

**THE CONCEPT OF THE POLITICAL IN CHANTAL  
MOUFFE: THE LIMITS OF POST-MARXISM**

*Dissertation submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the award of the Degree of*

**MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY**



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**2008**



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**CERTIFICATE**

It is certified that the dissertation entitled "*THE CONCEPT OF THE POLITICAL IN CHANTAL MOUFFE: THE LIMITS OF POST-MARXISM*" submitted by Smruti Ranjan Dhal is in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree of *MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY* of this university. This dissertation has not been submitted for the award of any other degree in this university or any other university and is his own work.

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For

Late Ramchandra Muduli,

My Maternal Grandfather (Ajaa)

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

*I owe a deep sense of gratitude to my supervisor, Professor Vidhu Verma. I acknowledge that, had I been asked to single out the person to whom I could give the credit for this work, it would be her, without any second thoughts. Notwithstanding this acknowledgement, all the usual disclaimers hold good. Responsibility for the work remains mine alone.*

*The idea to work on this topic dawned upon me during the compulsory paper offered by Professor Vidhu Verma and Professor Gurpreet Mahajan. The optional paper offered by Prof. Gurpreet Mahajan and Dr. Ajay Godavarty clarified many a concept which did not seem understandable at the first instance. I am thankful to Professor Pralay Kanungo, Professor Valerian Rodrigues, Dr. Shefali Jha, Dr. Asha Sarangi, and Professor Rakesh Gupta from whom I have got most of my knowledge in politics. I am indebted to Late Lalit Sir, Pabak Sir, and Swati Madam who has made political science interesting for me. Thanks to all the staffs of Libraries in JNU for their cooperative nature. The UGC fellowship came very handy.*

*I don't have words to express my heartfelt thanks to Vikas, Poonam, Krushna and Talim. For them, no word of gratitude will suffice. They are beyond that. Still I would like to confess that Poonam's continuous exhortations have compelled me to come out of my procrastination. Thank you Vikas and Poonam, for criticizing me wherever needed. My sincere thanks to Chandran who has selflessly shared with me his articles, relevant to my dissertation.*

*My sincere thanks to Girija Bhai, Sunil Sir, Manish, Swaran Prabhat, Sudhir Bhai and Arindam for their timely help. I am also thankful to Brijesh, Kshirod Bhai, Shakti, Bubu Bhai, Bibhu Bhai, Pradeep Bhai, Saroj Bhai, Ishwar Bhai, Siba Bhai, Mrinal Bhai, Arun Bhai, Fakir Bhai, Naresh Sir, Netaji Bhai, Gopal Bhai, Suhas Sir, Sanjayji, Vijay, Kunal, Sureswar and Santos.*

*My love for Bapa, Bou, Rajat, Pinky, Bapi who have always stood by me. Iti, Kalandi, Papu Bhai, Jitu Bhai, Ravi Mamu, Dillip Mamu, Renu Main and Mommy, Jeja, Maa, Mausii, Mama, Chhuapa, Chhuabou, Nanabou, Nana, Nanabapa, Baby, Bibhuna Mamu, Pabana Mamu and Gopi Aja are the people whose queries regarding my study constantly encourages me to do better.*

*Lastly, I would like to thank Pramod Bhaiya and Vijay for their food at the dhaba in the late night.*

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## INTRODUCTION

The fall of the Berlin Wall which was one of the symbols of the Cold War in 1989 was followed by a series of events leading to collapse and disintegration of the 'second world' - the socialist countries of Eastern Europe. Mass demonstrations caused the overthrow of communist governments in the eight East European countries that were part of the Soviet bloc. Eventually the Soviet Union disintegrated. Socialism became discredited with the collapse of communism.

Francis Fukuyama in his article 'The End of History'<sup>1</sup> in 1989 argued that western liberalism had triumphed over all its rivals. The collapse of communist rule in Eastern Europe in 1989 marked 'an unabashed victory of economic and political liberalism' which was evident in the 'total exhaustion of viable systematic alternatives to Western liberalism'.<sup>2</sup> Fukuyama argued that the collapse of Soviet Union was not just the end of the Cold War, or the passing of a particular period of postwar history, but the end of history as such. By the 'end of history', he meant "the end point of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalisation of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government."<sup>3</sup> Citing the spread of consumerism in China and Russia, Japan, Iran and other countries as the proof of the penetration of liberal culture, he argued that collapse of communism is not only about high politics and politics, it is beyond that. He was of the view that although the 'victory of liberalism' had occurred 'primarily in the realm of ideas or consciousness' and was 'yet incomplete in the real or material world', there were convincing reasons for believing that it was the ideal that would "govern the material world *in the long run*."<sup>4</sup> To

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<sup>1</sup> Fukuyama, Francis (1989). 'The End of History', *The National Interest*, summer, vol. 16, pp. 3-18. This article was also published in Fareed Zakaria (ed) (1997). *The New Shape of World Politics*. New York: Foreign affairs. Here I have used the latter.

<sup>2</sup> Fukuyama, Francis (1997). 'The End of History', in Fareed Zakaria (ed). *The New Shape of World Politics*. New York: Foreign affairs, pp. 1-2.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

paraphrase Hobsbawm, 'the short twentieth century'<sup>5</sup> ended in 1990. Today we are challenged by problems of a new order.

Some of these problems arise from the fact that Marxist theory has been inadequate to face the challenges posed by today's three significant intellectual currents that have begun to take shape during the last decades of the twentieth century. They are the theories of postmodernism/ post structuralism; the theoretical assertion of the new social movements such as feminism, eco-politics and the identity politics inspired by these intellectual movements and the revitalised theory of liberal democracy.

Classical Marxism<sup>6</sup> envisages antagonism between only two classes: bourgeoisie and proletariat. It does not say much about other antagonisms inherent in society. So in 1970s, when the new social movements surfaced in the world panorama, Marxism was unable to locate the nature of these movements. It did not have any satisfactory answer for their non-class character. The privileged 'working class' of Marxism was not representing the movements. These movements were concerned with different kinds of identities. Liberalism was also unable to account for the rise of these movements. For, the idea of the autonomous and free individual could not let the liberal self come to terms with the outburst of numerous movements based on different identities. However since then liberal theorists have grappled with problems of multiculturalism, citizenship and liberal democracy.

Given that the ideology and political practice of social democracy, including the welfare state as a form of social administration are in considerable disarray doubts about the prospects for a revival of old ideas, values and norms are questionable at this stage. The current difficulties in democratic practice owe a lot to a mismatch between the organizing practices of liberal democracy and changed material

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<sup>5</sup> Hobsbawm, Eric (1991a). 'Goodbye to All That', in Robin Blackburn (ed) *After the Fall: The Failure of Communism and the Future of Socialism*. London & New York: Verso, p. 123. Hobsbawm borrows this from a Hungarian historian, whose name he does not mention.

<sup>6</sup> I use the term classical Marxism to refer to the works of Marx and Engels as found in the classical texts such as *German Ideology* (Marx, 1970) and *Capital* volume 1 (Marx, 1977).

conditions within which those practices operate. Citizens who might otherwise have sought collective solutions to common problems are increasingly drawn to more particularistic or individualistic strategies to advance their own good.

The broader class of citizens who might support democratic ideals is itself more politically heterogeneous. For a generation now, interests not best organized from the standpoint of formal class positions – interests in gender or racial justice, self-government by national groups, ethnic rights, and the environment – have been expressed with an intensity exceeding those of class. Moreover, they are not seen as reducible to class concerns, and are jointly pursued at least in part through cross-class alliances. As a result, any politics limited to class concerns would likely be doomed. But no new solidarity appears to be emerging out of this heterogeneity of interests.

### **Class Politics and Rise of New Social Movements in India**

The post-colonial Indian state has been challenged by conflicting agendas of nation construction since independence. The imagery of nationhood was linked closely to Gandhian vision of the rural economy as the foundation for development, contradicted since its inception by Nehruvian ideals of progress mediated through aggressive modern development. Gandhi promised a liberation that encompassed economic and social security, premised on a sacred commitment that the diversity of cultural, social and spiritual traditions of India be resuscitated and feudal colonial postcolonial oppressions be addressed (Gadgil and Guha 1995; Nandy 1983). Gandhi's vision of development was obscured by the ideas of Nehru and other who opted for development through large-scale industrialization, urbanization and modernization, designed to alleviate poverty and debt that ironically targeted elite and urban sections of India. Development actions succeeded in increasing India's industrial production and radically deteriorating its land, forest and land resources. Its consequent impact, calculated to alleviate poverty and related socio-economic oppressions within the most disenfranchised caste, class and *adivasi* communities in India failed to produce corresponding results. The oppressions and contradictions produced by dominant



development actions, led to the emergence and consolidation of people movements across India. These movements historicized the ideology of progress, questioning the process of development in Asia that facilitated the creation of the third world.

The decline of nation state-project, rise of new social movements and *naxalite* movements against the state tempt many people to argue that the nation state project has declined.<sup>7</sup> In 1970s, popular discontent expressed itself in the form of new social movements.<sup>8</sup> It was when diverse social groups like women, students, Dalits and farmers felt that democratic politics did not address their needs and demands. Therefore, they came together embracing various social organizations to air their concerns. These assertions marked the rise of new social movements in Indian politics. These movements were reactions to the indifference of electoral politics towards the grievances of various social groups. These were distinguished by their large scale active forms of participation. These movements raised legitimate demands of the poor, socially and economically disadvantaged sections of the society. Attributing democratic element to these movements, C. P. Bhambhri highlights failure of the state institutions. In his words, “new ‘democratic movements’ are taking up the causes of the diverse disempowered segments of society and exposing the hollowness of the so-called democratic accountability of the institution of the state.”<sup>9</sup>

The view supporting the decline of Indian state or the democratic institutions of the state has many takers. Scholars like Atul Kohli talk about the ‘crisis of governability’ facing the Indian State. His diagnosis of the crisis holds the personal ambitions of the powerful leaders responsible for the decline of the political parties (Kohli, 1990). Some views also suggest that “the institutions for the governance of India are

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<sup>7</sup> See Tilak D. Gupta (2006), Maoism in India. EPW, July 22, pp. 3172-3176.

<sup>8</sup> See Shah, Ghanshyam (2002). ‘Introduction’, in Ghanshyam Shah (ed) *Social Movements and the State*. New Delhi: Sage Publications, pp. 13-31; Rao, M. S. A. (2000). ‘Introduction’, in M.S.A. Rao (ed.) *Social Movements in India*. New Delhi: Manohar, pp. xv-xxx.

<sup>9</sup> Bhambhri, C. P. (1998). *The Indian State 1947-98*. New Delhi: Shipra Publications, p. 124.

‘overloaded’ and the Indian State has taken upon itself tasks which it is not capable of performing.”<sup>10</sup>

Suhas Palshikar has also noted that the key problems pertaining to these movements is their failure to grapple with the deep rooted interests of different classes and lack of a political vision bordering almost on being apolitical. He argues that ‘since many of these movements celebrate the local in opposition to the national, they retain as specifically local character which limits the movement to locality or local issues’. Indeed many new movements advocating alternative development tend to ignore the ‘broader processes of domination such as capitalist development’.<sup>11</sup> There is no doubt that the legitimacy of the post-colonial state is under attack. Thus there is an urgent need to theorise the new realignments in politics taking place.

### **Lacunae in meta-theories**

If we examine the world political scenario at the outset of the twenty first century and relate it to the grand theories of the twentieth century or nineteenth century, it would not be a mistake to claim that these theories have failed in predicting the future. For example, Marxism fared badly. Its prophecy could not materialize into reality. Capitalism has not dug its grave so far. It has triumphed over its rivals. The debacle of communism and the disintegration of the practising socialist states have put a question mark on the viability and the practicability of Marxism. Also, it could not address the rise of new social movements in 1970s. Marxism gave way to liberal democracy. But this does not make liberalism the unchallenged victor. First, liberalism has not succeeded to address the problem of political apathy (such as lower vote turnout) in various advanced countries. Here, liberalism is challenged by civic republicanism. Political participation has not been very satisfying in the recent years. In the third world countries, where voter turnout has been more than that in the advanced

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<sup>10</sup> Bhambhri, C. P. (1998). *The Indian State 1947-98*. New Delhi: Shipra Publications, p. 130.

<sup>11</sup> Palshikar, Suhas (2004). ‘Whose Democracy Are we Talking about? Hegemony and Democracy in India’, in Rajendra Vora and Suhas Palshikar, (eds.). *Indian Democracy. Meanings and Practices*. Sage, New Delhi, p. 146.

countries, it is thanks to the mobilization of identity based on religion and caste etc. This does not augur well for the future of democratic polity. Secondly, communitarianism offers an alternative to what Michael Sandel calls an 'unencumbered self' of liberalism. Although communitarianism does not have many takers, it offers a sustainable challenge to the atomized nature of the liberal self. The communitarian arguments in favour of community and common good seem to attract attention when well-educated, affluent persons took to terrorism in the name of community and religion. This makes a point that almost all the meta-theories have some lacunae.

Laclau and Mouffe try to fill these gaps by engaging with these problems. They propose their model of radical plural democracy which addresses various issues such as power, domination and hegemony which are arguably among the causes of the above mentioned problems facing contemporary society. And it is Mouffe who takes up the concept of 'the political' in her recent books. In her view, the concept of 'the political' is the dimension of antagonism which is inherent in social relations. She does not prescribe the complete containment of the antagonistic dimension of social relations. She wants to tame 'antagonism' to transform it into 'agonism' which is indispensable for democracy. She wants to salvage liberal democracy by purging it of its deficiencies. This research intends to look into Mouffe's notion of 'the political'.

### **The Origins of Radical Democracy**

Chantal Mouffe is a political theorist (born in 1943) from Belgium although she is better known as the co-author of *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (1985) with Ernesto Laclau. Their training in Marxism and to socialism, took place both in the student movements and in the political struggles of the 1960's taking place all over Latin America. These movements were inspired by the Cuban revolution led by Fidel Castro. Later they were active in the working class and new social movements taking place in Europe and elsewhere. Their thoughts are described as being part of what is broadly called post-Marxism today, as they have questioned the basic tenets of

classical Marxism. They rejected economic determinism and the notion of class struggle being the single antagonism in society in their analyses of popular movements, mass mobilizations and ideological movements. Instead, they provided radical democracy of agonistic pluralism where all antagonisms could be expressed as an alternative. She criticizes those leftists who criticize parliamentary democracy. Mouffe specially criticizes classical Marxism for its class reductionism and economic reductionism. She argues that classical Marxism is unable to address the numerous oppressions, domination, and exploitations. At the same time she argues in favour of a revived left (New Left) to provide a theoretical base to the new social movements.

Both of them were deeply influenced by the French structuralist Louis Althusser and the founder of hegemony, the Italian theorist Antonio Gramsci. Chantal Mouffe shows more of the latter's influence in her work. She found Gramsci's approach towards Marxism as non-reductionist and that which would give theoretical tools to understand the new social movements. Gramsci was aware of the existence of an antagonistic struggle in which different forces tried to articulate into their project a set of social elements whose class belonging is not determined from the beginning. Given the crisis that Marxist theory was facing at that time Mouffe realized that there was need to think about a new left wing project and to try to reformulate concepts so that they could take what was still relevant from Marxism. On that basis Mouffe along with Laclau embarked in her subsequent works on two tracks – the theoretical one which involves a critique of economism and essentialism and a political one which involves a reformulation of the left wing project in order to connect working class struggles to the struggles of the new social movements.

The most important theoretical breakthrough in the later writings concerns the analysis of politics and political identities. They now view the subject as constructed through a plurality of subject positions that are constantly rearticulated. In this way social movements could be seen as embodying a new set of politics in which the political are composed of fragmented social identities that are constructed on the basis of complex discursive practices.

The concept of 'the political' is developed by Mouffe in *The Return of the Political* (1993), *The Democratic Paradox* (2000) and *On The Political* (2005). In this thesis I view Mouffe as a left-liberal<sup>12</sup>. She criticizes the dominant liberal strand for being rationalist, essentialist, universalistic and instrumentalist. But she is a supporter of liberal plural democracy. She extols institutions of parliamentary democracy for transforming antagonism to what she calls 'agonism'. She along with Laclau proposes a model of radical and plural democracy. It will not replace the existing formal institutions of liberal democracy such as the executive, the legislature and the judiciary. Mouffe and Laclau call it 'radical' because it aspires for liberty and equality for all. For Mouffe, the term 'radical' means the radicalization of the democratic revolution by its extension to more and more areas of social life.

The objective of radical democracy is to struggle against all modes of oppression and subordination in society by fully realizing the ideals of liberty and equality for all. Although someone may argue that the objective must always be the eradication of suppression and subordination rather than the struggle against them, it seems that for Mouffe, both – the goal and the way to achieve that goal – are struggle. She believes that complete elimination of all kind of power relations is a chimera. One form of hegemony may be replaced by another. But some kind of hegemony will always persist. Subordination will always be there. So arguably her objective is not the eradication of subordination, as she is sure about its permanence. Because of this, she argues that radical democracy is not a goal to be achieved. Rather, it is a way which should have no end. For its achievement will bring with it its doom.

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<sup>12</sup> Mouffe in the introduction to her edited book *The Challenge of Carl Schmitt* (1999, Verso: London) rightly calls all the contributors to that volume as 'left liberals'. Needless to say that Mouffe was also a contributor to that.

## Outline of Present Study

Laclau and Mouffe co-authored the book *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* in 1985. Then Mouffe alone wrote *The Return of the Political* (1993), *The Democratic Paradox* (2000) and *On the Political* (2005). Although Laclau and Mouffe together developed their version of post-Marxism and radical plural democracy, it is Mouffe who developed the concept of 'the political' in her later works which are mentioned above. I have chosen to concentrate on Mouffe in this work because of her contribution on 'the political' is more articulate. Lack of time and space, and the limited nature of this research account for my decision to emphasise on Mouffe's work. However, as Mouffe, in her later writings on 'the political', have time and again referred to *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, it was difficult, rather impossible, to exclude Laclau completely from the scope of my work. For, Mouffe builds many of her arguments on the points mooted either by Laclau or by both of them. That is why, especially in the third chapter when I shall discuss post-marxism, I refer to Laclau at many occasions. It should be mentioned here that Mouffe and Laclau support each other's position in their individual writings and interviews. Both represent the same strand of post-Marxism. Both follow the same approach. But it may be argued that their individual positions may not converge. It can safely be argued that their approaches will not oppose each other. So particularly in relation to post-Marxism and radical democracy, their positions are almost the same.

The objective of this thesis is to delve into the notion of 'the political' in Chantal Mouffe and to critically examine the limits of the framework of post Marxism that she along with Ernesto Laclau presents. One of the main objectives of Mouffe's notion of 'the political' is to strengthen liberal democracy by emphasizing the antagonistic dimension of 'the political'. The leitmotif of Mouffe's later writings is the permanence of antagonism in politics and society. Antagonism can never be eradicated from social relations. Mouffe argues that the aim of liberal democracy must not be the arrival at a rational consensus by the elimination of antagonism. That is not beneficial for liberal democracy as the transformation of antagonism into

agonism is indispensable. Thus, one of the objectives of this thesis is to examine these claims. Secondly, this thesis also intends to look into the location of post-Marxism. In other words, this makes an attempt to know the distance of post-Marxism from both Marxism and Liberalism, if any.

