

**INDIVIDUAL CHARISMA, DISINTERESTEDNESS, AND  
GENEROSITY IN ACTIVISM: A SOCIOLOGICAL  
CRITIQUE OF SATYAGRAHA USING THE THEORY OF  
PIERRE BOURDIEU**

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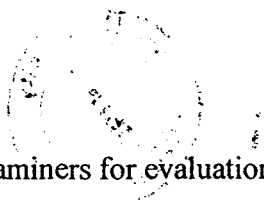
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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled “**Individual Charisma, Disinterestedness, and Generosity in Activism: A Sociological Critique of Satyagraha Using the Theory of Pierre Bourdieu**”, submitted by Ashok Kumar Kizhakke Covilakam, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree of **MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY** is his original work and has not been previously submitted for the award of any other degree of this or any other University.



We recommend this dissertation to be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

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# CHAPTER 1

## Introduction

This dissertation tries to understand an empirical act, an act of *Satyagraha* in a labour struggle in Kerala. Through an examination of this, an attempt is made at understanding the institution of political activism and the figure of the selfless, sacrificing activist.

The attempt here is to look at *Satyagraha* as an act of sacrifice, an act of gift, because it involves giving away of human life. The logic of gift exchange is regulated by values of generosity and disinterestedness. Usually, generosity and disinterestedness are misunderstood as personal generosity and personal disinterestedness, in other words as individual qualities. A consequence of such personalization of generosity and disinterestedness is the celebration of persons as great or noble.

As opposed to the common sense personalism, Bourdieu has conceived generosity and disinterestedness relationally, i.e., as structural phenomenon, as effects of a social structure which he calls, a field. Such a conception permits a strong criticism of enchanted conceptions of generosity and nobility. According to him, generosity and disinterestedness are part and parcel of a system of gift exchange while personal charisma, affection, gratitude, personal greatness are effects of it.

In this dissertation, my attempt is to employ Bourdieu's social theory, to understand an empirical act. The test is to see if Bourdieu's social theory throws new light to understand protests and resistance using the mode of protest of *Satyagraha*.

Academia presents itself as a disinterested activity. This self-presentation authorizes its criticism of fields of interested action. It is customary to criticise interested action from fields which claim to be disinterested. Yet, the self-reflexive scholar should suspect if these fields which claim to be disinterested are beyond interest or power, and prepare to scrutinize such fields of disinterested action. Through his criticisms of the field of academy and art Bourdieu has been pursuing this lead. I was influenced by Bourdieu's criticism of disinterestedness because the form of power that functions behind disinterested acts is much more difficult to understand than the form of power that organizes interested acts.

## *The Analysis of a Satyagraha*

The scene is set in 1980s Kerala. A large group of men walk in a procession rather silently carrying flags. Two leaders prepare for an indefinite hunger strike. Their *Satyagraha* is offered as a plea to the government. They want the government to negotiate a settlement with the factory management to end a three year lock out of the factory on which four thousand workers and their families depend for their subsistence - a noble cause indeed. The two leaders are all the more noble in contrast to the factory owner who was deliberately imposing unemployment and starvation on workers. The workers were held captive as instruments of ransom by the industrialist, to pressurise the government to submit to company management's demands of subsidized supply of raw materials. Photographs<sup>1</sup> show them as being led into the area where the strike is to commence. They were garlanded with blood red flowers<sup>2</sup>, which the black and white picture can only suggest. One could see in their eyes the inevitable, that they were not going to return unhurt. It is never clear from the picture if the leaders are leading the procession or if they are being led by the procession! Yet, the leaders had boldly chosen as their fate, probable death. Newspapers report that starvation was widespread in the industrial town. Like Jesus Christ and all those who had chosen to die so that others be saved, they hoped that their spectacular deaths open the government's and the public's eyes to the hunger silently borne by the town. Exercising the choice to die for a cause may have seemed more meaningful than life to them.

This dissertation has at its origin in a complex, puzzling act – an act of *Satyagraha* by two leaders, an act which qualifies to be called noble, yet an apparently irrational act in which they met with near deaths.

Some very simple, commonsense questions confronted me when I encountered the act for the first time: isn't an act of donation of one's life, for a noble cause, a noble act? Isn't an individual who volunteers to sacrifice her life for a noble cause a great person? In a world given over to cash and power, isn't such an act an exemplar of disinterestedness? Shouldn't acts of disinterestedness deserve to be worshipped,

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<sup>1</sup> See Madhyamam, 27.1.1988

<sup>2</sup> Red is also interestingly worn by the performer of sacrificial rites of the goddess cults in Kerala. It is needless to state the association between red and communism.

worthy of reverence? Yet isn't an act which brings one to near death an irrational act? Are public causes worthy enough to lay down one's life for? As most people are not prepared to lay down their lives for any cause, shouldn't we suggest that those who are prepared for it are truly extraordinary or distinguished? The question is simple: how could one understand the rationality of people being ready to die for a cause? What perspective can the science of Sociology offer us to understand such a distinguished act of courage and nobility, so crucial for political movements? Rather, how do we scientifically understand the extraordinary, the distinguished, the noble, charisma, generosity, and disinterestedness?

To be reflexive, this problem struck me because I was predisposed to admire charisma. Charismatic leaders inspired me. I was enchanted by radical politics too. I believed in the Marxian dictum that the point however is to change the world<sup>3</sup>. I also felt that social change comes from agential action of individuals<sup>4</sup>. Personal heroism was its fantastic limit. Where will revolutions be, had there been no revolutionaries? While I believed that nothing gratifies like being able to contribute to changing the world for the better, yet I was sceptical about this discourse of the agent and social change, because I was inducted in the Durkheimian school which believed that society was all too powerful for an individual to hope to change it, or that social change is change permitted and consented by society within definite limits. Moreover, I live in the post-modern times, disenchanted with all things worthy, sceptical of all that is true, and suspicious of all that is great. I knew that these leaders were ordinary human beings, human, all too human. They were as small as one of us. There was no basis to any claim for greatness. The foundation in which greatness stood was shaky. This belief in radical equality and scepticism towards any claim for unequal status, lead me to question the tendency to revere leaders.

It is easy to argue that worshipping leaders is common sense, and that a student of social science need not consume common sense uncritically. One may add that his objective must be to attribute common sense, a status proper to it, and constitute

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<sup>3</sup> Marx, Karl. Theses on Feuerbach. [Online: web] Accessed 5 Jan. 2010 URL: <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/theses/theses.htm>

<sup>4</sup> All contemporary analysis of events in the media foregrounds the individual thus hiding the field as a structure. Politicians are seen as individuals. Politics as a field with its own values and principles is not referred to in common discourses.

knowledge about the society which produces such common sense. But such talismans do not protect the scholar during his fieldwork. The field effectively imposes its common sense and biases on the scholar. At least, that is what happened to me. When I met the leader whose *Satyagraha* I studied, I was convinced that I was talking to one of the greatest Maoist leaders of 1970s' Naxal revolution in Kerala.

If this is how commonsense influenced me unconsciously, a strain of radical relativism encouraged me to embrace common sense as legitimate knowledge. It is pertinent to take a short excursus at this position on which the academy is divided. The dispute is on the question as to whether common sense and scientific knowledge are equal in status. Radical relativist schools which consider that "all knowledge claims are equally valid and justifiable" (Hale: 2001, 13) often deny science any superior status in relation to common sense. They refuse to see any distinctions in scientific knowledge over common sense. Such schools suggest that the job of the student of social sciences is to collect and present 'voices' of lay people from the field. Knowledge in social science for them is an account of accounts. Under influence of such schools of thought, for a long time, I did not know, how a research scholar is to reconcile the multiple and contradicting opinions she encounters in the field. Should she collect all opinions and then construct a composite account? If so, how will she manage to distinguish herself from a 'mere' journalist? Is she then supposed to make a judgment, by choosing one voice as the true voice and reject all others as false?

Bourdieu's writings on the distinctions between common sense and science are useful to break free from such radical relativism. Not only did his works affirm that scientific knowledge was actually possible, but also gave the method to arrive at scientific knowledge. The trick is in rejecting foundationalism and populism at once. Bourdieu himself receives this position from Blaise Pascal. The position is arrived at by refusing "the ambition of foundation" (Bourdieu: 2000, 3) and "populist naivety" (Bourdieu: 2000, 3).

For a long time I had adopted the habit, when asked the (generally ill-intentioned) question of my relations with Marx, of replying that, all in all, if I really had to affiliate myself, I would say I was more of a Pascalian. I was thinking in particular of everything that concerns symbolic power, the aspect through which the affinity



appears most clearly, and other, less often observed, facets of his work, such as the refusal of the ambition of foundation. But, above all, I had always been grateful to Pascal, as I understood him, for his concern, devoid of all populist naivety, for 'ordinary people' and the 'sound opinions of the people'; and also for his determination, inseparable from that concern, always to seek the 'reason of effects', the *raison d'être* of the seemingly most illogical or derisory human behaviors - such as 'spending a whole day in chasing a hare' - rather than condemning or mocking them, ....(Bourdieu: 2000, 3).

According to Pascal and Bourdieu, no common social practice is unworthy of scholastic attention. Common social practices are important, yet as opposed to radical relativists, he argues that the logic behind such practices may not be what common sense claims as its logic. Thus, it is important for the student of social sciences to listen and document the voices from the field. Yet, it is important not to adopt the explanations of people from the field as explanations of social phenomena in question.

Common sense is a set of classificatory categories which structure the way to view the world.

Common sense is a stock of self-evidences shared by all, which, within the limits of a social universe, ensures a primordial consensus on the meaning of the world, a set of tacitly accepted commonplaces which make confrontation, dialogue, competition and even conflict possible, and among which a special place must be reserved for the principles of classification, such as the major oppositions structuring the perception of the world (Bourdieu: 2000, 98).

For instance the male/female opposition is a self-evident common sense in a gendered space. A common sense that this dissertation tries to destabilize is that of interested action/disinterested action, self-interest/generosity, utilitarian action/self-sacrifice and their common sense equation with values of base/noble. This dissertation is also an attempt to come to terms with the conflict between Marxian schools' idea of revolutionary agential action and Durkheimian school's scepticism of the individual agent's potential to change.

In this work, I try to review some sociological literature around such notions as *the*

*noble, charisma, generosity, and disinterestedness*, by some key authors in sociology. My attempt is to question the foundations of the doxic common sense of personal greatness. I find that claims to personal greatness are arbitrary. Contrary to popular belief, there are no qualities in individual persons, for instance, charisma, that make them great. There are no generous people. Neither are there generous acts. Actions do not exist in the imaginary context of the isolated individual. Actions are social. They are enacted and take their meanings in differentiated social fields. All acts that claim to be of generosity solicit returns. Hence there are no totally disinterested people or acts. Even acts that distinguish themselves as totally disinterested exist in *economies of honour* where agents compete with each other for honour. Bourdieu's sociological thought does not see persons as naturally endowed with charismatic qualities that make them successful. He sees the charismatic as endowed with symbolic capital which they employ to dominate others. This kind of an argument not only disenchanters readers of greatness in individuals, but even villanises people who serve community welfare causes. Surely demonising individuals is as superficial as its inverse, deifying individuals, a mistake that I wish to avoid.

Yet, subjectively we feel that in some moments, some people are indeed great. We really experience greatness in them. Experience is often offered as evidence of all kinds of claims including that of greatness and charisma. Have not whole generations, and not just a few people, experienced the saintliness of the Mahatma? In this case, the profound experience produced by the performance of fifty six days of fasting by the leader becomes the evidence of the leader's sincerity and commitment. How should one reconcile the contradiction when scientific evidence contradicts the evidence of intense experience? Both science and experience cannot be true together; one of it surely has to be false. This sets the ground for a short detour on the debates around the "evidence of experience". I became interested in the theoretical issues of experience, reading later schools of feminism, which have labored to deconstruct the authenticity of shared experience of women as a united subject.<sup>5</sup>

Joan Scott (1991) questions the uncontestable status enjoyed by "evidence of experience" because of the immediacy of experience. Does not the peculiar position

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<sup>5</sup> Earlier schools of feminism see the objectivity of science (which claim to be based on experiments rather than experience of a subject) itself as based on experience of male subjects. Based on this, they build legitimacy for a case of experiences of other locations.

of the ethnographer who is participating and observing draws part of its authority from the legitimacy of the immediacy of experience? Is this not a case when even science relies on the evidence of experience? Scott articulates the position of experience as discursively and historically constituted.

[W]hat could be truer, after all, than a subject's own account of what he or she has lived through? ... When experience is taken as the origin of knowledge, the vision of the individual subject (the person who had the experience or the historian who recounts it), becomes the bedrock of evidence on which explanation is built. Questions about the constructed nature of experience, about how subjects are constituted as different in the first place, about how one's vision is structured about language (or discourse) and history-are left aside (Scott: 1991, 777).

Another author who rejects the notion of un-interpreted, pure, unmediated access to truth through experience is Donna Haraway (1988) who writes to criticise objectivity in scientific accounts. Her analysis of vision, a kind of experience, as constituted, is useful to understand the constructed nature of all experience. She shows how the vision of science is a composite vision assembled from partial perspectives of its instruments. Then, Haraway extends this constructed status of artificial seeing to natural human vision. According to her, the so called natural human vision and perception is not passive. It is a result of construction and active interpretation:

The 'eyes' made available in modern technological sciences shatter any idea of passive vision; their prosthetic devices show us that all eyes, including our own organic ones, are active perceptual systems, building on translations and specific ways of seeing, that is ways of life. There is no unmediated photograph or passive camera obscura in scientific accounts... (Haraway: 1988, 583).

Nietzsche was probably among the first thinkers to recognize perspectivism and name the phenomenon. He was one of the first philosophers to see the similarity between seeing and knowing. Perspective is an important element in seeing. But his innovation was in applying this concept to knowing.

Henceforth, my dear philosophers, let us be on guard against the dangerous old conceptual fiction that posited a "pure, willless, painless, timeless knowing subject"; let us guard against the snares of such contradictory concepts as "pure reason," "absolute spirituality," "knowledge in itself": they always demand that we should think of an eye that is completely unthinkable, an eye turned in no

particular direction, in which the active and interpreting forces, through which alone seeing becomes seeing something, are supposed to be lacking; these always demand of the eye an absurdity and a nonsense. There is only a perspective seeing, only a perspective "knowing"; and the more affects we allow to speak about one thing, the more eyes, different eyes, we can use to observe one thing, the more complete will our "concept" of this thing, our "objectivity," be. But to eliminate the will altogether, to suspend each and every affect, supposing we were capable of this - what would that mean but to castrate the intellect? (Nietzsche in *Genealogy of Morals*, quoted in Clark: 1990, 128)

In more fundamental terms, perspectivism is interpretation. It is "an acknowledgment of the primacy and irreducibility of interpretation" (Cox: 1999, 3). The point is that, the authenticity attributed to direct intense experience is questionable because all experience is experience from a perspective mediated by interpretations. If so, how can we simply accept an enchanted experience of greatness as evidence of greatness? We experience greatness in Gandhi because we exist in systems of interpretations that render his actions as great. It is the burden of this dissertation to investigate how exactly do social systems work to interpret certain actions of selfless giving as noble or great.

In spite of having no real basis for a person to be great, people may perceive greatness, charisma, etc. in individual persons because, there are systematic social mechanisms which are designed to make human beings perceive<sup>6</sup> greatness in individuals. Yet, individuals contain within their substance little of any sort which wins them their fame and greatness. It is my argument that greatness is an effect of the functioning of a social institution. It should never be mistaken as a feature or character of any individual person, however great he may be, from Christ to Gandhi. Charisma is not the causative quality that leads to great actions. Rather it is an effect.

The text of this book is arranged as follows: I begin an analysis of the act of

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<sup>6</sup> As we have seen with experience, perception of experience is also not passive or automatic, but a result of interpretation. Common sense as we have seen exist in the form of classificatory categories, in the form of "schemata of perception and action, principles of vision and division, and mental structures" (Bourdieu: 1996, 5). The perception of greatness is an enchanted experience of the world. This is what Husserl called the "natural attitude" (Husserl quoted in Bourdieu: 1996, 5) which makes common sense appear natural, universal and eternal. It is in fact a fetishistic blindness. According to Bourdieu, the objective of social science should be to "denaturalize and defatalize" by unveiling the "historical foundations and social determinants of principles of hierarchization and evaluation..." (Bourdieu: 1996, 6).

*Satyagraha* by provisionally accepting its common sense interpretation as *an extraordinary act of sacrifice; an act of great generosity or altruism*, because the leader<sup>7</sup> who performs it was giving away his life for a public cause; *an act of great individual volition*, because the leader voluntarily chooses his starvation and suffering, as opposed to the workers on whom starvation was imposed from outside which they suffered *mechanically*; *an act of great disinterest*, because the leader was making no material gains from this act. This is especially so in contrast to the factory management, which was deliberately imposing suffering on workers, held captive for 'ransom' to pressurise the government of Kerala to supply raw materials at subsidized prices. One can construct numerous objects from an empirical situation according to what point of view one accepts. Thus, Saussure is accurate when he argues that 'the point of view creates the object' (Saussure quoted in Bourdieu: 1990b, 30).

Far from it being the object that antedates the viewpoint, it would seem that it is the viewpoint that creates the object; besides, nothing tells us in advance that one way of considering the fact in question takes precedence over the others or is in any way superior to them (Saussure: 1974, 8).

It is epistemological and not ontological objectivity that constitutes the object of study. From so many objects I could have constituted from the field, I chose as my object of enquiry this *act of sacrifice*, which I further narrowed down by interpreting it as an *act of great disinterestedness and generosity, and of immense volition and individual freewill, an act of charisma*. To understand the notion of individual greatness, the method used was to read around the themes of *charisma, generosity, disinterestedness* and the notion of *individual*.

First I shall examine Weber's writings on charisma. Simply put, Weber argues that there is something called as charisma, a quality that only some elect individuals possess. Naturally endowed with charisma, such individuals are able to work wonders and perform miracles. Jesus Christ, Moses, John Calvin, Prophet Muhammad, and even Adolph Hitler, all, qualify to be classified as charismatic. According to him, neither is the quality that magicians claimed in primitive societies, anything other than this. Bourdieu's criticism of Weber is that he makes no attempt to examine the

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<sup>7</sup> Although there were two leaders in the *Satyagraha*, I interviewed and interacted with only one. Hence I refer to his act in particular. This should in no way be seen as ignoring the contribution of the other leader to the struggle.

social or economic conditions under which an individual develops such a quality. No analysis of the institutional mechanisms the charismatic leader engages is offered by him. Naturalizing human capabilities is not sociological. It is humanism, a kind of essentialism, a blind belief in individual human beings, a lack of scepticism in isolated individual persons, which itself is a product of a particular historical period. It ends all possibilities of criticism. By locating charisma within the individual, Weber sociologizes common sense.

Having rejected the Weberian approach, for its lack of social institutional analysis, I abandon the method of understanding greatness purely through textual interpretation of it as charisma. Rather, I shift focus onto the actual empirical act the leader performs, the *Satyagraha*. I proceed by asking what a *Satyagraha* is. One way to look at *Satyagraha* is as an act of generosity by an individual. In fact it is exactly a perspective of individual act of bravery that bestows on its author the aura. It was Marcel Mauss who moved from the notion of a *generous individual* to the notion of a *system of generosities*. According to him, *gift* was the instrument of expression of generosities in a system. The basic argument is that there exists a system of giving, taking and returning in all societies around the world. Individuals appear as the givers, takers and reciprocators. But this is mere appearance. They are just role players in the social institutions which are the organizing force underneath acts of gifting and reciprocation. The donor of the gift is not always gifting out of individual affection, but mechanically performing the role assigned to him. The system of generosities is a mechanism with the function of social integration. Gift giving was only a form of the more fundamental mechanism of social exchange. Similarly, Hubert and Mauss argue that sacrifice is not just a rite that individuals perform, but a social institution<sup>8</sup>, underneath which, is nothing but another social institution, namely, gift. Indeed the leader can be seen as offering his life as gift to the community or as offering his life in sacrifice to the cause, the struggle. Mauss's perspective shifts focus to the social institutions of gifting and social exchange. Such a perspective weakens the common sense humanist perspective that placed the focus on the individual leader. The individual is reduced to a performer of the role of donor or recipient of gift in a system.

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<sup>8</sup> On Mauss's contribution to the theory of gift, Wiseman writes that it is the uncovering of a more fundamental system of exchanges that underlies gift, with a function of maintaining social order, that makes the theory of gift important: "gift giving was one of the forms taken by a broader and more elemental system of exchanges that is essential to the elaboration and maintenance of social order. He showed that much social life was regulated by a triple unspoken obligation: to give, to receive and to return" (Wiseman: 2009, 8).

What have we really achieved by arguing that the individual is insignificant? One of the conditions of possibility of personal greatness is the notion of the individual person. The notion of the individual person is that of the isolated agent, with no mention of the structural circumstances in which she is found; with free will or volition, conscious intentions, explicit and express, acting in accordance to reason, calculating and predicting, the exemplar of which is the *homo economicus*, who follows the utilitarian reason to maximize economic profit. It is this notion of the individual that expresses in social theories of action. Without the individual, there is no great individual. So the first step to destabilize the established notion of personal greatness is to show that the notion of individual itself is a construct.

What is a construct? The most important insight of constructivism is “the politically situated character of all knowledge production” (Hale: 2001, 13). According to Ian Hacking (1999), social construction's appeal is in its promise to liberate. To understand that meanings of things are not "fixed and inevitable", nor natural, i.e., rooted in nature of the substance, but a product of "historical events and social forces, and ideology" is the characteristic of a constructionist stand.

For one thing, the idea of social construction has been wonderfully liberating. It reminds us, say, that motherhood and its meanings are not fixed and inevitable, the consequence of child-bearing and rearing. They are the product of historical events, social forces, and ideology. Mothers who accept current canons of emotion and behaviour may learn that the ways they are supposed to feel and act are not ordained by human nature or the biology of reproduction (Hacking: 1999, 2).

Secondly, the construction of personal greatness, in our case, depends on another construct, called *voluntary generosity*. Voluntary generosity in most societies is expressed in social practices of gift exchange. Voluntary generosity receives its noble status by its opposing relation to utilitarian self-interest expressed in market exchange. This opposition is another historical construct that needs to be problematized. Thus, production of personal greatness is possible only in a social system with gift exchange mechanisms. By revealing the working of gift exchange mechanisms and describing how they produce feelings of generosity and disinterestedness, science renders personal greatness as a social construction.

Bourdieu has developed Mauss's themes of gift exchange, generosity, disinterestedness, and the critique of the individual, into a full-fledged social theory. While Mauss does not analyse the functioning of social exchange in simpler more

fundamental categories, Bourdieu unites all concepts into a rigorous theoretical scheme, based on key notions like symbolic economy and capital. Usually people in the political field claim to be doing work for public interest, in other words, doing non-profit seeking work, or disinterested work. By such claims, people imply that they are not interested in economic profits. This disinterest supports an implicit claim of a moral superiority, the exemplar of which is soul's indifference, tranquillity and detachment claimed by saints. Bourdieu has argued that disinterested action is not possible at all in any field. Why? To explain, he uses the model of social game to understand activity that goes on in different fields. Bourdieu following Huizinga (1949) sees activity that goes on in any field as a game. Thus, Bourdieu views artistic activity and activity in the intellectual fields as a kind of game, where as politicians are seen as engaged in another kind of game, while businessmen in the field of economy are viewed as playing a third kind of game. However, different the activities may appear, or whatever distinctions players claim in their self representations, Bourdieu views all agents as playing games. All fields require the participants to take the game in their field to be important. This is to consider the stakes in the game to be worth achieving. Only by investing time and effort can players participate in games in the social field. Participants will invest time and effort only in those games which they believe is worth playing. Participation in the competition of the game indicates the players' interest in the stakes of the field. Committed participants permit themselves to be caught up by the game. They even show readiness to die for the stakes of the game. Thus people, who are participating in politics even when they are not expecting any financial rewards, are caught up in the game, i.e., deeply interested in the game. This interest is not the financial interest, but deep engagement in competition. It is the opposite of indifference. Just because their interests are not monetary does not exempt them from the competition, or investment or commitment to the game. No participant can be disinterested in the sense of being indifferent. Only someone who is outside the field can be indifferent to games in that field. Thus, businessmen can be indifferent to art, and artists indifferent to business. Indifference is the disposition of those who are not interested in the game, who is outside its competition and whom its stakes cannot influence. Different fields have different kinds of stakes. By claiming that he is not interested in the economic field's stake does not make a participant disinterested in his own field's stake. So politicians may compete for honour, prestige, symbolic power, influence, etc., all of which are as powerful and worthy as economic profits. This means that there is no purely gratuitous action in any field. If there is no action that is for nothing, and all



participatory actions in a field have potential to fetch some kind of reward, then the idea of disinterestedness and the purity, moral superiority and saintliness it claims, becomes arbitrary or baseless. This is the second critique of claims to personal greatness based on disinterested action.

