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Editor-In-Chief
Prof. K.N. Shelke

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A detailed still-life composition featuring a quill pen as the central focus. The quill is positioned diagonally, with its tip resting on a scroll of aged parchment. The scroll is secured with a red wax seal and a red ribbon. In the background, a lit candle in a brass holder casts a warm glow. In the foreground, a glass inkwell with a quill inside and a red wax seal are visible. The entire scene is set on a dark wooden surface.

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The Victimized Marxism in Asimov's Foundation Novels**Anas Babu T T***PhD Researcher, Department of English, Annamalai University, Annamalainagar (T.N.) India***Dr. S. Karthik Kumar***Assistant Professor, Department of English, Annamalai University, Annamalainagar (T.N.) India***Abstract**

Isaac Asimov has largely been influenced by Karl Marx, to whom he is indebted for providing a firsthand scientific approach to history. The basic premises of both the legends bear many similarities, as they believed that means of production was the driving force of the society. The influences of Marx's theories are explicit in Isaac Asimov's writings. His fictional science Psychohistory is one of the greatest achievements in science fiction. This is absolutely a distorted version of Marx's Historical Materialism- staple discovery of classical Marxism. The paper probes into Asimov's Foundation Novels' underlying conceptual similarities with Karl Marx's notions of history and how they are utilized in plot setting. By doing so, the paper tries to disclose the reasons behind the unparalleled success of Foundation novels in spite of their serious flaws.

Key Words: Marxism, Asimov, Foundation Novels

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unparalleled success of Foundation novels in spite of their serious flaws.

Surely no other writer did enjoy much spectacular popularity as Isaac Asimov received for his Foundation Novels. As a result, it has been awarded 'the best all time science fiction series' by Hugo, and still it occupies much of science fiction stacks. Despite the serious defects which were always indicated by science fiction aficionados, the series continues to go through printing after printing. In this regard, many attempts have been made to find out what elements of the series so fascinate its readers. Though it is difficult to sketch precisely what evokes readers' attention to a work, in the case of Foundation novels, critic Alva Rogers' response is particular: "Foundation series

are some of the greatest science fiction ever written, with a Sense of Wonder in the underlying concepts that is truly out of this world” (107). When these underlying ‘wonderful’ concepts are analyzed in terms of historical parallels, it clearly hints to the world acknowledged Marxian ideologies, and thus to Karl Marx. It is Marx, who first brought out a scientific approach to historiography, by his Historical Materialism, as Isaac Asimov was the one who did the same fictionally in science fiction.

The underlying concept of Foundation novels which captivates readers’ attention is its deal with historiography. The conceptual parallels between Marxism and Historical Materialism, which has fascinated and still conjures the attraction of millions, are obvious in the novels. Psychohistory is the basic notion of whole Foundation Series; the unique and memorable science fiction concept of Asimov. It stands on the basic concept that past history should serve as a guide for future history, and history would repeat. As in Asimov’s own terms “psychohistory dealt not with man, but with man-masses. It is the science of mobs; mobs in their billion. It could forecast reactions to stimuli...” (*Prelude*24). Using this statistical science, the psychohistorian Hari Seldon proves that the empire is about to collapse within a few hundred years, hence the entire civilization and world order would decay. He affirms that this nosedive is unavoidable and what humanity can do is just minimize the duration of dark ages followed by it. On the other hand, what Karl Marx already suggested was that the different societal phases’ arrival in a pinnacle and so that it

will follow a transformation, i.e., the world in an evolutionary terms. To be more specific, Marx concludes that the means of production alone can bring changes in the society and eventually it will take humanity to the ultimate goal of history, the socialism, followed by several steps like feudalism and capitalism. Each one of these phases represents a different way in which people produced the goods they needed to survive- and a different way of living (Elkins 37). Moreover, many historians who came after Marx, like Spengler, Arnold Toynbee and Pitirim Sorokin also have suggested the idea that a scientific approach to history would allow us to predict future trends.