The first chapter enquires into what constitutes 'the political'. It discusses some of the normative issues – notion of participation, idea of the individual and the self, community and common good – which influence Mouffe's concept of 'the political'. Some of the issues in various intellectual traditions like Marxism, Feminism, Liberalism, Communitarianism and Civic Republicanism will be dealt with in this chapter. Aristotle, Machiavelli, Rawls and Gramsci are among the thinkers who play important roles in the formation of Mouffe's idea of 'the political'. So this chapter looks into these thinkers. Here, it should be made clear that this chapter does not intend to give a comprehensive view of the aforementioned traditions and the thinkers as that is not needed for the development of the arguments of this thesis. So only those aspects of these traditions and thinkers, which are required to introduce Mouffe's conception of 'the political' will be delved into. This chapter is a backdrop for the concept of 'the political' in Mouffe.

Chapter two analyses Mouffe's notion of 'the political' in detail. It attempts to understand the concepts underlying 'the political'. How the concept of hegemony is very important in 'the political' is discussed in this chapter. Implications of 'the political' for liberal politics are also looked into in the second chapter.

Chapter three focuses on Post-Marxism. It discusses Mouffe's Post-Marxist critique of classical Marxism in detail. It also sheds light on the various challenges to radical politics. It takes note of the major criticisms against radical politics. It also takes cognizance of the main contributions of Post-Marxism to political and social theory.

## Chapter One

# THE CONCEPT OF *THE POLITICAL*: SOME NORMATIVE ISSUES

### Introduction

What constitutes the 'political' domain has been debated for centuries. Carl Schmitt used the term 'the political' as a concept in itself in his book *The Concept of the Political* way back in 1927. Since then many theorists have joined the debate with different interpretations. But the debate around 'the political'<sup>1</sup> comes to the centre-stage again after the publication of John Rawls's *Political Liberalism*. Noel O'Sullivan goes so far as to write that a "striking feature of contemporary political philosophy is the emergence of the political itself as a central theme of discussion."<sup>2</sup> Contemporary politics involves multiplicity of struggles and multiplicity of political identities thereby leading to very flexible, porous and fluctuating political perspectives. It has serious implications for our understanding of democracy, citizenship and political participation. What makes this a very challenging task is that the meaning of the term 'political' has changed over the years.

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The term '*political*' is an adjective. Recently it has been used by some political theorists as a noun. As a noun, it is written as '*the political*' instead of '*political*'. So *the political* is treated as a concept in itself rather than describing some other noun. Emily Hauptmann puts it in following words: "'The political' is a neologism employed by academic political theorists, one so specialized that it does not even appear in the latest edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary*." Hauptmann, 'A Local History of "the Political"', *Political Theory*, vol. 32, No. 1, February 2004, 34.

O'Sullivan, Noel (1997). 'Difference and the Concept of the Political in Contemporary Political Philosophy'. *Political Studies*. XLV, p. 739.



Rawls wrote *A Theory of Justice* in 1971 and *Political Liberalism* in 1993. I shall take up his concept<sup>3</sup> of the political later in this chapter. Broadly, the objective of this chapter is to indicate briefly how Chantal Mouffe's conception of 'the political' is a critique to Rawlsian notion of 'the political'. She has intervened in the debate on 'the political' and raised some very important normative issues in political theory. Specifically, I discuss some of the thinkers and traditions which influence Mouffe's notion of the political. It should be stated at the very outset that I shall focus only on some related themes like political participation, democracy and citizenship in their writings. I shall examine the concepts underlying Mouffe's notion of the political in chapter two and shall give a more detailed critique of Marxism in chapter three.

I begin with a distinction between 'politics' and 'the political' made by Chantal Mouffe. In the process I also examine how politics is conceived in other intellectual streams, viz. liberalism, republicanism, communitarianism, feminism etc.

What Mouffe calls 'the political' is the dimension of antagonism – the friend/enemy distinction. Agreeing with Schmitt, she says that, this can emerge out of any kind of relation. It is not something that can be localized precisely; it is an ever-present possibility. But, 'politics', according to her notion, on the other hand, is the ensemble of discourses and practices, institutional or even artistic practices that contribute to and reproduce a certain order. These are always in conditions that are potentially conflictual because they are always informed by or traversed by the dimension of 'the political'.<sup>4</sup> In this sense, they may be related to Gramscian ideas of common sense and of hegemony. Politics is always about the establishment, the reproduction, or the deconstruction of a hegemony, one that is always in relation to a potentially counter-hegemonic order. Since the dimension

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<sup>3</sup> Although some authors like Rawls make distinction between the terms 'idea', 'concept', 'notion' and 'conception', I shall use all the four terms interchangeably, irrespective of their different meanings, if any.

<sup>4</sup> Mouffe (2000). *The Democratic Paradox*. London & New York: Verso, p. 101.

of 'the political' is always present, it is impossible to have a complete, absolute, inclusive hegemony.

It should be made clear here, from the outset, that, Mouffe wants to retain the antagonistic dimension of 'the political'. But she thinks that it should be tamed. She calls the taming process the transformation from 'antagonism' to 'agonism', where the former is the relation between 'enemies' and the later is between 'adversaries'. She is of the view that 'politics' could well be devoid of 'the political'. But when it is so, the effects are detrimental to politics. So 'politics' must always be accompanied by 'the political'. For the antagonistic dimension is impossible to be eradicated from the human relation. If it is not given a political outlet, it will look for other platforms to present itself and then it may take violent turns, which is inimical to a pluralistic and democratic political order. To be sure, Mouffe's primary and ultimate concern is for establishing pluralistic democracy and so she wants 'the political' to inform 'politics' for ever. Having given a brief introduction to her notion of 'the political', I take up other normative concepts like political participation, the notion of the self and common good.

### **1.1. Notion of Participation**

The political as embodying public interest gets slowly and continuously restructured within the liberal paradigm because individual self-interest is given central position in liberal political thought. Liberalism is not averse to political participation, but participation in public affairs for the sake of common interest is not highly valued in liberalism. Individuals taking care of self-interest not disturbing others are best suited to a liberal framework. Participation in matters of public interest is not needed for individuals for acquiring liberal citizenship. Within the social contract tradition, individualism is one of the core ideas. This has led many scholars to argue that liberalism envisages an "unencumbered self"<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> Michael Sandel criticized the liberal view of self as *unencumbered self*. See Michael Sandel (1982). *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Communitarians

It assumes that if everybody tries to pursue his own interest not disturbing others, the common interest would be taken care of, if it is needed at all. Further Lockean liberals assume that constitution guarantees a set of rights to everyone; those with a more pluralist orientation also assume that institutions maintain law and order, balance different interests and negotiate between competing parties. However unlike liberalism, political participation is highly valued in what is widely known today as republicanism. It requires citizens to have virtues of an active citizenry. Participation in matters of common concern is sine qua non of a republican notion of citizenship.

While what constitutes political participation is the key difference between liberalism and republicanism, what goes into making the ideal of community is the main difference between liberalism and communitarianism. An eminent political scientist Will Kymlicka states that until recently, “most contemporary liberal philosophers have said little about the ideal of community. If community is discussed at all, it is often seen as derivative of liberty and equality- i.e. a society lives up to the ideal of community if its members are treated as free and equal persons. Liberal visions of politics do not include any independent principle of community, such as shared nationality, language, identity, culture, religion, history, or way of life.”<sup>6</sup> The central claim of communitarianism which emerged as a reaction to liberal individualism, is “precisely the necessity of attending to community alongside, if not prior to, liberty and equality. Communitarians believe that the value of community is not sufficiently recognized in liberal theories of justice, or in the public culture of liberal society.”<sup>7</sup>

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advocate a notion of embedded self or ‘situated self’ in oppositions to the liberal self. Even if there are differences among them they broadly agree on the critique of participation. See Alasdair MacIntyre (1981). *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*. London: Duckworth.

<sup>6</sup> Kymlicka, Will (2002). *Contemporary Political Philosophy*. Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press. p. 208.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

To give an alternative to liberalism which does not have a conception of community, communitarians want to revive the elements of participation and common good which were emphasized by the classical civic republican tradition often traced back to Greek and Roman thought. Chantal Mouffe is interested in reviving this spirit of participation in the republican tradition. But she is also aware of the potential ‘danger of returning to a premodern view of politics’ – ‘the recovery of a strong participatory idea of citizenship at the cost of sacrificing individual liberty’.<sup>8</sup> She says that this would lead to totalitarianism and conservatism. She wants to retain individual freedom but not individualism of liberalism. But she is of the view that we can not afford to dispense with the ‘crucial contribution of liberalism’ and ‘the novelty of modern democracy’ – ‘the defence of pluralism, the idea of individual liberty, the separation of Church and state and the development of civil society’ etc.<sup>9</sup> In other words Mouffe proposes to do away with the deficiencies of both the traditions of liberalism and republicanism while retaining the positive contributions of both. She sees “the exigency of conceiving the political community in a way that is compatible with modern democracy and liberal pluralism.”<sup>10</sup> So she wants to draw on both liberalism and republicanism. She argues that replacing one with other would not work. There is a need to combine the positive aspects of both the traditions of liberalism and republicanism. She says that this would help in strengthening what she calls ‘a project of radical and plural democracy’.<sup>11</sup>

In what follows, Aristotle and Machiavelli are the two thinkers who are discussed as contributing to this tradition. As the argument in this section does not demand, republican thinkers such as Cicero and Guicciardini have not been discussed here. Likewise, contemporary republicans such as Petit, Pocock are not discussed either. Only Skinner’s interpretations are reviewed while discussing Machiavelli.

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<sup>8</sup> Mouffe (1993). *The Return of the Political*. London & New York: Verso, p. 62.

<sup>9</sup> Mouffe, Chantal (1993). *The Return of the Political*. London & New York: Verso. p. 62.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 63.

### *Participation in the Republican Tradition*

Knud Haakonssen states that republic (*res publica* in Latin), was the “public realm of affairs that people had in common outside their familial lives”.<sup>12</sup> Republicanism is etymologically related to republic. He goes on to explain that “the crux of the ideal type of the Roman *res publica* was that the people (*populus*, giving the adjective *publicus*) had a decisive say in the organization of the public realm and this understanding linked the idea of an organized public realm in general to that of a specific form, or rather source, such organization - namely the people – thus creating the basis for modern concepts of republic”.<sup>13</sup> The origin of the republican ideas, such as participation in common good, can be traced back to the Greek thought. Aristotelian notion of political participation is one of the constituents of republicanism. However, for most theorists classical republicanism received its most robust restatement in the early Renaissance especially in the city states of Italy.<sup>14</sup> The meaning of the concept of active citizenship in a republic became a leading concern. Political thinkers of this period were critical of the Athenian formulation of this notion, as their views were influenced by Aristotle, one of the most notable critics of Greek democracy. While the concept of the polis remained central to the political theory of Italian cities, most notably in Florence it was no longer regarded as a means to self-fulfillment. Emphasis was placed on civic virtue but the latter was understood as fragile and subject to corruption. Machiavelli argued that all singular constitutional forms were unstable and only a governmental system combining elements of each could promote the kind of political culture on which civic virtue depends. The best example of such a government in his view was Rome.

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<sup>12</sup> Haakonssen, Knud (1997). ‘Republicanism’, in Robert E. Goodin and Philip Pettit (eds.), *A Companion to Contemporary Philosophy*, 1997, Blackwell, Oxford, UK, Massachusetts, USA, p.569.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> See Skinner, Quentin (1978). *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, Vol. 1, Cambridge.

What emerges from some of these interpretations is that the core of the Renaissance republican case was that the freedom of a political community rested upon its accountability to no authority other than that of the community itself. Self government is the basis of liberty together with the rights of citizens to participate – within a constitutional framework.<sup>15</sup>

According to Quentin Skinner republicanism suffered a setback due to the decline of the republic of Florence and eventually liberal ideals overshadowed republican ideals. What emerged with time is the triumph of liberalism and its emphasis on individual liberty.

### *Ethics and Politics: Aristotle*

The term ‘politics’ owes its origin to the Greek word ‘*polis*’ which means city-state. When Aristotle begins his text ‘Politics’ by stating that: “the state belongs to the class of objects which exist by nature, and that man is by nature a political animal. Any one who by his nature and not simply by ill luck has no state is either too bad or too good, either subhuman or superhuman” (Aristotle, 1992, 59-60). In this way the polis is represented as a self-sufficient community bonded together by shared practices and values. Every freeman should actively participate in political affairs, i.e. the affairs of the ‘*polis*’. In his view, household activity and economic activity actually provide leisure to make men fit for political participation. But only in engaging household matters is not sufficient to attain the highest good because Aristotle also believes that “the state has a natural priority over the household” (Aristotle, *ibid*, 60).

In Aristotle’s writings the individual is subservient to the community because the ‘state is both natural and prior to the individual’ (*ibid* 61). He explains that ‘whatever is incapable of participating in the association which we call the state, a

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<sup>15</sup> Skinner, Quentin (1978). *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, Vol. 1, Cambridge, pp. 138-139.

dumb animal for example, and equally whatever is perfectly self sufficient, has no need to (eg. a god) is not part of the state at all” (ibid 61). In this way the state enables its citizens to achieve their true human worth. However we know that Aristotle in the section on citizenship defines citizen as one ‘who participates in giving judgement and holding office’ and this excludes a very large proportion of the population in the Greek world notably women and slaves.

Despite its exclusionary character, the state transcends the level of biological necessity which is the case with household and village. Household is the private domain. But state is a public domain where citizens take decisions affecting the whole community. Only in the state, only in the public arena of political action, can people acquire virtue and thereby attain genuine human happiness and fulfillment. Janet Coleman is of the view that “the *polis* is necessarily (logically) prior to each of its members because it is that by which humans secure their living well. Aristotle argues that it is in the interest of each concrete, particular citizen to participate, co-operate and support the *polis*, even in situations which would be at the expense of his own immediate advantage.”<sup>16</sup>

Throughout Aristotle’s writings ethics and politics are complementary to each other. They can not be separated as they are integral to each other. Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*, argues Coleman, “deals with the good life as it may be realized by a plurality of good men who share ways of evaluating and discussing the good life in a good city or ‘state’, and the *Politics* deals with those constitutive principles of the good ‘state’ itself..... One can not determine what makes for a good ‘state’ unless one first has some idea of what humans as such need (not as individuals considered in isolation from the *polis*) and of what they are capable.”<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Coleman, Janet (2000). *A History of Political Thought: From Ancient Greece to Early Christianity*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, p. 147.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 146.

In contemporary political theory communitarians invoke Aristotle's notion of common good, and republicanism also traces its origin to Greek thought. Although Chantal Mouffe does not subscribe to the element of substantive common good from Aristotle or his communitarian and republican followers, she thinks some form of commonality is needed to constitute the political community. Here she employs a concept called *res publica*. She borrows this concept from Michael Oakeshott<sup>18</sup>. This notion of *res publica* implies a form of commonality which does not require a substantive notion of common good.

### ***Machiavelli: Reconciliation Between the Liberty of Ancients and Moderns***

We relate the word 'realpolitik' with Machiavelli. Pejorative terms like 'Machiavellian and Machiavellianism' owes their origin to Machiavelli's writings notably 'The Prince'. It is generally believed that politics was distinguishable from ethics in the classical Greek notion of politics. So politics aimed at the transcendental elevation of human being and his goodness. In Machiavelli we find that he argued to go for these worldly virtues not only in practice but also in principle. He was of the view that there were two independent spheres of morality: first, Christian morality and second, Pagan morality. Neither of these two is superior to the other.

According to Isaiah Berlin, Machiavelli's originality lies in making a differentiation between two incompatible ideals of life and therefore two independent moralities.<sup>19</sup> One is the pagan morality, its values are courage, vigor, fortitude in adversity, public achievement, order discipline, happiness, strength, justice, above all assertion of one's proper claim and the knowledge and power needed to secure their satisfaction. The other one is the Christian morality. Its ideals are charity, mercy, sacrifice, love of God, forgiveness of enemies, contempt for the goods of this world, faith in the life hereafter, belief in the salvation of the individual soul as being on incompatible value-

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<sup>18</sup> See Oakeshott, Michael (1975). *On Human Conduct*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

<sup>19</sup> Berlin, Isaiah (2000). 'The Originality of Machiavelli', in Nigel Warburton, Jon Pike and Derek Matravers (eds). *Reading Political Philosophy: Machiavelli to Mill*, Routledge, pp. 43-58.



higher, indeed wholly incommensurable with, any social or political or other terrestrial goal any economic or military or aesthetic consideration. Berlin says that Machiavelli is convinced that constructing a satisfactory human community in his Roman sense is incompatible with the practice of the Christian morality. Machiavelli regards the Christian virtues as 'insuperable obstacles' to the building of the kind of society natural for all normal men to want – the kind of community which satisfy men's permanent desires and interests. Berlin-convincingly argues that Machiavelli suggested embracing Pagan morality and shunning Christian morality if men were to live in political community. Machiavelli did not deny the goodness of the Christian virtues. But he argued that it was impossible to combine them with a satisfactory, stable, vigorous, strong society on earth. Machiavelli eulogized the Roman political community. He wanted the political community to be built in the line of practicable virtues and not along the impossible lines. According to Machiavelli, if men were to lead private secluded life then Christian morality would do. But that is not the reality, and to lead a public life in a political community Christian morality has to be eschewed.

Despite several differences between them like, Machiavelli, like Aristotle, believed that political activity was intrinsic to human nature. Having discussed that Machiavelli held political morality in high esteem and he viewed human being as inherently political, it is imperative to discuss what constitute the political domain for Machiavelli.