Thirdly, it is not the merit of the individual participant that he or she is disinterested. Disinterestedness is not an individual trait or merit, but a value of the field. Participants play as disinterested only because the game demands disinterestedness and rewards disinterestedness. There are games which encourage disinterestedness, just as there are fields that promote interest as a value. Disinterestedness is not a heroic quality of virtuous people. It is a cultivated disposition within a social world that demands and rewards disinterested action. In other words, there are social conditions of possibility for disinterested action. Any model which focuses on the disinterested individual hero misses the objective social fact entirely. This is the critique of personal aspect of greatness. The great person is socialized into behaving like great people, and his followers are socialized to recognize greatness in him.

Fourthly, arguing that the leader was consciously trying to become a celebrity would fit the utilitarian model of human action. Utilitarianism has argued that the human being is rational and calculates her action aiming to maximize profits. Only in such a model, can the leader's action, look like a planned move with fame as its end. But most human behaviour is not planned. Social practice is “infra-conscious” (Bourdieu: 1993a, 46). Participants only have a feel for the game. In such a play, participants may actually do things which are disinterested and may look irrational – like dying for the stake – but is reasonable given that there was never a plan to die. Spontaneous un-calculated practical action can look irrational, but is reasonable in the fuzzy logic of practice. People may be ready to die for the field's ends, irrespective of whether they will be rewarded by honour or not. If it is necessary to be disinterested to succeed in the game, players may be spontaneously disinterested. And this is quite attuned to their interests.

The summary of the argument is that contrary to common sense, the leader's action of *Satyagraha* is not an act of personal heroism. His act follows the grammar of social institutions of gift exchange and sacrifice. A more sociological perspective is to view him as playing a role in a grand scheme, the grammar of which is not determined by the individual, but by the collective. From Bourdieu's perspective, the leader was

playing a social game in the field of politics in Kerala; a game that necessarily involves stakes and rewards; a game that demands a certain symbolic capital if one is to hope to succeed in it. His action of *Satyagraha* and his near suicide was the only way in which the leader could have given his competition a run for their investments. The act is reasonable given the position of the leader in the field of politics in Kerala – a lone person with almost no following, competing with large and established organizations with thousands as cadres. To die for a cause does not fit the utilitarian rationality. Thus, his act cannot be understood by utilitarian theory of action. Neither is his generosity an act of individual heroism, as Naxalites are usually understood. *Satyagraha* can only be understood using the model of gift exchange. But, gift here does not mean things or services that individuals donate. Gift here means any article or service that the field forces its participants to exchange. He was being generous because the game demanded it from him. It was not a free gift either, because he was rewarded with honour and prestige. But nor does it make sense to argue that he did it purely out of a desire for celebrity status. That would be to allege utilitarian rationality to his action. As mentioned before, in the social games which agents participate, there is no conscious and abstract calculation. There is only a feel for the game. The leader felt that the right thing to do, morally and politically, is to perform a *Satyagraha*. As Bourdieu puts it, the logic of practice is not that of the logician (Bourdieu: 1990b, 86).

## CHAPTER 2

### The Story of a Struggle

A wood pulp factory was established at Chavoor<sup>1</sup> by Raymon in 1957 after this capitalist firm was invited by the first ever democratically elected communist government led by E.M. Sankaran Namboodirippad (hereafter E.M.S). Raymon found the invitation attractive, since it was looking to expand into production of wood pulp, a raw material in the production of rayon fibre. Bamboo, with which Kerala was liberally endowed, was the raw material.

It is paradoxical that the communists invited the infamous capitalist, notorious for his exploitative excesses to Kerala. It is probable that the communist party was struggling with a social organization in Kerala, which they classified as a kind of feudalism, “caste-land lord-feudal rule” structure<sup>2</sup>, which the communists thought to be a worse evil than capitalism. According to Namboodirippad (2000), capitalism has historically weakened the ‘caste-land lord-feudal rule’ structure. By inviting one of the largest capitalists of India, the communist government was hoping to dismantle the ‘caste-land lord-feudal rule’ structure. Within the caste structure, direct ties<sup>3</sup> between people permitted little space for the State to mediate between people. The bringing of

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<sup>1</sup> Some proper nouns have been mangled to protect identities. The main informant whom I have interviewed is referred to in this dissertation as the leader or the union leader.

<sup>2</sup> According to Namboodirippad (2000) “*jathi-janmi-naduvazhitam*”, or “caste-land lord-feudal rule” structure was the economic structure of Kerala. In this structure, caste provided the division of labour. The system of landlords offered a system of private property. And feudal lords ran the government (Namboodirippad: 2000, 122). But this structure was so oppressive that it led to the enrichment of the minority of dominant groups at the expense of the majority. Any change from this situation was possible only by weakening this structure. Historically, only those who embraced capitalism in Kerala have managed to achieve social mobility and pose a challenge to these lords. Namboodirippad sites the examples of many capitalists who have grown richer than the lord of Calicut (2000, 234-237). Thus for him, capitalism was a veritable social revolution under British rule and a great blow to caste-land lord-feudal rule structure (Namboodirippad: 2000, 236).

<sup>3</sup> The young Marx notes that social power was not differentiated into the form of a state until modernity. The private individual who can be politicized and who is produced in opposition to a public state, was an ideal for Marx (Giddens: 1971, 6). State is absent in Greek polis or in Medieval Europe. Translating these Marxian ideas for Kerala, Namboodirippad expresses concern that the lower castes through their economic dependency on the upper castes were not directly linked to the State, but only linked through the upper castes. For instance a lower caste person had to perform many duties as a subordinate to upper castes simply because land ownership was with the upper castes. The land reforms and the factory to a great extent were part of the plan to break such ties in society and link people onto state or capital with no intermediaries to whom they had to subject themselves to.

industrial mode of production and land reforms both were supposed to break the ties between castes, integral to the reproduction of the older social structure. In the industrial mode of production, workers will be concentrated in a small area, making worker organization a much easier task than if they are distributed over a large area with seasonal migration<sup>4</sup> etc. Thus, higher wages and easier unionizing, crucial to create a politicized citizen, were all incentives of shifting onto the industrial mode of production.

The factory was supposed to produce rayon-grade pulp for which it needed bamboo as raw material. Bamboo was available in plenty in the Wayanad region and the Nilambur region of Kerala. Raymon consented to establish the factory in order to develop the region<sup>5</sup>, only if the government in turn ‘gifted’ them with raw materials, at a subsidized rate much below the market rate. In this gift exchange<sup>6</sup>, for bamboo that the government gifts Raymon, it will reciprocate by employing thousands of local people as workers in the factory. Indeed, the factory at Chavoor employed about four thousand people directly, and a much larger figure indirectly. Soon the whole region came to depend on it for its subsistence. A token value of Re. 1 for a tonne of bamboo was fixed to disguise gift exchange as market exchange. How they were going to maintain this exchange, which was inherently exploitative, became clear only when the crisis set in. The government negotiated with all physical assets of Raymon’s factory at Chavoor as ransom, while Raymon negotiated with the workers

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<sup>4</sup> An ex-employee commented that before Raymon came to Chavoor, the largest employer in that region was a large Muslim land lord, who had thousands of acres of land near Chavoor and also in Kalpally in Wayanad district. In these farmlands, ‘Kappa’ (tapioca) was produced. People went to work in these farms for wages as low as Rs 1-2 a day. Thus for the communists, a shift in the mode of production meant higher wages and a workforce more amenable to unionizing (Krishnan, phone interview, Calicut, 07 January 2010).

<sup>5</sup> The region did develop, informants say, after the factory came. In an informant’s narrative, Chavoor is represented as a wild and uninhabitable, “neglected” area “full of snakes” before the arrival of Raymon. While the factory was being set up, employees had to live in the near by town of Calicut and commute every day to Chavoor because there were no lodges in Chavoor (Damodaran, phone interview, Calicut, 15 January 2010). According to another informant, the development that the government brings is only for the industry and if the common people are beneficiaries, they are only indirectly so. A major road that connects Kozhikode to Chavoor was built for the factory’s connectivity. Paliyar river got a bridge thanks to the factory. In addition to government spending, Raymon built a township at Chavoor, with a hospital, a temple, a CBSE school (actually intended for the children of the upper management) etc. (Krishnan, phone interview, Calicut, 07 January 2010).

<sup>6</sup> The distinction between market economy and gift economy is questionable to the extent that capitalists all over the world depend on subsidies which are nothing but gifts from the government for functioning.

held captive threatening layoff. The communist government's calculation was to set up a strong union, CITU, and thus keep the capitalist excesses in check. But because of divisions among workers, multiple unions sprang up and Raymon could manage to divide and keep the unions in check. At one point there were thirteen different unions in the Chavoor factory. But most importantly, the factory at Chavoor itself was only a small link in a large chain<sup>7</sup> of production in the Raymon Empire. The product of the factory, rayon-grade pulp<sup>8</sup> itself was only a raw material for producing rayon, the final product.

In spite of this apparently marginal status of Chavoor factory in the Raymon Empire, an informer tells that workers in the Chavoor factory had enormous negotiation power<sup>9</sup>. A lax attitude of Raymon towards worker indiscipline emboldened workers and led to Raymon losing control. Thus, Raymon was feeling all the more threatened by worker militancy. Nevertheless, it found ways to 'manage' the workers. Raymon appointed a clever manager to bribe and keep the unions and politicians and media under its control<sup>10</sup>. The president of the factory appears in all accounts as an undeserving 'Marwari' infamous for his arrogance and autocratic ways of

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<sup>7</sup> Pulp was initially transported to another unit in Madhya Pradesh where it was made into rayon fibre. Later, Raymon established a fibre unit next to the pulp division.

<sup>8</sup> "When produced, it looked like a sheet of 'Mathrubhoomi' news paper", an ex-employee of the factory told me (Krishnan, phone interview, Calicut, 07 January 2010).

<sup>9</sup> According to an informant who was an engineer at the factory, Raymon caused its own downfall by being lax towards worker discipline. This was because, Raymon was a monopoly in the production of pulp and rayon fibre in India, and they wanted to make as much profit as possible while the monopoly status lasted. Thus, the top management had advised the local management to keep the factory running 'twenty four – seven' at all costs. So the management was told to turn a blind eye towards reasonable worker indiscipline and maintain a friendly and cooperative attitude towards workers such that the production remains unaffected. Once it so happened that a worker demanded overtime work which is paid at double the rate. The manager could not fit him in the next shift because all workers for the next shift had reported. The peculiar process involved in the production of pulp is such that if the paper (the final form in which pulp appears) breaks, the production has to be stopped. Once the production stops, it takes three quarters of an hour to restart the production process. The disappointed worker threatened to tear the paper if he is not accommodated in the next shift. In spite of the threat as he was not accommodated, he tore the pulp paper forcing the plant to shutdown for an hour. Yet, no disciplinary action was taken in order to avoid the problem from escalating. The informer who is a middle level employee who looks down at workers thinks that such lax responses emboldened the workers (Sudhakaran, phone interview, Calicut, 21 January 2010).

<sup>10</sup> Thus, a factory worker told me that Raymon kept politicians with it by employing a famous politician's niece as the lady welfare officer at Chavoor. A famous news paper owner's nephew was the public relations officer to keep the media on its side. Another politician who later went on to become a minister was a contractor with Raymon (Krishnan, phone interview, Calicut, 07 January 2010).

functioning. An informant from middle level management tells that Raymon's organization was more patrimonial than bureaucratic. They preferred close friends and relatives instead of qualified professionals to occupy the highest administrative positions<sup>11</sup>. Most people agree that the president practiced autocratic ways of functioning and flouted all norms of bureaucratic order at will<sup>12</sup>. All these led to the deinstitutionalization and led to resentment of honest workers. Union leaders had enormous powers to influence recruitment and promotions which made it impossible for workers to be neutral towards politics. Clever workers bribed their way to higher positions. According to the leader who performed the *Satyagraha*, corruption had taken root that all unions were revelling in corruption, especially CITU, the union of the communist party.

Meanwhile, the price of raw materials rose from Re. 1 a tonne to Rs. 600 a tonne by 1980s<sup>13</sup>. In addition to this, scarcity<sup>14</sup> of raw materials also began to be felt. Both of

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<sup>11</sup> According to an informant, Raymon paid no heed to the principle of merit when it came to administrative recruitments. Technical personnel could not hope to be promoted beyond a level. The first president of the factory was a technical person, who had actually developed the process of converting bamboo into pulp in Japan. But once the unit was established and became stable, he was transferred to another unit and the president's job was given to a close aid of the Raymon family. This had angered the middle level management who were aspirants to top roles. They felt that the 'Marwadi' recruit did not deserve the position (Sudhakaran, phone interview, Calicut, 21 January 2010).

<sup>12</sup> Thus, it is alleged that the president of the company kept the union leaders happy with bribes. He promoted those whom the union leaders recommended. Even workers with many years of experience were sidelined and young people with connections bypassed them in promotions. Workers at the factory floor allege that he siphoned off even that money which Raymon had budgeted for paying bribes to union leaders to avoid strikes (Krishnan, phone interview, Calicut, 07 January 2010).

<sup>13</sup> One informant told me that the price of raw materials was increased by the Kerala government as revenge towards Raymon. As the story goes, George Fernandez who was a declared enemy of Raymon became the industrial minister when Janata Party came to power. Raymon which had managed to win a monopoly status in the production of wood pulp by influencing Lal Bahadur Shastri and ending all imports of wood pulp to India was reeling in profits. George Fernandez decided to end this monopoly by relaxing import restrictions of wood pulp. Once the restrictions were lifted, Scandinavian wood pulp which was superior in quality and cheaper in comparison to Raymon's pulp flooded the Indian market. If Raymon continued to produce pulp, given the logic of the market, Raymon's pulp would sell at a lower price than the imported pulp, causing permanent damage to its value. Raymon decided to shutdown production until it could reinstate the import restrictions. Chavoor unit was ordered to shutdown until further notice. It is said that the president of the Chavoor unit of Raymon was about to sign a routine extension of employment contract for the factory workers, with the chief minister of Kerala, when the order arrived. Displaying no tact or diplomacy, he refused to sign the contract, that too without citing any reason. An irritated chief minister decided to take revenge and hiked the raw material prices. When finally after eight months, Raymon decided to reopen the factory (having managed to reinstate import restrictions), raw material prices had become higher. Having turned friends in local politics to foes, it could not stop successive governments from hiking the prices (Sudhakaran, phone interview, Calicut, 21 January 2010).

<sup>14</sup> Although bamboo was the preferred raw material for pulp production, a slightly inferior quality pulp could be produced from eucalyptus also. The disadvantage with bamboo is that, it takes

the above conditions severely affected Raymon's production and profits. However, the salary bill kept increasing. At one point the situation reached a stage where keeping the factory shut would be more profitable than keeping it running<sup>15</sup>.

Thus there were many factors gathering momentum leading to a crisis: unavailability of raw materials, increasing price of raw materials, autocratic functioning of the management, increasing workers' indiscipline and militancy and general decline of bureaucratic and democratic norms and increase of patrimonial relations, bribery and corruption. Raymon, the government, and workers all contributed to the looming crisis. But most importantly, factors outside the national economy like the arrival of IMF, increasing liberalization of Indian economy etc changed equations of power between capital and labour<sup>16</sup>. Liberalization removed restrictions on import of raw materials from outside. Thus all structural conditions for a crisis had been present in the mid eighties and all that was needed was an immediate cause. This came in the form a workers strike demanding bonus payment. Because the company was not making profits, Raymon was not paying bonus as in the past. Unaware of the grave situation in which the factory was caught, the workers decided to demand bonus and entered a strike for this demand. Emboldened by a license to import pulp from outside India, Raymon closed the factory with no plans to reopen it. No one knew that the lock out would continue for the next three years. It was this lock out that the leader would break with his *Satyagraha*.

At the end of three years, the workers were broken by starvation and were desperate for income. They withdrew all demands and pleaded with an unheeding management.

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decades to grow and cannot be farmed. Moreover, bamboo dies once it flowers. Raymon cites flowering of bamboo in Wayanad region as one of the reason for a layoff. But, eucalyptus takes only about seven years to harvest and is lends itself to mass production by plantation farming. Thus, Raymon had bought about thirty thousand acres of estate land to cultivate eucalyptus, to sustain production perpetually. But, a socialist state government nationalized those thirty thousand acres for a program of public redistribution of land. Not only did Raymon lose land, the government laid the land waste without planting Eucalyptus there. This meant that government was indirectly responsible for creating the raw material crisis. This incident sent a message to Raymon that its property was unprotected. It perceived the government as not just indifferent or non-cooperating, but positively harmful towards capitalist expansion (The union leader, personal interview, Calicut, 10 December 2009).

<sup>15</sup> The union leader argued that the Raymon's argument that Chavoor unit was making losses was a lie. He accepts that profits decreased with time. Even if the plant as an individual unit were not profitable, Raymon taken as a whole chain of production of rayon was making large profits (The union leader, personal interview, Calicut, 10 December 2009).

<sup>16</sup> Raymon acquired a license to import pulp at will from Japan. Thus it became less dependent on the Chavoor unit for its daily production of viscose staple fiber.

It had become clear to everyone that the management was less bothered with bonus payments and that the real issue was the steady supply of raw materials. Raymon was using the starvation of workers to pressurise the Kerala government to sell bamboo and Eucalyptus at a steady rate.

The factory was closed down during a congress government's tenure. The communists had claimed that they would solve the problem in twenty four hours if voted to power. The people of Chavoor did vote them to power in the hope that they will keep their word, but once in power, they began dragging the foot instead of engaging in useful discussions with a hostile factory management. Thus the workers felt that no one was taking their starvation and destitution seriously.

At this point, a small section of disillusioned workers left mainstream trade unions which had nothing other than promises to offer and formed a small union. They invited a charismatic leader<sup>17</sup>, an ex-Naxalite of great renown to lead them. This man was initially a very prominent member of the communist party. He had joined the party in 1945 and rose to become a leader of some visibility, but soon grew tired seeing corruption<sup>18</sup> that was budding in the party. According to him, the communist party was not corrupt initially, but became corrupt once it got power in government. He was influenced by the Maoist ideas spreading at that time among communists, and left the party to join the Naxal movement of 1968. He took part in an armed action in Kerala which landed him in jail. The punishment extended over several years and included excruciating experiences like solitary confinement and torture. After the term, when he came out, he kept a low profile, but never resigned from politics. It was then that he was invited by a group of employees to lead a new trade union at Chavoor.

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<sup>17</sup> This dissertation refers to this person as “the leader” or “the union leader” interchangeably.

<sup>18</sup> When I asked how did he know that the communist party had become corrupt, the leader said that “the cars of local capitalists started visiting the district committee offices [of the communist party] ... The [communist] party and CITU started stalling legitimate strikes for worker's rights.” (The union leader, personal interview, Calicut, 10 December 2009.) They did nothing when honest workers were expelled from the company. According to him, corruption had begun even in 1958, but it was not openly carried out. By 1967, it was open and visible even for people outside the party, and there was no other option for an idealist like him but to distance from the communist party. He sees corruption as a cancer that develops in post independence Indian politics. It is the same corruption that he sees in Chavoor factory - politicians bought out by the factory management, ready to exchange justice for money. Thus when he distinguishes himself as sincere as opposed to the corrupt CITU, he is engaging in an exchange with CITU that is nothing new between them, but extends back for decades.



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The new union's basic stand was that all unions had grown corrupt because of their links to political parties and thus what workers of Chavoor needed was a union that was not affiliated to any established political party. Unions affiliated to political parties did not intend to solve the problem because they were ruled by political parties who were not accountable to Chavoor workers beyond election time. Only a sincere union could represent the interest of workers. Thus the leader established a binary classification of sincere and corrupt trade union leadership which the workers of Chavoor began to consider with some seriousness.

He (along with another leader) began an indefinite *Satyagraha* which he said will end only when the government reopens the factory or when the Satyagrahi dies. Cleverly, he addressed the *Satyagraha* towards the government and not towards Raymon. He knew that if he died in the hunger strike, for the ensuing revenge of people to have some effect, the enemy had to be a player within the Malayalee public sphere. Raymon was too far away for the Malayalee public to be affected by it. Secondly, Raymon was a private firm, much less accountable to the interests of the public, while the communist party was much more accountable to the public.

The government did all they could to ignore the strike and stall the movement. Yet, the leader and his followers put together an agitation which almost brought the government down. The indefinite hunger strike continued in two phases for fifty six days. Under pressure to act, the government gave in to all demands of Raymon, and the factory reopened ending the struggle. What other unions through their traditional modes of protest and negotiation could not accomplish for years, an individual's selfless act of sacrifice had achieved!



## CHAPTER 3

### ***Satyagraha as a Gift of Life: Tracing Bourdieu's Theoretical Lineage***

The theoretical problematic of this dissertation is an investigation of the relation between personal greatness, charisma, and disinterested generosity.

#### ***Posing the 'Right' Question: A Detour in Methodology***

A theoretical problématique is a structural model, an instrument of thought that states a problem. It can also be the form in which problems are to be posed in a science at a historical juncture. Althusser and Balibar (1970) explicate this notion with remarkable precision:

...it [science] can only pose problems on the terrain and within the horizon of a definite theoretical structure, its problematic, which constitutes its absolute and definite condition of possibility, and hence the absolute determination of the forms in which problems must be posed, at any given moment in the science (Althusser and Balibar: 1970, 25).

Thus, my problem also (like all problems) can be posed only in a certain discipline at a certain point in time in its history. The very sighting of these objects – charisma, disinterestedness and generosity - in the data points to the visibility of these concepts and the invisibility of other concepts and relations between them.

A short excursus on the concept of theoretical problématique is interesting from the point of view of methodology because defining a theoretical problématique is a crucial step in the process of research.

Thus, the problematic even determines what the researcher (and the field) sees and misses. Defining the limits set by the theoretical problematic that sights certain problems and not others, Althusser and Balibar says that this opens the way to an understanding

...of the determination of the visible as visible, and conjointly, of the invisible as invisible, and of the organic link binding the invisible to the visible. Any object or

problem situated on the terrain and within the horizon, i.e., in the definite structured field of the theoretical problematic of a given theoretical discipline, is visible. We must take these words literally. The sighting is thus no longer the act of an individual subject, endowed with the faculty of 'vision' which he exercises either attentively or distractedly; the sighting is the act of its structural conditions, it is the relation of immanent reflection... between the field of the problematic and its objects and its problems. Vision then loses the religious privileges of divine reading: It is no more than a reflection of the immanent necessity that ties an object or problem to its conditions of existence, which lie in the conditions of its production. It is literally no longer the eye (the mind's eye) of a subject which sees what exists in the field defined by a theoretical problematic: it is this field itself which sees itself in the objects or problems it defines -- sighting being merely the necessary reflection of the field on its objects. (This no doubt explains a 'substitution' in the classical philosophies of vision, which are very embarrassed by having to say both that the light of vision comes from the eye, and that it comes from the object.) (Althusser and Balibar: 1970, 25).