Marx pictures each stage in a clear evolutionary stage, each stage representing a more advanced society than the last. Similarly Hari Seldon has also forecast the cyclic nature of society and civilization with its rise and fall, and development and deterioration. Seldon’s system allows far more economic factors, than what Marx did in his theories. In both cases, it should be kept in mind that, both systems are derived from principles rather than empirical studies. In Charles Elkins’ opinion, Asimov’s use of Historical Materialism is a “crude caricature of this concept, a simplistic distortion similar to other varieties of ‘vulgar’ Marxism of the period when the Foundation stories were being written” (28). As in Asimov, the modified or altered version of Marxism lies explicit on such works as Plekhanov’s *The Role of the Individual in History*(1898), Bukharin’s *Historical Materialism*(1921) and Stalin’s *Leninism*(1924). Donald Wollheim also

opines the same for the following reason. Asimov's illogical and contradicting fatalistic aspects make Foundation Stories a caricature of vulgar or a filtered version of Marxism. Asimov's major intellectual shortage lies in his failure to understand the complexities of Historical Materialism and its humanitarian emphasis.

In Foundation Novels, Asimov's handling of historiography and materialism is incomplete, or rather a distorted version. The plot naturally raises a question that if the history is predetermined, and if it is inevitable, what is man's role in history-making? Characters experience a dilemma to act or not to act, where everything is predetermined. Unable to change the preordained course of events, man becomes, instead of the agent of history, a 'pawn' in the grip of history or in the calculations of Hari Seldon. If Seldon's plan is accurate future prediction, what action should be taken by characters is always haunted. Except a non-human character, the Mule and elite group including Seldon are the only minority who are committed to set the future. The ignorant mass, those with all Seldon Plan is to deal upon, is kept passive. The future becomes a movie script in the hands of 'intellectual minority'. Throughout the Foundation, the man masses are dealt with supreme contempt. They are described as "fanatic hordes" the featureless...mob. Their duty is minimized to be the subjects for the Seldon's experiments. This is a notable flaw of Isaac Asimov even in his own definition of science fiction. Asimov defines science fiction as a branch of literature which is concerned with the Impact of scientific advance upon human

beings. In another instance he says "science fiction deals with the possible advances in science and with the potential changes—even those damned eternal verities— these may bring about in society. Foundation novels fail to equip with both these opinions of author himself. Though he brings many probable technological future aspects in it, he fails to provide what changes it brings in society.

Donald Wollhiem is true when he says Foundation Novels' deficiency in ideological fascination and evocatively distorted intellectuality lies in their portrayal of "mechanical Pseudo-Marxism." The fatal error which Asimov committed is that the treatment of 'history' as a science above man, rather than just men as its makers. Asimov's idea to deal with man masses evolved basically from Marx and Engels's opinion that the movement of human mass must be subject to the laws of motion and interaction, and he himself concluded that a science could be developed based upon mathematics and utilizing all the known data. Asimov's mode of dealing with multitude of people is also shaped by Lenin's statements:

Historical materialism made it possible for the first time to study with scientific accuracy the social conditions of the life of the masses and the changes in these conditions...Marxism indicated the way to one all-embracing and comprehensive study of the processes of the rise, development, and decline of socio-economic systems... Marx drew attention and indicated the way to a scientific study of history as a simple process which, with all its immense variety

and contradictions, is governed by definite laws (13).

Lenin's observation that history has 'definite laws' created an intriguing effect on Marxian interpreters as well as readers of Foundation novels. It questions human freewill against historical determinism. This dilemma between the historical determinism and free will is evident in Isaac Asimov's works. On the other hand, in another historical conception of Marxism, Bukharin's statement makes clear that intense activity is necessary to bring about the fulfillment of the inevitable end. His *Historical Materialism* (1921) asserts that socialism will come inevitably because it is inevitable that men, definite classes of men, will stand for its realization, and they will do so under the circumstances that will make their victory certain (41). It is this uncertainty that caused great psychological as well as political tensions to the social

activists of 1930s. Moreover, probably because of this reason, it is strictly evident in Asimov's writing too. It is for these reasons, Charles Elkins affirms that Asimov's portrayal of Marxism is distorted. Another reason he brings out for this defect is that Americans' understanding of Marxism was through USSR-filtered books. Works of Marx and Angles and Antonio Gramsci were not translated in the 1930s. Therefore, the Americans, when Asimov's novels were being written, were left with a limited or edited version of Marxism, whereas it is of unlimited possibility, of hope and of freedom in reality.

Aside all the alleged, at times proved, criticisms of Asimov for having tinkered major principles of Marxism i.e., Historical Materialism for the setting of Foundation series, it can be seen that the distortion added literary values and fictionality.

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