Skinner says that according to Machiavelli, "the goal of maintaining the freedom and safety of a republic represents the highest, and indeed the overriding, value in political life."<sup>20</sup> For Machiavelli, the public life and the good of the community constitute the political domain. But he also held a pessimistic view of human nature. He believed that human beings did every thing for the sake of his own interest. Self interest plays a dominating role in determining human behavior. According to Skinner, "The opening

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<sup>20</sup> Skinner, Quentin (1978). *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, vol. 1. Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press. p. 183.

words of the *Discourses* speak of ‘the envy inherent in man’s nature’, and the whole of the work predicated on the assumption that ‘in constituting and legislating for a commonwealth it must be taken for granted that all men are wicked and that they will always give vent to the malignity that is in their minds when opportunity offers.’<sup>21</sup> But Machiavelli also writes in the preface to the first *Discourses* that men who possess the highest virtue are those “who have gone to the trouble of serving their country.”<sup>22</sup>

Machiavelli in the *Discourses* eulogizes the role played by the political participation and civic virtue of people of Rome in securing Rome its political liberties. Machiavelli’s term *Virtu* is widely translated as ‘public spirit’. According to Skinner, “the idea of *Virtu* is simply equated (in Machiavelli’s writings) with whatever qualities are in practice needed to save the life and preserve the freedom of one’s country.”<sup>23</sup> Here arises a question: If Machiavelli held human nature as primarily self-interested then why and how did he envisage political participation, civic virtue, public spiritedness and republican form of government which needed political participation. Quentin Skinner solves this contradiction in Machiavelli. He convincingly sketches Machiavelli as a beautiful blend of individual liberty and political liberty of the state which needs political participation of the citizenry. He locates Machiavelli in the civic Republican tradition. According to him, Machiavelli’s idea of liberty in the *Discourses* means the capacity for individuals to pursue their own goals. And in order to secure and ensure the conditions which allow individuals to go for what they want to pursue it is indispensable for individuals to do some public duties with public spirit (Skinner, 1984). Here duty does not denote a burden but a desire to ensure of the conditions of one’s own liberty. Both *The Prince* and the *Discourses* aim at the security and interest of the state and the good of the political

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<sup>21</sup> Skinner, Quentin (1978). *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, vol. 1. Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, p. 186.

<sup>22</sup> Machiavelli quoted in Skinner (1978). *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, vol. 1, p. 176.

<sup>23</sup> Skinner (1978). *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, vol. 1, p. 184.

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community, although the forms of government in achieving this goal are different from one another in both the prescriptions.

Thus for Machiavelli, the political domain is constituted by the common good. It can be said that citizens' participation in the interest of the political community is the overriding concept of Machiavelli's concept of the political, although he did not treat this as a distinct term. Mouffe draws on Skinner's interpretation of Machiavelli's contribution to republican tradition as reconciliation between negative and positive liberty.

## **1.2. Notion of the Individual: the Unencumbered Self**

### *The liberal notion of politics*

Liberal notion of politics can be distinguished from the classical notion of politics. Politics, in the classical Greek notion, proposed a comprehensive view which touched a wide range of issues. If we compare the liberal view of politics to the classical Greek view of politics, we see the realm of the political undergoes a metamorphosis. The classical Greek view did not separate the 'social' from 'the political'. Society as a whole always comes into picture while discussing the classical notion of politics. The citizen had to participate in the affairs of the state to realize his true nature as a man. Human beings, according to Aristotle, are naturally political animals. In the Greek city states, participation in the deliberation to arrive at decisions for the community was an integral part of social life. Politics was an ethical activity concerning itself with the question of how we should live. So individual self-interest and individual freedom were not the ideals for the classical notion of politics. Common good was its objective. But the liberal notion of politics does not necessarily envisage common good as the end of politics. Instead, it gives primacy to what Sandel calls the "unencumbered self, a

self understood as prior to and independent of purposes and ends.”<sup>24</sup> In this chapter, the views of the Kantian liberals have been taken into account. Kant saw human beings as end-in-themselves. Those liberals who are influenced by Kantian view of individual autonomy do not think that politics is the instrument of common good. This is not to say that they are against common good. The intention is only to state that individual can not be used as a means to common good as there should be no prescribed common good. Individual should have the right to define and revise what is the good life.

### ***Rawls: the political and metaphysical domains***

John Rawls is arguably one of the most influential political philosophers of the twentieth century. His Theory of Justice, and then a series of articles<sup>25</sup> and some books<sup>26</sup> have contributed to developing a major theory of justice as fairness. Chandran Kakuthas and Philip Petit argue that although there is not a major shift in his positions over the years, he tries to accentuate ‘the political’ in his writings which came after *A Theory of Justice*. Since 1982, they believe that “Rawls forswears Kantianism and recasts his philosophical enterprise as a political rather than a moral endeavour.”<sup>27</sup> Kukathas and Pettit call this ‘Rawls’s later thought’.<sup>28</sup> To get a good idea of Rawls’s view on the political, in this section I will focus more on his later thought. However one important point should be mentioned here: Rawls, in this later writings, has not, at all, abandoned what his fundamental to his thought – the priority of right over good. He has just distanced himself from

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<sup>24</sup> Sandel, Michael J. (2003), ‘The procedural republic and the Unencumbered Self’, in Goodin and Pettit (eds.) *Contemporary political Philosophy: An Anthology*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, p. 249.

<sup>25</sup> Rawls, John (1985), ‘Justice as Fairness: Political not Metaphysical’, *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 14/3, pp. 223-51; (1987), ‘The Idea of an Overlapping Consensus’, *Oxford Journal of Legal Studies*, 7/1, pp. 1-25; (1988), ‘The Priority of Right and ideas of the Good’, *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 17, 251-76; (1989), ‘The Domain of the Political and Overlapping Consensus’, *New York University Law Review*, 64/2, pp. 233-55.

<sup>26</sup> Rawls, John (1993), *Political Liberalism*, New York: Columbia University Press.

<sup>27</sup> Kukathas, Chandran & Philip Petit (1995). *Rawls: A Theory of Justice and its Critics*. Cambridge: Polity Press, p. 120.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 133.

giving an all-encompassing theory of justice. And instead, he has focused on the political aspect that was already implicit in *A Theory of Justice*. In what follows I will first discuss the contrast Rawls makes between the political and the metaphysical domain. I then also examine the distinction between the public and private sphere.

Rawls contrasts his notion of the political with the metaphysical. He tries to make a distinction between the political domain and the metaphysical domain, where the latter does not have any room for comprehensive doctrines. Rawls distinguishes between two types of disagreement. The first disagreement comes from the encounter of different conceptions of good. The second one is the disagreement over different conceptions of justice. Rawls thinks that the first disagreement cannot be eliminated without resorting to coercion whereas the second one can be resolved rationally and non-coercively. Rawls argues that 'justice as fairness' is purely a political conception and not a metaphysical one. Comprehensive views of the good life, which are metaphysical in nature, can be restricted to the private sphere. Each person should have the right to decide what is good for him. Thus, right should have priority over good. Everyone should be free to pursue his notion of good life in his private sphere. But in the public sphere, an overlapping consensus can and should be reached, in which those who hold different comprehensive views of good life converge on a single conception of justice governing the institutional set-up of our society and political structure. Rawls proposes 'the method of avoidance'- conceptions of justice should avoid controversial metaphysical claims and disputed notions of the good- which would be instrumental in reaching an overlapping consensus. For Rawls, division and disagreement comes into picture when different moral or philosophical standpoints encounter. Comprehensive questions necessarily attract disagreement. The political domain can and should be free of divisive issues. We, as members of liberal democratic political order, should agree on the principles and institutions of our political society. Differences should be allowed only in private sphere. Public sphere, the exclusive domain of the political should be free of comprehensive

philosophical and moral issues which make dissent inevitable. Consensus is indispensable for the creation and stability of a political society. It is not possible always to have convergence even in political sphere. So, dissention comes into picture, it should be addressed by rational deliberation. Consensus is to be achieved and maintained for the maintenance of the stability of the political order.

Liberalism delimits the public and the private sphere. Unlike in feminism and communitarianism, in liberalism, a clear demarcation is possible between the public and the private sphere. The public sphere is the domain of the political. The domain of the political comprises the public institutions. Modern liberal democracy emphasizes on the institutional design or what Rawls calls the 'basic structure' of society. For him, it is the way in which the major social institutions distribute fundamental rights and duties and determine the division of advantages from social cooperation. By major institutions Rawls understands the political constitution and the principal economic and social arrangements. According to him, "the legal protection of freedom of thought and liberty of conscience, competitive markets, private property in the means of production, and the monogamous family are examples of major social institutions. Taken together as one scheme, the major institutions define men's rights and duties and influence their life prospects, what they can expect to be and how well they can hope to do."<sup>29</sup>

Liberal thinkers mostly argue that the public institutions and structures of state are sufficient to ensure democracy. By strengthening these institutions, democracy can be also strengthened. Will Kymlickā is of the view that many classical liberals believed that a liberal democracy could function effectively even in the absence of an especially virtuous citizenry, by creating checks and balances. Institutional and procedural devices such as the separation of powers, a bicameral legislature, and federalism would all serve to block would-be oppressors. Even if each person pursued her own self-interest, without regard for the common good, one set of

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<sup>29</sup> Rawls, John (2000). *A Theory of Justice*, Delhi: Universal Law Publishing CO., p.7.

private interests would check another set of private interests. Kant, for example, thought that the problem of good government ‘can be solved even for a race of devils’.<sup>30</sup>

This faith in political institutions lies in the fact that in the liberal design, individual is given the widest possible liberty compatible with similar liberty of others. From the individual nothing is expected beyond a settled behavior of not disturbing others. The Individual is required not to transgress the laws of the state. This is the maximum which the individual is required to do for getting his liberty ensured by the state. Active participation in matters of common interest is not among the pillars sustaining liberalism and liberal democracy.

In this way we can argue that the political domain in liberalism is restricted to the public sphere where the individual is expected not to do anything positively but to negatively restrain himself from disturbing others or breaking laws. To put it differently, liberalism theoretically does not need not an active citizenry but a passive citizenry. Citizenship in a liberal-democratic welfare state “is often called ‘passive’ or ‘private’ citizenship, because of its emphasis on passive entitlements, and the absence of any obligation to participate in public life. It is still widely supported. When asked what citizenship means to them, people are much more likely to talk about rights than responsibilities or participation. For most people, citizenship is, as the American Supreme Court once put it, ‘the right to have rights’.”<sup>31</sup>

A response to my argument can be that liberalism gives centrality to personal autonomy. Individualism constitutes the core of liberalism so how can we argue that individual liberty is not connected to the idea of political participation.

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<sup>30</sup> Kymlicka, Will (2002). *Contemporary Political Philosophy*. Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press. p. 285.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p.288.

In practice, in most liberal democracies political participation has been limited mainly to the right to vote. Thus liberal democracy is getting replaced, to a great extent, by electoral democracy. Even in these electoral democracies, all citizens do not vote. Voting is not mandatory. This has led to political apathy. In some electoral system governments are formed even with less than half of the total vote. Thus democracy is working only procedurally. It is seen that policies of the democracies are often not what the people want. This 'democratic deficit' does not concern the liberal political theorists.

Contemporary civic republican tradition tries to address the challenge posed by political apathy. Communitarians and republicans level their criticisms mostly against Rawls as he epitomizes the liberal tradition in the post second world war situation. Mouffe also criticizes Rawls from a perspective different from that of communitarianism and republicanism. According to Mouffe, contemporary liberalism is incompetent to understand the 'specificity of the political'. Liberalism talks about rational consensus, reasonableness and neutrality. It does not recognize the power relations and hegemonising tendency of the liberal consensus. Indeed Mouffe goes so far as to argue that Rawls's political philosophy is without politics.<sup>32</sup>

### **1.3. Community and the common good**

Communitarianism developed as a reaction to abstract liberal individualism. Communitarians argue that liberalism is "unable to account for, or to sustain, the communal sentiments, identities, and boundaries needed for any feasible political community."<sup>33</sup> Communitarians argue that the liberal notion of 'unencumbered self' is a flawed one because it does not recognize the fact that the self is always 'situated' in some social, communal and cultural practices. The identity of the self

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<sup>32</sup> Mouffe (1993). *The Return of the Political*. London & New York: Verso, pp. 41-59.

<sup>33</sup> Kymlicka, Will (2002). *Contemporary Political Philosophy*. Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, p. 284.



is necessarily anchored in these communal practices. The self is constituted through the traditions and experiences of the community. In no way can it be constituted completely from within itself.

Liberals argue that individual should always have the right to question the traditions, practices and way of life of the community.. The communitarian critique of Rawls “identifies in Rawls’s theory of justice weaknesses it considers to be characteristic of liberal theory in general. For Sandel, the characteristic weakness is to be found in the incoherences associated with the notion of the self presupposed by Rawls’s theory of justice. For the communitarians generally, it lies in the implausibility of the idea that there are universal standards by which the practices of particular communities may sensibly be judged.”<sup>34</sup>

Kymlicka summarizes the communitarian arguments that attempt to explain why the liberal view of the self is inadequate. Those five arguments in his words are the following: “the liberal view of the self (1) is empty; (2) violates our self-perceptions; (3) ignores our embeddedness in communal practice; (4) ignores the necessity for social confirmation of our individual judgements; and (5) pretends to have an impossible universality or objectivity.”<sup>35</sup>

#### **1.4. Personal is political**

The public/private divide is one of the most important components of the traditional notion of politics. Traditionally the public sphere is correlated to the political domain. Family belonged to the private sphere of life which according to this notion, is the domain which is and should be devoid of politics. But in the twentieth century and more particularly since 1960s, situations started changing. Radical feminism come

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<sup>34</sup> Kukathas, Chandran & Philip Petit (1995). *Rawls: A Theory of Justice and its Critics*. Cambridge: Polity Press. p. 118.

<sup>35</sup> Kymlicka, (1989). *Liberalism, Community and Culture*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 47.

with the buzzword – ‘the personal is the political’. According to this notion, every power relation involves the political. Every conflict comes under the realm of the political. Kate Millet, for example, defines politics as ‘power-structured relationships, arrangements whereby one group of persons is controlled by another’<sup>36</sup>. According to this view, politics not only exists between the government and citizens, but it also exists between husbands and wives, and between parents and children. Sexual division of labour, argue feminists theorists, is very much political rather natural. Although ‘sex’ is a natural category, ‘gender’ is psychological, social and, above all, political. Likewise, nature has made woman the mother – the child-bearer, but male dominated society has made woman the child-rearer. Jean B. Elshtain in *Public Man, Private Woman* argues that the public sphere of life has been confined to the domestic sphere of household, which is considered to be the private sphere of human being.

Men usually go to work outside and women manage the domestic affairs of the household. Men are paid for their outside work whereas women do the work of the household which is not paid so goes unnoticed. This places men at a superior position in their home and also in society in relation to women. Politics is related to the public sphere. So women do not have a impressive presence in the political domain. Women’s concerns do not get a fair presence in the political arena. Feminists argue that women as a class are subordinated to men as a class, and it involves politics. The subordination is concealed under the category – the private sphere.

Patriarchy is a set of structural arrangements which allows domination by men. Feminists argue that patriarchal arrangements have been preserving and perpetuating the socially-made inferior status of woman. Millet defines patriarchal government as “the institutions which ensure that half of the populace which is female is controlled by that half which is male.”<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Millet, K (1970). *Sexual Politics*. New York: Doubleday.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.

The aspect of feminist theory which is important here for the discussion about 'the political' is that politics exists where power-relation exists. Public/private distinction perpetuates patriarchy. It can be argued that feminists do not accept the argument that politics is a procedure to arrive at common good or to neutrally reconcile between various conflicting interests. According to the feminists thought, since the ancient times, politics and public sphere has been remaining the domain of male domination, where-every thing tries to naturalize the male dominance in perpetuity. It will never give equal status to women, if the current situation persists. So it has to be resisted. That the public sphere is the domain of the political has to be opposed. The sphere of the household involves politics and this has to be recognized. We have to abandon the idea that politics is all about common good and come to terms with the fact that politics involves conflicts, power-relation, and domination. The private sphere is inherently political and this has to be brought about explicitly. The personal domain of the household should be politicized.

### **1.5. Carl Schmitt on 'the political'**

Agnes Heller calls Carl Schmitt the 'godfather of the concept of the political'<sup>38</sup>. She justifies this with some convincing arguments. According to Heller, the 'concept of the political' as a philosophical device was unknown in pre-modern thought. Even cultures with the strongest political awareness, for example the Greek and the Roman, 'shared the quasi-naturalistic and therefore unproblematic view that only acts which have been decided upon and performed by the members of the political class(es), can be termed political.'<sup>39</sup> Heller argues that the acts of the members of the political class (when they acted in their capacity as members of this class) were by definition political. The acts of all others are, by definition, non-political. The important question was not *what* but *who* the state was. With the advent of modernity, this approach to the political question changed. There arose a question to

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<sup>38</sup> Heller, Agnes (1991). 'The Concept of the Political Revisited', in David Held (ed.) *Political Theory Today*, Cambridge: Polity Press, p. 332.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid*, p. 331.

set the criterion for determining which actions, phenomena and institutions are of political provenance and which are not. The political question changed. 'Who is the state?' changed to 'what is the state?'.<sup>40</sup> Heller is of the view that Max Weber<sup>41</sup> was perhaps the first to open the path towards the concept of the political. But Schmitt treated it with the approach of political philosophy: "Schmitt's contention was that although the supreme political act is the act of decision, the concept of the political lies not in sovereignty, but in the binary category 'friend and foe'."<sup>42</sup>

In this manner Schmitt analyses 'political' in terms of the degree of intensity of association or dissociation between a friend and an enemy. The concept of friend, enemy and battle has a real meaning. They obtain and retain the meaning through the real possibility of physical. Schmidt was driven by the desire to divorce the concept of political from all possible limiting influence, controlling spheres and to make it autonomous, isolated and independent.

Chantal Mouffe relies on his critique of liberal democracy for her own analysis of contemporary politics. Schmitt believes that the concept of the politics has been emasculated by liberalism since liberals have been driven by the desire to depoliticize the political. They denounce politics and the public life of the individual pales besides private interests robbing of its distinctiveness and specificity. The complete and absolute freedom of choice was in fact no choice at all and this will destroy political of all its virtue in the public sphere.

Mouffe borrows the term 'the political' with its meaning – the dimension of antagonism – from Carl Schmitt. In *The Concept of the Political* Schmitt shows a contradiction within liberal democracy which can not be overcome. For, liberalism

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<sup>40</sup> Heller, Agnes (1991). 'The Concept of the Political Revisited', in David Held (ed.) *Political Theory Today*, Cambridge: Polity Press.

<sup>41</sup> Max Weber (1965). 'Politics as a Vocation', in H. H. Gerth and C. W. Mills (eds), *From Max Weber*. Philadelphia, Fortress

<sup>42</sup> Heller, Agnes (1991). 'The Concept of the Political Revisited', in David Held (ed.) *Political Theory Today*, Cambridge: Polity Press, p. 332.

is premised on the universal humanity. But democracy is based on ‘the demos’ – the people – which should be homogeneous. He criticizes G.D.H Cole and Laski for their pluralism as they both view state as one among other institution. Schmitt says state is the political association which is above all other institutions. According to Schmitt, democracy requires ‘first homogeneity and second – if the need arises – elimination or eradication of heterogeneity.’<sup>43</sup>

Mouffe is inspired by the way Schmitt talks about two types of equality: substantive and abstract. Democratic equality is substantive and the liberal one is abstract. Liberal equality is a moral in nature and the democratic equality is political nature. Liberal equality is the general equality of mankind. So, for Schmitt, it cannot serve as a premise for a state or any form of government. The democratic equality requires ‘the demos’ which is a substance and within which every member is equal. ‘The demos’ is the ‘us’. It requires ‘them’ and to derive its meaning and existence as ‘us’. Within ‘the demos’, there is no place for pluralism. According to Schmitt, pluralism of ‘the demos’, i.e. pluralism of states, should be the order of the world. He rejects the liberal idea of a world state. According to him, the political world is a ‘pluriverse’, not a universe. In his view the “political entity cannot by its very nature be universal in the sense of embracing all of humanity and the entire world.”<sup>44</sup>

## **Conclusion**

This chapter gives a backdrop to the concept of ‘the political’ as found in the writings of Chantal Mouffe. I have argued that in Renaissance republican and in Greek democratic thought a citizen was someone who participated in giving judgment and holding office. Citizenship meant participation in public affairs. This definition means that the political was viewed very differently from the location of citizens in modern electoral democracies. The limited scope in contemporary liberal politics for

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<sup>43</sup> Schmitt quoted in Mouffe (2000). *The Democratic Paradox*. London & New York: Verso. p. 38.