The objective of quoting Althusser and Balibar was to evict the prenotion that it is the merit of the individual researcher which notices the object in its relations. Althusser and Balibar assert that it is the academic field and not the individual researcher which makes the sighting.

Bourdieu also echoes a similar position on problematics. For Bourdieu, a problematic is an instrument of thought along with "concepts, methods and techniques" (Bourdieu: 1990b, 5). It is a space of specific possibles inscribed in the field. The researcher acquires problematics only through experience of the discipline in the 'scientific city' (Bourdieu: 2000, 113). For instance, to relate two entities, consciousness and political agency in "consciousness as a necessary precursor to any political agency" (Lane: 2006, 65), is to pose a problematic. What professors mean when they narrow research, to asking the right question, a skill that is hard train, is to identify and work within the problematics of the discipline. What renders some concepts and relations as self-evident today which were unthinkable in the past is due to a problematic.

Thus the field is the site of a regime of rationality set up in the form of rational constraints, which, objectified and manifested in a particular structure of social exchange, encounter the immediate complicity of the dispositions that researchers have largely acquired through experience of the disciplines of the 'scientific city'. It is these dispositions which enable them to construct the space of the specific possibles inscribed in the field (the problematic) in the form of a

state of the argument, of the question, of knowledge, itself embodied in agents or institutions, remarkable figures, '-isms', etc. (Bourdieu: 2000, 113).

Not understanding the centrality of the theoretical *problématique* in the process of research, for a long time, I failed to come up with any research question, let alone, the “right” ones. No amount of empiricism yielded the questions also.

### ***Theoretical Lineages of our Problématique***

If it is indeed the field that sees itself in a *problématique*, at a particular point in time in its history, a useful exercise is to place the *problématique* in the history of the ideas of the discipline. Our specific *problématique* concerns not the whole repertoire of Bourdieu’s concepts but only a subset of it, namely, *charisma* and *disinterested generosity*. Therefore, I shall limit myself to the tracing of these concepts in the theoretical lineage of his writings.

In Bourdieu’s writings *charisma* and *disinterested generosity* are not explicitly linked. He does speak about *disinterestedness* centrally in his works dealing with the field of art.<sup>1</sup> He receives these two concepts from his predecessors, Max Weber and Marcel Mauss respectively. He critiques Weber’s notion of *charisma* and extends Mauss’ theory of gift exchange (which I find useful to understand notions of *disinterested generosity*).

Weber, writing on structures of domination, developed individual *charisma* as a distinct structure of authority opposed to bureaucratic and traditional authority. Mauss writing on gift has attempted a critique of individual *generosity*. Thus, Bourdieu receives these concepts from two dissimilar schools of thought.

### ***Weber on Charisma***

According to Weber, *charisma* is a gift of “grace”, a “capability”, and a “distinctive power” that is “endowed” naturally. He classifies *charisma* into “absolute grace” and grace acquired by “extraordinary” “good works”.

The term *charisma* will be applied to a certain quality of an individual

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<sup>1</sup> I try to extend his reading to the field of political activism through this work.

personality by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with super natural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers and qualities (Weber: 1978, 241) .

Once endowed, it lives inherently in the *substance of the person* or object until it is lost.

Although in *Sociology of Religion*, Weber is speaking about religious charisma or the capability of magicians, in *Economy and Society*, he says that the phenomenon of charisma is “universal” (Weber: 1978, 1112), i.e., it can manifest in “religious, ethical, artistic, scientific, political or other kind” (Weber: 1978, 1116). Thus charisma has also been used to understand extraordinariness and distinction in secular fields, which common sense names talent or merit, creative genius and greatness. Thus prophets like Jesus or Muhammad, warlords like Napoleon or Hitler, political leaders like Gandhi or Che Guevara, artists like Picasso, etc. are all considered naturally “gifted” individuals. I analyse Weber's understanding because of its close proximity to common sense notions of individual merit, greatness, and agency. “As a rule, charisma is a highly *individual quality*” (Weber: 1978, 1113, emphasis mine). It is this vesting of the extraordinary quality in the substance of the individual, seeing it as “personal capacity” that distinguishes Weberian theory of charisma.

According to Weber, charisma is demonstrated through some miracle and hence genuine - a personal capability, that is naturally endowed having revolutionary potential and engendered not in everyday situations but only in a situation of crisis. To repeat, charisma is an *essence*, in the *substance* of the *individual*.

The leader's action of fasting for fifty six days was deemed a miracle and the performer of the miracle was hailed charismatic by the mass media.

To think about greatness as an *essential quality*, a *human capacity*, shared in the *substance* of great individuals is possible only within paradigms of thinking called essentialism, substantivism and humanism. To think about greatness as an effect of qualities embodied by the great person is based on a notion of individual, which is a humanist idea. Therefore, the concept of charisma is based on essentialist, substantivist, and humanist notions about social reality. A brief critical digression on essentialism will set the base for Bourdieu's extensive critique of the Weberian notion

of charisma.

### ***A Critique of the Philosophical Position of Essentialism***

Essentialism is a position in ontology, which states that some properties of an object are essential to it. Essence of an object is the totality of all its essential properties. When some property is an essential property, it is necessarily true that the property is part of the constitution of the object. A necessary truth holds true in all possible worlds (that is, in all periods in history and all societies), whereas a contingent truth can be true in some worlds and not others. This means that if the object retains its essence, it retains its identity across history and in all societies.

A good elucidation of essentialism from Karl Popper's *Poverty of Historicism* is given below as a long quote. Here he sets up essentialism as the opposite of nominalism.

Every science uses terms which are called universal terms, such as 'energy', 'velocity', 'carbon', 'whiteness', 'evolution', 'justice', 'state', 'humanity'. These are distinct from the sort of terms which we call singular terms or individual concepts, like 'Alexander the Great', 'Halley's Comet', 'The First World War'. Such terms as these are proper names, labels attached by convention to the individual things denoted by them.

Over the nature of universal terms a long and sometimes bitter dispute raged between two parties. One held that universals differ from proper names only in being attached to the members of a set or class of single things, rather than to just one single thing. The universal term 'white', for instance, seemed to this party to be nothing but a label attached to a set of many different things--snowflakes, tablecloths, and swans, for instance. This is the doctrine of the nominalist party. It is opposed by a doctrine traditionally called 'realism,'-a somewhat misleading name, as seen by the fact that this 'realist' theory has also been called 'idealist'. I therefore propose to re-name this anti-nominalistic theory 'essentialism'. Essentialists deny that we first collect a group of single things and then label them 'white'; rather, they say, we call each single white thing 'white' on account of a certain intrinsic property that it shares with other white things, namely 'whiteness'. This property, denoted by the universal term, is regarded as an object which deserves investigation just as much as the individual things themselves. (The name 'realism' derives from the assertion that universal objects, for instance, whiteness, 'really' exist, over and above single things and sets or groups of single things.) Thus universal terms are held to denote universal objects, just as singular terms

denote individual things. These universal objects (called by Plato 'Forms' or 'Ideas') which are designated by the universal terms were also called 'essences'.

But essentialism not only believes in the existence of universals (i.e. of universal objects), it also stresses their importance for science. Singular objects, it points out, show many accidental features, features which are of no interest to science. To take an example from the social sciences: economics interests itself in money and credit, but it does not care about the particular shapes in which coins, banknotes or cheques appear. Science must strip away the accidental and penetrate to the essence of things. But the essence of anything is always something universal (Popper: 1957, 27).

The above example is about methodological essentialism in philosophy. The notion of essentialism is explicated in social sciences, especially in feminism, where it played a major role in constituting that branch of study. How do we translate and understand these arcane philosophical debates in terms of contemporary social science debates?

Diana Fuss, in *Essentially Speaking* (1989) gives examples from the social world for this philosophical position. "Essentialism is classically defined as a belief in true essence - that which is most irreducible, unchanging and therefore constitutive of a given person or thing." An essence is thus distinguished by its irreducibility, its immutability, and its significance in the definition of things. This understanding comes from Aristotle, states Fuss (Fuss: 1989, 2). Essences often are articulated using the term 'original', where they are thought to be found in their purest form. As an example, Fuss gives a notion of "original femininity" or "female essence". Essentialist feminist theory appealed to "a pure or original femininity, a female essence, outside the boundaries of the social and there by untainted (though perhaps repressed) by a patriarchal order" (Fuss: 1989, 2).

Similarly, Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble* (1999) refers to a hegemonic metaphysics of substance which locates phenomena like gender in the substance that each person is supposed to contain:

The sex which is not one, then, provides a point of departure for a criticism of hegemonic Western representation and of the metaphysics of substance that structures the very notion of the subject... What is the metaphysics of substance, and how does it inform thinking about the categories of sex? In the first instance, humanist conceptions of the subject tend to assume a substantive person who is

the bearer of various essential and nonessential attributes. A humanist feminist position might understand gender as an attribute of a person who is characterized essentially as a pregendered substance or “core,” called the person, denoting a universal capacity for reason, moral deliberation, or language (Butler: 1999, 14).

Outside philosophy, in common sense also, thought often takes the structure of essentialism. To believe that to be shy is part of being woman, is a widely held essentialist belief.

In Bourdieu's writings essentialism is referred to as substantialism, which is a mode of thinking that locates activities and preferences of individuals in the individuals' substance itself.

To say that a particular whiteness or woman-ness as eternal, timeless and definitive is a political position. Such essentialism started being viewed as also implicated in legitimizing social order. Essentialism in human sciences was a pattern of thinking that views human behaviour as deriving from causes which are in the realm of nature, often referred as human nature, or in the body, in which case, it is argued that they are best explained by the science of biology. Thus womanness, and femininity, (which can be servile behaviour in some particular cultures), is often located in the phenomenon of sex, in a bodily feature. Essentialists thus work with a category of nature that is conceived of as existing outside culture, society and history and thus not affected by social, cultural or historical changes – in short, given, immutable, inevitable, justified and necessary. So it is often believed that females should remain subordinate to males because the experience of subordination was part of the being woman. Likewise, differences in intelligence between races, sexes, classes, etc are also traced to body and biology and thus justified.

The sense of essentialism, which is not natural, has through a process of history become common – common sense. It forces us to see charisma in the leader's miraculous performances. The question – “what capacitates a person to perform such a noble, moral action of great generosity?” and the obvious answer of “charisma!” – both these tend to function in the same paradigm of liberal humanism. The precondition for such a question is a humanist perspective which looks at the leader as an *autonomous individual* with *self-knowledge* and *capacity for moral action*. It validates *intentionalism* and a notion of *freewill*. It further points to an “obsession



with *persons* and *person-hood*, with *beliefs*, *plans*, *goals*, and *intentions*”, which are all liberal humanist preoccupations.

### ***Bourdieu's Criticism of Weber's Notion of Charisma***

Bourdieu's criticism of charisma is pervasive, spanning all his works.

While, Weber understands charisma as a true/essentially existing personal quality, Bourdieu sees it as an ideology. Most of Bourdieu's work on charisma is on its role in the field of art and education. In the literary field, charismatic conceptions appears as idealistic and “essentialist theories based on the charismatic ideology of the writer as 'creator'” (Bourdieu: 1993, 4). Creativity of authors is a claim of charisma according to Bourdieu:

...the tradition of training in the humanities is thoroughly permeated with a humanistic, personalist, and spiritualist ideology, ... It is in fact a charismatic representation of the act of writing, described as "creation" and "mystery", and of the deciphering of a written text, seen as a "creative" reading involving the spiritual identification of the " I " of the reader with the " I " of the author, that is at the basis of the subjectivist praise of the arbitrary of sensations and feelings, a pretext for the complacent egoism of self-centred effusions, romantic mysticism, and existential pathos (Bourdieu: 1996, 17) .

As opposed to Weber, who understands charisma as a personal quality, for Bourdieu, charisma is an ideology. The charismatic ideology is prevalent in not just politics, but is an element in all fields.

In the charismatic conception, value derives from the person of the creator of the cultural good. “It is this ideology which directs attention to the apparent producer, the painter, writer or composer, in short, 'author'”. (Bourdieu: 1993, 76) Charismatic ideology has a major role in assigning value to cultural goods. “The 'charismatic' ideology which is the ultimate basis of belief in value of a work of art and which is therefore the basis of functioning of the field of production and circulation of cultural commodities, undoubtedly the main obstacle to a rigorous science of the production of the value of cultural goods” (Bourdieu: 1993, 76).

While all commodities derive their value from labour, as Marx's labour theory of

value posits, the charismatic conception of value does not comply with Marx's labour theory of value:

If it is all too obvious that the price of a picture is not determined by the sum of the production costs - the raw material and the painter's labour time - and if works of art provide a golden example for those who seek to refute Marx's labour theory of value (which anyway gives a special status to artistic production), this is perhaps because we wrongly define the sum of production or, which amounts to the same thing, the process production (Bourdieu: 1993, 76).

Another important critique against the ideology of charisma that he raises is that charisma should be seen as the working of the "field" (rather than the individual). The conception of value of the product produced by the charismatic individual/author, suppresses the field which is actually the force that authorizes the author to create. Charisma suppresses "the question of what authorizes the author, who creates the authority with which authors authorize" (Bourdieu: 1993, 76). For instance, the inspired artist probably is the last link in the creation of value of the painting, according to Bourdieu who describes that particular field thus:

The ideology of creation which make the author the first and last source of value of his work conceals the fact that the cultural businessman (art dealer, publisher, etc) is at one and the same time the person who exploits the labour of the 'creator' by trading in the 'sacred' and the person who, by putting it on the market, by exhibiting, publishing, or staging it, consecrates a product which he has 'discovered' and which would otherwise remain a mere natural resource; and the more consecrated he personally is, the more strongly he consecrates the work (Bourdieu: 1993, 76).

As Marcel Mauss has shown, the power of the magician has its source in collective belief in magic. Similarly, the source of charisma is nowhere else other than in the field. But notions of charisma place the source of charisma in the individual.

The common sense conception of charisma is as natural gift. The turning point in Bourdieu's writings is to view what believers in charisma take as natural gift, as a result of "imperceptible familiarization and an automatic transferring of aptitudes... a cultural heritage, which is transmitted by a process of unconscious training". When culture which is actually "artificial and artificially acquired" becomes "second nature", when no more is it an addendum, an external possession, but "a possession

turned into being", it looks like natural. Bourdieu calls such 'naturalized' realizations of cultural, habitus.

Bourdieu reconceptualises charisma as a result of consecrations by institutions like parties or elite schools or the artistic collective. His account of how the charismatic are produced in elite schools shows the process of social production of the individual charisma:

Far from being simply the last relic, within a rationalized system of education, of techniques used to awaken a novice's charismatic qualifications and put them to the test, as Weber would have it, hazing, which, as Durkheim notes, aims to "shape individuals for their new existence and assimilate them into their new environment," is merely the most visibly ritualized aspect of a vast consecration ritual. The ordinary cursus of "elite schools" exhibits all the characteristics of a charismatic initiation process that aims to instil the recognition of a social competence (while still inculcating elements of a technical competence), including retreat from the habitual environment, a break with all family ties (both of these through more or less strict boarding practices), entry into an educational community, the transformation of an entire way of life, asceticism, physical and mental exercise intended to awaken aptitude for rebirth, and repeated testing of the degree of charismatic qualification attained, all of these being so many trials leading gradually to the formal reception of the "approved" into the circle of the chosen and granting access to the "consecrated life" (Bourdieu: 1996, 109).

Charisma thus is also the excuse used by the consecrated to distinguish them from the obscure. If all value comes from labour, as Marx's labour theory of value states, then why should the leader's labour be more valuable than that of normal workers? Why should the leader's *Satyagraha* be unequal to that of the workers' starvation? Why should the leader's *Satyagraha* be unequal to the other worker who was fasting?<sup>2</sup> If *Satyagraha* is a work of art, the Satyagrahi, or the leader is like the consecrated artist and starving workers like the obscure artists or labourers. Such direct inequality is never explained, not even questioned, but buttressed with notions of charisma or mana.

The artist who puts her name on a ready-made article and produces an object whose market price is incommensurate with its cost of production is collectively

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<sup>2</sup> This thesis itself probably ignored him because he is less consecrated.

mandated to perform a magic act which would be nothing without the whole tradition leading up to her gesture, and without the universe of celebrants and believers who give it meaning and value in terms of that tradition. The source of 'creative' power, the ineffable mana or charisma celebrated by the tradition, need not be sought anywhere other than in the field, i.e. in the system of objective relations which constitute it, in the struggles of which it is the site and in the specific form of energy or capital which is generated there (Bourdieu:1993, 81).

Charisma reduces all factors of production to individual's innate capacity (talent, imagination etc), as if disciplined hard work is not necessary.

Nothing could be further, for example, from the charismatic vision of the writer's 'mission' than the image proposed by the successful writer previously cited: 'Writing is a job like any other. Talent and imagination are not enough. Above all, discipline is required. It's better to force oneself to write two pages a day than ten pages once a week. There is one essential condition for this: one has to be in shape, just as a sportsman has to be in shape to run a hundred metres or to play a football match (Bourdieu: 1993, 130).

Usually charisma is enveloped in a "language of celebration". In *Logic of Practice*, he proposes that his concept of Symbolic capital is nothing but Max Weber's notion of charisma. "Symbolic capital would be no more than another way of referring to what Max Weber called charisma," (Bourdieu: 1990b, 141). But reconceptualising charisma as capital permits Bourdieu to analyse how capital (and charisma) is accumulated. Symbolic capital is the result of countless crediting operations: "[W]hat makes the most intrinsic charm of its object, its charisma, is merely the product of the countless crediting operations through which agents attribute to the object the powers to which they submit" (Bourdieu: 1990b, 141).

The most important of Bourdieu's critique of charisma is on its incarnation as merit. What he calls as cultural capital is privilege that is inherited, which is actually a gift (akin to credit) from parents to children. Representing cultural capital as natural gifts or charisma of the gifted child is an ideology that masks the transfer of privilege or capital in cultural form. The "charismatic (or meritocratic) ideology, a particular form of the giving of 'gifts', which explains differential access to qualifications by reference to the inequality of innate 'gifts', thereby reinforcing the effect of the mechanisms that mask the relationship between qualifications obtained and inherited

cultural capital” (Bourdieu: 1996, 133). Charisma which pretends itself as a gift of nature is nothing but social privilege trying to legitimize itself.

The extreme case of merit is the scholastic achievements of “the child prodigy”:

One of the clearest attestations of the privilege that is granted to charismatic values, leading the educational institution to disregard strictly scholastic learning, is the cult of precocity, valued as an indicator of "gifts."... Through the near miraculous speed of her learning, the precocious student (the extreme example of which is "the child prodigy" or, as we would say today, "the exceptionally gifted child") demonstrates the extent of the natural gifts that enable her to avoid the slow work ordinary individuals must perform in order to learn. In fact, precocity is but one of the many academic retranslations of cultural privilege.”(Bourdieu: 1996, 19) It is charisma that appears in students' classification of their teachers, either as scholastic or charismatic: "Thus, the aspiration to a narrower more "scholastic" frame of learning alternates with the ideal and prestigious image of noble independent work, free of control and discipline. The expectation that a teacher [maitre] be prestigious, "brilliant," "not too bookish," lit with a "sacred fire," "energetic," and able to "make others love what he is presenting and to establish communication with his audience" (according to comments noted, among others, in interviews with students from Lille) coexists, often within a single individual, with a taste for the "useful," "well done," "well organized," "easy to follow," and "well documented" "lecture." While the two types of expectations carry altogether variable weights according to the categories and, more particularly, the social origins of the students, as well as discipline (as we saw in the case of the Concours General prize winners), charismatic values nonetheless always predominate to such a degree that all "scholastic" demands appear shameful and guilty (Bourdieu: 1996, 19).

The notion of Charisma comes from a tradition when production was carried out by independent artisans solely using their cultural capital. No more does production in any field depend on the charisma of the individual. Labour even in intellectual and political fields is carried out in collectives, using technical means, and employing social differentiation in production units. Thus Bourdieu views charisma as a characteristic of a mode of production of the past.

Intellectual work performed collectively, within technically and socially differentiated and often hierarchized units of production, and largely dependent on past or present collective work and costly instruments of production, can no longer

surround itself with the charismatic aura that used to cloak the traditional writer, artist, or philosopher, as small independent producers labouring solely with their cultural capital, apt to be perceived as a gift from heaven (Bourdieu: 1996, 337).

The "charismatic ideology of the irreplaceable individual"(Bourdieu: 1990b, 132) is opposed to that of the bureaucracy's interchangeable individuals. Although, the "charismatic ideology of the irreplaceable individual"(Bourdieu: 1990b, 132) is opposed to that of the bureaucracy's interchangeable individuals, institutions also depend on charisma of its office holders and demand excellence of the individual:

The most typically charismatic feats, which are almost always based on the more or less ostentatious renunciation of the most visible protections of the institution supreme resort of the affirmation of the excellence of the individual, including verbal acrobatics, hermetic allusions, disconcerting references, or unfathomably obscure passages - as well as the technical formulae that serve as support or substitute, such as concealing sources or using prepared jokes — owe their symbolic efficacy to the conditions of authority that the institution sets up for them. By authorizing those who aspire to the status of "master" to divert the authority of the office to their personal advantage, the institution assures itself of the most certain way to get the public servant [fonctionnaire] to put all his resources and enthusiasm toward fulfilling his office [fonction], while at the same time tending to redirect onto the contents of the communication the prestige (itself diverted) that the "irreplaceable" way of communicating these contents provides the interchangeable author (Bourdieu: 1996, 28).

In short, Bourdieu destroys what Weber conceives as charisma and reconceptualises it as symbolic capital. Charisma is an invitation to personalism. We shall see more of it in the chapter dedicated to his social theory. Having seen Bourdieu demolish personalism in his attack on charisma, we have to ask if the individual is the real social actor. Or is it a 'polite fiction' of the cult of the individual<sup>3</sup>, to mask the real social forces, the social institutional mechanisms?

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<sup>3</sup> The hero is the charismatic individual. And heroism, an innate quality called charisma. It is common sense to think of charismatic leaders as specially elect people with super human capabilities or qualities. In fact success in all fields is widely thought to be as due to individual qualities. A belief in individual capacities (for love, moral action, self-knowledge, etc.) is a humanist ethic.

Humanism created the notion of individual that we encounter today. Dignity is a crucial value in humanism. It saluted "human freedom and dignity" as opposed to "ignorance, tyranny and superstition". It is a radical rejection of all that is transcendental. Humanism in Marx is in

We look at the leader's most agential action, the act of *Satyagraha* from the point of view of a sacrifice, as self-sacrifice. It might be ironic to use a text which deals with religious sacrifice to understand secular self sacrifice. But, it is quite pertinent as, underlying every religious rite is the social institution. Also, the religious undertones of consecration and charisma give life to the leader's act. Thus, even "secular rites" closely parallel religious counterparts.

### ***Marcel Mauss' Theory of Sacrifice and Gift***

If sacrifice is the production of the sacred, then is there a relation between the performance of the *Satyagraha* or sacrifice and the leader's greatness? Where does greatness of the leader who performs the *Satyagraha* arise from? It arises from two important factors: firstly, from the fact that he shows his preparedness to give up his life for the cause of the public, and secondly, he does it with no apparent desire for any reward, as an entirely self-less act. The leader's act appears truly noble in contrast to the selfish act of the factory owner, who was deliberately imposing starvation on the workers, holding them as ransom as part of a strategy in the negotiation with the communist government. The existing trade union leaders who collude with the owner appear more corrupt than the owner himself because of the betrayal of their peers.

Personal sacrifices are considered supreme in a world view where the individual life is sacred. Thus, the greatness the leader acquires is also because of the fact that the personal nature of the sacrifice he makes - a gift of his own life. Thus, I believe that it is this personal nature of his sacrifice and the apparently disinterested and gratuitous nature of his action that distinguishes him and his act from other trade unions, the employer and their acts.

