Here, the good society is marked by its acceptance of the dignity of the human person, the rights of her body and mind to freedom, self-respect and a love premised on mutuality and reciprocity. Here the eye finally becomes a human eye, and the senses become theoreticians of their own practice, unbound as they are now, from the servility of caste labour, the weight of a knowledge that destroys their self-worth, and social relationships which degrade and condemn them to servitude and unfreedom.

(This article was written to mark Periyar's 119th birth anniversary. He was born on September 17, 1879. It has been written for Mano (S.V.Rajadurai), to mark a moment in our long conversations about Marx and Periyar.)

All references to Periyar's work, unless otherwise mentioned, are from V. Anaimuthu, Periyar EV R Sinthanaigal, in 3 volumes, Trichy: Sinthanaiyalar Pathippagam, 1974. The translations are mine. The other texts referred to here are Terry Eagleton, Marx and Freedom, Phoenix Books, London, 1998; Eric Hobsbawm, Introduction to The

Communist Manifesto, A Modern Edition, Verso, London, 1998;
K.Viramani, Suyamariyathai Thirmanangal, Chennai, 1997).

Notes

Iyothee Thass, buddhist thinker and an early dalit intellectual noted of brahminical thought that it had produced 'really useless' knowledge systems, impractical and contradictory and, worse, and led to the underdevelopment of such practical arts such as agronomy, irrigation and transport. The labouring castes that could have produced a different sort of knowledge, responsive to their felt needs had been prevented from doing so by a perverse social order which allowed them no access to learning (Tamizhan, 28-10-08)

2It is clear that Periyar and Marx are crucially linked in a homologous relationship and it is the power of metaphor, an act of imagination which helps one perceive the homology as an enabling and productive one. On to Marx: writing of Marx's theory of revolution, Hobsbawm calls attention to the singular role Marx reserves for philosophy in both his theory and practice. It was as if the revolution was absolutely essential to resolve a philosophical as much as a political contradiction (Hobsbawm 1998: 22) . The point is, for Marx, the intellect was indispensable to practice and philosophy was to enable itself and its users to penetrate the speculative magic of idealist thought as well as the mystery of the commodity form, both of which were, after all, linked together in a relationship of opacity. In its very act of figuring the ground on which idealist thought stands and which exists as something anterior, historical and fundamental, philosophy returns to history. In doing so, it affords for itself a more modest and therefore more enabling role, or as Eagleton observes a more sensuous one.