<sup>44</sup> Schmitt quoted in Mouffe (2000). *The Democratic Paradox*. London & New York: Verso, p. 51.

the active involvement of citizens could be regarded as most undemocratic by this tradition.

The demise in many countries throughout the world of the idea of the active citizen, one whose very being is affirmed in and through political action, is hard to explain fully. But it is clear that the increasing voter apathy and emergence of identity movements throughout the world indicate a rise in voluntary citizen cooperation and perceived loss of the idea of politics as grounded in state practices. These developments have given rise to the need to stress on the qualities of citizens i.e. their sense of identity and their desire to work in the political process to promote the public good.

Having discussed the normative issues, intellectual traditions and thinkers which influence Mouffe's notion of 'the political', now the next chapter takes up her conception of 'the political' in detail.

## Chapter Two

### MOUFFE'S NOTION OF THE POLITICAL

#### 2. Introduction

As I have mentioned in chapter one, Laclau and Mouffe jointly wrote *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (1985). Then both the authors separately wrote and edited some books. Mouffe wrote *The Return of the Political* (1993), *The Democratic Paradox* (2000) and *On the Political* (2005). She also edited *Dimensions of Radical democracy: Pluralism, Citizenship, Community* (1992), *Deconstruction and Pragmatism* (1996) and *The Challenge of Carl Schmitt* (1999). This chapter is an exposition of the concept of 'the political'. For this I shall rely on her later writings where she has explicitly taken up the concept of 'the political'.

My main argument is that Chantal Mouffe emphasizes on the centrality of the idea of pluralism for modern democracy. For Mouffe, the most important issue for contemporary democratic politics is how to deal with pluralism. In her writings the 'dimension of undecidability' and the 'ineradicability of antagonism' are constitutive of the political. These two dimensions not only address some of the theoretical problems that have emerged with the rise of new social movements but also the political problems of the fragmentation and the dispersion of power in postindustrial societies. Laclau and Mouffe term this change in the power-structure as 'democratic pluralism'. This serves as a basis for the new politics which has replaced the class-based politics of the earlier times. The new movements not only present new and rival centres of power, but they also diffuse power more effectively by resisting bureaucratization and developing more spontaneous, affective and decentralized forms of organizational power structure.

## 2.1. Understanding the concepts

In chapter one, we discussed the manner in which Chantal Mouffe was influenced by Carl Schmitt's critique of liberal parliamentary democracy in his book *The Concept of the Political* (1927). Although he is considered a conservative thinker and his works are not widely discussed due to his connections with Nazism Mouffe has decided to seriously engage with his works because she thinks that only by doing that we can strengthen liberal democracy. There is no doubt that Mouffe treats him as an adversary, but according to her, he is "an adversary of remarkable intellectual quality."<sup>1</sup> Mouffe is of the view that by ignoring his views we would overlook "many insights that can be used to rethink liberal democracy with a view to strengthening its institutions."<sup>2</sup> Her strategy is "definitely not to read Schmitt to attack liberal democracy, but to ask how it could be improved."<sup>3</sup> Thus "to think both *with* and *against* Schmitt"<sup>4</sup> is the way taken up by Mouffe for addressing the deficiencies of liberal democracy. Mouffe's concept of the political gives centrality to the friend-enemy distinction – the dimension of antagonism. The other components of the concept are: pluralism, hegemony and democratic undecidability. These concepts are discussed in this chapter.

### *Friend-enemy distinction: the dimension of antagonism*

Mouffe develops her arguments from the claim that antagonism is unavoidable in social relations. She traces the dimension of antagonism to human psychology. No society is possible without antagonism. Since the social world is pluralistic it entails conflicts for which no rational solution is possible. In Mouffe's words, "it is not in our power to eliminate conflicts and escape our human condition, but it is in

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<sup>1</sup> Mouffe (1999). *The Challenge of Carl Schmitt*. London: Verso, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.



our power to create the practices, discourses and institutions that would allow those conflicts to take an agonistic form.”<sup>5</sup>

Her second claim is that a society based on perfect consensus on each and every issue is a chimera. Given that antagonism is ineradicable from human relations we should not aspire for a perfect consensus. Even when the consensus is based on rational deliberation, exclusion can not be ruled out.

From these arguments it would appear that that a) antagonism could not be and should not be eradicated from social relations and b) consensus in political arena would necessarily be exclusive. These two conclusions imply that consensus must not be the aim of democratic politics.

Mouffe also states the need to recognize the temporariness of the consensus. Any consensus must not be taken for granted. For, no consensus is a perfect harmony. According to Mouffe, the ‘dimension of undecidability’ and the ‘ineradicability of antagonism’ are constitutive of the political.<sup>6</sup> Thus she advocates for a liberal-democratic model of politics which gives centrality to power and antagonism. She calls this model ‘agonistic pluralism’ which entails a ‘conflictual consensus’ rather than a perfect consensus and which is based on the understanding that “power is constitutive of social relations”.<sup>7</sup>

Earlier in the text on *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, Mouffe and Laclau argue that social objectivity is constituted through acts of power. Power is at the very core of the constitution of identities. Thus any social objectivity is ultimately political. According to them, ‘hegemony’ is the ‘point of convergence’ – or rather ‘mutual collapse’ – between objectivity and power. We mistake this hegemony for consensus. But Mouffe is not opposed to hegemony. Nor does she want to rule out

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<sup>5</sup> Mouffe, 2005, *On The Political*. London & New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, p. 130.

<sup>6</sup> Mouffe, 2000, *The Democratic Paradox*. London & New York: Verso, p. 105.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 98.

hegemony from the political order. Mouffe develops some of her earlier arguments to state that hegemony could not be eliminated because when we bring an end to a hegemonic order, a new hegemonic order comes into existence. We should recognize that hegemony should be precarious and vulnerable. Every political order is the expression of a hegemonic order, of a specific pattern of power relations. According to the deliberative approach to democracy, the role played by power gets abridged when the society becomes more democratic. Mouffe criticizes this approach. She argues that the main question for democratic politics is not how to eliminate power but how to constitute forms of power more compatible with democratic values.<sup>8</sup> Perfect harmony should not be the ideal of a democratic society. Whenever we take a situation as harmony we tend to forget that harmony is an illusion. What we understand as harmony is, in reality, based on some power which gives legitimacy to the so-called harmony. By forgetting this fact, we tend to give permanence to the ephemeral nature of harmony and thereby hegemonising the hegemonised for a long time.

Once we accept the ineradicability of antagonism from human psychology and social relations, the subsequent question would be: what kind of antagonism would be suitable for democratic politics? Antagonism may lead to violence and other intractable problems. So it is necessary to tame antagonism to maintain the social fabric. Here, Mouffe introduces a concept what she calls 'agonism'. She explains that "while antagonism is a we/they relation in which the two sides are enemies who do not share any common ground, agonism is a we/they relation where the conflicting parties, although acknowledging that there is no rational solution to their conflict, nevertheless recognize the legitimacy of their opponents. They are 'adversaries' not enemies. This means that, while in conflict, they see themselves as belonging to the same political association, as sharing a common symbolic

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<sup>8</sup> Mouffe (2000). *The Democratic Paradox*. London & New York: Verso, p. 100.

space within which the conflict takes place. We could say that *the task of democracy is to transform antagonism into agonism.*"<sup>9</sup>

### *Hegemony*

Mouffe takes the concept of hegemony from Gramsci. Mouffe initially took an approach influenced by Althusser. Then she became very dissatisfied with the dogmatism of Althusserian approach. But since *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, she tilted towards Gramsci. After this, her view regarding liberal democracy started changing. The new social movements of 1970s made her work on the Gramscian concept of hegemony. Mouffe in *Gramsci and Marxist Theory* (1979) identified a form of Marxism with Gramsci that was non-reductionist and that could provide theoretical tools to understand precisely the novelty of the new social movements of the 1970s. Mouffe felt that classical Marxism could not help in interpreting the social movements.

In her recent work she clarifies that next to antagonism, "the concept of hegemony is the key notion for addressing the question of 'the political'."<sup>10</sup> She argues that every social order is hegemonic in nature. The political is linked to the acts of hegemonic institution of social relations. For her "every order is political and based on some form of exclusion."<sup>11</sup> Further, she elaborates that "things could always be otherwise and therefore every order is predicated on the exclusion of other possibilities. It is in that sense that it can be called 'political' since it is the expression of a particular structure of power relations."<sup>12</sup> "There are always other possibilities that have been repressed and that can be reactivated. The articulatory practices through which a certain order is established and the meaning of social institutions is fixed are 'hegemonic practices'. Every hegemonic order is

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<sup>9</sup> Mouffe (2005). *On The Political*. London & New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, p. 20. Italics added.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

susceptible of being challenged by counter-hegemonic practices, i.e. practices which will attempt to disarticulate the existing order so as to install another form of hegemony.”<sup>13</sup>

Many scholars are of the view that eventually Laclau and Mouffe use the term hegemony quite differently from Gramsci. Stanley Aronowitz argues that for both Laclau and Mouffe, ‘Second International Marxism created an essentialist doctrine in which the working class was, *a priori*, the social agent. Nor was Gramsci exempt from such error. Although he saw the relatively powerful role ideology and the state performed in modern capitalist societies, hegemonic functions were still tied to classes..... Laclau and Mouffe seek to overcome this "inner essentialist core" of Gramsci by removing the idea of correspondence, or more exactly of representation, from the concept of hegemony.”<sup>14</sup>

For these reasons it is believed Laclau and Mouffe accorded hegemonic status to discursive formations. The class does not get the monopoly over the concept of hegemony in their writings. They freed it from the reductionism of Marxist orthodoxy. According to Stanley Aronowitz, “hegemony is constituted, but not by primordial class relations. Following Sorel, Laclau and Mouffe argue that there is no necessary or logical relation between social agents and productive relations. Instead, they launch a frontal assault on the independent materiality of the economic, arguing instead for the primacy of *discursive formations* within which the social itself is constituted as a precarious field within which these formations contest for hegemony. In turn, all the categories of the social become merely positions in the discursive fields which, for Laclau and Mouffe, are now considered material forces that do not attach to metaphysical "classes" but to concrete movements that are themselves articulated in terms of discursive practices.”<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Mouffe (2005). *On The Political*. London & New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, p. 20.

<sup>14</sup> Aronowitz, Stanley (1986-1987). “Theory and Socialist Strategy”, *Social Text*, No. 16, Winter, p. 8.

<sup>15</sup> Aronowitz, Stanley (1986-1987). “Theory and Socialist Strategy”, *Social Text*, No. 16, Winter, p. 8.

## 2.2. Radical democracy vs. Liberalism as agonistic pluralism

For Mouffe, the most important issue for contemporary democratic politics is how to deal with pluralism. She argues that, liberalism views pluralism as a *fact*. So some liberals emphasise the pluralism of interests, others the pluralism of values. But in both the cases the aim is to reach a reasonable consensus. Mouffe does not accept such an approach which aims at consensus. For, she thinks that no consensus is possible without exclusion. She argues in favour of a different kind of approach by Derrida, Lacan and Foucault. These thinkers, in their own different ways, elaborate a fundamental insight which argues that there cannot be a consensus which is not based on some form of exclusion. According to such a view, any social objectivity is constituted through acts of power and is ultimately political. Mouffe advances a model of radical plural democracy which would not strive for consensus. 'The political' or the antagonistic dimension present in social relations is the underlying principle of radical democracy.

To take account of 'the political' as the ever present possibility of antagonism requires coming to terms with the lack of a final ground and acknowledging the dimension of *undecidability* which pervades every order. In *The Democratic Paradox* she argues that "to present the institutions of liberal democracy as the outcome of a pure deliberative rationality is to reify them and make them impossible to transform. It is to deny the fact that, like any other regime, modern pluralist democracy constitutes a system of relations of power, and to render the democratic challenging of those forms of power illegitimate."<sup>16</sup> Therefore Mouffe proposes that a final resolution of conflicts is an illusion which reflects the desire for a reconciled society devoid of pluralism. She claims that if pluralist democracy aims at a reconciled society, it "becomes a 'self-refuting ideal' because the very moment of its realization would coincide with its disintegration."<sup>17</sup> Mouffe says, "instead of trying to erase the traces of power and exclusion, democratic politics

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<sup>16</sup> Mouffe, 2000, *The Democratic Paradox*. London & New York: Verso, p. 32.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

requires us to bring them to the fore, to make them visible so that they can enter the terrain of contestation.”<sup>18</sup> Mouffe concludes that post-structuralism provides a much better theoretical framework to appreciate the specificity of modern democracy than rationalist approaches because post-structuralism recognizes difference while rationalist approaches would aim at consensus which is not beneficial for pluralism. Since most of the modern democracies are pluralistic, post-structuralist approach is suitable for the conflicts in these societies.

Mouffe argues that political liberalism’s picture of the well-ordered society free of antagonisms, violence, power and repression is a clever stratagem justified with the principles of “free exercise of practical reason”<sup>19</sup> that establishes the limits of possible consensus. Mouffe tries to show that since rationality and individual choice are crucial to acting in concert with each other by recognizing that certain rules and conduct are binding, any who refuses to choose from among the good life established by the system of social arrangements, must be irrational. Debunking the notion of neutrality, Mouffe writes that “when a point of view is excluded it is because this is required by the exercise of reason. Once exclusions are presented as arising from a free argument resulting from rational procedures (“veil of ignorance” or “rational dialogue”), they appear as immune from relations of power. In that way rationality is the key to solving the ‘paradox of liberalism’: how to eliminate its adversaries while remaining neutral.”<sup>20</sup>

Reflecting on recent debates on democracy, Mouffe stands opposed to the deliberative model which aims at consensus through free rational deliberation. She argues against the deliberative models proposed by Habermas and Rawls. She says that her view does not aim at eliminating undecidability, because according to her, “it is the very condition of possibility of decision and therefore of freedom and

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<sup>18</sup> Mouffe, 2000, *The Democratic Paradox*. London & New York: Verso, p. 34.

<sup>19</sup> Mouffe (1993). *The Return of the Political*. London: Verso, p. 142.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

pluralism.”<sup>21</sup> But deliberative democrats try to address the problem of to get rid of undecidability through a rational public sphere, whereas radical democrats do not regard it as a problem. Thus radical democracy and deliberative democracy are opposite approaches for the issue of pluralism.

While elaborating her opposition Mouffe explains that “in order to radicalize the idea of pluralism, so as to make it a vehicle for a deepening of the democratic revolution, we have to break with rationalism, individualism and universalism. Only on that condition will it be possible to apprehend the multiplicity of forms of subordination that exist in social relations and to provide a framework for the articulation of the different democratic struggles – around gender, race, class, sexuality, environment and others.”<sup>22</sup> It may seem that such an approach rejects any idea of rationality, individuality or universality. But according to Mouffe, “this does not imply the rejection of any idea of rationality, individuality, or universality, but affirms that they are *necessarily plural, discursively constructed and entangled with power relations.*”<sup>23</sup>

The friend-enemy distinction mentioned above underlies the pluralism proposed by Mouffe. So she argues that such pluralism must be “distinguished from the postmodern conception of the fragmentation of the social, which refuses to grant the fragments any kind of relational identity.”<sup>24</sup> She also clearly states that her perspective “consistently rejects any kind of essentialism – either of the totality or of the elements – and affirms that neither the totality nor the fragments possess any kind of fixed identity, prior to the contingent and pragmatic form of their articulation.”<sup>25</sup> Mouffe claims that the conception of radical and plural democracy she advocates is the “only conception that draws the full implications of the

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<sup>21</sup> Mouffe (2000), *The Democratic Paradox*. London & New York: Verso, p. 34.

<sup>22</sup> Mouffe (1993). *The Return of the Political*. London & New York: Verso, p. 7.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7. Italic added.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*,

'pluralism of values'."<sup>26</sup> What Mouffe has in mind is an agonistic pluralism taking place between different conceptions of citizenship.

### *Universal and particular*

Refusing singularity does not preclude recognizing and taking a position on the conflict. For Mouffe, pluralism that she espouses is not neutrality, at least the pluralism that emerges with the invention of democracy. Democracy appears with the disappearance of references to a substantive ground that unifies the social order. Conflict is legitimated. In the absence of a ground, the identity of society, like any social identity, is constituted by setting something aside. Identity is nonidentity. The two are entangled in a relationship that Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe call "antagonism," which differs from contradiction. Both are relations of difference. But contradiction is a relation between objects that are singular, in the sense of full identities; antagonism prevents the fullness of any identity. Antagonism names the relation with an exterior that both affirms and prevents the closure of identity. Having several positions is one thing, shunning antagonism another. For it invalidates conflicts between and within positions or, put differently, validates the possibility of a singular, non-exclusionary position or, put yet another way, evades the political.

According to Mouffe, "it is unlikely, given the practical and empirical limitations of social life, that we will ever be completely able to leave all our particular interests aside in order to coincide with our universal rational self."<sup>27</sup> This permanence of conflict in society should be taken positively. This dimension of antagonism is 'the political'. Criticising the Habermasian and Rawlsian deliberative model of democracy which is based on rational consensus which is realized when the conditions of ideal discourse is fulfilled, Mouffe says, "indeed, the free and unconstrained public deliberation of all on matters of common

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<sup>26</sup> Mouffe (1993). *The Return of the Political*. London & New York: Verso, p. 8.

<sup>27</sup> Mouffe, 2000, *The Democratic Paradox*. London & New York: Verso, p. 48.



concern goes against the democratic requisite of drawing a frontier between ‘us’ and ‘them’.<sup>28</sup>

Consensus should not be aspired for on all matters. It naturalises the hegemony which should be contestable. Mouffe claims, “...consensus in a liberal-democratic society is – and will always be – the expression of a hegemony and the crystallization of power relations. The frontier that it establishes between what is and what is not legitimate is a political one, and for that reason, it should remain contestable. To deny the existence of such a moment of closure, or to present the frontier as dictated by rationality or morality, is to naturalise what should be perceived as a contingent and temporary hegemonic articulation of ‘the people’ through a particular regime of inclusion-exclusion. The result of such an operation is to reify the identity of the people by reducing it to one of its many possible forms of identification”.<sup>29</sup> Mouffe’s notion of the political is central to her ‘liberal-democratic pluralism’ which she also calls as ‘radical democracy’.