The performance of this selfless act extends to the whole life of the leader. The "simple" way in which he lives his whole life, the small room in which he sleeps located in a crowded bazaar area, the doors of this small place which are constantly open flooding the place with visiting activists, the collapsing of his personal dwelling place with the party office where one can see printed pamphlets kept for distribution,

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conceptualizing man as not rooted in anything beyond himself." [t]o be radical is to grasp things by the root. But for man the root is man himself" (Marx: 1970, 137). For an introduction to history of humanism see Davies (1997).

the almost total erasure of him as a family man because one doesn't find any photographs of his family displayed on the walls of this place but prominently displayed are the communist icons like Marx and Stalin, garlanded with flowers – all these serves to build his saintly, monk image of the committed political activist. All these daily performances become meaningful only in the context of years of committed political activism in the Communist Party and the Naxal movement. The prison sentence and his giving away of his meagre savings<sup>4</sup> are of course central points in the building up of this saintly image.

The act of *Satyagraha* plays out this whole life of selfless disinterestedness in a concentrated form.<sup>5</sup> In fact, the moment of Chavoor *Satyagraha* also epitomizes another poignant point – the suffering and resistance of the workers. If religious rites are indeed concentrated forms in which values of a society are rehearsed, the moment of *Satyagraha* plays this out in a religious form. The body of the leader becomes the sacrificial platform where the suffering of the people and his own life are made sacred, consecrated.

This gets us to a point where we need to examine the theoretical lineage of sacrifice – the word used in a religious sense.

The word sacrifice usually refers to a rite. Henry Hubert and Marcel Mauss have studied the rite of sacrifice. In the process, they unearthed the social institution that underlies religious rite. Rites are interesting to students of social sciences only as long as the social institutions underlying such rites are unearthed.

We shall look at some works that Mauss refers to that explore the nature of sacrifice before proceeding to his own ideas.

Robertson Smith explained sacrifice using totemism. The totem was the god. It was related to the devotee by blood and so they both shared the same life. The act of

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<sup>4</sup> He relinquishes his gratuity after serving as a factory worker for around twenty three years in 1968 to buy arms for a Naxal action in Kerala (The Union Leader, Personal Interview, Calicut, 10 December 2009).

<sup>5</sup> The researcher wanted to write the biography of the leader in the beginning of his research career. The leader discouraged such an apparent and obviously hagiographic move and advices him to write about Chavoor struggle instead. (The Union Leader, Personal Interview, Calicut, 10 December 2009)



sacrifice, like the 'blood covenant' or the 'common meal' re-established the unity of their flesh and blood. Human sacrifice establishes direct exchange of blood between the god and the devotees (Hubert and Mauss: 1981, 2-4). By eating the totem as a group, they assimilated the totem and were assimilated to it. According to him, one function of sacrifice was expiation. Thus, Robertson Smith posited that the social institution of sacrifice, strengthened cohesion of community. The principle of sharing which underlay the practice of sharing of substance (which followed the sacrifice) establishing a feeling of oneness. It healed fissions. What is significant for us is that in the mechanics of sacrifice, sharing is crucial for cohesion. Sharing of substance, here the suffering acted out in the body of the leader, during sacrifice creates a feeling of oneness and thus integrates the community; it expels undesirable factors and thus expiates and cleanses the group.<sup>6</sup>

J. C. Heesterman (1993) sees sacrifice as a practical means to redistribute material goods needed to maintain life. He argues that sacrifice works with a notion of person that is interesting. The person is strictly bounded. But he also depends on others for obtaining and exploiting the sources of life. "People are as it were permeated by the exchanges with the others on whom they depend for survival... On his own, no one can survive let alone perpetuate himself through procreation."(Heesterman: 1993, 39) The sacrificial rite emphasizes the interdependencies between the person and the group. It maximizes "mutual involvement". It also extricates and separates identities. The person is not completely submerged in relations, says Heesterman. Thus, sacrificial institution redraws notions of person. It merges and separates identities at once.

Frazer was the one who explained sacrifice of gods sensibly. Such a sacrifice was played as a drama in which the god himself played the role of the victim and scapegoat and was killed and eaten. It was believed that the sacrificed god would take away sickness, death and sin with him. Here, sacrifice functioned to expel and expiate

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<sup>6</sup> During the euphoric high point of struggle, the whole Chavoor town united in support of the fasting leaders and the till then divided unions were forced to come together against the leader's union. In large numbers, the other unions lost their following. The fragmented Naxalite factions were also forced into a difficult, yet actual collaboration. (Krishnan, phone interview, Calicut, 07 January 2010)

(Hubert and Mauss: 1981, 5).<sup>7</sup>

Hubert and Mauss' main contribution was in explicating the function of sacrifice which they thought was communication between the sacred and profane. One feature that is common among all rites of sacrifice around the world is that it is communicative. It establishes a strong relation of communication between realms which are otherwise disconnected. It is a technique that can pierce through the dualism of the profane and the sacred uniting them. But this communication takes the form of pure practice without theory.

The other important feature of sacrifice is that, the victim itself passes from the profane to the sacred realm. Thus, sacrifice is a consecration (Hubert and Mauss: 1981, 9-10). He defines sacrifice as “a religious act which, through the consecration of a victim, modifies the condition of the moral person who accomplishes it or that of certain objects with which he is concerned” (Hubert and Mauss: 1981, 13). A sacrifice in which the personality of the sacrificer is directly affected by the sacrifice is a “personal sacrifice” (Hubert and Mauss: 1981, 13). Such explanations of sacrifice simply lay out the rules of functioning of the system without explaining the mechanics of how it happens. This is impossible because Mauss does not escape the essentialism of religious explanations.

### ***Sacrifice as Gift***

It was Tylor who stated that sacrifice is a kind of gift. He saw it as a gift that the primitive man made to his gods originally. As the gods grew greater and more removed, the act developed into the form of a rite. The rite was supposed to make the object spiritual. The gift gave the sacrificer rights over the god (Hubert and Mauss: 1981, 2). What is interesting to us is that, firstly, the social institution of sacrifice is understood by an even more fundamental social institution called gift and secondly, that even Tylor recognizes that gifts served a function of established relations of obligation between the recipient and the donor of the gift. Thus, the religious rite of sacrifice was understood as a gift to a powerful force which gives the sacrificer rights and obligates the force to return favours;

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<sup>7</sup> The connection with the performance of the modern political struggle need not be stressed in this case.

Heesterman compares sacrifice to potlatch, where tribal nobles compete to gift more and more to other clans for the sake of prestige. He adds that the site of sacrifice is to be viewed as the battle ground on which parties engage in the contest of life and death. The warrior of Mahabharata (which Mauss calls "the story of gigantic potlatch") works with the idea of self-sacrifice, which is implied in all sacrifices. The warrior hopes to win new life. Here sacrifice does appear as a game of competitive destruction for sake of honour, akin to potlatch. A comparison between sacrifice of the leader and potlatch is useful (Heesterman: 1993, 39).

The gratuitous disinterested nature of gift is a European notion, again based on the notion of an individual's spontaneous expression of innate love. In modern societies, people use gifts when they want to express personal affection. Gift usually refers to things voluntarily given, freely offered with no expectation of return, and hence is considered as one of the most conspicuous ways to express innate love. Something that is given mechanically, or offered under compulsion from norms that impose it, or given with a rational calculation in mind, as part of a plan, *especially* coveting a return, does not fit the European notion of gift.<sup>8</sup>

As sacrifice is a specific case of gift, a much more pervasive and fundamental form of social exchange, it is important to review Mauss' work on Gift.

In *The Gift*, Mauss demonstrates that the notion of the individual is a 'polite fiction' and social institutions are the real actors. This means that we need to review the sacrifice the leader makes under the light of Mauss' theory of gift.

In *The Gift*, Mauss demonstrates that gifts in archaic societies are not freely given articles with no expectation of reciprocate gifts. They are compelled exchanges between groups. They are highly interested exchanges. This is the second reason why a review of Mauss' theory of Gift is pertinent to rethink the leader's apparent act of gift of life - sacrifice. This gives us a clue to perhaps deconstruct even modern gifting practices as interested exchanges which disguise themselves as disinterested.

So, how do we benefit from Hubert and Mauss' description and analysis of sacrifice? They see religious rites as concentrated forms in which values of a society are

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<sup>8</sup> What better gift than the gift of one's whole life, lived for others fits the notion of this modern idea? Political activist draws his strength also from selfless acts of gifting.

rehearsed. The leader's acts which parallel religious rites of sacrifice held such emotional value also due to the form it took. The parallels between sacrificial acts in fields other than religion (like politics) can be easily drawn from a description of religious sacrifice. As far as the claim that sacrifice increases group cohesion because of the rite of sharing of substance, the leader does not share any substance like food, with the workers. Instead he shares abstention from food. Fasting and hunger is what he shares with the workers. Like food, sharing of hunger too can unite, as evinced in the ritual fasts around the world among many religions. His hunger strike was a symbol of his sharing of the starvation the workers were suffering. The affirmation that the leader shall not eat until the workers too have something to eat, sent the message that the leader shall stand with the workers in good and bad. The leader placed himself at total risk, when the workers were at risk. Sacrificial suffering is embodied suffering. The employment crisis had forced workers into all kinds of suffering including bodily suffering of starvation. The leader's choice of mode of protest was such that he would appear in stark contrast with the CPM and CITU leaders who travelled around in cars making nothing more than speeches in solidarity<sup>9</sup>. Declaring solidarity through sharing of suffering that is borne through the body<sup>10</sup>, appeared to the workers as far more sincere than mental or even financial support.

As the reviews suggest, expulsion of undesirable factors is often an aim of the sacrificial rite. The theme of exchanging one's life for some good like purity which is then offered as gift to others reappears in myths. The self sacrifice of Jesus was supposed take away sins of believers. There is some mimicking of this theme of expulsion in the leader's practice too. But this is much more subtle and symbolic. The leader once expressed his hope that he dies in the fast, thus leading to a resolution of

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<sup>9</sup> The communist party did send its ministers and trade union leaders to speak in solidarity at Chavoor. Tired of such speeches with no consequence, a small section of workers staged a black flag demonstration in front of a minister to insult her. The government retaliated with a baton-charge (*Calicut Times*, 17-12-1987).

<sup>10</sup> While the CITU and CPM tried to communicate in words, the leader's sacrifice communicated without words. The sacrificial institution has a communicative function which is sub-conscious. The leader's sacrifice communicated without words, and is immediately understood by the workers. This ability of immediate comprehension, to communicate without words, from body to body, through the hexis, influencing the perceptions of the audience and relying on their tastes, pleasing or displeasing without explication, is what Bourdieu considers as the functioning of habitus (Bourdieu: 1977, 1-2). The concept of habitus will be discussed in the chapter on social theory of Pierre Bourdieu.

the crisis. He hoped that his death would carry away with him, all the ills and crisis of the factory. It was also represented as an expiatory act to make up with the powers, the factory owner and the government. Thus the notion of expiation and expulsion is very much part of his act. At another level, the leader's struggle was supposed to expel the corruption in trade unions and purify workers' movements. There is surely a reliance on tropes like this which are part of the repertoire of the social institution of sacrifice.

What is the exact mechanics by which the act of *Satyagraha* propels the leader to great renown and fame? The rite of *Satyagraha* sacralises the victim, says Hubert and Mauss. Does the victim become sacred through the process of sacrifice or does it have to be sacred in order to be admitted to the sacrificial rite? Was all of the leader's charisma attained through the process of *Satyagraha*? It seems not. Surely the *Satyagraha* won him immense respect among the community. But it was his already charismatic figure that qualifies him to be chosen as the leader. Just like all animals are not fit to be sacrificial victims, not all persons are fit to perform a *Satyagraha*. In other words, everyone's *Satyagraha* is not at par with that of others. Had it been so, the workers starvation and suffering also would qualify to be equivalent to *Satyagraha*. But their starvation was just that, imposed suffering. Suffering by itself, especially when borne by commoners does not constitute a *Satyagraha*. Only when the 'right' people suffer, that too *willingly, for others*, properly following the *rites* of *Satyagraha*, i.e. enacted in public, giving due attention to the performative rhetorical aspects does the act become the rite, and suffering takes the meaning it has in *Satyagraha*, that of sacrifice. In other words, there is a grammar to the rite which produces the meaning the rite has. Unless this grammar is followed, the effect is not produced. Gandhi has established the model of *Satyagraha*. In short, *Satyagraha* has many similarities with the sacrificial rite, the most important commonality being, to be effective both have to be performed by an elect few, properly following the code of the rite. It is not open universally. We know that the *Satyagraha* propels the leader into fame and recognition. But the descriptions of sacrifice cannot enlighten the exact mechanics of how renown comes on those who labour for the public. There is a veil of essentialist religious notions that prevents us from seeing the social forces that work underneath them. We have a much better explanation of this in Bourdieu using the notion of symbolic capital.

Individuals cannot express solidarity or claim leadership by any random act. They have to communicate with others their desire, and communication as in any language is possible only when a grammar is followed. Such a grammar is what makes the audience understand the actions of the performer. There are social institutions in place for individuals to express their solidarity or to claim leadership. Individuals are allotted roles within institutions which they play. Sacrifice provides the structure and framework in which a role of that of sacrificer is allocated. All the individual does and has to do is to play the role. The individual cannot invent roles. Even the most charismatic agential individual works through playing roles in social institutions which are not his creations. What the leader was doing was following the grammar of the social institution of sacrifice when to communicate with his group.

Thus understanding the leader's act of *Satyagraha* as deriving its force from compliance to the grammar of the well established social institution of sacrifice, as opposed to an invented idea of an individual genius is a more sociological way to understand this act.

To summarise, sacrifice is a social institution. It is based on the more fundamental social institution of gift exchange. Performance of sacrifice bestows rights on the sacrificer, and obligates the community to return favours. A principle of sharing underlies the act of sacrifice. It is this principle of sharing that creates a feeling of oneness and thus integrates the community. The aim of the act is to expel undesirable factors and thus expiate and cleanse a group. *Satyagraha* has many similarities with the sacrificial rite. The most important commonality is that both have to be performed by a chosen few, properly following the code of the rite to be effective. Sacrificial rite emphasizes the interdependencies between the person and the group. *Satyagraha* derives its force from compliance to the grammar of the well established social institution of sacrifice, as opposed to an invented idea of an individual genius. Yet the individual is not totally interchangeable. We shall be able to explain why only some can play the game of sacrifice when we review Bourdieu's works on capital.

### ***Critique of Disinterested Generous Giving in the Gift***

With rise of mercantilism and rationalism in history, a classification of most human action as self-interested arose. Along with it arose its binary opposite – the

disinterested act. There is a tendency to classify all acts using such a binary in order to understand them. Gainful actions are easily understood. Gratuitous actions are harder to rationalize. The leader's act surely does not appear to be self-interested. But the opposite question can also be asked: could the leader have risked his life for no gain in sight? Could he have acted according to some plan, in expectation of some utility? Thus could utility be the rationale for his action? If this is true, then one should attempt to find the gain the leader was trying to make by performing the sacrifice. Yet, the question arises as to what does one gain by sacrificing or gifting one's life, since one does not prevail to enjoy the gains? This puzzle makes sacrifices an irrational act from a point of view of gainfully acting agents. If we abandon the model of action that understands all actions as seeking some utility, some gain, and all actors as gainfully acting agents, then how do we rationalize the leader's act? Could the leader be truly irrational, i.e., in ways that social science cannot understand, at the face of which it can only resign? Or do we need to apply the model of gift as a gratuitous and generous act, expecting nothing in return, to understand his act? These questions arose when I read the gift in an attempt to rationalize the leader's act.

The school of thought that sees agents as "individual human organisms seeking to satisfy their wants" (Callinicos: 1987, 129) is called utilitarianism. Utilitarianism is not just an ethical theory; it is also an account of human action. Scholastic deductions of abstract economics are based on notions of a "Primitive Economic Man", who is thought to act according to principles of utility, self-interest and rationality. The gift is a critique of utilitarian conception of the human being as utility driven, self-interested and rational.

Even before Mauss, Malinowski had begun a critique of utilitarianism... The self is motivated by material gains, or interest. In other words utilitarianism posits that self-interest is what drives all human action. It also posits that gains can be made most efficiently only if all actions are ordered rationally with profit and efficiency as priorities. Thus, utilitarianism celebrates a rationalistic conception of self-interest. Utilitarian man is thought to be "prompted in all his actions by a rationalistic conception of self-interest, and achieving his aims directly and with the minimum of effort" (Malinowski: 1978, 47). What drives his actions are "pure economic motives of enlightened self-interest" (Malinowski: 1978, 47). Even at the bottom of Marx's

"materialistic conception of history lies a somewhat analogous idea of a human being, who, in everything he devises and pursues, has nothing but his material advantage of a purely utilitarian type at heart" (Malinowski: 1978, 406).

Yet, Malinowski finds that the Trobriander is not a utilitarian. He "works prompted by motives of a highly complex, social and traditional nature, and towards aims which are certainly not directed towards the satisfaction of present wants, or to the direct achievement of utilitarian purposes" (Malinowski: 1978, 46).

Work is not carried out on the principle of the least effort. On the contrary, much time and energy is spent on *wholly unnecessary effort*, that is, from a utilitarian point of view. Again, work and effort, instead of being merely a *means to an end*, are, in a way *an end in themselves*. A good garden worker in the Trobriands *derives a direct prestige* from the amount of labour he can do, and the size of garden he can till. The title *tokwaybagula*, which means "good" or "efficient gardener," is bestowed with discrimination, and borne with pride (Malinowski: 1978, 46).

The idea of *personal benefits* or individual making gains is totally absurd among Trobriands.

...almost all the fruits of his work, and certainly any surplus which he can achieve by extra effort, goes not to the man himself, but to his relatives-in-law... about three quarters of a man's crops go partly as tribute to the chief, partly as his due to his sister's (or mother's) husband and family... But although he thus derives practically no personal benefit in the utilitarian sense from his harvest, the gardener receives much praise and renown from its size and quality, and that in a direct and circumstantial manner (Malinowski: 1978, 47).

The idea of gain itself is suspect among Trobriands. Unlike what economists thought, what drives exchange is not mutual utility.

And it is important to realise that in almost all forms of exchange in the Trobriands, there is not even a trace of gain, nor is there any reason for looking at it from the purely utilitarian and economic standpoint, since *there is no enhancement of mutual utility through the exchange*. Thus, it is quite a usual thing in the Trobriands for a type of transaction to take place in which A gives twenty baskets of yams to B, receiving for it a small polished blade, only to have the whole transaction reversed in a few weeks' time. Again, at a certain stage of



mortuary ritual, a present of valuables is given, and on the same day later on, the identical articles are returned to the giver (Malinowski: 1978, 134, emphasis mine).

What might drive the Trobriand man may be an aesthetic disposition or a desire for prestige. "The Trobriander works in a roundabout way, to a large extent for the sake of the work itself, and puts a great deal of aesthetic polish on the arrangement and general appearance of his garden. He is not guided primarily by the desire to satisfy his wants, but by a very complex set of traditional forces, duties and obligations, beliefs in magic, social ambitions and vanities. He wants, if he is a man, to achieve social distinction as a good gardener and a good worker in general" (Malinowski: 1978, 47).

For an action to fit the utilitarian model, it has to fit the model of rationality. "Action is rational in so far as it pursues ends possible within the conditions of the situation..." (Parsons: 1949, 58). For action to be rational, ends have to be clear. And ends should be sought using means "best adapted to the end" (Parsons: 1949, 58). Also the reasons for which the actor thinks that the means is best should be "understandable and verifiable by positive empirical science" (Parsons: 1949, 58). Modern capitalism inherits a utilitarian ethics (Goodman: 1999, 373). As the native Trobriand is not acting according to utilitarian reason, he was understood as irrational by visitors prior to Malinowski. Much of Malinowski's writings were to show the reason behind actions of native Trobriands.

We reviewed some literature on utilitarian critiques in order to contrast the leader's action against the utilitarian model of human action by which economists think human beings act. The factory owner's actions probably fit the utilitarian model of action.

But the leader's act does not fit the utilitarian model of human action. Mauss' notion of gift is much more appropriate to understand the leader's action. Mauss wrote *The Gift* as a critique of utilitarianism. The fundamental argument may be put thus: The kind of rationalism that has turned mankind into an economic animal is a recent phenomenon. "Before the rise of *homo economics*, there was another and quite different type of human being whose ethos did not adhere to the calculating reason of

Adam Smith” (Goodman: 1999, 373). So the Trobriand is not irrational in any absolute terms. It is only in relation to this calculating *homo economics*, and his model of utilitarian action, that the Trobriand become ‘primitive’ and irrational. The gift, which does not fit utilitarian logic, is the ‘primitive’s ‘irrational’ way of exchange.

The gift is an archaic form of contract. It is based on the total service. It establishes obligations to give, to receive, and to reciprocate. Such total services formed the foundations upon which law and economics once rested even in Europe (Goodman: 1999, 373). Utilitarianism is built on humanism and individual pursuit of interest. Mauss’ basic argument is that the rational economic man is not yet a reality. It lies ahead though. And the brutish pursuit of individual ends is harmful even for the individual. Because the individual is not what he thinks is – ‘individual’; he is part of the general and social. A significant measure of argument is expended in criticising economism, and individualism. Levi-Strauss has summarised Mauss’ notion of gift thus:

Mauss sought to show that exchange in primitive societies consists not so much in economic transactions as in reciprocal gifts, that these reciprocal gifts have a far more important function in these societies than in our own, and that this primitive form of exchange is not merely nor essentially of an economic nature but is what he aptly calls "a total social fact," that is, an event which has a significance that is at once social and religious, magic and economic, utilitarian and sentimental, juridical and moral ( Levi-Strauss: 1969, 53).

The fact that Gift is not an economic transaction is repeated by Radcliffe Brown too. “The purpose that it did serve was a moral one. The object of exchange was to produce a friendly feeling between the two persons concerned” (Radcliffe Brown quoted in Levi-Strauss: 1969, 55).

Utilitarian economists had claimed that the force that circulates things in an economy was their utility. Interest or "individual search after what was useful" is what motivates all human action and not just economic action. Their argument was that primitive (unenlightened) economies do not fit the utilitarian model because they don’t produce a surplus and also because ‘primitives’ are ‘irrational’. Rational human action is gainful action that aims utility. Mauss goes on to show that "It is indeed

something other than utility that circulates in societies of all kinds, most of which are already fairly enlightened" (Mauss: 1990, 92). What motivates exchange of gifts is not just commercial interest. One may suspect that these so called primitive societies do not have a notion of economic value at all. Mauss says that the notion of economic value functions in primitive societies also (Mauss: 1990, 92). "Very large surpluses, speaking in absolute terms, are amassed. They are often expended to no avail, with comparatively enormous luxury, which is in no way commercial." (Mauss: 1990, 92) What is interesting is that production of economic value is not for material gains, but for religious reasons. "The various economic activities, for example the market, are suffused with rituals and myths. They retain a ceremonial character that is obligatory and effective. They are full of rituals and rights" (Mauss: 1990, 92). It is not that people of such societies are superstitious and irrational (not enlightened). Mauss says that people of these societies are much more composed than stock exchange traders and much more excited to be called materialistic. Individual self-interest is not what drives the archaic economy. Thus we can see Mauss working to establish the Durkheimian thesis that economy can indeed be a product of religion in many societies.

If the primitive man's actions are not driven by self-interest, could it be possible that the primitive man is a noble, carrying out all his acts in total disinterest? There are some very established binary opposites which have been established by preceding thinkers. As we have already seen, Malinowski's description of the Trobriands actually point out the quality of disinterest in natives. Accordingly, Trobriands spend much of their efforts in aesthetic aspects of the work, and work is not purely means to an end, but an end in itself. Having shown that individual self-interest is not what drives the archaic economy, Mauss forwards his second argument, that in archaic societies economic acts are neither performed in total disinterest. Mauss' idea is to criticise such oppositions like "liberty and obligation", "liberality, generosity, and luxury, as against savings, interest, and utility" (Mauss: 1990, 93). It was Malinowski who had constructed the binary opposite of the pure gift (total disinterest) against the pure barter (total self-interest). But according to Mauss, the Trobriands have an economy that is neither "free, purely gratuitous rendering of total services, nor that of production and exchange purely interested in what is useful" (Mauss: 1990, 93). Thus, the gifts the husband gives to wife are pure gifts. But, it is also a kind of salary

for sexual services.