### **2.3. Specificity of ‘the political’**

In chapter 1 I began with a distinction that Chantal Mouffe makes between ‘politics’ and ‘the political’. She explains that by political she refers to the dimension of antagonism that is inherent in human relations, antagonism that can take many forms and emerge in different types of social relations. ‘Politics’, on the other side, she writes “ indicates the ensemble of practices, discourses and institutions which seek to establish a certain order and organize human coexistence in conditions that are always potentially conflictual because they are affected by the dimension of ‘the political’. I consider that it is only when we acknowledge the dimension of ‘the political’ and understand that ‘politics’ consists in domesticating hostility and in trying to defuse the potential antagonism that exists in human relations, that we can pose what I take to be the central

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<sup>28</sup> Mouffe, 2000, *The Democratic Paradox*. London & New York: Verso, p. 48.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49.

question for democratic politics. This question, pace the rationalist, is not how to arrive at a consensus without exclusion since this would imply the eradication of the political. Politics aims at the creation of unity in a context of conflict and diversity; it is always concerned with the creation of an 'us' by the determination of a 'them'".<sup>30</sup>

Mouffe is faced by a problem while constructing the identity of 'the demos'. On the one hand, she wants to have a form of commonality for the identity of the people. But on the other hand, she thinks it necessary to retain the dimension of antagonism present in human relations. The 'demos' or the people can only be constructed by some form of commonality. But 'the political' is the dimension of antagonism which informs the constitution of the people. When we talk about politics, we already have in mind a dimension of 'the common' because politics seeks to establish a certain order, which is based on a commonality. Chantal Mouffe argues that 'politics' should be informed by the political – the dimension of antagonism, i.e. between 'us' and 'them'. We should not fix a permanent 'common'. 'The people' must be constituted precariously. For identities are never fixed. They change continuously. The undecidability should always remain in 'the political'. The division between 'us' and 'them' have to accompany the politics.

The 'us' and 'them' division, according to Mouffe, should be internally present to legitimize the constitutive conflict within a political community. Political community should be constituted along the lines of same ethico-political principles for example liberty and equality. But the meaning of these terms should not be permanently established. Asserting the integrative role that conflict plays in modern democracy Mouffe writes that any "well-functioning democracy calls for a confrontation between democratic political positions, and this requires a real debate about possible alternatives. Consensus is indeed necessary but it must be accompanied by dissent. There is no contradiction in saying that, as some would pretend. Consensus is needed on the institutions which are constitutive of

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<sup>30</sup> Mouffe, 2000, *The Democratic Paradox*. London & New York: Verso, p. 101.

democracy. But there will always be disagreement concerning the way social justice should be implemented in these institutions. In a pluralist democracy such a disagreement should be considered as legitimate and indeed welcome. We can agree on the importance of 'liberty and equality for all', while disagreeing sharply about their meaning and the way they should be implemented, with the different configurations of power relations that this implies."<sup>31</sup>

In this way Mouffe implicitly proposes that politics could well be devoid of the political. For example, in authoritarian and totalitarian regimes, politics manifests without the political. The 'us/them' distinction is present in these regimes, but only in relation to the exterior 'them'. And the whole political community, in these regimes, takes a form of 'us' which does not permit any us/ them distinction within itself. When we don't allow democratic political confrontation within our political community, it threatens our unity of our political community. In Mouffe's words, "when democratic confrontation disappears, the political in its antagonistic dimension manifests itself through other channels. Antagonism can take many forms and it is illusionary to believe that they could ever be eliminated. This is why it is preferable to give them a political outlet within an 'agonistic' pluralistic democratic system".<sup>32</sup> So Mouffe argues that 'the political' should always accompany 'politics'. Here it should be clear that this 'the political' is not the 'political' the adjective of 'politics'. Mouffe uses this the term 'the political' exclusively for the dimension of antagonism. 'The political' is the manifestation of conflict. For her, politics is the ensemble of practices, discourses which seek to establish a certain order for human co-existence which is always potentially conflictual. So politics aims at domesticating conflict and establishing a commonality.

Although Mouffe borrows the concept of the political from Schmitt, she does not leave the 'us/them' distinction at the exterior level of the state or the "demos". For

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<sup>31</sup> Mouffe, 2000, *The Democratic Paradox*. London & New York: Verso, pp. 113-114.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 114.

her, this distinction is more important within 'the demos'. 'The demos' should be established on some ethico-political norms. But those norms should not have fixed meanings; people within the demos – the political community – should be free to interpret the meaning and the way how to follow the norms. Politics, for Mouffe, aims at transforming *antagonism* into *agonism*. So if 'the political' is not allowed to go in tandem with 'politics', then the conflicts within 'the demos' will take the form of an 'antagonistic struggle between enemies' instead of 'agonistic confrontation among the adversaries' which is required for the smooth healthy functioning of 'the demos'.

### ***Mouffe on liberty***

After discussing Mouffe's conception of the political, it seems imperative to explain the significance of her notion of freedom in the understanding of political. Mouffe attempts at reconciliation between what Benjamin Constant calls the 'liberty of moderns' and the 'liberty of ancients'. "In his *Ancient and Modern Liberty* (1819), Constant develops with great force and clarity a crucial distinction between liberty as a guaranteed sphere of personal independence and liberty as the entitlement to take part in government. He claims, further, that modern liberty is the liberty of independence, whereas ancient liberty – the liberty that Constant sees Rousseau as trying to revive – is the liberty of participation in collective decision-making."<sup>33</sup> These two liberties are thought to be irreconcilable as it is generally accepted that the enjoyment of the later will endanger the earlier.

Isaiah Berlin, in a similar vein to that of Constant, categorizes liberty into two distinct types: negative and positive liberty. To explain negative liberty, he says that it is the answer to the question 'What is the area within which the subject – a person or a group of persons – is or should be left to do or be what he is able to do or be, without interference by other persons?' And positive liberty is the answer to the question 'What, or who, is the source of control or interference that can

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<sup>33</sup> Gray, John (1998). *Liberalism (Second Edition)*, Delhi: World View Publications, p. 21.

determine someone to do, or be, this rather than that?’<sup>34</sup> In other words negative liberty is the ‘liberty *from*’<sup>35</sup> and the positive liberty is the ‘freedom to – to lead one prescribed form of life.’<sup>36</sup> In Berlin’s view, the negative liberty is comparatively more modern than the positive one. Freedom in this negative sense ‘is not, at any rate logically, connected with democracy or self-government. And ‘there is no necessary connection between individual liberty and democratic rule.’<sup>37</sup>

As John Gray has pointed out that at some points in ‘Two Concepts of Liberty’, he (Berlin) “seems to suggest that a commitment to negative liberty in terms of non-interference embodies true liberal values, with positive conceptions of liberty as personal autonomy representing a departure from this position.”<sup>38</sup>

Mouffe also holds on to the interpretation that Berlin argues that positive freedom is ‘potentially totalitarian and unacceptable for a liberal’.<sup>39</sup> Mouffe has tried, in line with the argument by Skinner, to show that reconciliation between the negative and the positive conceptions of liberty is possible. Skinner she claims “attempts to prove that one can find in the civic republican tradition, and more particularly in the work of Machiavelli, a conception of liberty that, while negative – for it does not imply the objective notion of *eudiamonia* – still includes the ideals of political participation and civic virtue. It is thus in the *Discorsi* that Machiavelli proposes a conception of liberty as the capacity of men to pursue their proper objectives, their *humori*, all the while affirming that in order to secure the necessary conditions for avoiding coercion and servitude, which would render impossible the exercise of this individual liberty, it is indispensable that men fulfil

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<sup>34</sup> Berlin, Isaiah (1984). ‘Two Concepts of Liberty’ in Michael J. Sandel (ed.) *Liberalism and Its Critics*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, p. 15.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> Gray, John, 2000, *Two Faces of Liberalism*, New York: The New Press, p. 31.

<sup>39</sup> Mouffe, Chantal (1993). *The Return of the Political*. London & New York: Verso, p. 37.

certain public functions and cultivate the requisite virtues. If it is necessary to practise civic virtue and to serve the common good, it is so, for Machiavelli, in order for us to guarantee the degree of personal liberty which will permit us to pursue our ends.”<sup>40</sup>

## 2.4. Implications for liberal politics

Mouffe’s conception of the political has far reaching implications for liberal politics. Although Mouffe is in favour of individual liberty, she is opposed to the individualism of liberalism. Mouffe has nothing to say against liberal institutions. Rather, she strongly favours them and recognizes the contributions of these institutions towards pluralism.

There are three main challenges to liberalism that can be summarized here. First, Mouffe is more strident in her opposition to rationalism and essentialism in politics and the way it is suspicious of collective action. She prefers ‘passion’<sup>41</sup> to ‘reason’. She is of the view that “by putting the accent either on the rational calculation of interests (aggregative model), or on moral deliberation (deliberative model), current democratic political theory is unable to acknowledge the role of ‘passions’ as one of the main moving forces in the field of politics and finds itself disarmed when faced with its diverse manifestations.”<sup>42</sup> Enlightenment accorded emphasis on reason, mistrust of religion and traditional authority. It brought about a gradual emergence of the ideals of liberal, secular, democratic societies. This resulted in an ever-increasing accent on individuality. Except nationalism, every form of collective identification was viewed with doubt and pessimism. So in the liberal rationalist framework, collective forms of identifications were not regarded as good signs for the individual. Since liberalism was based on Enlightenment modernity and rationality, collective

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<sup>40</sup> Mouffe, Chantal (1993). *The Return of the Political*. London & New York: Verso, p. 38.

<sup>41</sup> Mouffe uses ‘passions’ to refer to the various affective forces which are at the origin of collective forms of identification. (*On the Political*, p. 24.)

<sup>42</sup> Mouffe (2005). *On the Political*. London & New York: Routledge, p. 24.

identities are regarded detrimental to individuality. The rationalist approach to politics holds ‘mass-feeling’ as archaic and pre-modern. It tends to see “political mass movements as an expression of irrational forces or a ‘return of the archaic’.”<sup>43</sup> A Rationalist approach towards politics assumes that any kind of ‘crowd’<sup>44</sup> appeal or the attraction of the crowd is pre-modern which should have disappeared with the advances of modernity. Mouffe is opposed to such universal rationalist frameworks of liberalism.

Second, her attack on liberalism is not about institutions but about the way liberalism evades the antagonistic dimension of the political. Antagonistic dimension is negated and foreclosed by the liberal framework. The dominant liberal framework – such as Rawls, Habermas – believes in a vision of a consensus that would not imply any form of exclusion and the availability of some form of realization of universality. Liberals do not see the hegemonic dimension of discursive practices.

Third, Mouffe does not believe that the principles underlying liberal democracy are the only legitimate ones. In her view, liberal democracy is only one form of democracy, but there are other forms. She opposes the universalisation of liberal democracy throughout the world. Thus Mouffe challenges liberalism’s universalizing tendencies.

However these challenges do not mean that she is antiliberal. She wants to purge those elements from liberalism that are inimical to democracy. According to Mouffe, there are “many liberalisms”.<sup>45</sup> With the exceptions like John Gray, Isaiah Berlin, Michael Walzer and Joseph Raz among others, the dominant strand of liberalism is rationalist and individualist in nature which does not acknowledge any kind of collective identities. Stressing the inability of this kind of liberalism to adequately grasp the pluralistic nature of the social world, and the conflicts

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<sup>43</sup> Mouffe (2005). *On the Political*. London & New York: Routledge, p. 24.

<sup>44</sup> Mouffe borrows this term from Elias Canetti, who authored a book *Crowds and Power*.

<sup>45</sup> Mouffe, (2005). *On The Political*. London & New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, p. 10.

therein, Mouffe argues that, this kind of liberalism is unable to appreciate the political and it also negates the political in its antagonistic dimension. For, this type of liberalism presents a non-conflictual picture of pluralism. Mouffe argues that “the typical liberal understanding of pluralism is that we live in a world in which there are indeed many perspectives and values and that, owing to empirical limitations, we will never be able to adopt them all, but that, when put together, they constitute an harmonious and non-conflictual ensemble.”<sup>46</sup> According to Mouffe, “pluralism implies the permanence of conflict and antagonism,”<sup>47</sup> and in a democracy “conflicts and confrontations, far from being a sign of imperfection, indicate that democracy is alive and inhabited by pluralism.”<sup>48</sup> Thus Mouffe emphasizes on “the centrality of the idea of pluralism for modern democracy.”<sup>49</sup>

## 2.5 Rise of new social movements

A social movement is a distinct form of collective action which involves activism and a strong commitment to its cause. It is often planned, and not based on spontaneous mass action. It usually has a loose organizational framework. The cause of the social movements may vary from identity, respect to interest or material benefit. They try to promote a specific cause. Every social movement has a clear objective. So it can be said that these movements are narrow with regard to their objective and area of focus. These movements draw members from various classes. However, a particular movement may stick to a certain class. Social movements are not endemic to democracy. They surface in the undemocratic scenario as well. They are becoming ubiquitous in contemporary world politics.

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<sup>46</sup> Mouffe, (2005). *On The Political*. London & New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, p. 10.

<sup>47</sup> Mouffe (2000), *The Democratic Paradox*. London & New York: Verso, p.33.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 34.

<sup>49</sup> Mouffe (1993). *The Return of the Political*. London & New York: Verso, p. 7.



Katzenstein and others have rightly noted that they “are broadly salutary to democracy.”<sup>50</sup>

But for many scholars it is difficult to define social movements due to their amorphous and ubiquitous nature. According to Ghanshyam Shah, “like many other terms such as ‘democracy’, ‘masses’, ‘popular’, ‘equality’, the term ‘movement’ is often used differently by different social activists, political leaders and scholars who have written on ‘movements’.”<sup>51</sup>

In recent years, the “coupling of social movement activism with democracy” has become almost axiomatic at a global level.<sup>52</sup> The revival of emphasis on social movements was brought about by the emergence of so-called ‘new social movements’ since the 1960s: the women’s movement, the environmental movement and the peace movement, and so on. Since then, these movements have been inhabiting the global political landscape with renewed vigour. In countries of Latin America, “that have undergone a transition to democracy, social movements have been credited (together with elite forbearance in the face of pressure to quell popular protest) with ushering in democratization and with raising new issues and prompting state institutions to respond to newly articulated needs.”<sup>53</sup> Sidney Tarrow and David Meyer talk about the advent of a “social movement society”.<sup>54</sup> They mention about three developments due to which, social movements are dotting the political scene in many democratic countries. In their words:

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<sup>50</sup> Katzenstein et al. (2004), ‘Social movements politics in India: institutions, interests, and identities’, in Atul Kohli (ed) *The Success of India’s Democracy*. New Delhi: Cambridge University Press, p. 244.

<sup>51</sup> Shah, Ghanshyam (2002). Introduction to Ghanshyam Shah (ed) *Social Movements and the State*. New Delhi: Sage Publications, p. 15.

<sup>52</sup> Katzenstein et al. (2004), ‘Social movements politics in India: institutions, interests, and identities’, in Atul Kohli (ed) *The Success of India’s Democracy*. New Delhi: Cambridge University Press, p. 242.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Tarrow and Meyer quoted in Katzenstein et al. (2004), ‘Social movements politics in India: institutions, interests, and identities’, in Atul Kohli (ed) *The Success of India’s Democracy*, p. 243.

First, social protest has moved from being a sporadic, if recurring feature of democratic politics, to become a perpetual element in modern life.

Second, protest behaviour is employed with greater frequency, by more diverse constituencies, and is used to represent a wider range of claims than ever before.

Third, professionalisation and institutionalization may be changing the major vehicle of contentious claims – the social movement – into an instrument within the realm of conventional politics.<sup>55</sup>

Having discussed all this regarding social movements now a question arises here: What is new about new social movements? According to Oxford Concise Dictionary of Politics, the term ‘new social movements’ is used “to describe a diverse set of popular movements characterized by a departure from conventional methods of political organization and expression, and experimentation with new forms of social relations and cultural meanings and identities.”<sup>56</sup> New social movements defy the existing social goals and political styles. They accept personal fulfillment and self expression as their goal. These movements have a significant membership overlap amongst themselves. Environmentalist movement, animal rights movement, peace movement, anti-globalisation movement, gay movement and lesbian movement are some of the examples of new social movements.

How these are different from the earlier ones? First, whereas the earlier movements represented the oppressed or disadvantaged, the contemporary movements have, in most cases, attracted the young, the better-educated and the relatively affluent. Second, new social movements are also distinguished by their generally post-material orientation, and their commitment to new forms of political activism, sometimes called the ‘new politics’, which unlike the earlier movements do not have much faith on established parties, interest groups and representative processes towards a more innovative and theatrical form of protest politics. Third, unlike their traditional counterparts, new social movements

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<sup>55</sup> Tarrow and Meyer quoted in Katzenstein et al. (2004), ‘Social movements politics in India: Institutions, Interests, and Identities’, in Atul Kohli (ed) *The Success of India’s Democracy*, p. 243.

<sup>56</sup> Ian McLean and Alistair McMillan (eds) (2005). *Oxford Concise Dictionary of Politics*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press. p. 371.

subscribe to a common, if not always clearly defined, ideology. These new movements have certain commonalities and they often work in tandem. It can be said in broad terms they are ideologically related to the New Left.

The rise of new social movements and their incompatibility with Marxism proved the incompetence of Marxist orthodoxy to provide any theoretical home to these movements. Feminists, ecologists, proponents of identity politics rooted in race, ethnicity, sexuality failed to find a theoretical shelter in Marxism. They have rather articulated an independent theoretical position. Despite its sensitivity to the role of social and material conditions in constructing social reality, traditional Marxism does not say anything on an issue that dominates contemporary theory: the cultural construction of race, gender, ethnicity and sexuality. Traditional Marxist theory emphasizes on a single factor: material/economic conditions. It is the clash of classes defined by the ownership of the means of production that drives Marxist theory; there is no room for differences of gender, class, race and ethnicity. This has created a peculiar dilemma for contemporary Marxists. The new social movements identify themselves as oppositional, resistance movements; they thus could be categorized under the traditional purview of the left. Yet Marxist theory cannot accommodate these movements without violating its basic tenets. Post-Marxism feels this gap. It provides a theoretical platform for the new social movements. For, it sees potential antagonism present everywhere in society. Post-Marxist notion of radical plural democracy envisages liberty and equality for all. 'The political', which is the dimension of antagonism, is the logic of the new social movements. It plays a crucial role in the post-Marxist thought of Laclau and Mouffe. They provide a theoretical support to the resistance movements against oppression, unjustified subordination and inequality.

### *'The political' located in post Marxism*

Towards the last decades of twentieth century, Marxism was losing ground both politically and intellectually. Politically its debacle was because of the demise of

Marxist-identified political regimes in Russia and Eastern Europe. As I argued in the introduction, Marxist theory has been unable to accommodate three significant intellectual movements: postmodernism/poststructuralism, theoretical articulations of the 'new social movements' such as feminism, ecology and identity politics, and a revitalized theory of liberal democracy. The postmodernism/poststructuralism criticized meta-narratives and totalizing theories that claim to explain the whole of social reality. This critique could be applicable to Marxism and traditional Liberalism as well. But it has been focused on the left because many postmodern/poststructuralist theorists are former Marxists. The rise of new social movements unearthed the incapacity of Marxism to address antagonisms other than the class-antagonism. The reemergence of liberal democratic theory and practice also discredited Marxism. Marxists assume liberalism is an ephemeral phenomenon, which will wither away with the inevitable demise of capitalism. So they do not feel it necessary to intellectually engage with it. But liberalism democracy has proved to be a dynamic force on the contemporary intellectual arena.

Thus the crisis in contemporary Marxism makes it very tempting to argue that the leftist intellectuals should simply abandon Marxism and embrace a more promising approach. But this sounds very unattractive for a number of reasons. First, many powerful concepts in Marxism (such as 'liberation' and 'emancipation') will be discarded like the babies with bathwater, if Marxism is abandoned entirely. Secondly, many of the proponents of the contemporary resistance movements are the disaffected Marxists. Third, critics of the left are not in a position to offer a viable alternative on the political left. Postmodernism has no clear political agenda. Despite their political programmes the new social movements fail to offer a comprehensive social and political theory. Post-Marxism emerged in the left-side of the political spectrum. It tried to retain the best fragments out of the debilitated Marxism. It attempted to fill the lacunae of the contemporary left. It keeps intact the liberatory and emancipatory theme of Marxist heritage.

Post-Marxism emerged as an answer to the incompetence of Marxism to incorporate new social movements into its framework. Marxism gives centrality to the class struggle. For Marxism, the most important antagonism is the class antagonism. It believes that a classless society will be a society without antagonism and that will be a reconciled society. It fails to recognize the subordination and exploitation which are outside the unified class category. Post-Marxism argues that Marxism is redundant to address the exploitations of the post-industrial society. Working class is no longer the representative of the exploited lot. For, now there are numerous forms of subordination and exploitation which cannot be addressed by a fixed concept of class struggle. Post-Marxism never fixes the category around a single identity. Its identification are therefore always precarious and temporary so that new forms of exploitations can be accommodated. 'The political' is the dimension of antagonism. Thus, new forms of antagonism result in formation of new political identities.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter I attempted an exposition of the idea of the political in the writings of Chantal Mouffe. She identifies pluralism as central to all societies. The main task for politics is to transform antagonism into agonism. While being critical of bids for consensus by liberal theorists she broadly affirms some of the principles of liberal democracy.

In the preface to *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, Laclau and Mouffe described their approach as post-Marxism. The concept of 'the political' was not properly developed in that book. This book is mainly a critique of the economic reductionism of Marxism. Later, Mouffe took up this concept seriously. However, 'hegemony' is the concept which was seriously taken by the authors in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*. This concept plays a very important role in understanding the concept of 'the political'. Although 'the political' is a topic on which only Mouffe, and not Laclau, has written a lot, it may be regarded the central concept of post-Marxism, because it emphasizes the dimension of antagonism and undecidability which are the mainstay of post-Marxism.

They go beyond the approach followed by Gramsci by their frontal assault on the independent materiality of the economic, arguing instead for the primacy of *discursive formations* within which the social itself is constituted as a precarious field within which these formations contest for hegemony. This allows them to analyse the role of social movements outside the framework of Marxist theory.

## Chapter Three

### POST-MARXISM: RETHINKING SOCIALIST POLITICS

#### 3. Introduction

In chapter one and chapter two, I mentioned that Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau have contributed to theories challenging Marxist as well as liberal politics intending to provide an alternative. Their writings have been located within the intellectual stream of post-Marxism<sup>1</sup>. Post-Marxism! What is post-Marxism? Has it anything to do with Marxism? Is this opposed to Marxism? Is it yet another kind of revisionism? Does it provide a viable alternative to Marxism? Questions like this arise when we come across the term 'post-Marxism'. This chapter tries to answer these questions implicitly or explicitly.

Let me start with the definition given by Laclau and Mouffe in the preface to the second edition of *Hegemony and Socialist strategy*. In their view, post-Marxism is “to reread Marxist theory in the light of contemporary problems necessarily involves deconstructing the central categories of that theory.”<sup>2</sup> They describe it as the process of “reappropriation of an intellectual tradition, as well as the process of going beyond it.”<sup>3</sup> Post-Marxism criticises Marxism for various reasons such as economism, class-reductionism and its rational and dialectical certainty. It argues that Marxism is irrelevant to address the numerous inequalities present in post-industrial society. Classical Marxism can only analyse class inequality. So class struggle is the panacea

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<sup>1</sup> In this chapter, post-Marxism denotes the approach by Laclau and Mouffe. Unless explicitly mentioned, it should refer to the position taken by both of them. But this does not mean that their individual positions are not post-Marxists.

<sup>2</sup> Laclau, Ernesto and Chantal Mouffe (2001). *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, second edition. Verso: London, p. ix.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

offered by Marxism. It is unable to estimate the relevance of different democratic struggles going on in different parts of the world. So there is a need to go beyond Marxism. But at the same time, Mouffe and Laclau do not want to call themselves post-liberals<sup>4</sup>. They think they are post-Marxists because, like Marxists, their aim is also liberation. They also want freedom and equality which are core ideas in Marxism. On the other hand they want to go beyond Marxism as it is unable to address the new inequalities. New social movements are not given space within the Marxist framework. And these movements are deepening democracy. These movements must be paid due attention.

Post-Marxism aims at two things, one of them is political and the other one is theoretical. The political objective is to challenge neo-liberalism. Mouffe is of the view that “the unchallenged hegemony of neo-liberalism represents a threat for democratic institutions.”<sup>5</sup> The theoretical objective of Post-Marxism is no less important than the political one. According to Mouffe, the blurring of the boundaries between left and right is not congenial for democracy. Instead, it is jeopardizing the future of democracy. She claims that the dominant approach in political theory is incompetent to salvage democracy from this imperceptible danger.

In *The Democratic Paradox* (2000), Mouffe talks about a ‘paradox’ at the heart of liberal democratic politics which is the articulation between two different traditions, namely the tradition of political liberalism, which is constituted by the rule of law, separation of powers and individual rights, and the democratic tradition of popular sovereignty. The tension between liberty and equality also makes the situation more complex. The democratic theorists and politicians are unable to perceive the ‘democratic paradox’ due to their mistaken emphasis on consensus. It is because of their misperception that antagonism can be and should be eliminated. Mouffe claims that an ultimate reconciliation between the two logics which are constitutive of liberal

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<sup>4</sup> Laclau and Mouffe don’t call themselves post-liberals, but Mouffe, in her book *On the Political* (2005), call the contemporary era as the post-liberal era.

<sup>5</sup> Mouffe (2000). *The Democratic Paradox*. London & New York: Verso, p. 6.



democracy is impossible. So the approaches of contemporary political theorists like Rawls and Habermas to reconcile democracy with liberalism through adequate deliberative procedures end up in failure. Therefore democratic political theory should jettison these types of futile approaches. Mouffe argues that only by acknowledging the paradoxical nature of liberal democracy, we can envisage modern democratic politics as an 'agonistic confrontation' between conflicting interpretations of the constitutive liberal-democratic values. In such a confrontation the left/right configuration plays a crucial role and the illusion that democratic politics could organize itself without them can only have disastrous consequences, claims Mouffe.

### **3.1. Critique of Classical Marxism**

#### *Questioning the idea of the class subject as the unifying subject*

Post-Marxism rejects the category of 'class' as the pre-constituted unity of the subject. This is to enable us to recognize the fragmentation and dispersal of subject position. Classical Marxism defines the class as the coherent totality of those positions starting from a precise location in the social totality – the relations of production. Post-Marxism, on the contrary, envisages subject positions external to the relations of productions which contributes to shaping the identity of the agent and there are no boundaries, which establish a priori the class unity of the agent. It helps us explain the complexity of the process at the formation of social and political identities in third world countries. Post-Marxists claim that the very concept of 'class struggle' became very inadequate to describe the social antagonisms in the world in which we live if we see the increasing dispersion of subject positions in advanced capitalist countries.

In post-Marxist framework, the subject is constructed through a plurality of subject position. There occurs constant process of articulation and re-articulation. No identity is final or fixed. There are processes of identifications rather than static identities. These identities are not completely separate from each other. For example, working

class cannot be a fixed identity. Working class woman is a category within that. Then working class women are from white and black people as well. Again black working class woman may have another identity within it. For, there may be some lesbian black working class women. It is also not that there are merely identities within identities. Identity formation is not that simple a process. It is replete with complexities and intricacies. Identities intersect each other. They are interwoven with each other to a great extent. So there are overlapping subject positions. For example, a person can bear multiple identities of subordination. The same person can be a black, an woman, a lesbian and so on. This process goes on indefinitely as long as there are different kinds of subordination in the society. Marxist notion of class struggle stands redundant today. Exploitations, antagonisms, struggles have not disappeared from our societies, but the struggles of our time cannot be and should not be clubbed together as class struggle. There are different struggles besides the struggle of workers. Laclau puts it very succinctly: "if one asserts that there are, for example, workers' struggles, but these struggles form only *one* of the subject positions of social agents, since the workers themselves participate in many others which do not have any *necessary* relation with the struggles that are waged at the level of the factory floor, one is asserting something very true, but something which is incompatible with the Marxist theory of classes."<sup>6</sup>

However post-Marxists do not blame Marx for the class reductionism or economism. For example, Laclau writes:

in societies prior to capitalism the 'boundaries' of social and political identities *tended* to coincide with the unity of the group as a coherent and integrated set of subject positions..... In these circumstances, the problem of the dispersion and overlapping of subject positions could not really arise for Marx nor for his contemporaries. The group as a set of integrated positions (the *class*) presented itself as the agent of this struggle.....for Marx, 'non-antagonistic society' and 'classless society' were synonymous. Marx's vision of 'class struggle' was relatively correct and it accorded fairly well with social reality because the society of his time was to a

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<sup>6</sup> Laclau (1990). *New Reflections on the Revolutions of Our Time*. London: Verso, p. 163.

large extent a class society. But the society in which we are living a century later is an increasingly less classist society, because the unity of group positions on which the Marxist notion of 'class' is based no longer obtains. We have exploitation, antagonisms, struggles, but the latter – workers' struggle included – are increasingly less *class* struggles.<sup>7</sup>

Laclau argues that although our societies are becoming less classist societies that does not imply that the antagonistic potential of this has declined. And we are not entering into increasingly integrated societies. For, "the era of 'disorganized capitalism' implies that the fragmentation of subject positions which it generates is accompanied by the proliferation of new antagonisms and points of rupture."<sup>8</sup> We are witnessing proliferation of new antagonisms. Thanks to this proliferation, new forms of struggle erupt. In this era of 'late capitalism' – which witnesses 'uneven development in contemporary societies, rapid rate of technological transformations and increasing commodification' – there is a "decline of 'classes' as a form of constructing collective identities."<sup>9</sup> Laclau calls this "a decline of the *social* – as a set of sedimented objectives – and an expansion of the field of the *political*."<sup>10</sup> Here, decline of classes does not imply decline in social inequalities, but it implies that the existing inequalities can be characterized less and less as class inequalities. So the transition from Marxism to Post-Marxism – the transition from 'the social' to 'the political' – can be termed as the broadening of horizons. Laclau claims that Post-Marxism does not negate Marxism. Instead, Marxism is presented within post-Marxism as a special case of specific historical forms within a wider universe of possible articulation. "The transition from one to the other could be characterized as a widening of horizons."<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Laclau (1990). *New Reflections on the Revolutions of Our Time*. London: Verso, pp. 164-165.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 165.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 166.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> Laclau (1990). *New Reflections on the Revolutions of Our Time*. London: Verso, p. 166.

### *The political domain as determined by economic forces*

Marxism holds an image of society totalised by a single, economic contest. Rejecting the idealism of Hegel, who believed that history was the unfolding of world-spirit, Marx held matter to be fundamental to all forms of social and historical development. The theory of base and superstructure holds that economy is the base or real foundation of society. The legal and political superstructure arises from the economic base. Superstructure is the totality of ideological relations like politics, law, morality, religion and art etc. Base is the totality of the historically determined production relations underlying superstructure. Thus Marxism argues that political domain is always determined by economic forces. It neglected politics by holding a notion that politics is always subordinated to economy.

Post-Marxism challenges this supremacy given to the economic over 'the political' in Marxism. It believes in the autonomy of 'the political'. Post-Marxism discards the notion of a universal working class which was constructed upon economic lines. It also shuns the notion of class struggle present in Marxism which is also a struggle for the control of the economic structure. In the place of class struggles it gives supremacy to the new social movements. These movements are not determined by economic factors. These are the manifestations of the subordinations present in post-industrial societies. These are not necessarily economic subordinations. Antagonism is not necessarily the product of economic domination. Any kind of social relation may lead to antagonism. Subordination is there in every social relation.

The concept of hegemony is very important in Mouffe's 'the political'. Mouffe takes the concept of hegemony from Gramsci. The new social movements of 1970s made her work on the Gramscian concept of hegemony. Mouffe in *Gramsci and Marxist Theory* (1979) identified a form of Marxism with Gramsci that was non-reductionist and that could provide theoretical tools to understand precisely the novelty of the new social movements of the 1970s. Mouffe felt that classical

Marxism could not help in interpreting the social movements. She was also very dissatisfied with the economic reductionism of classical Marxism.

Mouffe frees the concept of hegemony from economic reductionism. Hegemony may be of different nature. Every society does have a hegemonic order. No hegemonic order is permanent. Always there is a chance that, it may be replaced with another hegemonic order.

### *Against Class essentialism*

Post-Marxism is to go beyond what Mouffe calls 'classism' of Marxism. It claims that Classical Marxism is class reductionism, which is unable to give voice to numerous new forms of exploitation prevalent in post-industrial society. Post-Marxism argues that centrality of the social class is redundant because there is a wide range of other "moments" of struggle which we have to recognize. These are the so-called new social movement such as the ecological movement, Women's movement, the gay movement and so on. Unlike Marxism, post-Marxism is not presumed upon economism. While classical Marxism accentuates the class, post-Marxism emphasizes on the historical conditions which constitute the social agents or classes. Whereas classical Marxism fixed an objective meaning on history which subsequently operated as an unquestioned transcendental horizons in the analysis of concrete social process, Post-Marxism tries to historicizes the horizon itself to so it in its radical contingency. Post-Marxism enables us to think about a set of historical possibilities different from those which are thinkable within Marxism.

Commenting about the post-Marxist approach Allen Hunter writes, "in rejecting an economistic view of the working class as privileged agent of transformative political action, many have set aside questions about economics, class, and agency. Retreating from apocalyptic, Jacobin visions of revolution, many radicals no longer long for revolution. Dismissing dogmatic Marxist assertions about laws of motion of history,

there is an emphasis on unknowability, so that strategy ceases to be a category distinguishable from instrumental politics.”<sup>12</sup>

### *Against Rational and dialectical certainty*

Rational and dialectical certainty of Classical Marxism views history as a rational process with a culminating point in communism, wherein all social contradictions will be resolved. Classical Marxism attempts to gain historical understanding through the application of scientific methods. It claims that it uncovers the laws of historical and social development. Dialectical Materialism is a scientific philosophical world outlook. It embodies two central assumptions: first, the primacy of matter; second, the dialectical character of all processes, whether natural or human, expressed in three laws: the transformation of quantity into quality, the unity of opposites, and the negation of negation. The dialectic of Marx and Engels is concerned with the growth of the consciousness of man in society and not with the unfolding consciousness of the world spirit. Marx’s dialectic was an adaptation of Hegel’s dialectic.

Marxism claims to foretell about the future stage of human history with certainty. It is of the view that society will pass through changing phases as contradictions at every stage of history are resolved in the next stage. These contradictions are expressed clash between those who own the factors of production and those who do not. Marx’s theory of history identifies four stages or epochs: primitive communism; slavery; feudalism; and capitalism. Each stage is a struggle between the oppressor and the oppressed. Each stage of history marks a further development of the forces of production. Marxism envisages an end of history which would come with a society having no internal contradictions and antagonisms. This is communism, a classless society based on the common ownership of productive wealth.

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<sup>12</sup> Hunter, Allen (1988). ‘Post-Marxism and the new social movements.’, *Theory and Society*, Vol. 17, No. 6, Nov., p. 886.

Post-Marxism criticises this element of certainty in Marxism. Unlike Marxism, it does not aim at any society free of antagonisms. For post-Marxism argues that there is no end to the permanence of antagonism in society. Contingency, uncertainty and unknowability are the features of post-Marxism which are pitted against the certainty of Marxism.

### **3.2. Challenges to Radical Politics**

#### *On left politics*

Mouffe expresses apprehension over the fact that many Left parties are rechristening themselves as 'centre-left'. They are doing this to adopt themselves to what Mouffe calls the 'common sense' in today's liberal democratic societies. She argues that the 'neo-liberal dogmas' about the inviolable rights of property, the all-encompassing virtues of the market and the dangers of interfering with its logics constitute this common sense. Since 1989, many books have been published under a new series (entitled 'Phronesis') from Verso<sup>13</sup>. Laclau and Mouffe are the editors of this series. An editorial policy appeared in the beginning of all the books came under the series. The statement shows the apprehension of Laclau and Mouffe for the change in the nature of left parties. It reads:

There is today wide agreement that left-wing project is in crisis. New antagonisms have emerged – not only in advanced capitalist societies but also in the Eastern bloc and in the Third World – that require the reformulation of the socialist ideal in terms of an extension and deepening of democracy.

Then they go on to describe two theoretical strategies to carry out such a task. One of these strategies sticks to the universalism and rationalism of democracy. But the other one argues that the critique of essentialism is the necessary condition for understanding the widening of the field of social struggles characteristics of the

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<sup>13</sup> VERSO publishes books having leftist approach. It is also regarded as the publisher having radical outlook.

present stage of democratic politics. Laclau and Mouffe conclude the statement by declaring:

*Phronesis* clearly locates itself among the latter. Our objective is to establish a dialogue between these theoretical developments and left-wing politics. We believe that an anti-essentialist theoretical stand is the sine qua non of a new vision for the Left conceived in terms of a radical and plural democracy.

The crisis of left-politics is aggravating, argue Laclau and Mouffe. *The Democratic Paradox* was published under the same series *Phronesis* in 2000. Mouffe was the author. Now a revised version of the editorial policy came in this book. Here Laclau and Mouffe, after mentioning about neoliberal hegemony, write:

Today, the left-wing project is in an even deeper crisis than ten years ago. An increasing number of social democratic parties, under the pretence of 'modernising' themselves, are discarding their left identity. According to the advocates of the 'third way', and with the advent of globalisation, the time has come to abandon the old dogmas of Left and Right and promote a new entrepreneurial spirit at all levels of society.