If gifting is neither a purely selfish act nor a purely self-less act, then, what is it? Mauss' argument is that gifts are neither freely given nor are they disinterested. "All in all, just as these gifts are not freely given, they are also not really disinterested. They already represent for the most part total counter-services, not only made with a view to paying for services or things, but also to maintaining a profitable alliance, one that cannot be rejected" (Mauss: 1990, 94). People gift others because they want to retain profitable alliances. Gifts are at once "mystical and practical", Gift "ties clans together and at the same time divides them that divides their labour, and at the same time constrains them to carry out exchange" (Mauss: 1990, 94). Gift compensate labour. Gifts maintain profitable relations. Gift exchange is division of labour itself.

Then what is it that gifts transact? Gifts transact *honour*. According to Mauss, gifting something that cannot be returned is like offering a debt that cannot be repaid. It is a certain way to dominate. Behind expressions of greatness is egoism. Gifting brings great renown. For Mauss, all acts of gifting necessarily establish hierarchies which are relations of domination. Potlatch, where chiefs compete with each other to destroy wealth, is the exemplar of such a gift.

Even pure destruction of wealth does not signify that complete detachment that one might believe to find in it. Even these acts of greatness are not without egoism. The purely sumptuary form of consumption (which is almost always exaggerated and often purely destructive), in which considerable amounts of goods that have taken a long time to amass are suddenly given away or even destroyed, particularly in the case of the potlatch, give such institutions the appearance of representing purely lavish expenditure and childish prodigality. In effect, and in reality, not only are useful things given away and rich food consumed to excess, but one even destroys for the pleasure of destroying... But the reason for these gifts and frenetic acts of wealth consumption is in no way disinterested, particularly in societies that practise the potlatch. Between chiefs and their vassals, between vassals and their tenants, through such gifts a hierarchy is established. To give is to show one's superiority, to be more, to be higher in rank, magister. To accept without giving in return, or without giving more back, is to become client and servant, to become small, to fall lower (minister)" (Mauss: 1990, 95, emphasis mine).

Thus the gift establishes relations of domination. Even in the so called modern

societies, the objective of amassing riches beyond a limit is for the sake of prestige and the power prestige bestows.

Is this not a good point to argue that the real economy is that of honour? In many societies, the value is not wealth primarily. What is sought after is beauty, luck, strength, wealth etc. If a gift helps retain prestige and rank, and even in capitalist societies, wealth, after a limit is purely for the sake of prestige, and the worth of wealth is in permitting us to lord our fellow men, then does not an *economy of honour* underlie an economy of wealth?

Later, the chief gives proof of his mana by redistributing what he has just received to his vassals and relations. He sustains his rank among the chiefs by giving back bracelets for necklaces, hospitality for visits, etc. In this case riches are from every viewpoint as much a means of retaining prestige as something useful. Yet are we sure that it is any different in our own society, and that even with us riches are not above all a means of lording it over our fellow men? (Mauss: 1990, 96)

Even people from disinterested economies have an interest. They repay with interest not to compensate the donor for the loss due to deferred consumption, but to humiliate the donor. They accumulate so that they spend it later on their fellows to obligate them and turn them into their vassals. In other words gifts allow them to dominate others in an economy of honour.

If some equivalent reason animates the Trobriand or American Indian chiefs, the Andaman clans, etc., or once motivated generous Hindus, and Germanic or Celtic nobles, as regards their gifts and expenditure, it is not the cold reasoning of the merchant, the banker, and the capitalist. In those civilizations they are concerned with their own interest, but in a different way from our own age. They hoard, but in order to spend, to place under an obligation, to have their own 'liege men'. On the other hand, they carry on exchange, but it is above all in luxury articles, ornaments or clothes, or things that are consumed immediately, as at feasts. They repay with interest, but this is in order to humiliate the person initially making the gift or exchange, and not only to recompense him for loss caused to him by 'deferred consumption'. There is self-interest, but this self-interest is only analogous to what allegedly sways us (Mauss: 1990, 96-97).

What exists in the world is a gradation of economic systems, which at one extreme has a relatively amorphous and disinterested economic system, and on the other end

individualistic and purely self-interested economy of European societies. Most of them are not governed by economic rationalism. “In ancient systems of morality of the most epicurean kind it is the good and pleasurable that is sought after and not material utility.” (Mauss: 1990, 97) The notion of interest is a historically recent invention. “The very word ‘interest’ is itself recent, originally an accounting technique: the Latin word interest was written on account books against the sums of interest that had to be collected.” (Mauss: 1990, 97) The conditions of possibility of profit and the individual are rationalism and mercantilism. “The victory of rationalism and mercantilism was needed before the notions of profit and the individual, raised to the level of principles, were introduced. One can almost date—since Mandeville’s *The Fable of the Bees*—the triumph of the notion of individual interest” (Mauss: 1990, 97).

His basic argument is that the rational economic man is not yet a reality. It lies ahead though. And the brutish pursuit of individual ends is harmful even for the individual. Because the individual is not what he thinks is: individual. He is part of the general and social.

It is our western societies who have recently made man an ‘economic animal’. But we are not yet all creatures of this genus. Among the masses and the elites in our society purely irrational expenditure is commonly practised. It is still characteristic of a few of the fossilized remnants of our aristocracy. *Homo oeconomicus* is not behind us, but lies ahead, as does the man of morality and duty, the man of science and reason. For a very long time man was something different, and he has not been a machine for very long, made complicated by a calculating machine (Mauss: 1990, 98).

### ***Is the Leader's Sacrifice Actually Disinterested?***

How useful was our review of Malinowski and Mauss to understand the leader's act? Firstly, our review constructed two kinds of actions, the utilitarian action favoured by neo-classical economists to understand all kinds of human actions, and then the action of gifting. In Malinowski's account, gifting is the opposite of utilitarian action. Mauss' account is more complex. For him, gifting is not a purely self-interested act and thus opposed to cold icy calculating acts of utilitarianism. But neither is gifting a totally disinterested mystical act. Gifting is in between. It is mystical and practical at once. Mauss succeeds in showing that in reality, that no body is a utilitarian. Even

the most utilitarian individual has not become a homo oeconomicus. The leader's act is not aimed at amassing some material benefit. Nor is it the most rationally calculated act if at all it has such aims. Even the leader does not claim so. His claim is the opposite, that it is the most disinterested and generous act. So it should be to analyse this claim that we should employ our readings of Mauss.

It was after I read about the potlatch of chiefs that I was struck by the parallels between sacrifice and potlatch. The leader's sacrifice was not just destruction but competitive destruction, because he was surely in competition with other trade unions to claim leadership. *Satyagraha* can be seen as a symbol of exaggerated generosity, an attempt to kick start a potlatch, of compulsive participation in a competition for honour, a very interested competition in which participants cared for success and failures. And potlatches are driven by concerns of prestige and honour. Thus, to see the leader's act as a simple act of disinterestedness and innocent generosity would be to miss the aspect of race for prestige and honour. Even if it is seen as a simple gift and not a potlatch, after Mauss, we know that there is no pure gift. Gifts always expect to be reciprocated. They expect a return. This need not be material gains, but can be gains in honour and prestige. There is no pure gift like there is no purely utilitarian economic act. The dualism between interest and disinterest does not exist in reality. It is a construction of rationalism and mercantilism which creates interest and at once classifies all those activities that do not seek things that fit the definition of economic profit as disinterested. But just because 'disinterested' activities do not seek material profits does not mean that they seek no rewards. There is always interest behind disinterest. The reward invisible to economists is honour, says Mauss. Disinterested activities seek honour as reward. And as we have seen, seeking honour is establishing relations of domination. Human beings need not always act with the motive of monetary profit and efficiency in mind. Yet if the leader performs *Satyagraha*, could he have had honour or glory in the back of his mind motivating him to perform this dangerous act? We do not get much further than this with Mauss until we see how Bourdieu treats the same position.

### ***The Critique of the Humanist Notion of Individual in Gift***

The bedrock of modern society is supposed to be the market economy. In the modern market economy, exchange transactions (give and take) are instantaneous. One receives the good on one hand and pays with the other hand. Such a transaction seems designed to suit the demands of an individuated anonymous city dweller where the

seller and buyer do not know each other before or after the transaction. In turn it creates the individuated anonymous city dweller who need not know the counterparty of her exchange. But some transactions, like credit, are not instantaneous. The return of the borrowing happens after a time delay. In cases where the return part of the exchange is deferred, how is it that a return is guaranteed from an anonymous individual? To guarantee a return, laws and instruments like contracts are used. Such contracts are impersonal and presuppose interchangeable agents. Whether it is instantaneous exchange or deferred exchange, *it is a fundamental law of the economy that for an exchange to sustain, it should be reciprocal*. In other words, every act of giving has to match with an act of receiving as well. Otherwise, if one keeps giving and the other keeps receiving without returning, the donor's resources gets exhausted quickly and exchange grinds to a halt, sooner than later.

How was exchange regulated in 'primitive' economies? Economists knew that 'primitive' societies had no system of market or money. Thus they assumed that 'primitive' societies exchanged using a system of barter. But they assumed that exchange was between individuals. Jurists believed that in archaic societies, there were no laws and rules and contracts were impossible. So they could not explain how credit could have been possible in such societies. Some believed that there reciprocity of exchange in 'archaic' societies was grounded in some doctrine like modern contract, in which contracting parties were individuals. They could not imagine any other system of obligating people other than the European legal and financial institutions. Some people did suggest that circulation of goods and services took the form of gift, but gift was not an obligating instrument in Europe. For European common sense, gift was a voluntarily given object with no expectation of a return. Underlying these entire hypotheses on how the archaic societies conducted their economic exchange, were various Eurocentric notions like the European notion of the individual, European law which was based on the notion of individual, European notion of contracts which was based on a notion of free and voluntary individual, etc. In short, they had projected the European idea of individual into societies which they called 'primitive'.

But in archaic societies, most exchanges were not transacted in a barter market. Nor did they have legal instruments like modern contract to guarantee a return for credit offered. Yet they managed to reciprocate in all exchanges using a special instrument



called Gift, which was based on something very different from the European notion of gift that emerged in eighteenth century. Gift exchange formed a veritable economy. In the Gift, Mauss studies the form and nature of this 'primitive' economy. Mauss showed that it was not individuals who exchanged in barter. It was entire collectivities that exchanged. Exchange was not primarily barter, which is a purely economic exchange, but took the form of ritual gifts. As there is no apparent immediate return in gifting, Mauss wanted to investigate why the recipient would pay back? What code of law ensured a return? In short, how did such societies obligate their individuals to each other? Soon he realized that the notion of gift in Europe was an illusion. European representation of gifts was that of a freely given object. In the societies which he studied, it was obligatory to accept a gift, and once accepted, it was mandatory to reciprocate the gift. Any rejection or non-reciprocity was equivalent to declaring war. This proved that archaic societies had the notion of contracts, but they were not individual contracts but collective contracts. Secondly, their basis was religion and ritual obligations, spirits of people called *mana* that lives in objects exchanged, such that any un-reciprocating individual is confronts misfortune and disaster due to the effect of this spiritual force. At the base of their economy lay religion or at least differentiations into economy and religion looked unjustified in such societies.

Thus as Michel de Certeau (1984) puts it, gifts are "generosities for which one expects a return" (Certeau: 1984, 27). Gifts are "voluntary allowances that counts on reciprocity and organizes a social network articulated by the "obligation to give" (Certeau: 1984, 28). Such obligations would not work without institutional mechanisms. Gifts presuppose institutions of obligations; it constructs such institutions. Gifts create a social network with obligations to give. Thus gifting is not an independent act of an individual, as Europeans thought. Around the world, the social practice of gifting presupposes social institutions. Every time a gift is exchanged, these institutions are recreated. People gift because there is institutional recognition to such a practice as legitimate.

The nature of collective contract was "religious" as opposed to the modern one. In such contracts, the individual had no special status. In fact in such laws, the status of persons was similar to that of things. The laws of 'primitive' societies did not

distinguish between persons and property. Everything, from casual hospitality, to daughters, is given and returned. Things and persons were inseparable (Algazi: 2003, 162). Strangely to Europeans, archaic societies did not distinguish between material and symbolic goods, and services. Thus, they exchanged military services, women, courtesies, feasts, rites, children etc (Mauss: 1990, 59). Everything existed in a collective network exchangeable between groups. *Thus the status of the individual was no different from that of a thing nor where material goods distinguishable from symbolic services.*

Another notion in Europe is that an act of gifting is an expression of the spontaneous flow of emotions from an individual, an act of individual will. According to Mauss, gift exchange was not an affair of individual wills. Without the involvement of a totality of society, ("potlatch, clans confronting one another, tribes visiting one another, etc." [Mauss: 1990, 100]), whole tribes, or clans, and their institutions, such an act is impossible. Thus Marcel Mauss calls the facts of gift exchange "total social facts" (Mauss: 1990, 100). Contrary to the views of economists, gifting is not just an economic act. And contrary to the views of romantics, it is not entirely an emotional act either. It involves all aspects of social life: "[a]ll these phenomena are at the same time juridical, economic, religious, and even aesthetic and morphological, etc." (Mauss: 1990, 101). Thus gift is not mere economic exchange or an act of spontaneous expression of individual affection as it is thought to be in Europe. Involved in it are institutions of all fields which are differentiated in modernity, but inseparable in 'archaic societies'. Shockingly for Europeans, the 'primitive' entered into contracts with spirits and gods (this we saw in sacrifice). Spirits were the first and most important beings the 'primitive' was obligated to enter into contracts. The notion of the person was so totally different from the European notion of individual since persons were considered masked incarnations of spirits (Mauss: 1990, 20).

Mauss argues that gifting is a social institution. The function of gifting according to him was to make peace and prevent war. If one does have to compete and defeat, one may engage in potlatch, an extreme case of gift, which is nothing but sublimated warfare. Whether it is hostility or generosity the 'primitive' shows it in exaggerated form, says Mauss. Gifting is antithetical to war, since trade can begin only when the spear is laid down. Exchange is peace because it involves "coming to terms". War

begins from self-concern. To give and return is to put aside all self-concern. Gifting creates mutual interests and opens the way to mutual satisfaction. It offered a way to people to defend mutual interests without resorting to arms. In short, the practice of gifting is itself morality and economy in primitive societies. To summarise, in gift exchange the real actor is the group, the tribe or clan, and function of gifting is to prevent war between these collective actors. It does this by creating mutual involvement, interest in each other, leading to mutual satisfaction, and affords protection of interests without taking up arms. It is an instrument that combines morality and economy.

Schrift (1997) says that gift is reason itself, since “it is the triumph of human rationality over the folly of war” (Schrift: 1997, 89). The segmentary society oscillates between confrontation and dispersion. To give, receive and repay is to stabilize relations. It is progress itself.

How did the critique of the notion of Individual affect my perspective on *Satyagraha*? The Gift changed the way I looked at the leader's sacrifice. It offered a theory of symbolic giving with material consequences. It offered a critique of individual and individual action, individual volition and a critique of generous actions which were thought to be disinterested. My initial view of the leader's act as an act of individual generosity and disinterested giving was weakened. I started seeing the social institutions of gift and sacrifice as orchestrating the act of giving. I started seeing the rewards of prestige bestowed institutionally on the donor. Thus the initial view of the leader as a great man because he had innate qualities of greatness started giving way to greatness as prestige bestowed on him by institutional mechanisms.

There were some other parallels which struck me between the leader's act and the social practice of gifting. Gifting in archaic societies functioned in a cosmology where persons were property of groups. Persons did not have the sacred value it has in European societies. Did the leader's act derive its force because it derives from a cosmology that did not really distinguish persons from property? He brought his own life into an exchange system just like a material thing. Thus the leader said, “Please do not waste your time and effort to save me. I hope I die, so that people's problems get addressed”<sup>11</sup>. Here equivalence between human life and solutions to human

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<sup>11</sup> See “Force feeding sramam parajayappettu” in Mathrubhumi 9.2.1988

problems seem to be struck. In contrast to this, Godelier in *Enigma of the Gift* (1999) argues that there are sacred objects in all societies, including modern secular societies, which are not subject to exchange. They are not put in exchange, but are retained by humans. Individual life has become so sacred an object in modern societies that it never comes into exchange in modern societies, as opposed to 'archaic' societies. A sacrifice necessarily places individual life in a system of exchangeable goods. By placing individual life in a system of exchange through his sacrifice, the leader proclaims that the groups' existence is much more important than the individual. This is exactly why his act gained such tremendous force.

I think there is a message that the leader communicates through his act of gift which is very pertinent to the situation of struggle. Gifting is a powerful statement on ownership. By the act of giving, the leader was indeed teaching a lesson on wealth and possession, that permanent ownership was selfish and anti-social<sup>12</sup>. He wanted to kick start a gift economy in which temporary ownership was glorious. The act of *Satyagraha* was that kick start of the gift economy, where one begins by offering the most precious things one possesses which in modern societies is individual life itself.

Bourdieu takes forward Mauss' problematic using structuralism. By arguing that neither is pure generosity, nor pure self-interest found in 'primitive' societies, Mauss already problematises the opposition of generosity and self-interest. Mauss stops at saying that the conditions of possibility of the notion of interest is mercantilism and rationalism, which means that without mercantilism and rationalism, the notion of interest would not have been possible. Bourdieu takes from where Mauss stops, by saying that generosity is a meaning that receives its identity from its opposition to self-interest. Self-interest and generosity need each other to maintain their distinctions. What permits him to point out the relational nature of meanings of generosity and self-interest is a relational approach that relates words (and social phenomena) with each other, without seeking their meanings in external reality. This is structuralism. We shall look at Bourdieu's structural constructivist approach next.

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<sup>12</sup> This ethic itself is observed by Malinowski in Trobriands. I believe that anthropology does offer an understanding of the familiar which comes from the close study of the exotic. "The juxtaposing of exotic customs to familiar ones, or the relativizing of taken-for granted assumptions, has always been the kind of cultural criticism promised by anthropology" (Fischer: 1986, 199). When I saw a case of behaviour that I felt was extraordinary, I searched for similar practices in societies where such behaviour was ordinary. I could draw parallels between patterns of behaviour I saw in my own society, with those seen in societies as distant as Trobriand Islands.

## CHAPTER 4

### Understanding Generosity and Disinterestedness: Reviewing the Social Theory of Bourdieu

The central categories we have worked with till now are generosity and disinterestedness in political activism. The previous chapter was an attempt at reviewing anthropological literature around these categories through social institutions of sacrifice and gift. This chapter continues discussion of the gift exchange system and elaborates the framework which animates this dissertation.

The gist of Bourdieu's argument related to the problem at hand, the *Satyagraha*, has mainly three points. These are positions he takes regarding questions of agential acts/volition or freewill, disinterestedness/generosity which leads to a theory of social action which rejects utilitarian rationality.

Firstly, as regards orienting, motivating and determining human action, he attributes a large role to the field, or the social structure. Thus he denies the individual much agency. According to him, the individual may feel agency, but his actions will always be in harmony with the structure, rarely confronting it. Purely individual action is impossible because it will have no direction. Undifferentiated individual libido, or human energy, needs orientation within a social field to turn into meaningful social action. Having rejected pure agency, he rejects pure determinism too. A summary of his theory of action is obtained in the review below.

Secondly, I consider his writings on disinterested action. Bourdieu takes the position that there is no action that is purely disinterested. For him, all actions are interested, in the sense that they are oriented towards some value or principle through a reward by the field. Fields have in-built mechanisms, a system of rewarding, to motivate and energize agents, so that their actions are oriented in specific directions. However, interest that motivates action need not always be economic interest as utilitarian thinkers thought. Interest can be symbolic in the form of honour or even rejection of all honour and economic interest if that is what the field demands. No agent is indifferent to all games and all fields. Thus his position on generosity is not an essential quality innate in a human being but a subjective feeling, an effect produced

on the recipient of gifts within a gift exchange system. Objectively, there is no free, gratuitous gift, because all gifts are strictly reciprocal. Generosity represses the objective fact that all gifts expect to be returned at some time in future.

Thirdly, I consider his position on utilitarianism. He rejects the utilitarian position that claims that actions of agents are always means to some end or profit; including symbolic profits like honour, to achieve which, they perform abstract rational planning. To counter this utilitarian perspective, he forwards his theory of practice, which in short argues that agents resemble players playing a sport or a game. Their classifications do not have the epistemic clarity of rationally and logically arranged ideas. Their classifications are fuzzy and made for the purpose of practice. He compares social agents to players of game who act spontaneously and practically. They do not rationally plan and execute their actions with the end of honour or other symbolic profits in mind. Social life is spontaneous practice, not execution of abstract calculations and planning, based on some theory, with the objective of achieving some definite end.

If we are to translate this complex social action theory into the context of our problem at hand, the leader's *Satyagraha* should not be seen as an individual's performance (which is to continue the critique of the individual which Mauss and Levi-Strauss developed). It is to be seen as an action which takes place within a field, the field of politics. Disinterestedness and generosity are not innate qualities of the leader as common sense might perceive. But he has them in him, because these values are encouraged and cultivated by the field of politics. This field encourages disinterestedness simply for distinguishing itself from the field of economy which encourages self-interest. Yet, the field of politics, Bourdieu would argue is nothing but another economy that transacts honour. It is neither devoid of competition, nor is it outside power. Domination is as prevalent in disinterested economies like politics and the field of art, as economic economies. However, by focussing on such symbolic acts like disinterested exchanges, the field of politics represses the harsh and inevitable economic aspects, domination, struggles, competition and exclusion within itself. Generosity is a construction that receives its proper meaning only from its opposition with self-interest, which is the value of the economic field. Generosity has no meaning if isolated from the economic field and its values. In other words, generosity is a distinction that non-economic economies claim to distinguish themselves from the economic field in their mutual struggles. The 'disinterested',

'generous' politician is quite similar in position to the businessman. Having said that there are similarities between leader's actions and that of a businessman, the leader's *Satyagraha* is not the result of some plan to achieve honour. He does engage in strategies aimed at maximising resources and status. But it is never done consciously. Like mathematicians who in their wish to triumph over opponents produce contributions to the field, the unconscious libidinal energy guided by feel of what might be the right thing to do in the game in which he was immersed, propels the leader to act in a disinterested manner.

### ***The Critique of the Individual Hero***

Mauss has demonstrated how insignificant the individual is in archaic societies. The real social actors are social facts like gift exchange practices. Individuals are just players of roles in social practices. If the individual is not the actor, then individual reason or volition or freewill is not what orders the social world. This thesis has to be combined with that of Levi-Strauss, who has argued that social practices are not random or illogical, but have an underlying structure and reason. They have a unity. Their sense is revealed when we arrive at the order behind them. The order is a set of principles or elements and a set of rules which together makes a model or the structure. What are these principles and the rules that constitute the model or structure? How can one structurally understand the phenomenon of human capacities, using a model? It is for this question that we find an answer in Bourdieu. The answer is a model which Bourdieu calls economy.

The question that Bourdieu asks is how to understand social action? The short answer is that human actions take place in a space which he calls social space and within it in an even smaller area differentiated into something that Bourdieu calls a field. Examples of fields are arts, academy, polity, economy etc. Human action is never action of the autonomous individual. But it is action within a social field. The field determines the action much more than the agent who performs it. Thus we can know more about the action by studying the field than the human being who performs it.