Here their objective has been broadened to some extent. In their words:

*Phronesis's* objective is to establish a dialogue among all those who assert the need to redefine the Left/Right distinction – which constitutes the crucial dynamic of modern democracy – instead of relinquishing it. Our original concern, which was to bring together left-wing politics and the theoretical developments around the critique of essentialism, is more pertinent than ever.

Mouffe criticizes the centre-left parties' effort to create a 'consensus at the centre' which they declared to be the only type of politics suited to the new information society. These parties have done away with the traditional struggle of the left for equality. They use the façade of rethinking and updating democratic demands to disguise their refusal to pay any heed to the demands of the popular sectors. By providing the pretext of modernization, flexibility they are becoming callous to their



political and social priorities. Mouffe criticizes the 'third way' as "no more than the justification by social democrats of their capitulation to a neo-liberal hegemony whose power relations they will not challenge, limiting themselves to making some little adjustments in order to help people cope with what is seen as the ineluctable fate of globalization."<sup>14</sup>

### ***Right wing populism***

The right wing parties are coming to power in many European countries. France is an example. But Mouffe does not think it to be worrying factor. She is of the view that the right (the democratic right according to Mouffe) and the left are facing the same problem. Both of them do not know how to address the present situation. After the failed Thatcher experiment, many right wing democratic parties are not in position to offer any viable alternative. Their neo-liberal model is not performing up to their expectations. Mouffe is really worried about the emergence of the extreme right in many of the European countries. She argues that these right wing parties are occupying the 'terrain of contestation deserted by the left'. Worsening the situation many sections of the working class turn towards this right wing populist parties in the belief that these parties are more concerned about their interest than the social democrats. These sections of the working class fall prey to the demagogues of the right easily as their faith in the traditional democratic politics is waning.

Mouffe points out that of the extreme right is coming to the political arena due to the blurring of the boundaries between 'left' and 'right'. Antagonism is ineradicable form social relations. If it is not given a political channel to express itself it takes the form of religion and other fundamental issues. And then it proves to be fatal for democratic society and polity. She thinks that this situation is very dangerous because the extreme right puts into question the very basis of the liberal democratic institutions. The extreme right movements often turn violent. They do not follow the democratic rule of the game. So their emergence would threaten the foundation of the liberal political

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<sup>14</sup> Mouffe (2000). *The Democratic Paradox*. London & New York: Verso, p. 6.

order. Mouffe sees that as the biggest danger. For Mouffe argues that the kind of adversarial relation she is proposing is not possible with the extreme right. It can only be possible between the democratic left and right. The extreme right should be considered as enemies because they defy the rules of the game.

### *Critique of the consensus model*

Mouffe is of the view that the consensus model of democracy is dangerous. She is opposed to both the consensus models: theoretical and political. Theoretically she criticises the deliberative model of democracy proposed by Habermas and Rawls. Politically, Mouffe is a critic of the 'third way' proposed by Anthony Giddens and Tony Blair. She opposes the politics of a 'radical centre'.

Rawls and Habermas offer two main model of deliberative democracy. Both, in different ways, try to craft a public sphere in which a rational consensus can be reached. Rawls tries to achieve the consensus by relegating everything divisive to the private sphere. Habermas envisages a form of perfect deliberation under the rules of rational discourse which would finally achieve a consensus. This is a challenge before the radical politics because it aims at permanence of agonism whereas the objective of deliberative democracy is to reach a rational consensus. Chantal Mouffe is of the view that to envisage politics as a rational process of negotiation among individuals is to obliterate the whole dimension of power and antagonisms – the political – and thereby completely miss its nature.

The 'Third Way' presents the idea of a 'Radical Centre' – a blend between the left and the right. To go with Tony Blair, a leading supporter of the 'Third Way', the era of left wing and right wing policy has gone. Time has come for good or bad policies. 'Third Way' argues that the radical politics is irrational, anachronistic and extremist. Thus 'Third Way' tries to depoliticise the political arena and poses a real threat to the radical politics. It also advocates a notion of social unanimity which goes against the post-Marxist goal of permanence of 'agonism'.

Mouffe feels that the blurring of the boundaries between the Left and the Right is alarming. She is of the view that this is very precarious for democratic politics as the democratic space is now being taken over by various ethno-religious groups which capitalize this blurring of the boundaries between the Left and the Right. Democratic politics must have a partisan character. If we abandon to think in terms of right and left, then the distinction between right and left will emerge in a big way and that will be difficult to tame. “This in turn fosters disaffection towards political parties and discourages participation in the political process. Hence the growth of other collective identities around religious, nationalist or ethnic forms of identification.”<sup>15</sup>

Taking the examples of the left parties (Blair’s ‘Third Way’ and Schroder’s ‘neue Mitte’ which are inspired by Clinton’s strategy of ‘triangulation’)<sup>16</sup> which are heading towards the right, Mouffe argues that the ‘third way’ is a ‘politics without adversary’ which makes a false claim that ‘all interests can be reconciled’. The third way tries to naturalise the ‘current neo-liberal hegemony’. Taking note of the ‘third way’ politics, she writes that it “mobilises a view of politics which has evacuated the dimension of antagonism and postulates the existence of a ‘general interest of the people’ whose implementation overcomes the winners/losers form of resolution of conflicts.”<sup>17</sup> She argues that such a perspective is unable to see the “power relations which structure contemporary post-industrial societies.”<sup>18</sup>

### ***The Challenge of terrorism***

Mouffe believes that, “instead of being perceived as the expression of a few evil and pathological individuals, terrorism has to be situated into a wider geopolitical

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<sup>15</sup> Mouffe(1993). *The Return of the Political*. London & New York: Verso, p. 5.

<sup>16</sup> Mouffe (2000). *The Democratic Paradox*. London & New York: Verso, p. 6.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 15.

context.”<sup>19</sup> Westernisation, modernisation along the line of western modernity and globalisation are causing fear and despise among the non-Western societies which in turn causes violent resistances from them. Some theorists like William Rasch opine, “the choice that confronts ‘Asiatic societies’ or any other people is a choice between cultural identity and economic survival, between in other words, cultural and physical extermination.”<sup>20</sup> Habermas also argues that, since the challenges facing all societies are same in nature, they have no option but to embrace Western standards of legitimacy and legal systems based on human rights, irrespective of their individual cultures. Mouffe criticises Habermas and Rasch for this approach which engenders violent resistances from the societies on which western institutions are imposed.

### ***Challenges of universalisation of liberal democracy***

Mouffe acknowledges the significance of liberal institutions and values for pluralism. But she claims that her “allegiance to democratic values and institutions is not based on their superior rationality and that liberal democratic principles can be defended only as being constitutive of our form of life.”<sup>21</sup> However, Mouffe sees insurmountable dangers in the attempt to universalise of liberal democracy. It leads to cultural fear among the non-western societies. Terrorism may be an offshoot of this. Unlike Rawls and Habermas, she does not present “liberal democracy as the model which would be chosen by every rational individual in idealised conditions.”<sup>22</sup> In her view, political institutions should be practice-specific, depending on particular contexts. Political institutions should not be based on Kantian notion of a universal morality. Keeping in view the ‘deeply pluralistic character of the world and the irreducible conflict of values’, this type of a universal morality should be discarded. Agreeing with Richard Rorty, Mouffe writes that we have “to relinquish the idea that liberal democratic societies are the rational solution to the problem of human

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<sup>19</sup> Mouffe (2005). *On The Political*. London & New York: Routledge, p. 94.

<sup>20</sup> Rasch quoted in Mouffe (2005). *On The Political*. London & New York: Routledge, p. 86.

<sup>21</sup> Mouffe (2005). *On The Political*. London & New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, p. 121.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

coexistence, a solution that other peoples will adopt when they cease to be 'irrational'."<sup>23</sup>

### 3.3 Radical Democracy and Socialism

Mouffe and Laclau advance the idea of radical plural democracy. They try to redefine the socialist politics and envisage it as the extension of democracy to a wide range of social relations. Their objective is to reinscribe socialist goals within the framework of a pluralist democracy and to insist on the necessity of their articulation with the institutions of political liberalism. But, why do the need arise to redefine the socialist project? They provide the answer. It is necessary to abandon the idea of socialism envisaged as a completely different social system whose realization would require the discarding of the political principles of the liberal democratic regime. The objectives of socialism could be conceived as one dimension in the struggle for a deepening of democracy. According to Mouffe, "Understood as a process of democratization of the economy, socialism is a necessary component of the project of radical and plural democracy."<sup>24</sup> Laclau and Mouffe in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* assume a post-Marxist view in defense of socialism and the extension of democracy through a radical politics involving not only the working class but other social movements. They outline a new politics for leftists based on a project of radical democracy and argued that "it is no longer possible to maintain the conception of subjectivity and classes elaborated by Marxism, nor its vision of the historical course of capitalist development, nor, of course, the conception of communism as a transparent society from which antagonisms have disappeared."<sup>25</sup>

Laclau and Mouffe establish their post-Marxist position premised on pluralistic politics and pluralism. They advocate a post-Marxist model of struggle that

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<sup>23</sup> Mouffe (2000). 'Rorty's pragmatist politics', *Economy and Society*, vol. 29, no. 3, Aug, pp. 440.

<sup>24</sup> Mouffe (1993). *The Return of the Political*. London & New York: Verso, p. 90.

<sup>25</sup> Laclau, Ernesto and Chantal Mouffe (2001). *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*. Verso: London, p. 4.

incorporates a multitude of interests emanating from various strata, groups and social movements. In this model, socialist movement can evolve independently of class. This approach does away with terms like 'dictatorship of proletariat', 'vanguard party' and so on. Mouffe recognizes the virtues of pluralist democracy, but she warns us about the implications of accepting 'actually existing capitalist liberal democracies' as the 'end of history'. She says that there are still numerous social relations where the process of democratization is needed, and the task for the left today is to envisage how this can be done in a way that is compatible with the existence of a liberal democratic regime.

Mouffe does not abandon the socialist goal but at the same time nor does she advocate for the overthrow of the state or withering away of it. Instead, she believes in the potential of liberal democracy in facilitating the goals of socialism, although her view of socialistic society is not the view of the early socialists or, for that matter, the Marxists. She advocates the notion of 'liberal socialism' which, according to her, contains the virtues of socialism and of liberal democracy. Mouffe builds her arguments on the ideas proposed by Nerberto Bobbio who argues that socialist goals could only be achieved within the framework of liberal democracy. He claims that a democratic socialism is essentially a liberal one, for liberalism and democracy go in tandem and their relation is not at all contradictory. Bobbio belongs to an important tradition of Italian liberal thought that, since the nineteenth century, under the influence of John Stuart Mill, has been receptive to socialist ideas. This tradition believes in 'liberal socialism' which is a combination of socialist objectives with the principles of liberal democracy: constitutionalism, parliamentarism and a competitive multi party system. According to Bobbio, the current debate around contractarianism provides the terrain for the democratic left to make an important intervention. He considers that the crux of the debate is to see whether, starting with the same incontestable individualistic conception of society and using the same institutional structures, we are able to make a counter-proposal to the theory of social contract which neo-liberals want to put into operation, one which would include in its

conditions a principle of distributive justice and which would hence be compatible with the theoretical and practical tradition of socialism.

Mouffe agrees with Bobbio about the importance of individualism in the emergence of the modern conception of society, but it seems to her that the real question is to ask whether today such an individual conception has not become an obstacle to the extension of democratic ideals. She argues that, in order to solve the problems facing liberal democracy – the large scale of modern life; the increasing bureaucratization of the state apparatus; the growing technicality of the decisions; and the trend of civil society towards becoming a mass society – and to provide an effective articulation between socialist goals and the principles of liberal democracy, the framework of individualism must be relinquished. She says that she is not postulating a return to an organicist and holistic conception of society which is clearly pre-modern and hence inadequate for modern democracy. She does not accept that the only alternative to such a view is the individualistic conception predominant in liberal theory. According to her, it is necessary to theorise the individual as a site constituted by an ensemble of ‘subject positions’, inscribed in a multiplicity of social relations. We should not consider the individual as a monad, an ‘unencumbered’ self that exists prior to and independently of society. Rather it should be regarded as the member of many groups and as a participant in a plurality of collective forms of identification.

Mouffe claims that after having broken from the straitjacket of individualism we can envisage the articulation between liberalism and socialism in a more promising way. In such an endeavour, says Mouffe, an important source of inspiration is to be found in our flourished associational socialism. This flourished both in France and England during the nineteenth century and continued until the early 1920s. Following the arguments made by Paul Hirst regarding ‘associational socialism’, Mouffe says that the central idea of associational socialism is that economic units should be cooperatively owned self-governing associations. Hirst views associational socialism as representing the only challenge to corporate capitalism that respects the principles of liberal democracy. Because of its emphasis on the plurality and autonomy of

enterprises and collective bodies as decision-making agencies, associational socialism is a means of enhancing the tradition of pluralism and liberalism. It can provide us with important models for the democratization of corporations and public bodies because associational socialism encourages the organization of social life in small units and challenges hierarchy and administrative centralization. Education, health, welfare and community services can be provided by cooperatively or socially owned and democratically managed bodies. Associational socialism permits such bodies to set their own objectives. It is thus compatible with a pluralistic society in which there are distinct sorts of values or organized interests. It can tolerate and, indeed, should welcome, for example, the Catholic Church and the gay community, which provide health and welfare services for their members, says Mouffe. She claims that associational socialism can give us an insight into ways of overcoming the obstacles to democracy constituted by the two main forms of autocratic power, large corporations and centralized big governments, and shows us how to enhance the pluralism of modern societies. It also indicates the necessity of breaking with the universalistic and individualistic models of thought which have been dominant in the liberal tradition. Mouffe, like Hirst, holds that associational socialism is very useful, although the appropriation of such a tradition must be made in a very selective way given that some of its ideas are now clearly obsolete.

Mouffe's socialistic ideas are not identical with that of socialism or Marxism. Her socialism does not envisage a classless society. She does not accept the idea of a rational consensus. She celebrates constitutive antagonism which strives not for consensus but for differences. At the same time she is not obsessed with conflict between capitalists and proletariat. She appeals to recognize the nature of new kinds of antagonisms, so that every opposed voice should make his/her point. Mouffe believes that the articulation between socialism and political liberalism could enrich and deepen the pluralist advances made by liberal democracy and help us institute the framework required for the development of a radical and plural democracy. This is what, says Mouffe, a liberal socialism sensitive to the multiplicity of democratic struggles should strive for. In its questioning of individualism and in its contribution



to the formulation of a new approach to individuality that restores its social nature without reducing it to a simple component of an organic whole, that the socialist tradition can still play an important role. Mouffe claims that it is necessary to free political liberalism from the hindrances of universalism and individualism if the elaboration of a non-individualistic conception of the individual is one of the most pressing tasks of our time. To sum up, socialism is taken over by pluralism in the radical and plural model of democracy of Mouffe and Laclau.

### **3.4. On the future of radical politics**

Since the publication of *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, Mouffe and Laclau have attracted many criticisms against their post-Marxist approach. Some criticisms are from Marxists and the rest is from liberals and others. Liberal criticism of post-Marxism attacks the argument of Mouffe where she claims that 'the political' is present only in collective identity formation, and not in individual identity. Although this may endanger the individual liberty, and Mouffe also does not offer any solution to this problem, trying to evade the issue only by offering abstract ways out of this dilemma. She argues for 'liberty and equality for all' and 'individual liberty without individualism'. These may be regarded as mere rhetoric.

Underlying the Marxist critic of Laclau and Mouffe is the argument that they have abandoned Marxism and embraced neo-liberalism. Common among the arguments of the Marxist critics of post-Marxism is the name – post-Marxism. The charge levelled against post-Marxism is that has nothing to do with Marxism or socialism. So they should call themselves by some other name rather than post-Marxism which imply some relation with Marxism.

Although Mouffe's radical plural democracy is influenced by most of the existing approaches to politics, she tries to distinguish her model from traditional liberal democracy, communitarian model and socialistic politics, etc. but the alternative is ill-defined, particularly in political terms. She does not describe about the details of the

model she offers. Emphasising this point, Brett R. Wheeler points out that “the emphasis on a new philosophy of identity, while provoking much-needed discussion on the mutual interaction of democracy and the political agent, ultimately evades the equally political issue of a concrete (institutional) alternative. It must be partially attributed to the innovative quality of Mouffe's thinking that the reform of democracy is restricted to the *re-thinking* of the political. Ultimately, however, any serious theory of democracy must go beyond thought and be able to guarantee a democratic *praxis* with institutional models more appetizing than those of Carl Schmitt's. For this, Mouffe's agonistic mechanics needs to be complemented by models of normative social integration that exceed the not-so-assuring reassurance that pluralist indeterminacy will preserve radical democracy.”<sup>26</sup>

In what follows below I examine some critiques of Laclau and Mouffe's approach towards politics.

### *Critiques*

#### *a) Norman Geras*

The first major critique of Mouffe and Laclau comes from Norman Geras. He argues that they reduce all of Marxism to a crude economism. Geras emphasizes their failure to recognize the significance of notions such as ‘relative autonomy’ that have enriched Marxist theories of base and superstructure. Geras even goes to the extent of saying that post-Marxism is not “theoretically worthwhile in any substantive respect”; “it is a product of the very advanced stage of an intellectual malady”; “it is theoretically profligate, dissolute”.<sup>27</sup> He goes on to say that “at the heart of this post-Marxism there is an intellectual vacuum”; “both a theoretical and a normative void,

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<sup>26</sup> Wheeler, Brett R. (1996). ‘Conflictual Politics and Procedural Democracy’, *The German Quarterly*, Vol. 69, No. 2, Spring, p. 197.

<sup>27</sup> Geras, Norman (1987). ‘Post-Marxism?’, *New Left Review*, No. 163, May/June, pp. 42-43.

with some very *old* viewpoints, prejudices and caricatures around it.”<sup>28</sup> Geras is of the view that post-Marxists like Laclau and Mouffe should be called ex-Marxists or non-Marxists.

***b) Allen Hunter***

Criticising Mouffe and Laclau, Allen Hunter writes, “it is all the more disappointing that their criticisms of Marxism lead them not to the complexities of multiple social determinations, but to the substantively vacuous category of discursive indeterminacy; not to the tensions between the totalizing and fragmenting tendencies in contemporary life, but to an overestimation of fragmentation in the modern world. They expose orthodox Marxism's failure to accommodate subjectivity and human agency, yet their theory obliterates subjectivity and agency. They propose to radicalize socialism, yet they as much retreat to liberal pluralism as move beyond it. They thus begin with a powerful immanent critique of Marxism, and conclude with an inadequate, regressive alternative.”<sup>29</sup>

Showing the inadequacy of Laclau and Mouffe in offering any viable alternative to what they criticize, Rustin argues that their “critique of Marxism grows from the spirit and needs of the new social movements. Yet like those movements their many insights remain a “strategy of opposition,” for they are not successfully integrated into a “strategy of construction” of a new theory. Their proposed alternative social theory remains so focused on critique that it is inattentive to central categories of contemporary experience and to the particular concerns that face these movements. The new social movements raise critical theoretical challenges to Marxism, but deconstructive flights into indeterminacy do not resolve or even directly address them. Laclau and Mouffe's admirable radical skepticism will have contributed to the

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<sup>28</sup> Geras, Norman (1987). ‘Post-Marxism?’, *New Left Review*, No. 163, May/June, p. 43.

<sup>29</sup> Hunter, Allen (1988). ‘Post-Marxism and the new social movements.’, *Theory and Society*, Vol. 17, No. 6, Nov., p. 886.

reconstitution of radical politics if their critique is accepted and their alternative rejected.”<sup>30</sup>

*c) Michael Rustin*

Rustin accuses Laclau and Mouffe of being inconsistent because they are, on the one hand, “recognizing that a measure of closure or positivity is necessary to any viable form of social life,” on the other hand “denying this of the cognitive structures on which societies also depend. Rational conduct is impossible except on the basis of good enough knowledge of the natural and social worlds.”<sup>31</sup>

Rustin is of the view that the problem with Laclau and Mouffe's “assault on the “rational” grounds of socialist practice and their transformation of it into a performance of collective will is that it leaves their own radical democratic politics almost wholly ungrounded. They entertain neither a naturalist justification of socialism (i.e., one based on a theory of human nature), nor an ethical one.”<sup>32</sup> In answer to their criticism of Marxism on anti-rationalist and ant-essentialist grounds, he argues that Marxists are not the only ones who have “sought to give some descriptive and explanatory order to political practice. All economic and political theories do this when they describe regularities of social behavior, and base prescriptions on these.”<sup>33</sup>

Laclau and Mouffe criticize Marxism on the ground of its essentialism. Rustin acknowledges that “the fundamental socialist proposition is that material constraints have hitherto been central in determining the possibilities of most human lives.” But

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<sup>30</sup> Hunter, Allen (1988). ‘Post-Marxism and the new social movements’, *Theory and Society*, Vol. 17, No. 6, Nov., pp. 899-900.

<sup>31</sup> Rustin, Michael (1988). ‘Absolute Voluntarism: Critique of a Post-Marxist Concept of Hegemony’, *New German Critique*, No. 43, winter, Special Issue on Austria, p. 168.

<sup>32</sup> Rustin, Michael (1988). ‘Absolute Voluntarism: Critique of a Post-Marxist Concept of Hegemony’, *New German Critique*, No. 43, winter, Special Issue on Austria, p. 172.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p.168.

he argues that it is a historical proposition and not an essentialistic one “which leads to the idea that economic changes are central to human emancipation.” Then he goes on to claim that “the greater freedom of choice postulated by Laclau and Mouffe may be understood as the consequence of the alleviation of scarcity (at least for a majority in some Western nations), and as itself an effect of economic change, rather than as an argument for discursive over materialist explanation.”<sup>34</sup>

#### *d) Atilio A. Boron*

Boron questions Laclau and Mouffe’s attempt to separate liberalism from possessive individualism. He argues that “democratic liberalism is closely intertwined and articulated with a structure of class domination and exploitation in whose bosom it was developed and whose fundamental interest it has diligently served for three centuries.”<sup>35</sup> Boron is of the view that there is an indestructible link between liberalism and class exploitation which is overlooked by Laclau and Mouffe.

### **3.5. Contribution to political and social theory**

#### *Need for agonistic public sphere for contestation*

Contestation with the objective of not reaching a rational consensus may sound uneasy. But it is a novel idea. This approach may prove to be useful for the multicultural society and multinational states. The element of undecidability is given emphasis not to suggest the absence of a consensus but to emphasise that every consensus is based on some form of exclusion. So consensus should be conflictual. It should be informed with a right to dissent. Consensus is necessary for taking decision. But it should not be coated with the cover of a rational consensus. This approach is an

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<sup>34</sup> Rustin, Michael (1988). ‘Absolute Voluntarism: Critique of a Post-Marxist Concept of Hegemony’, *New German Critique*, No. 43, winter, Special Issue on Austria, p.169.

<sup>35</sup> Boron, Atilio A. (2000) ‘Embattled Legacy: "Post-Marxism" and the Social and Political Theory of Karl Marx’, *Latin American Perspectives*, Vol. 27, No. 4, July, p. 73.

answer to the deliberative model of Rawls and Habermas. Adapting Carl Schmitt's distinction between friend and enemy into a distinction between we and them, Mouffe argues that we may not agree with the other's stand, but we should respect his/her right to make his point. That should not be questioned unless he/she defies the rules of the game, i.e. ethico-political principles of liberty and equality for all, in the case of liberal democratic polity. In Mouffe's lexicon, agonism is the tamed version of antagonism. Agonism is the relationship between adversaries whereas antagonism is the relationship between enemies. She writes, "an adversary is an enemy, but a legitimate enemy, one with whom we have some common ground because we have a shared adhesion to the ethico-political principles of liberal democracy: liberty and equality."<sup>36</sup> Commenting on the nature of agonistic democracy proposed by Laclau and Mouffe, Wayne Gabardi writes: "Like communitarian and deliberative models of democracy, agonistic democracy relies on the active citizen model. Yet the agonistic citizen is not motivated to achieve the common moral good or deliberative consensus. She is rather dedicated to a civic ethos that grasps the nature of the political as a pluralistic field of diverse, constructed identities and values shaped by power, struggle, and a commitment to radical democracy."<sup>37</sup>

### *Reviving the issue of political participation*

One of the significant contributions of post-Marxist notion of 'the political' Mouffe tries to address the issue of political apathy in contemporary societies. The predominant version of liberalism presents a notion of individual who rationally maximises his/her own interest without having any concern for the community. He is not bound by some prior good. This notion of individual is the trend in many contemporary societies. Such an individual does not get any (theoretical) incentive to participate in common affairs. So there is a clash between negative liberty and positive liberty. Mouffe tries to offer a solution to this problem by employing

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<sup>36</sup> Mouffe (2000). *The Democratic Paradox*. London & New York: Verso, p. 102.

<sup>37</sup> Gabardi, Wayne, (2001). 'Contemporary Models of Democracy', *Polity*, Vol. 33, No. 4, Summer, p. 554.

Skinner's interpretation of Machiavelli. A blend of both these liberties is available in this interpretation. According to this reading of Machiavelli, he argues that individual liberty (negative liberty) can only be ensured by political liberty. And political liberty can be ensured by political participation (which is a kind of positive liberty).

Also revived in 'the political' is a notion of community. This is not a community with a substantive common good proposed by the communitarian tradition. But some form of commonality has to be present to imbibe the notion of participation in a community. Mouffe employs the notion of *res publica* proposed by Oakeshott to have some form of commonality without having a substantive notion of common good.

*Employing the postmodern, poststructural, linguistic and psychoanalysis in political theory*

Post-Marxism is criticised for its eclecticism. In a theoretical sense, the weaknesses may be regarded as the strengths of the post-Marxist approach. The approach brings together the dominant theoretical positions of the twentieth century: postmodernism, poststructuralism, language theory, psychoanalysis, hermeneutics and even liberal democracy. Aaronowitz points out that "the importance of Hegemony consists in its pathbreaking attempt to make the literary, philosophical critique of post-structuralism political."<sup>38</sup> It also incorporates many valuable insights of the new social movements such as feminism, ecology, and the identity politics of racial and ethnic minorities. And it achieves this intellectual feat without discarding the liberatory and emancipatory impulse of Marxism. No other theoretical approach, left or right, has accomplished this. This is a significant contribution of the post-Marxist approach by Mouffe and Laclau. "It raises most of the questions that have languished on the margins of traditional left discourse, particularly leninist circles and even among democratic socialists."<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Aronowitz, Stanley (1986-1987). 'Theory and Socialist Strategy', *Social Text*, No. 16, Winter, p. 13.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

## Conclusion

Post-Marxism proposes to construct a new language which means new objects, new problems, new values and the possibility of decisively constructing new antagonisms and forms of struggle. Post-Marxism does not necessarily deny classical Marxism in its totality. However Laclau and Mouffe argue that most of its important concepts such as class essentialism and economic determinism etc. are irrelevant now in the post-industrial and post-liberal societies. Post-Marxism retains the emancipatory and liberatory themes of Marxism. But it put it in its own mould. Laclau and Mouffe claimed, in the introduction to *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, that their intellectual project is situated in a “post-Marxist terrain.”<sup>40</sup> They say that their approach is “*post-Marxist*” and “*post-Marxist*” as well. Needless to say that, the first term puts accent on the ‘post’ part, and the latter on the ‘Marxist’ part. By saying this, they wanted to convey that although were abandoning the Marxist terrain, Marxism is where they have come from. The liberatory and the emancipatory impulse would always be the guiding principle in their radical and plural democracy. Although more than twenty years have been passed since the publication of that book, they have not changed this view regarding post-Marxism in any of their subsequent works. However, a close analysis of post-Marxist ideas of Laclau and Mouffe can arguably conclude that their model of politics is not socialist now except that it holds only ‘collective forms of identifications’ as political. Even that also they receive in an adapted manner. Gramscian conception of hegemony also confronts a similar fate in post-Marxism. It is received but treated with the post-Marxist effect.

A far-reaching change may occur to liberalism if liberals subscribe to Mouffe’s proposition regarding the eligibility required for an identity to be counted as a political identity. Individual forms of identification cannot be political, according to Mouffe. This criterion of political nature of any identification goes against the liberal notion of self. When Mouffe and Laclau propose ‘individual liberty’ without ‘individualism’ it

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<sup>40</sup> Laclau, Ernesto and Chantal Mouffe (2001). *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, second edition. Verso: London, p. 4.



also goes against the liberal ethos. Except this, their model is closer to liberalism. With each of her successive book Mouffe becomes more liberal. It can be said that, although theoretically her model goes against some dominant ethos of liberalism, practically she accepts the role of institutions of liberal democracy in ensuring pluralism. The post-Marxist idea of radical and plural democracy does not imply to take into question the constitutional principles of liberal democracy, but radicalising them by applying them to more and more areas. But the takers of this view should also buy one caution with it – this model has serious implications for liberalism thanks to its emphasis on collective forms of identification as against individual forms of identification and individualism. If this question is addressed, post-Marxism will hopefully be welcomed by its most pessimistic liberal critics.

## CONCLUSION

This thesis is an attempt to critically examine into the concept of 'the political' in the writings of Chantal Mouffe. In this study there was a general focus on the post-Marxist approach to politics that she along with Ernesto Laclau presents. Among other things, post-Marxism aims at strengthening liberal democracy by engaging with the criticisms levelled against it by Carl Schmitt, a staunch critic of liberal democracy. Mouffe is of the view that permanence of agonism (the tamed version of antagonism) is indispensable for liberal democracy. The notion of 'agonism' may be helpful in making liberal democracy more pluralistic. It also endeavours to find out whether the conceptual tools of post-Marxism are closer to liberalism or Marxism.

I began by examining the various intellectual streams that have influenced the work of Chantal Mouffe. After giving this background I go on to examine some very specific notions that she advances in her work: antagonism, hegemony and radical democracy. This chapter also throws light on to the implication of 'the political' for liberal politics and new social movements. Chapter three looked into the challenges faced by Marxist theory and class politics in the last two decades and the implications it has for developing a plausible theory for emancipation and for radical politics.

What emerges from this study is that one of the objectives of Mouffe is to understand the dynamics of democratic politics and identity politics. A significant part of her work aims to overcome the weaknesses of Marxist reductionism and to question the terms of consensus and reconciliation advocated by liberal theorists. She vows to strengthen democratic pluralism which is best ensured in a liberal society. But she is well aware of some deficiencies of liberal democracy. For this, she employs Carl Schmitt's criticism of liberal democracy only to strengthen it. She also envisages the creation of a vibrant agonistic sphere of contestation which overcomes the disadvantages of 'deliberation' in democracy.

But several problems emerge in this understanding of the political. Chantal Mouffe proceeds on a path that seems very risky, at least, to the liberals. Her concern for the betterment of liberal democratic pluralism could not help her acquit of the charges of relying upon the texts of a staunch critic of liberal democracy, who also supported Hitler.

Furthermore, Mouffe draws on Michael Oakeshott's conception of *respublica* while envisaging political community without a substantive notion of common good. Oakeshott is a thinker reasserting the notion of Burkean conservatism. Mouffe takes the anti-rationalist position from Oakeshott. This linkage with Oakeshott's ideas tempts her critics to level charges of conservatism against Mouffe. She also acknowledges that her notion of radical democracy draws upon conservative thinking: "Because of the importance it accords to the particular, to the existence of different forms of rationality, and to the *role of tradition*, the path of radical plural democracy, the path of radical democracy paradoxically runs across some of the main currents of conservative thinking."<sup>1</sup>

The second problem is the way the notion of rights is not given due importance in her model of radical and plural democracy, although she is not against the rights of citizens. She writes: "the centrality of the notion of rights for a modern conception of the citizen should be acknowledged, even though these must be complemented by a *more active sense of political participation* and of belonging to a political community."<sup>2</sup> But Mouffe makes no satisfactory effort to explain how we can achieve a more active sense of political participation. She discusses different notions of citizenship, such as the communitarian/republican notion of citizenship, the liberal one and the feminist one. She discards the universal model of citizenship advocated

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<sup>1</sup> Mouffe (1993). *The Return of the Political*. London: Verso, p. 15. Emphasis added.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 83. Emphasis added.

by liberals. The republican/communitarian citizenship insisting on a substantive notion of common good is also not accepted by Mouffe. But she does not discuss the criteria of active citizenry. The discourse of rights is inevitably linked to the public/private distinction. The public/private distinction also gets blurred in Mouffe's model of radical and plural democracy. The view of citizenship she is proposing rejects the idea of an abstract universalistic definition of the public, opposed to a domain of the private seen as realm of particularity and difference. It considers that although the modern idea of the citizen was indeed crucial for the democratic revolution, it constitutes today an obstacle to its extension.

Mouffe claims that in her view the public/private distinction is not abandoned but reformulated. Somewhere in her writings, after invoking the feminist criticism of liberal distinction of public/private, she argues that the "problems with the liberal construction of the public/private distinction would not be solved by discarding it, but only by reformulating it in a *more adequate way*."<sup>3</sup> Nowhere in her writings does Mouffe try to clarify what does her "more adequate way" mean. So theoretically it leads to nothing other than confusion. Politically and practically, it would drag us to totalitarianism, which perhaps Mouffe fails to contemplate!

Lastly, the element of uncertainty is a recurrent theme in her writings. For example, she says that her notion of radical democracy is radical because it aims at liberty and equality for all. But she does not give any concrete model to achieve this goal. She is of the view that as there are several possible interpretations of these principles of liberty and equality, no fixed meaning should be attached to them. She is in favour of individual freedom without individualism. But she does not give any framework for achieving this kind of individual liberty without individualism. It seems that she is just playing with words, although it may not be her intention. She argues that a perfect democracy can not be achieved. She writes:

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<sup>3</sup> Mouffe (1993). *The Return of the Political*. London: Verso, p. 83. Emphasis added.

What is specific and valuable about modern liberal democracy is that, when properly understood, it creates a space in which this confrontation is kept open, power relations are always being put into question and no victory can be final. However, such an 'agonistic' democracy requires accepting that conflict and division are inherent to politics and that there is no place where reconciliation could be definitively achieved as the full actualization of the unity of 'the people'. To imagine that pluralist democracy could ever be perfectly instantiated is to transform it into a self-refuting ideal, since the condition of possibility of a pluralist democracy is at the same time the condition of impossibility of its perfect implementation. Hence the importance of acknowledging its paradoxical nature.<sup>4</sup>

Nothing in Mouffe's writing gives the description of her notion of radical and plural democracy more than what the above paragraph does. This paragraph may be regarded as a blueprint for the 'agonistic' model of democracy. But does this serve the purpose of a blueprint? Is there anything given in this paragraph which is a concrete model for a new political order? Probably the answer is a 'no'. At best, it may be regarded as a guiding principle for organizing a political order.

The framework of post-Marxism that emerges within her writings does not offer any viable alternative to the models it criticizes. Her model is very much influenced by postmodernism which criticizes for the sake of criticizing without giving an alternative to the criticised. But she considers her model different from postmodernism which had so far concentrated on 'culture' whereas her framework is overtly political. She also argues that her model is not a postmodern one because unlike postmodernism, her model gives an alternative. She makes an endeavour to apply the postmodern philosophy to deepen the democratic project of modernity. She claims that, "such a project could be defined as being both modern and postmodern."<sup>5</sup> The future exploration in the field of political theory could answer whether there can be any possible beautiful blend like this.

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<sup>4</sup> Mouffe (2000). *The Democratic Pradox*. London: Verso, pp. 15-16.

<sup>5</sup> Mouffe (1993). *The Return of the Political*. London: Verso, p. 10.

Despite these problems we cannot overlook her contributions. First, the contributions of Laclau and Mouffe lie in reinventing the idea of political and raising the distinction between 'politics' and 'the political'. Second, Mouffe's idea of a political community without a substantive notion of common good may address the issue of political apathy in contemporary societies. Mouffe questions the universality of liberal democracy and attempt for an alternative. She also acknowledges the existence of different forms of rationality. These ideas may influence the rethinking of mainstream Western modernity. The irrational ideas such as 'Whiteman's burden' are falsified by the kind of theories she advances. Thus her ideas help in alleviating the cultural fear and anxiety of non-western societies. The problem of terrorism may be addressed by this kind of approach.

Due to the limited nature of this research I did not enquire profoundly into the issues like 'identity' which play an important role in the new social movements for which Mouffe tries to give a theoretical base. As I have mentioned earlier, I have emphasized on the later works by Mouffe starting from *The Return of the Political* in 1993. Laclau's writings have not been discussed at length. They have been touched tangentially wherever needed. Deconstruction, psychoanalysis, the philosophy of language as initiated by the later Wittgenstein and post-Heideggerian hermeneutics are very important for understanding the agonistic model of radical and plural democracy proposed by Laclau and Mouffe. Especially they play a very important role while delving into the formation of identity. All these post-structural and post-modern theories are also among the most important recent trends in contemporary political and social theory. The concept of 'the political' in Mouffe has also drawn on these theories criticizing essentialism. According to Laclau and Mouffe, post-structuralism is the main source of their theoretical reflection and, within the post-structuralist field, deconstruction and Lacanian theory have had a decisive importance in the formulation of their approach to hegemony.<sup>6</sup> The notion of undecidability in

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<sup>6</sup> Laclau, Ernesto and Chantal Mouffe (2001). *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, second edition. Verso: London, p. xi.

Derrida is also very important in their approach to hegemony. So the ideas of Derrida and Lacan need to be explored further on these approaches. The ideas discussed in this thesis could help in further research in these domains.

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