### ***The Concept of Social Space***

According to Bourdieu, human social life takes place in social space. Bourdieu proceeds by performing a spatial analysis. "Sociology in its objectivist moment is

social topology” (Bourdieu: 1990a, 126). It is an analysis of relative positions and objective relations between those positions (Bourdieu: 1990a, 126). Bourdieu thus develops his notion of the social space and the field, in which human action unfolds. Human agents in a society exist in locations which Bourdieu calls social positions. Male is a position, female is another position. Father and child are positions. But it is not just abstract roles or groups that occupy positions in the social space. Individuals also occupy positions in social space. Positions are not totally isolated from each other, but exist next to other positions. They are related to each other. Just like in physical space, the identity of a point is relative to other points, in social space too, identity of a position exists relative to other positions. A house identifies itself as the next one in the row of another house, or towards the left side of the hill etc. Similarly, only by reference to others do we receive our identity which is positional. To think about identities as deriving their meanings from mutual relations in which they exist is a position called relationalism. Relations are that of proximity, distance, hierarchy etc. So people are either above or below others, far away or close to others etc. This is social distance in social space. The totality of all positions constitutes the social space.

How does all this influence human action? Action takes place within social space. The action of the father cannot be the action of the son. Thus action is positioned action. Action does not take place outside social positions. Positions largely determine actions. Thus each of us exists and acts from within our positions in a social space. Our self and actions should not be seen as emanating from us, but as determined by the relations we have with others which make the social space. Thus actions that the leader takes is not his individual actions, but are related to other agent's actions, often responses to other agent's actions.

### ***The Concept of Field***

The universe of social space itself is not homogenous, but is differentiated into many worlds called fields, in modern societies.

In highly differentiated societies, the social cosmos is made of such relatively autonomous social microcosms, i.e. spaces of objective relations that are the site of a logic and a necessity that are *specific and irreducible* to those that regulate other fields.” (Bourdieu: 1992, 97) “In analytic terms, a field may be defined as a network, or configuration of objective relations between positions (Bourdieu:



1992, 97).

Fields are nothing but a subset of positions within the social space that share some common values between them. It is relationalism that manifests in the conception of social space in terms of fields. “To think in terms of the field is to think relationally” (Bourdieu: 1992, 96).

To think in terms of field demands a conversion of the whole ordinary vision of the social world which fastens only on visible things: on the individual... (Bourdieu: 1990a, 192).-

Following Marx, he argues that “the real is the relational: what exists in the social world are relations-not interactions between agents or intersubjective ties between individuals, but objective relations which exist “independently of individual consciousness and will,” as Marx said” (Bourdieu: 1992, 97).

Economy is a field within modern societies. Similarly, the academic field, bureaucratic field, political field, the field of family, etc are other fields in any modern society.

Why are fields important to understand human action? Each field has its own fundamental values which are not the same as that of other fields.

The economic field constituted itself by expelling enchanted relations of love and friendship celebrating “business is business” (Bourdieu: 1992, 98).

Similarly, the political field constitutes itself by defining itself as distinct from other fields in terms of fundamental values, public interest as opposed to self-interest. These values influence actions of agents whose positions are within fields. Thus, there are limits to what a member of a family positioned within the field of family can perform. She is bound by duties and conferred with privileges through her position. Bourdieu's claim is that human action is not determined at the level of the isolated individual. Were an isolated individual is the actor, he could have done anything. Individuals do not just do anything. According to Bourdieu human action to a large extent is determined relationally. By relational, Bourdieu means that the relations of positions in which the individual finds himself and the values of her field orient and determine her action. Each field has a notion of what is rational or sensible to do within it. People's actions comply with the rationality of their field. The

businessman's actions are oriented towards making monetary profits, a value of the economic field. The artist's actions are oriented towards producing artistic works which are considered great in his field. The actions of the house wife are largely oriented by a value of sacrificial gifting. If one applies the values of the economic field universally to all fields, which was what the utilitarian thinkers attempted to do, then actions in the field of art or politics will look irrational. Thus, if one is to understand the action of the leader, one has to understand the field of politics. Politics as a field encourages action that is supposed to be in public interest. In other words, the political field demands disinterestedness in monetary profits. In short, there are as many values as there are fields. Values and actions in one field look arbitrary from other fields.

Each field is characterized by the pursuit of a specific goal, tending to favour no less absolute investments by all (and only) those who possess the required dispositions (for example, *libido sciendi*). Taking part in the *illusio* - scientific, literary, philosophical or other - means taking seriously (sometimes to the point of making them questions of life and death) stakes which, arising from the logic of the game itself, establish its 'seriousness', even if they may escape or appear 'disinterested' or 'gratuitous' to those who are sometimes called 'lay people' or those who are engaged in other fields (since the independence of the different fields entails a form of noncommunicability between them) (Bourdieu, 2000, 11).

There is no really objective position outside of all fields (like a god's eye view) from where an agent can judge a particular field as superior to other. In other words, the field of politics and the field of economy are incommensurable, and consequently, political action cannot be held to be morally superior to economic action.

### ***Social Games***

Bourdieu does not just stop by exposing the relative and arbitrary nature of underlying values of fields and incommensurability of actions based on such values. Fields do much more than offering values that orient social actions. Fields might look different from each other because the fundamental values by which they judge actions in their area are different. Yet there are similarities between fields. What is this "homology across fields"<sup>1</sup>? (Bennett: 2008, 12). Firstly, all fields resemble each other

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<sup>1</sup> Bennett et al. (2008) has argued that Bourdieu's key arguments can be axiomatized as "(a) the importance of cultural capital, (b) the homology between cultural fields, and (c) the role of culture in reproducing advantage" (Bennett: 2008, 10). One of this is homology between fields. Some modernist

in that they are sites of social games. A social game is an activity in which people who are positioned in the field participate. In all fields, participating agents are engaged in a play with each other. The social game is a competitive struggle between participants. They are competitive in the sense that, like all games, social games also have their stakes, and only a few get to win the rewards. Others, excluded from the rewards of the game are judged as failed. There are entry requirements to the game, or qualifications to participate in any field. So each game excludes some groups even before it starts. Only those who are qualified can participate in the game. The dictum, “let no one enter here who is not a geometrician”, means “‘that none enter here’ unless endowed with a point of view which accords or coincides with the founding point of view of the field” (Bourdieu: 1995, 223). It is fundamentally exclusionary. Poets have their criterion for excluding others, just like mathematicians have theirs. Family excludes everyone except those who are close blood relations into entering its space. Academia excludes those who have failed in their entrance examinations or who do not have sufficient academic training to take part in debates. Similarly politics excludes those who are not well versed with the practical training and experience necessary to participate in it. There is no field open indiscriminately to all. The social game proceeds through exchanges<sup>2</sup> between agents, which take the form of challenge and riposte, and entering the field itself is one challenge.

What does all this mean to action theory? This is a radical attack on the conception of action as action of free will of individuals. Actions are participatory actions in a play, within social games of fields within social space. They are necessarily competitive. Actions are actions of coping with the game. They are responses to other actions by other members, constantly shifting their strategies. This means that the self-presentation of non-economic fields as homes of disinterested action is in no way compatible with what actually goes on in there. They are in no way any less competitive and devoid of struggles<sup>3</sup>. They rank and exclude their participants as

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aesthetes had claimed that artistic field has its own form immanent to itself irreducible to any other. Bourdieu argued against this position saying that similar principles can be detected across different worlds and thus, there are general principles that govern all fields. This dissertation tries to view the political field as working by similar mechanisms as that of the economy.

<sup>2</sup> For Bourdieu, gift exchange need not always be exchange of pleasantries. According to him, even a series of murders based on the sense of honour, obeys the same logic as gift exchange (Bourdieu: 2000, 193).

<sup>3</sup> Andrew Sayer has a critique of Bourdieu on his “Hobbesian pursuit of advantage”. “Actors compete and struggle both *for* such goods, that is compete for things which are agreed to be worthwhile, and over the definition of what *is* valuable or worthwhile. Some may want mainly the goods that the dominant groups monopolise, others may care most about different kinds of goods”

much as the economic field does. Their only quarrel is on the criterion of ranking. What this basis is, we shall soon see. This is much more than what Weber said when he argued that actions are social and not individual.

The leader's actions are part of a game which he plays in his field, the field of politics. His social position is such that he is confronted in all sides by mainstream trade unions. All his actions thus are actions to compete and prevail in a very competitive field. The factory owner himself had been revolutionizing the social space by constituting a social field of economy in the village, by compelling all actions to be ordered by profit and utility in mind. The established trade unions had accepted this and were cooperating with the factory management and letting the values of economic field dominate the field of politics too. Most of the actions of the leader were responses to this historical social situation in which he found himself. How can one ignore the social nature of action? Action is never individual, but always in response to a historical situation in which actors find themselves. And this situation is almost always the result of past actions of a totality of agents which we call a field. Thus actions are constituted by a field.

### ***The Model of Economy***

What should such a structure be that organizes actions as exchange, and orients agents into competition with each other? Market seems a good metaphor. Bourdieu calls it an economy. Struggle or competition and exchange are the fundamental principles of the structure called economy. Bourdieu uses the model of economy to understand the functioning of all social fields. All social action is then in some way an exchange in an economy. Economy is a site of exchange. It is also the site of struggle. Participating agents<sup>4</sup> are in competition with each other. There is one more

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(Sayer:2005, 3). In his analysis of struggles in social field, Bourdieu emphasises "their habitual and instrumental character, as if a combination of habit and the pursuit of status and power animated everything"(Sayer:2005, 16). Sayer argues that one cannot understand struggles "purely in terms of a Hobbesian pursuit of advantage in terms of economic, cultural and social capital, as argued by Pierre Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 1984). Although achieving these goods may bring power, recognition and perhaps envy, actors may pursue them for their own value too. The struggles are not merely for power and status but are about how to live. Sayer is also critical of Bourdieu, "especially the crypto-normative stance of much of his writing, the underestimation of actors' rationality and reflexivity, and the heavy reliance on economistic metaphors" (Sayer:2005, 16).

<sup>4</sup> Bourdieu does not deny agency totally. People who participate in a field are called agents (as opposed to subjects).

reason for Bourdieu to model fields as economies. Social games look like the economic game in that, participants play by making investments. If they play well, and the investment is sound, the game returns the initial investment with a profit<sup>5</sup>.

The most important innovation that Bourdieu brings to social theory is in recognizing that investment is not limited to investment in cash or monetary investment. That which is invested, he calls capital, can exist in various forms according to the field.

Depending on the field in which it functions, and at the cost of the more or less expensive transformations which are the precondition for its efficacy in the field in question, capital can present itself in three fundamental guises: as economic capital, which is immediately and directly convertible into money and may be institutionalized in the form of property rights; as cultural capital, which is convertible, in certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalized in the form of educational qualifications; and as social capital, made up of social obligations (“connections”), which is convertible, in certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalized in the form of a title of nobility (Bourdieu: 1986, 16).

Thus, educational qualifications are capital in the games of the academic field. Education for Bourdieu “is the transformation of ‘inherited capital’ (superior social origins) into educational capital, whereby scholarly degrees legitimize subsequent elitist careers” (Girling: 2004, 2). He calls them cultural capital<sup>6</sup>. Cultural capital is

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“We have come, in fact, to the most obscure principle of action, which lies neither in structures nor in consciousness, but rather in the relation of immediate proximity between objective structures and embodied structures - in habitus. There is action, history, and preservation or transformation of structures only because there are agents. But these agents are only effective and efficient because they are not reduced to what is ordinarily meant by the notion of the individual. As socialized organisms, they are endowed with a set of dispositions that imply both their propensity and their ability to enter into and play the game” (Bourdieu: 1996, 38).

<sup>5</sup> The relation between field and capital is that positions in the field vary “in the structure of distribution of species of power (or capital)...” (Bourdieu: 1992, 97). The profit in each field is specific to it. These profits are the stake in the field. This could be honor or influence in political field and not necessarily money. The more capital one has the more profit he commands from the field.

<sup>6</sup> Bennett summarises cultural capital in simple terms distinguishing it from economic capital: “[c]ultural capital works rather like property: those with it can gain at the expense of those without. As with financial capital, Bourdieu also detected a process of circulation and accumulation. Cultural capital is embodied, and the educated middle classes are physically as well as intellectually socialised into appreciating ‘legitimate’ culture, that which is institutionalised through being venerated in the educational system and the cultural apparatuses associated with museums and art galleries. Yet, cultural capital is also different from property: since it is embodied, and does not exist independently of people’s dispositions and perceptions, its role is systematically and necessarily misunderstood by social combatants” (Bennett: 2008, 11).

not directly useful to play social games in the economic field, for which one needs capital in the economic form, i.e., cash. He calls cash and property, economic capital. Yet cash is totally useless if one wants play in a status society's games. Here one needs connections, or recognition and honour within a small group. Thus each field recognizes only a form of capital which may not be recognized in other fields. This collapses the distinctions between activities in all fields, by reducing them to social games as games of various forms of capital investment and profit making. All social games are games that take either wealth, qualifications, or influence. One plays in the social games of the fields to profit from investing the different forms of capital one has. If all human actions are part of game playing, and if these games demand capital of some kind, and necessarily involve making profits, then in which way are they different from the interested games played in the field of economy? No actions qualify to be treated as totally innocent of profits. If games necessarily discriminate and exclude participants on the basis of the volume of capital they bring into the game, then how can such games claim to be disinterested or morally superior? All fields resemble the economy in that the structure of the field is the structure of distribution of capital.

Bourdieu uses investment from the psychoanalytic point of view also. Libido in Freud meant desire, lust, will, and the drive to pleasurable satisfaction, especially the sexual (Swartz: 2004, 205-207). According to Bourdieu, interest is related to libido. For Bourdieu, investment means both investment of libidinal energy or psychic energy in objects, and investment in the economies for profit. Libido is undifferentiated by default. It is the process of socialization that shapes it to fit a differentiated field and thus become what Bourdieu calls *illusio*. *Illusio* is a concept that he develops to talk about libido invested in a particular field. Undifferentiated libido when socialized into *illusio* can now recognize value in some actions and not others. It is then that people begin to distinguish between interesting actions and actions towards which they are indifferent. Actions in all fields are investment of libidinal energy. If desire is at the root of action that claims disinterestedness then how are they in any way distinct from economically interested action which also derives its energy from the same source? Actors within all fields, including intellectuals and political fields, engage in strategies aimed at maximising resources and status. Behind the will to truth or will to beauty, or will to gift, is will to power. Social interestedness of intellectuals affirms that "there is no absolute standpoint outside of fields of struggle." (Maton, Karl: 2003, 61-62)

Although all social fields are modelled as economies, no participant player in non-economic fields will like their field to be classified as an economy. Unfazed, Bourdieu argues that this is just a euphemism. Bourdieu himself classifies social fields into two kinds, based on if their ordering value is self-interest or disinterestedness. The economic field, or the field of market exchange, encourage agents to have interests and to reveal them in public without reservation. It is legitimate to have an interest to maximize profit in this field. Here every one competes with each other to maximize their monetary profit. But the value of other fields is the reverse of the economic field. The reverse of self-interest, disinterestedness, is encouraged by these fields on their agents. In fields which encourage disinterestedness, maximization of monetary profit is despised. Yet, action in such fields may seek symbolic profits like honour.

The gift economy, in contrast to the economy in which equivalent values are exchanged, is based on a denial of the economic (in the narrow sense), on a refusal of the logic of the maximization of economic profit, that is to say, of the spirit of calculation and the exclusive pursuit of material (as opposed to symbolic) interest, a refusal that is inscribed in the objectivity of institutions and in dispositions. It is organized with a view to the accumulation of symbolic capital (a capital of recognition, honour, nobility, etc.) which is brought in particular through the transmutation of economic capital achieved through the alchemy of symbolic exchanges (exchange of gifts, words, challenges and ripostes, murders, etc.) and only available to agents endowed with dispositions adjusted to the logic of 'disinterestedness' (Bourdieu: 2000, 195).

Actors within disinterested fields, including intellectual and political fields, are encouraged by these fields to engage in strategies aimed at maximising resources and status. Thus the artistic field has awards; political field has power and influence as rewards for competition.

But they need not legitimize seeking of power, although they permit power to operate in these fields. So in public they despise seeking to maximize profits. In public they repress it. It is usual in such fields to reject utilitarian principles like counting, calculation, and rational planning and prediction etc since these are the values and ways which the economic field celebrates. Yet fields of disinterestedness are not devoid of profits. Such fields euphemize their underlying economy by focussing on

symbolic activities like gifting. Such focus on symbolic aspects is only to present themselves as distinct from the economic field. Thus Bourdieu calls such a field an *economy of symbolic goods*, because profits here is definitely not material, yet such fields are not without profit, in fact their profits being symbolic in form. Their capital too is symbolic in the form of influence and connections. Thus the action of the leader has to be understood as some kind of investment of symbolic labour in the hope of making some symbolic profits, to accumulate symbolic capital.

But can one say that the leader performs the *Satyagraha* as part of a rationally calculated plan of action to maximize honour, in other words, symbolic profits? Does this all finally mean that disinterested social workers are scheming villains? Surely villainizing which is simply the inverse of deifying have still not departed from humanism. If honour was the aim, then action that meets near death is surely too risky a means for this end. To take such a high risk is irrational for any profit, let alone honour among a small group of factory workers. Does this mean that the leader cannot calculate risks? Bourdieu argues that agents in noneconomic economies do count and calculate. But, such calculations are practical. To perform abstract calculations is a taboo. Why do non-economic economies make calculations and rational planning a taboo?

According to Bourdieu, all rational planning and calculations are repressed to mask the inefficiencies within non-economic economy. The pre-capitalist economy is the noneconomic economy par excellence. All other fields other than the economic field in capitalist societies mimic the pre-capitalist economy. Thus, in the domestic economy, the housewife does not count the number of hours she spends in bringing up her child. If she actually counts it, and then perform an abstract calculation of the total effort needed across twenty years of bringing up before the child becomes self-reliant, the utilitarian reason will immediately flag the activity of child rearing as uneconomical. Much more economically efficient ways of bringing up children can be devised (and this is in fact being done today as we become more and more utilitarian as Mauss feared). But if the domestic economy focuses on efficiency, the distinction between the domestic economy and economic economy will dissolve. So instead of fixing the inefficiency, the domestic economy masks its inefficiency by focussing on symbolic acts, like expression of love, loyalty, etc. It also represses



calculation and prediction because these are the preconditions for discovering inefficiencies. Thus calculation and planning is rendered taboo. The most important symbolic exchange that non-economic economies engage in is gifting. Thus non-economic economies are fundamentally gift economies. All the care the child receives is a gift of labour from its mother. Although gift economies are not the most efficient economies, yet they are economies. The child needs to gift back the mother all services when she grows old. These are structures that arrange two way exchanges between human beings. It is just that they are ordered by rationalities other than that of efficiency: Thus agents do calculate, but repress calculations because they have an economic aspect which the non-economic fields do not tolerate. Thus the leader might have calculated vaguely that if the *Satyagraha* wins, he will be much more powerful and honourable. But his action is not a product of a meticulous and detailed rational plan like that of an insurance company calculating premiums using quantitative methods. They are practical judgements based on situations. The field deems it important to repress the motives and practical calculations of profit. Thus, the field cultivates disinterestedness among its agents so that they do not calculate and count profit, or look for efficient means to compete for higher ranks. Yet the field has no other means to motivate agents to act other than by rewarding them unequally. So it is important to realize that the leader never competed for profits consciously. The organization of the field is such that someone who does not compete and who does not perform practical calculations of profits ever achieves any success in the games of the political field.

If it is not conscious deliberation that orders practice, then what principle orders action? *Habitus*<sup>7</sup> is Bourdieu's concept which is the opposite of conscious deliberation.

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<sup>7</sup> Bourdieu defines *habitus* as, "systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them. Objectively 'regulated' and 'regular' without being in any way the product of obedience to rules, they can be collectively orchestrated without being the product of the organizing action of a conductor. ... The *habitus* - embodied history, internalized as a second nature and so forgotten as history - is the active presence of the whole past of which it is the product. As such, it is what gives practices their relative autonomy with respect to external determinations of the immediate present. This autonomy is that of the past, enacted and acting, which, functioning as accumulated capital, produces history on the basis of history and so ensures the permanence in change that makes the individual agent a world within the world. The *habitus* is a spontaneity without consciousness or will, opposed as much to the mechanical necessity of things without history in mechanistic theories as it is to the reflexive freedom of subjects 'without inertia' in rationalist theories" (Bourdieu: 1990b, 53 - 56).

Habitus refers to those deeply engrained dispositions which are the products of socialisation, particularly in early life, and which orient individuals at a subconscious level towards the world around them. The dispositions have a structure which reflects that of the corresponding habitat in which they were formed... Habituation to this location within structures of social relations and material conditions produces a corresponding structure of dispositions which is attuned to them. When activated, these dispositions produce actions which tend to reproduce the external structures (Sayer: 2005, 23-24).

Habitus simply means a set of habits that define a human being's self. Habits are formed by repeated performances of actions living in a social field. The leader's life was full of personal sacrifices. He is never home, always running around to help others in their problems. From his early life itself, his work, early in his life in the CPM and trade unions made him into a public person oriented towards the public more than the family. Serving the public collective necessarily involved sacrificing the private and the individual. The *Satyagraha* is only an extreme case of the general life style of sacrifices to which he was habituated. So it is not sensible to argue that he could have performed the sacrifice one fine day with no history of offering personal sacrifices for public causes. The leader's *Satyagraha* was not the result of a thought out plan. It was a habitual extension of what he did every day.

To recount what was described yet, we introduced the notion of positions, and from there moved onto the notion of social space as the totality of positions, and then considered the differentiations within social space which Bourdieu calls fields, and from there explained their functioning using a model of economy, and finally explained their specific functioning in terms of the notion of capital and forms of capital, interest, symbolic capital and profit, disinterestedness, and habitus.

### ***Dual Nature of Social Reality***

According to Bourdieu, all social reality has a dual nature - an objective aspect which is the structural truth and a subjective aspect which is the constructed conception. The social space, differentiated fields, competition within the field, positional situations of an agent within the field, etc are objective realities. Through living in his position for a sufficiently long duration, the agent develops mental categories that reflect this objective social reality. These mental classificatory categories are the subjective aspect of social reality. Bourdieu's most important innovation is the idea that subjective mental structures are harmonious with objective social structures. This is in

fact not his thesis. He inherits this thesis from Durkheim and Mauss's primitive classification. Subjective understandings can either reflect the true divisions in social structure or they can function to misrecognize the social reality masking it. Thus mental categories or classifications can either reflect or mask social reality.

It is an objective truth that all fields have within them harsh realities like competition between agents and the capital that each agent brings to the social games in a field. On top of these there is competition between fields for domination. Then there is the truth of the economy that effort underlies all production. For example, it is a hard objective reality that there is no easy way to produce a grown up productive individual, other than putting twenty five years of hard labour of bringing up a child. But within the Indian family, no one speaks of the amount of long years of considerable labour involved in bringing up children. The members of the family effectively misrecognize this harsh reality of the economy. Their practices euphemize this harsh economic reality within the notion of familial love. The labour has to be implicitly borne, if the institution of family is to continue. If the objective truth is not repressed, the economic realities that underlie all fields are exposed and their distinctions from economic economy are lost, leading to destruction of the field itself. So even calculations of 'cost' of child rearing is considered profanation, a quite inappropriate act. Child rearing is seen as a sacred duty of parents towards the society. It is also seen as an act of disinterested, generous love. In short child rearing follows the grammar of gift exchange. The grown up child is a gift from parents to larger society and the child itself. But such an act of 'free giving' cannot persist if it is totally uneconomical. Uneconomical is that gift which is never reciprocated. The economics of gift exchange with children is that children return services to their parents when they need looking after in old age. These equations of economics of the Indian family (and for that matter, families across the world) are always held as implicit calculations never to be profaned by public acknowledgement. "Exchange always follows the logic of gift, not of credit, and the loans between parents and children exclude the charging of interest, with repayment dates left vague" (Bourdieu: 1998, 109) The economic aspect is systematically masked by a euphemism called love or duty. Thus generations of human beings engage in gift exchange of services which is nothing but fair economic exchange underneath. But the moment this dual economic aspect is recognized, the euphemism called familial love, which masks the

economic dimension of familial piety, will cease to function. The field of family will dissolve in economy once the euphemism is lost. Thus for Bourdieu, euphemism is an important concept, very essential for masking the objective truth using misrecognized classifications. Could generosity be a euphemism? If so, what objective reality does it mask?

### ***Generosity as a Euphemism***

We have seen that generosity within family is a euphemism to reduce the harshness of objective realities of labour. In fact whenever we receive a gift, the recipient feels that the donor is generous. The recipient implicitly knows that the donor needs to be gifted back, because no gift is free, and all gifts need to be reciprocated if the relationship is to continue. Thus it is an objective reality of gift exchange that gifts are reciprocal and thus are not generous. The recipient does not get richer because he has just received a gift. He immediately gets into a relation of obligation which he will be released from only when he has reciprocated, which will thus impoverish him to an equal extent. Thus the subjective feeling of generosity is not justifiable from the objective point of view. This is why Levi-Strauss does not see gift exchange as a succession of generous acts like Mauss saw it. He sees it as a system of reciprocal acts.

But Bourdieu says that gifting is at once a system of reciprocities and yet capable of producing subjective feelings of generosity in the recipients. Generosity is the effect of a small interval between the gift and the counter gift. One cannot immediately return the same article as counter-gift. The counter-gift has to be “deferred and different” (Bourdieu: 1998, 94). The function of the interval between the gift and the counter-gift creates an illusion that the gift and the counter-gift are “unrelated” and “unique” acts. It is only when the counter-gift is delayed and different that it is experienced as not a reciprocal gift of an earlier gift, but a truly generous, gratuitous act. Secondly, there is always the threat of non-reciprocation, which adds to the effect of generosity and gratuitousness to the reciprocating agent. Thus the feeling of generosity or gratuitousness is an effect, subjectively felt, in spite of the objective reality that gifts are strictly reciprocal and thus does not enrich or impoverish the giver or taker, having the function to mask the objective reality of exchange, the logic of reciprocity. Thus Bourdieu argues that the economy of symbolic goods is

characterised by practices having dual nature, or having objective and subjective aspects, yet the masking of harsh objective aspects by collective misrecognitions, and thirdly a prohibition of making things explicit revealing the logic of objective reality. Generosity has to be located as an effect of the working of an economy of symbolic goods with a function to mask the economic aspects of the field.

What does the new conception of generosity as subjective aspect of gift exchange projected by the repression of the objective aspects of gift exchange mean? It means that we perceive generosity in leader's act only because we repress the objective aspect of his sacrifice, that he expects something in return. To see generosity in an act is to accept the conditioning of gift exchange as unique generous acts. Generosity is not an individual quality as we initially thought. It is a systemic effect of the functioning of an economy of symbolic goods. Just like generosity is not an individual quality, disinterestedness, a value is not an individual value. It is not agents who invent the values by which their actions are oriented. We have seen that human action receives its orientation from values that social fields consider as significant. The leader receives the values that orient his action not from within himself, but from the political field. Disinterestedness is not a quality that he has within himself or he consciously chooses for himself, but a value of a number of fields which these fields impose on participants of the field.

The leader's *Satyagraha* had communicative functions which even the leader is not conscious about. The act of his sacrifice communicated without words, and was immediately understood. This ability of immediate comprehension, to communicate without words, from body to body, through the *hexis*, influencing the perceptions and counting on tastes of the community directly, pleasing or displeasing without explication, is what Bourdieu considers as the functioning of habitus (Bourdieu: 1977, 1-2). For the people to understand the action of the leader, the mental categories through which they perceive must be the same as that of the leader who produces the act. Through living in their positions for a sufficiently long duration, the workers had developed the mental categories that are in synchrony with the objective social structure of a sacrificial economy. This is why when the leader began his *Satyagraha*, they could immediately sympathise and understand his action. And part of this understanding is the misrecognition of his act as generous.

## CHAPTER 5

### Conclusion

It is a widely held common sense that success in any field (particularly in non-economic fields like politics, art and academia) is an effect of personal qualities. These qualities circulate under many names like talent, merit, genius, charisma, personal greatness etc., all of which act as some kind of distinction. The pre-condition for such a common sense as personal qualities, is nothing other than the cult of the individual. Individual surely is a very visible entity. One of the aims of this dissertation was to produce a theoretical critique of the common sense of individual, personal success and personal greatness.

I examined the Weberian notion of charisma as a representative of the theories that assume the notion of the individual. Charisma is presented as naturally endowed personal quality. The popularity of the common sense of 'individual merit' behind the achievements in the field of academy, even among sociology scholars, has always disturbed me. Without support of the even more fundamental myth of the individual agent, individual charisma and talent are impossible to erect. There are two methods to relativize and destabilize the assumption of the agential individual. The first way is to historicize the idea of the individual in the European cosmology, which will reveal its constructed status. A review of humanist discourses will be the method to achieve this. The second way would be a review of anthropological and ethnographic literature on other societies which do not have such a notion of the individual. Such a comparison produces a contrast which can enlighten us on the structural aspects (not just historical events, but the whole structure) of the society. This is what I have attempted using some key works of Marcel Mauss.

Once the idea of the individual human being is critiqued, the idea of human capacity, built on it becomes available to criticism. The category of individual is weakened through structural analysis to such an extent that it can no more hold individual qualities. Qualities which were thought to be individual have to be seen as an "outcome" (Fuchs: 2001), an effect of the structure. The sociological approach must introduce the system which produces the individual and gives it its qualities. Such an

approach does not see qualities as “naturally gifted”, but as *institutionally gifted* or structurally produced, by the social institutions.

Which is this social institution that organizes gifting of capabilities? Throughout the length of this dissertation, a particular social institution called the *system of gift exchange* is reviewed. This social institution is posited as a fundamental social structure in all fields of society. Following Bourdieu, this dissertation does not view society as a monolithic structure, but it instead uses the concept of social space that is differentiated into many fields. Along with market exchange, which presents itself as the binary opposite of gift exchange, the system of exchanging gifts constitutes one of the only two ways in which human beings can exchange goods, services and symbols to other human beings and groups, in all fields.

How does the introduction of gift exchange systems revise the conception of qualities and capabilities in social theory of Bourdieu? Following Bourdieu, all extraordinary human qualities or capacities can be seen as endowments of capital in material or symbolic forms. All achievements are translated as effects of the workings of capital. The gift exchange system and the market exchange systems function to the rules of capital. In turn, the functioning of capital is made possible because of exchange systems like gift exchange and market exchange.

What is the relation between the critique of the individual and Bourdieu’s theses on capabilities as capital? The individual has only a limited or insignificant role in the functioning of capital in this system of exchange. A significant volume of capital an individual possesses is seen as inherited from family or other sources like party etc, i.e. received as a gift, thanks to obligatory practices of systems of gift exchange. Further accumulation of capital is made possible by investing this initial endowment of capital in institutional mechanisms that return the initial investment in an enlarged form, i.e. with interest. The initial endowment and its enlargement are not due to individual effort, but functioning of institutional mechanisms. Thus capital and its reproduction are structural phenomena. Crediting the individual for his initial capital endowment, which is gifted to him by his previous generations, or the further enlargement of it, which is the effect of the working of institutions in the field, seems only as a euphemism to mask the functioning of such institutions and capital endowments. This is the critique of individual merit, talent, genius or greatness in any

field. Greatness has to be then understood as symbolic capital that is gifted and not earned. 'Further glory' has to be then understood as symbolic capital that is enlarged through institutional mechanisms like a party.

Mauss and Bourdieu have tried to show the importance of the social institution of gift exchange in understanding interactions between social groups. The objectivity of the gift exchange system is not obvious to the agents participating in gifting and receiving. The gift exchange system works behind the veil organizing individual actions without the explicit knowledge of individuals. We all give and take services and goods. We also feel loved and cared when we receive gifts. We feel treated with special privilege. While these subjective experiences are quite real, the objective structure of the practice of gifting is no less real. Society widely employs gifting as a practice. So although we feel special, there is nothing special or particular about being gifted; hundreds of people around us receive and return gifts. As Durkheim puts it, it is quite general. Secondly, we feel that the person who gifted us did so out of genuine and true feelings for us. In other words, gifting is an act motivated purely from within the individual, an expression of love within. But as Mauss shows, the act of gifting in reality is a result of compulsion. These are practices that one has to perform if one is to fulfil the roles. What coerces the Trobriand husband to pay his wife for her sexual services is such a system of gifting. Gifting has an objective dimension as externally imposed on the actor. As Bourdieu puts it, to mistake such exchanges as due to our individual volitions is to miss an objective structure that organizes all exchanges. We say that we are off to the market. But once in the market we see only traders exchanging goods. But does this mean that there is no objective structure called market which organizes and regulates exchanges through written laws or unwritten norms? The individual is an aspect of social reality, quite visible when one puts on the perspective of naive humanism. But it by no means is the only aspect. Objective aspects are quite real without being visible. Similarly, we exchange goods and services with our kin, without being cognizant of a system which regulates exchange of such articles, a system of gift exchange.

The leader's act of sacrifice of one's own life might appear to the lay person's eyes as a supreme gift to the working class, and this is exactly why his followers put up such a vigorous agitation. But to a person who can objectify the objective system of



exchange from outside is protected from the subjective experiences the system of gift produces on its participants. Only an experiencing subject is deceived by the common sense that gift is free or gifting is disinterested. *It is precisely this gratuitous nature of the act of gifting that gives the leader's action the noble character.* But in reality, like market exchange, articles and services in the gift economy too costs labour or take pains to produce. All things priceless have their price (Bourdieu: 1986, 16). But we always make sure that the price tag is removed before we pack the gift, to suppress the economic dimension of our existences. This suppression of the economic reality, this euphemism that makes gifts glow, makes them appear glorious, because the economic is constructed relative to the symbolic economies as the mundane. This is why calculation is denounced as disenchanting in economies of symbolic goods. The world of calculations, counting, measuring, predictions and competition, i.e. the values of the economic economy are excluded from an economy of symbolic goods, a veritable economy of honour. Yet, it is only a mistake to believe that economic economy and economies of honour are disjoint. Underlying this economy of honour is the economic economy with its 'cold', 'egoistical' calculations, which assert that no gift is free. If this relation between the economic economy and the economy of honour is revealed to the agents, the economy of honour can no more produce the subjective experiences of the gift, i.e. its emotional effects. Such a revelation will expose the real economic bases of which the cult of the individual was masking. What pains we take to make a gift look personal! Thus the real function of the cult of the individual is to mask the "social alchemy" that is necessary for the practice of gifts to continue. No gift is free. Even the most gratuitous acts of giving operate in an economy, an economy of honour. Greatness is profit made in that economy of honour.

If the leader's sacrifice is not to be understood as a free gift, a free giving away of his life, which would be to waste it, and is to be seen as an investment in an economy of honour for gains in symbolic terms, for capital gains in terms of honour, then how can he claim that he performed the *Satyagraha* for values of public interest that he believed in? He indeed believed in the values of the field of politics - public interest. This belief must have been his motive. Yet it is also true that he knew that great actions indeed are rewarding in symbolic terms. It is this economy of honour that ties people with the string of prestige compelling them into miraculous acts, acts of great

agency, which they would not attempt for all the gold in the world. If one is not looking for money, one is looking for honour. Consequently, there is no gratuitous act. If the economy of honour and the economic economy share the same structure, in terms of investment, capital and interest, then, what distinction can the political field claim over the economic field? What is the basis of the moral superiority claimed by a politically correct action over action ordered by naked self-interest?

If the political field is an economy of honour, then its 'moral' values arise only by difference from the values of the economic economy. The moral and political values are not superior to the value of economic economy, i.e. "self interested calculation, competition and exploitation" (Bourdieu: 1979, 23). The values of politics are as arbitrary as that of the economy. Bourdieu does not analyse political greatness directly. But his theoretical framework is good enough to understand and analyse prestige in the field of politics.

What is greatness of the great people, other than accumulated honour or prestige, or to borrow the technical term from Bourdieu, accumulated "symbolic labour"? Such accumulation of labour has social conditions of possibility, in the sense that, such accumulation is possible only in societies which permit accumulation. However, like common people, great people too do not see their greatness as products of accumulated labour, possible only in some social formations that permit it. Instead they distinguish themselves from common people through claims of possessing some innate quality or competence. What they in fact have is symbolic capital which declares that it is not capital. It disguises as competence or greatness.

But how do we benefit from conceptualizing personal greatness as capital? All kinds of capital are the cause of social inertia, or status quo. It is the inert quality of capital that prevents social transformation. Capital, when it works with the institutions that make, unmake and remake it, is a formidable force, the root cause of all inequality in the social world, and especially the reproduction of inequality, a preoccupation of Bourdieu. The more capital one has, the more profit it draws in each and every social exchange in all fields. The more integrated capital, is to the institutions that reproduces it, the more enlarged its profits are in the next turn. So with time, it will accumulate more capital in relation to people without capital. This means that with

time, the exclusion of capital-less people will intensify, simply if capital is permitted to operate by its principles of attracting unequal profits from the field of its operation.

The leader, whom I studied, accumulated some social capital in a short period. But he did not have an organized political party, in other words, an institutional mechanism to reproduce his accumulated capital. But CPM had such institutions already established. Thus EMS, the icon of CPM is able to reproduce his reputation and greatness even after his death. The very fact that he is dead makes it easier to turn him into a legend. Gandhi is another example of an institutional construction and maintenance of greatness. Behind the icon stands the force that benefit from the icon, the party or the nation state. It is the field and the institutions within the field that reproduces capital. As Bourdieu states, wealth or any form of value becomes capital only when it takes advantage of the institutional mechanisms of reproduction. Similarly, greatness becomes social capital only when integrated to institutional mechanisms that can reproduce it, which the leader did not have.

Huge volumes of capital exist in the form of symbolic capital escaping recognition as capital but legitimately performing its role of structuring the inequality and determining outcomes of all games. It is a deceptive form of capital because it is not recognized as capital but as true merit, greatness or love. In the family it appears in the form of love and mutual care tying generations with obligations. In the political field it appears as greatness that attracts devotees and ties them without their knowledge. In the academic field it appears as true competence that is thought to deserve rewards. In the field of art it appears in the form of genius that is worshipped. Economic capital seems less harmful in comparison with symbolic capital in reach and effects. I believe that students of social science must pay more attention to symbolic forms of capital, which akin to dark matter of the physical world, remains invisible while determining the social world's equations of power.

Trade union activism is based on the logic that economic capital can be fought through organization. Firstly, most trade union activism while fighting capital in its economic form, miss capital in other forms, where it hides in the disguise of competence or justified prestige and honour. But more importantly, activism runs into the contradiction because, as the leader's story shows, to be a good and effective leader one has to accumulate social capital. This means that to fight capital in its

economic form, one needs capital in its symbolic form. This means that one can only fight capital with capital. Most importantly, social capital is nothing but economic capital transubstantiated. Only someone who can support himself with sufficient funds during the long process of accumulation of social capital, alone can hope to be a leader. This means that only certain classes have the privilege to recruit leaders. The leader hailing from a poor family is an exception to this argument. Yet he is not the real downtrodden like some Dalit women who worked as contract workers in the factory, whom I met.

The leader's struggle is often represented as a revolution in trade union movement. The agential individual who carries out the revolution is a Marxist or Maoist imagination. But theoretical paradoxes are thrown up to the question, if the great can indeed carry out a real revolution? Does not the drive to constitute greatness come in the way of real revolutionary transformation? At the first sight, the leader's struggle may appear as unique and revolutionary. It is true that it did challenge the established powers like CPM in the political field of Kerala. But as Bourdieu says, the great are the most compliant and have the least liberty to challenge traditional values.

The tasks of representation and mediation which fell to the *tamen* did indeed demand a great deal of time and effort. Those on whom the group bestows the title "wise men" or "great men", and who, in the absence of any official mandate find themselves invested in a sought of tacit delegation of the group's authority, feel *obliged* (by a sense of duty towards themselves resulting from considerable self-esteem) constantly to recall the group to the values it officially recognizes, both by their exemplary conduct, and by their express utterances;... (Bourdieu: 1977, 193).

Indeed the leader was very compliant to traditional values of the family, a very dominant institution in Kerala. He personally did not maintain a family. But it was the pain of witnessing workers' families in starvation, that drove him into the hunger strike, he said once. Only by representing the welfare of the institution of family, which is the most dominant traditional institution in Kerala, could he (or for that matter any leader) have emerged as a leader. Only by complying with established rules of how a leader should look and behave could he have presented himself as a leader to a large public. His act of *Satyagraha* which endured for fifty six days was the epitome of agency, something that 'ordinary' human beings cannot achieve. But

the act was directed towards following the rules of the field in the strictest manner possible. The most revolutionary struggle in fact is the most compliant in terms of the values of the field. So at the heart of revolution lies strict compliance to existing order.

The political field with its ultimate value of public interest, and the economic field with its value of self-interest were established by historical forces. When the leader challenged the toughest and most established players in the political field, his action might have appeared revolutionary. But this is mere participation in the games of the field, which is possible only through compliance with the field's values. The leader did believe and act in exemplary way in public interest. How can compliance to field's values ever be revolution? Such an action is a reconstitution of the field with purer unadulterated values. In fact his classification of himself as sincere and CPM as corrupt only means that he has unadulterated pure commitment to public interest, while CPM has allowed the value of economic field, self-interest, to dominate the political field. As capitalism progressed, the economic field has come to dominate all kinds of fields. The value of the economic field - self interest - comes to dominate all fields' values, public interest in this case. The leader's struggle was against the domination of the political field by the economic field. He did what a lone agent could do working with insurmountable limits. Yet within limits, he exercised great agency. But this need not be thought as revolution. Is excelling in compliance to the fields' values the most revolutionary thing to do?

Every social field, whether the scientific field, the artistic field, the bureaucratic field, or the political field, tends to require those entering it to have the relationship to the field that I call *illusio*. They may want to overturn the relations of force within the field, but, for that very reason they grant recognition to the stakes, they are not indifferent. Wanting to undertake a revolution in a field is to accord the essential of what the field tacitly demands, namely that it is important, that the game played is sufficiently important for one, to want to undertake a revolution in it (Bourdieu: 1998, 78).

If carrying out a revolution itself is possible only by the acceptance of historically constituted fields and games in those fields, then what constitutes real transformation? I believe that the most vehement criticism of power is an attack on the field itself.

What Bourdieu's theories teach is that power does not lie in the participants of the games in the fields of this social world. In modern differentiated societies, power lies in the very structure of the fields and their differentiation. Even wealth without the institutional mechanisms (like banking network, credit institutions, insurance, contracts, legitimate authority to enforce contracts like state etc) and instruments and the games of economy, does not become capital. If revolution is that which challenges power, then it is action that which fundamentally challenges the field itself, which can come about only through mass disenchantment in the games of the field, and not by participation in the games of the field. Only when the social alchemy that produces value is disbelieved, does the field lose its power of coercion. But the power of the field is not purely constructed. Knowledge of how the field works by itself cannot render the field powerless. The mechanisms of the field are objective as well as constructed.

However, this criticism is a positioned criticism. Disenchantment with the games of the fields in this social world was not a choice for a position like that of the leader, caught in the game and compelled to play without any escape from it. Disenchantment is probably an available solution for a middle class subject like this research student.

Revolutionary action is often portrayed as an agential act, an act of great individual creativity, effort, sacrifice and risk. Such a view is possible only when one misses the social aspect of all actions. Like all other human acts, it is a social act, in the sense that, an action that requires permission by society, and that happens only because it is permissible by society, an action that relies entirely on social institutions for proceeding, in fact made feasible by society by its production and maintenance of the social institutions. The leader's revolutionary *Satyagraha* presupposed institutions of gift. Looking from a perspective of an objective social structure like the system of gift exchange, the leader's act is simply like any other act of giving that expects receipts. But common sense which sees only the act of giving but not the system which obligates a cycle of gifts and counter-gift, mistakes the giving as a disinterested, gratuitous act of unmatched generosity, which in relation to the acts in money economy, the epitome of which is Raymon's exploitation, misrecognizes it as a noble act, an act of greatness. The leader simply tapped into the pre-existing social

institution of gift in order to influence people. Sacrifice, like potlatch is gift in its extreme form. The leader did not invent *Satyagraha*, sacrifice or gift exchange. The leader's ingenuity was in recognizing and putting available social institutions to effective use. No miracle could have been done had the social systems of gift exchange or sacrifice were not available. There is no space outside social institutions. No individual can invent a new social institution. (That would indeed be a miracle!) Gandhi's greatness is often attributed to his creativity in inventing the form of protest namely *Satyagraha*. Only an anthropological perspective does reveal that he did nothing more than use the social institution of sacrifice and gift. Common sense which does not penetrate beyond what is apparent, misses the social institutions that make possible great actions, and thus makes personal greatness a possibility.

Gift economy when placed next to money economy will always appear as noble and disinterested. But like art and all things disinterested and priceless, it too has interests, not necessarily in economic terms. It seeks capital in forms other than the economic form. In the case of the leader, the capital he wanted to build was social capital, a group of followers who can be influenced, who will listen to him.

The leader's revolution might appear as a revolution centred on individuals; yet it is very much a collective act. Only with the support of so many families which came out and agitated, and the cooperation of so many organizations, and the visibility that so many news papers gave it, and the help of so many enemies of CPM does the struggle produce the effects it produced. The exchanges between them were made possible by social institutions that existed outside the money economy.

Gift economy might look totally opposed in principle in relation to the capitalist economy where every exchange is accurately and instantly compensated. In other words, capitalism might look as if it is accepting no favours, no discriminations, and no hidden special gifts. But without raw materials which were gifted by the government to Raymon, the industry would not have been possible at all. In fact the very condition that Raymon imposed on the government was that raw materials be given as a gift. To disguise it not like a gift, Re.1 was paid for one tonne of raw materials calling it a subsidy. What are subsidies if not gifts? How feasible would capitalism be without subsidies, in other words, government gifts? Thus the binary opposite of gift economy and market economy itself is problematic.

It is widely held belief among intellectuals that the field of economy is a bit inferior in comparison to fields like academia, art, politics, etc because economic action is interested action, while non-economic action is disinterested. In this dissertation, I have tried to examine action in the field of politics. As Bourdieu says, like all fields, the field of politics also differentiated out of the pre-capitalist social space. It is in no way structurally different from the field of economy. It is a field of positions that compete with each other in asserting and promoting values held as sacred by the field. Exchanges are necessarily aimed at increasing the profit for the volume of capital invested, which is not economic, but symbolic. In short, it is yet another economy. But as the currency in this economy, the thing in which agents are paid and repaid, is honour and not cash, one may call it an economy of honour. Political and moral convictions that motivate one to participate, the feeling of participating in noble actions, are simply prestige. The agents who participate and compete with each other in the academia spend all their lives debating with a small number of people on issues that is of interest only to them. They reward each other with mutual recognition. Prestige is the main profit that they reap in these economies of honour. Thus there seems to be only two classes of fields: an economy of cash (where cash is the recognized currency), and many economies of honour (where symbolic labour<sup>1</sup> is the recognized currency). The leader was competing in an economy of honour called the political field of Kerala.

The family is a small economy of honour where members hold their positions and transact in terms of honour. The inter-family interactions also seem to be regulated by principles of exchange of honour. Similarly, academy is an exchange network where exchange aims at accumulation of honour if not cash. If this is so, then how is the academy structurally different from an economy of cash?

If so, the political and moral convictions that drive intellectuals into life and death positions are as arbitrary as the values of economic economy which they inferiorize. Also, in no way can the politically charged intellectual claim more worth than the 'apolitical housewife'. If political action is not necessarily superior to apolitical

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<sup>1</sup> Gifting symbolic labour is a practice that is sure to produce capital. Housewives thus gift symbolic and material labour to their family members. Almost all their capital is in the form of social capital, or mutual recognition within the family.



existence, then how can the leader's (or for that matter Gandhi's) claim to greatness be justified? If disinterested actions are not possible in theory then everybody's actions are aimed at amassing capital. It is only because capital in its symbolic form is hard to recognize as capital, when invested and when profits are claimed, that actions look disinterested. The delayed<sup>2</sup> way in which the gift exchange system bestows symbolic profits on agents means that actions appear as not seeking reward, or gratuitous. If everyone is in a competition for economic or symbolic profits, then the businessman is not structurally different from the virtuous politician, who has no particular claims of distinctions over the apolitical housewife. We must admit that there is no noble action; noble actions are in fact actions that aim at a distinction as nobility.

The independent individual is an English liberal idea. Anthropology has always tried to show how social a being, the individual is. This is by drawing the institutional nature of human life and actions. It is only when one erases the social nature of human life that all things personal becomes possible. Personal charisma is one such construction that makes itself possible by the erasure of the social institutional mechanisms which is its real progenitor.

While I emphasise the importance of social institutions, I must repeat that the leader did have qualities like practical problem solving skills. The demand his union put forward reflected his practical problem solving nature. The first option was that Raymon opens the factory as soon as possible with no worker retrenched. If Raymon declines to run the factory, then government should take over the management and run it for the workers. If running the factory is impossible, then retrench all employees paying full benefits. What was not an option was to "tie the workers without a rope indefinitely". And it is up to the government to take the responsibility to negotiate with Raymon. The third option read along with the non-option distinguished him from all other trade unions. No other trade union was asking the workers to be retrenched with full benefits. It made it very clear that he meant to resolve the problem instead of enduring the crisis. It also meant that he saw retrenchment as a real option and it would be better for the workers to accept retrenchment than suffer indefinitely. It also imposed on Raymon the responsibility to

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<sup>2</sup> Bourdieu argues that gifts have to be deferred and different.

act, that if they intend to close it, make it fast and fulfil all obligations.

Bourdieu says that action in public interest is structurally similar to action in self-interest. Both economy (the field where action is ordered by the principle of self-interest) and political field/bureaucracy (the field where action is ordered by the principle of public interest) are fields that differentiate in capitalism and thus share the same structure. All fields have the structure of economy. They are fields where agents compete, exploit and take profits. Differences in the distribution of capital determine the structures of these fields. So agents with higher capital reap larger profits in all these fields. But the forms of capital in these fields are different. In all fields except economy the form of capital is symbolic. No one recognize symbolic capital as capital. Thus fame of the leader actually works to his benefit. It is his capital, but in a symbolic form. And it makes a competition with a commoner with no symbolic capital an unequal competition. But capital just in another form does not stop to function like capital. It is ultimately a force that creates inequality. And it is nothing other than economic capital that changes form and becomes symbolic capital.

Both bureaucracy and charismatic domination are ways of domination primarily rather than noble service. Noble service is misrecognition. As Bourdieu says, noble actions whenever they occur are actions that aim to create nobility. They are tropes to create symbolic capital that are used to dominate. If altruistic noble actions of charismatic leaders are nothing but devious ways to compete in an economy of honour, then why should we support resistance movements at all? A good reason why we should support resistance movements is that while capital is a pre-requisite for domination, it is as much a central factor in counter domination too. Resistance also depends on capital. So capital is not by definition a dominating force. It depends on how it is put to use. Capital can be used to resist attempts to dominate. The story of the leader who used his little bit of capital to resist the encroachment of agents with huge capital is a demonstration of this. Social space often becomes a site of relentless turbulence where capital in all its forms fights capital. There is no space outside the social space, outside all influence of capital. And only with capital can one resist domination by capital. We need not distinguish the leader as noble for what he did. But a sole focus on the aspect of domination will miss the aspect of resistance in collective struggles by capital-less people.

I see the struggle as a game in which a relatively low capital person enters a field where large sharks swim. It is important to note that the leader was not a common worker without any capital. It was his previously acquired symbolic capital that lets him compete with large unions. He was extremely prudent not to attack his enemies in the first couple of years. Initially he simply makes his appearance known to all and raises pertinent issues and responds diplomatically, never accepting enemies' invitation to play the game according to their rules (that of violence). In the first years he waits to assess the strengths and weaknesses of various players and the power distribution and the field. He chooses whom to team with and whom to avoid. He partnered with Muslims and avoided the left and the right. He launches his attack only when the time is ripe, when all workers' crisis has deepened to the extent that they have lost trust in his enemies. That is when he calls on the workers to change the demands and the mode of struggle, now that the time tested methods of mass struggle has failed. His switch over to *Satyagraha* (which needs only one man who has the will to starve to death), which is the structural opposite of mass struggle (which needs a large following), is as much an imposition by his structural situation as it is a practical strategy which aims at distinguishing himself again from large parties. *Satyagraha* also means desire for truth, or the demonstration of sincere commitment. So the method is just a practical performance of the discourse of sincere/corrupt trade unions, which he had been popularising for many years. Thus he brings practices in harmony with discourse. Such relations between practice and discourse are never made explicit anywhere but are understood by the fuzzy grasp of common sense. He cleverly made his *Satyagraha* address the government and not Raymon. The leader constructs the game in such a way that he made the CPM government as his counterpart in the game. This is strange, since by Marxian theory, the real enemy of working class is the capitalist, Raymon in this case. But this is not an arbitrary decision. The leader knew that he could not influence Raymon from his position. Raymon was too big and not accountable to his death if that happens in the process of *Satyagraha*. But, the CPM government was a sitting duck with long term accountability towards the public of Kerala. Thus he constructed the game with great care in such a way that his choice of the opponent made victory a possibility. He would have failed had he addressed any other power as his enemy. This is why Bourdieu says that there is not structural opposite, but only a constructed opposite within the structures. The enemy is a construction that we make. Quite a lot of winning the game is about choosing the

right partner. Thus he was a clever player. His victory is not a permanent or absolute victory as it is often represented. His victory is the result of a clever choice within the possibilities structures permitted. Thus there is choice and space for creativity and imagination within structural constraints. An uncreative and inexperienced player would have failed by making wrong choices.<sup>3</sup>

So why did the leader get obliterated in a few years after the closure of the factory? Weber says that only in condition of a crisis can charismatic authority arise and after which the structural conditions are not amenable to charisma. It gives way to bureaucratic domination. The leader could not establish an institution with a bureaucracy like the CPM or the CITU. His play ground did not offer him many more opportunities to remain in demand; the factory ran for another thirteen years before the next major crisis struck the environmental crisis. Chavoor was a small space and beyond that space, his influence was not significant. He could not move onto new *markets*, as the markets are necessarily kept in a fragmented form. Unification of markets of interventionists is not in the interests of capital. And it takes a long time for an individual to establish in a market. There was no crisis that he could have inserted himself into as an interventionist. Medha Patkar often moves from one issue to another in search of problems to intervene. Thus she creates a market of her own. The leader could not move on like that into a generalized charismatic problem solver. His calling was over. In ten years time the environmental movement began and it obliterated<sup>4</sup> the leader's struggle. Environmental movement with such a large institutionalized base<sup>5</sup> and tremendous criticism of capitalism ravaged the factory.

Wealth becomes capital only the presence of institutions that can make use of it in organizing production around it, like the banking network, credit and insurance instruments that these institutions produce, etc. Wealth without institutions to

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<sup>3</sup> But victory is also about iron will. The CPM chief minister tried to break the leader's game by requesting him to break the fast to make way for discussions. Once the leader broke his fast, the chief minister portrayed the leader's break of hunger strike as a failure. When the union leader heard this, he restarted the hunger strike and continued it for another 30 days. Thus the leader played by the rules. But when attacked, he improvised. This was display of good practical sense and will.

<sup>4</sup> Thus whenever I said I was studying a movement in Chavoor the factory people immediately respond, 'oh, the environmental movement'. The leader's movement now lives only within his old box and his memories.

<sup>5</sup> I believe that there is scope in studying how capital plays a part in the success of environmental movement.

reproduce it is not capital. Capital is wealth in a certain social formation, in a capitalist society. Similarly, social and symbolic capital needs to be fed into an institutional mechanism to reproduce it in enlarged form. Capital can remain capital only as long as it is involved in institutions. Weber mistakes this as rationality, as some kind of superior arrangement. Superior it is from the point of view of capital. The ways capitalist institutions use to reproduce capital within it is truly amazing. But to qualify it as rational at the expense of less institutionalized societies' prestige is ideology.

The leader's capital remained in the incorporated form. He did not have the institutionalized mechanisms to convert it into objective forms (Bourdieu: 1977, 186). CITU and CPM had established institutional mechanisms for producing and reproducing connections and influencing people. It could produce any number of followers in a systematic manner. The environmental movement has similar institutional repertoire to influence people. In putting people before profits, it opposes capital and its means of production, factories, but seems to employ the very same institutional mechanisms for the reproduction of its social capital. Thus structurally these movements are opposed to the leader's kind of movement which is based on non-institutional mechanisms. Thus in structure they have more in common with capitalist institutions than with the leader.

While the leader was reduced to obscurity, CPM survived. Even today it distinguishes itself as the progressive force in political field of Kerala. Many think that it is because of the ideological apparatuses CPM has that it is able to perpetuate itself as a considerable force. It is the sheer strength of its institutional mechanisms which guarantee their reproduction. In the initial stages production of legitimating discourses<sup>6</sup> are important, especially to conceal the relations of domination. But once domination is established, discourses are much less important that the institution can reproduce itself by sheer mechanical processes. Even for CPM at the lowest level of the hierarchy, domination is person to person. Kinship relations and friendship of party cadres are used to mobilize votes and keep the party.

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<sup>6</sup> An example of a legitimating discourse is the visionary discourse laid out by Namboodirippad (2000) on development of Kerala.

Power in capitalist society is totally different and superior in efficiency to pre-capitalist forms of power. It has objective mechanisms for setting up, reproducing and moreover “concealing lasting relations of domination” (Bourdieu: 1977, 189). Chavoor saw a moment of subjugation of institutional power by a pre-capitalist form of power, charismatic personal domination. As we have seen this is no revolution. Moreover, such momentary subversions are anomalies and not the rule.

I realized that economy is a good model to understand all fields, and not just the space of unions. Thus competition and struggle was a permanent feature in all spaces. There was tough competition between the middle classes and the ruling elite groups in the factory. One of the middle level engineers told me in an interview that the middle management hated the 'Marwari' because they systematically pushed down the 'meritorious' classes into middle level management securing all powerful posts. They felt that merit, judged by scholastic achievements, should have been the criteria, in determining the distribution of rare positions among the candidates. Yet to their disadvantage, patrimonial loyalties were what Raymon actually preferred. Thus they felt that the top echelons if not the whole structure was virtually closed to the principles of bureaucratic management<sup>7</sup>.

This rift between middle management and top management worked to my benefit. The engineer told me juicy stories<sup>8</sup> of why the environmental movement itself

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<sup>7</sup> Thus a scientist who had in fact developed the process of converting bamboo into pulp in Japan doing original research in chemical engineering was the head of the Chavoor unit initially. Later, he was transferred to Karnataka to head a new unit that was being established. Once Raymon knew that the plant was up and running and that the dependency on technical staff was less, they appointed a family friend, as the president of the factory. This man appears as a totally corrupt individual who established a business empire in Calicut using money swindled away from the factory.

<sup>8</sup> The president of the factory, he said, was a 'Marwadi', who according to the engineer informant did not know the ways of dealing with Keralite newspapers. He had established very patrimonial relations with a major newspaper in Malabar, giving the nephew of the chief of the newspaper a job in the factory. This was a move to silence the news paper from publishing any damaging news about the factory. The whole organization was run in very patrimonial manner. He had also employed the niece of a major politician to quieten the party. Also he worked closely with the trade union leaders and appointed whoever they wanted to be in the permanent rolls of the factory. Promotions were given to those people whom trade union leaders would recommend. Thus many late comers who had connections in the party and trade union climbed up in the hierarchy while experienced people wanting to keep their independence from party and its patrimony were sidelined. It was such practices that the leader criticised as corruption. So the leader was criticising patrimony and not bureaucracy. CITU, the largest union which is supposed to be a bureaucratically managed organization appears in all accounts as a large patrimonial system linked to CPM which appears an even larger system of patrimony.

The president of the company, who was used to the patrimonial ways of dealing with others, used it in the wrong place. It all began from a circulation war between two newspapers in Kerala. A news paper

erupted. This also came from structural discrepancies and competition between newspapers. What is interesting to us is that status quo is an intricate balance of power. A small mistake, or lack of diplomacy can unsettle this balance and it may sometimes work in the benefit of even the most powerless and capital-less people. Even Raymon is not outside the struggle for power between agents in the field<sup>9</sup>. Even the capitalist is in continuous exchanges of challenge and riposte with politicians, trade unions, media etc. Capitalists although they enjoy a certain amount of freedom from domination, as Weber may say so, are equally under threat from politicians, other capitalists, media, and natural factors like dearth of raw materials.

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from Southern Kerala, which was trying to encroach into the Malabar market, which was dominated by another news paper, published a piece on the environmental pollution caused by the factory. The president of the company irritated by this called up the former news paper's office and shouted at the staff. In Kerala, media could not be quieted by direct threats. The news paper from south Kerala decided to publish a series of articles about environmental pollution by the factory. This put pressure on the other news paper to take up the same issue, without which they would be perceived as allying with the factory. Thus they too published a series of articles on air pollution and water pollution in river Paliyar due to the operations of the factory. This gave the local people courage to question the indiscriminate pollution by the factory, which led to a series of protests. They broke a bund that was protecting the factory from its own polluted water. The bund was preventing the mixing of clean water in the river and the polluted water from the factory. This forced a halt of production, and caused loss for Raymon. Because of the broken bund, water supply to Calicut city was affected and water supplied on one day had foul smell. The much more influential city population revolted and things steadily worsened (Sudhakaran, phone interview, Calicut, 21 January 2010).

My informant had fashioned the whole story such that all blame would land on one person, the president, and his patrimonial practices. What is interesting to us is that status quo is an intricate balance of power. A small mistake, or lack of diplomacy can unsettle this balance and it may sometimes work in the benefit of even the most powerless capital less people.

<sup>9</sup> Another example of this balance of power is the history of how the raw material costs sky rocketed. Raymon with all its contacts in congress government had managed to remain a monopoly producer of pulp in India. George Fernandez, the socialist who was a long term enemy of Raymon, was determined to break this monopoly. Thus when he was made a minister in the Janata party government post emergency, he threw open the Indian market to pulp imports from Scandinavia, which had much better quality pulp at lower price. Raymon knew that if it continued to produce pulp, the logic of market will bring down the price of its pulp. Thus it ordered that all its pulp plants be shut down until the import relaxations were revoked. It was in the eve of signing the renewal contract of a year that Raymon ordered a halt of operations. The president of the company who was undiplomatic, it is said, walked into the office of the chief minister where all union leaders were ready to sign the contract, and said that it is not possible to run the factory, citing no reasons. Later they came to know the reason for the president's behaviour. The chief minister took his behaviour as an insult and decided to revenge this. The factory remained closed for eight months till the import restrictions were replaced. But when the factory reopened the congress government increased the raw material costs as revenge to the insult landed by the president of the company. The CPM government did not bring it down. And ultimately it spelled disaster to Raymon's operations in Chavoor. What is interesting is that contrary to popular belief, Raymon also is not outside all relations of domination. Capitalists although they enjoy a certain amount of freedom from domination, as Weber may say so, are equally under threat from politicians, other capitalists, media, and natural factors like dearth of raw materials.

What has the social theory of Pierre Bourdieu taught us about human behaviour? Firstly, I have tried to trace his intellectual lineage to Mauss in his theory of gift exchange. His problematic is built on problematic of earlier anthropologists like Mauss and Levi-Strauss. Yet he contributes significantly through developing a general theory of the economy of practice. A theory of an economy of general social practices is based on a claim that human activities in all fields obey a practical reason.

There is an economy of practices, a reason immanent in practices, whose 'origin' lies neither in the 'decisions' of reason understood as rational calculation nor in the determinations of mechanisms external to and superior to the agents. Being constitutive of the structure of rational practice, that is, the practice most appropriate to achieve the objectives inscribed in the logic of a particular field at the lowest cost, this economy can be defined in relation to all kinds of functions, one of which, among others, is the maximization of monetary profit, the only one recognized by economism. In other words, if one fails to recognize any form of action other than rational action or mechanical reaction, it is impossible to understand the logic of all the actions that are reasonable without being the product of a reasoned design, still less of rational calculation ; informed by a kind of objective finality without being consciously organized in relation to an explicitly constituted end; intelligible and coherent without springing from an intention of coherence and a deliberate decision ; adjusted to the future without being the product of a project or a plan (Bourdieu: 1990b, 50).

The disenchantment that his sociology produces has led me to posit that personal greatness as an arbitrary claim. We started with the question, "isn't an act of donation of one's life, for a noble cause, a noble act?" We found that it is a limited view to see the leader as solely engaged in trying to save four thousand workers and their families, and repress the fact that the leader was competing in an economy of honour with other trade unions. Repression of the objective realities like his position as a competing agent in a field of competition is part of the euphemism that produces the feeling of generous individual. The leader's act looks much less generous when the aspect of competition for honour is placed along with the disinterested act of saving lives. According to Bourdieu, a noble act is just that: an act that aims to create nobility, a group which considers them to be superior in relation to others.

"Isn't an individual who volunteers to sacrifice his life for a noble cause a great person?" I found that individuals do not act autonomously. In Mauss' accounts, action



is role play within social institutional arrangements like gift exchange systems. For Bourdieu, individual energy, or libido, is undifferentiated and without direction. Only when this undifferentiated libido is oriented by fields, do they become socially meaningful action. Thus actions have to be acknowledged as produced by field and not emanating out from the voluntary will of the individual person. Then how can we accept that sacrifice was a voluntary act? Sacrifices are not heroic acts, but cultivated dispositions with a decent statistical probability in fields where it is demanded and rewarded. The field compels and extracts certain acts from agents who are given roles of great responsibilities. Greatness thus has to be seen as bestowed by social institutions of sacrifice and gift giving.

“Isn't such generosity not to be revered?” Following Bourdieu we may argue that generosity is a subjective feeling that is produced in a recipient within all gift exchange systems. The function of the feeling of generosity is to act as a euphemism which represses the objective fact of labour and pain involved in carrying out the exchange. The time lag between the gift and the counter gift is what makes the counter-gift seem unique and unrelated to the original gift, leading to the feeling of generosity. When the leader offers his life as sacrifice, he looks generous because it appears like a gift, unmotivated by any material gain. As no return is demanded, the gift of life looks truly free. Yet this is only illusion, since the system of gifting would compel people to reward the leader by organizing and agitating and conferring on him great honour.

“In a world given over to cash and power, shouldn't such acts of disinterest deserve to be worshipped?” Structural analysis shows that there is no innate meaning to the term disinterest or acts of disinterest. Disinterest receives its meaning only from its opposing relation with interest. We have seen that fields present themselves as homes of disinterested action but in no way are they any less competitive and devoid of struggles. They rank and exclude their participants as much as the economic field does on the basis of the capital which participants possess. It is just that the form of capital which they recognize is different from that of the economic field. In fact the exclusion appears much more legitimate because the symbolic nature of the capital makes distinctions like claims of sincerity to look like true merit, the basis of popularity and greatness. Thus established trade unions with their huge symbolic

capital posed an insurmountable obstacle for a new leader or trade union to emerge and challenge their hegemony. The leader could hope to make a dent in their empires only through an act which would place him in favourable light vis-à-vis all other players. For this he had to represent all trade unions in such a way that he can distinguish himself through some discourse or act. The factory owner was being read as the exemplar of self-interest and destruction. The leader associated all trade unions with the factory owner in such a way that he could collapse the distinctions between them in principle. This was how he claimed that all other trade unions were corrupt and letting themselves to be dominated by the selfish corporate. This permitted him to distinguish himself as the sincere leadership, the faithful representative of the working class. *Satyagraha* was his discourse put into practice where through embodied suffering, which no other trade union was prepared to perform, he communicated sincerity and commitment without words, directly from body to body. Thus his discourse and practice were in harmony with each other action reaffirming words, escalating the intensity of communication as the climax arrived.

One of the most important distinctions of *Satyagraha* is that it is an 'abstract' cultural form, as opposed to say rioting. Raymon had encountered rioting in another plant in Karnataka which too had to be closed down. Why did the leader not instigate rioting? Even political practices have aesthetic aspects. Thus, it is important to pay attention to the aesthetic element in *Satyagraha*. The leader himself is a Maoist who in his own past had tried guerrilla warfare and failed to make any impact on his enemy - the state. Guerrilla warfare, like rioting, is direct and functional, necessitated and much less disinterested, and hence used widely by the most downtrodden people as their mode of resistance. Thus when the leader employs a more abstract mode of protest, which delivers result, we need to also think about why some modes of protest are responded to while other more 'brutal', 'barbaric' or 'savage' ones are repressed legitimately without guilt. The legitimacy of *Satyagraha* depends on the Bourgeois appreciation of 'abstract' cultural forms. The whole tradition of non-violence beginning from Gandhi is built on bourgeois notions of what is legitimate and aesthetic.

When the leader shows preparedness to gift his own life for the cause of the people, what he does is to override the prohibition of placing sacred things in gift exchange.

With the rise of the discourse of humanism and the notion of individual life as sacred, human life had become exempt from being placed in any kind of gift exchange system. Mauss has shown that this was not the case in 'archaic' societies where people and things were not distinguished as they did not have separate status. His act of placing his own life in a gift exchange invokes shocks because he subjugated the established notion of individual for the cause of the class. The leader might have found the notion of the individual self as the most important obstacle in the making of a united working class. Only through the repression of the notion of the individual self could a working class be constituted. And nothing was more appropriate than sacrifice of an individual life. Being the leader he felt all the more compelled by the field to perform the sacrifice of life himself.

But most importantly, the sacrifice happens in a "charismatic economy" which refuses any other determination other than pure political intention. In a time when the political field was being dominated by the economic field, the political field could only assert itself by producing a sacrificer indifferent to all economic compensation<sup>10</sup>.

What the leader calls as corruption is nothing but the domination of the political field by the values of the economic field – self-interested material profiteering. What the leader means by sincerity is an affirmation of public interest. When the leader's claims that he wants to purify trade unions of the corruption, he is pointing to a struggle to establish the autonomy of the political field from the domination of the economic field. In this sense, he wants to further the differentiation of fields in contemporary society into a clear cut political field which is autonomous from domination by the economic field. One should not suspect that he wants to go back into a 'golden past' prior to the emergence of self-interest.

*Satyagraha* is usually seen as a non-violent mode of protest par excellence because it hurts no one other than oneself. Yet Bourdieu's perspective sees it as a way in which the protestor distinguishes himself from other protestors. It is a weapon of struggle at once against the enemy and other protestors. Thus it is not as non-violent as it is made

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<sup>10</sup> "As we shall see, this does not mean that there is not an economic logic to this charismatic economy based on the social miracle of an act devoid of any determination other than the specifically aesthetic intention. There are economic conditions for the indifference to economy which induces a pursuit of the riskiest positions in the intellectual and artistic avant-garde, and also for the capacity to remain there over a long period without any economic compensation" (Bourdieu:1993,40).

to appear. It is the result of a strategy to distinction, and not outside power and competition. It is a weapon. Can weapons be non-violent? Protest is also a field of competition. And what does non-violence mean in a field of competition?

Bourdieu's social theory which sets up a very strong critique against claims to disinterestedness has allowed me to criticise disinterestedness in the political field. Surely a hagiographic reading supremely innocent of the social and historical conditions of possibility of such an act and the effect it produces (hero worship of the leader) is no more possible in the light of such a criticism. Yet it would be another humanist fallacy to draw a conclusion that the leader is a scheming villain. The real fruits of Bourdieu's theory are in distributing the logic of practice in structure and habitus equally. The functioning of the political field makes it impossible for a person like the leader to avoid taking the pains of sacrifices and pleasures of honour it bestows on him. When the field of economy dominates every other field including the field of politics, and when everyone turns utilitarian in their pursuits, it is such agents who live their lives in an economy of sacrifice bringing some distinction to the field of politics.

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