

Charisma vs. Capital?

*Satanik Pal

(Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, IIT Delhi, India)

Corresponding Author: *Satanik Pal

ABSTRACT: Weber's methodology for understanding political leadership has been misappropriated by organizational theorists and hence, has to be grounded and deconstructed using multiple strategies in order for us to understand the political leadership phenomena. Used in conjunction with a Bourdieuan method of analysis, contextualizing the professional politician may help us identify the complex processes of how charismatic leadership operates on the ground. The above concerns are addressed below.

Keywords: Bourdieu, Capital, Charisma, Pareto, Political Leadership, Weber.

Date of Submission: 15 -07-2017

Date of acceptance: 26-07-2017

I. INTRODUCTION

Deconstructive strategies in sociological writings should not only be fashionable practices post the cultural turn, but they should also be something that must be practiced on account of the fact that sociology is a discipline that prides itself on its criticality. While Weber's works have been arguably quite deconstructive in their spirit and practice, certain concepts have remained far from being well defined. The concept of "charisma" according to Weber was "a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which they are considered extraordinary and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers and qualities. These are such as are not accessible to the ordinary person. But are regarded as of divine origin or as exemplary, and on the basis of them the individual concerned is treated as a 'leader'" [1]. It remains one of the greatest mysteries to those who read Weber closely, with the inevitable question of the source of charisma coming up- whether he intended it to be socially constructed or if he had ideas of how charisma was also sometimes qualities of remarkable individuals [2].

II. DECONSTRUCTING CHARISMA

Joose seems to think that Weber would be more inclined to the former tendency, as his work was a repudiation of Sohm's concept of Charisma which was a derivative of the Christian concept of Charismata or individual possessions of the grace of God. Furthermore, Sohm's concept of Charisma was intended to preserve the conservative leadership in power during his time, by giving the masses political direction when the age of mass movements was around the corner [2]. Weber's concept could hardly be more different- not only was his concept of charisma filled with revolutionary potential [3], but it also had strong tendencies of going the social constructionism way, with Weber mentioning implicitly that charisma was a quality attributed by the followers and leaders [2]. The problem of not being able to define charisma then, lies with people who have incorporated Weber into organizational literature, valorizing only the individual qualities of managers and corporate leaders at the cost marginalizing the more relational aspects of charisma [4].

However, many have also deconstructed Weber's notions of charisma and its usage by people other than organizational theorists. Charismatic leadership theorised by Weber is, "unpredictable, radically innovative, and characteristically counter-hegemonic in stance toward the status quo institutional authority of normative traditions and bureaucratic procedure [3]". This view has been contended by McCulloch who asserted that not only is 'Charisma' under defined by Weber, but it is also "a device used by a faction of the ruling class seeking supremacy over the whole of the ruling class" [5]. He further stated that rather than charismatic leadership being transformational as is contended by Weber, it is a gross maintenance of status quo and social structure, citing the fact that the number of male, privileged charismatic leaders exceeds the number of female charismatic leaders. He also states how apparently charismatic leaders like Bill Clinton and Tony Blair were not charismatic, but rather, glamorous, and charming, allowing them to adopt right-wing policies despite their parties being more centre-left in orientation- they were leaders created by the ruling class' necessity of ruling over disenfranchised masses [5]. Weber's defiance of his own documented processes of routinization of bureaucracy and tradition, while leading to the theorising of the radically different charismatic one, made it counter intuitive to sociological

methods of analysis says McCulloch, bringing back a Marxist frame of analysis where he talks of class conflict and the role of charisma in it. It is interesting to note that the conservative and the Marxist analysis both deny charisma a counter-hegemonic quality that Weber seems to provide. What becomes relevant is the fact that rather than ideal types dictating the constitution of over-arching leader figures, we should seek more relational methods whereby the other forms of elitism are also acknowledged and addressed.

III. A FORGOTTEN APPROACH

To address this concern, we must bring into the debate, a theorist who has worked on political leaders but has been in the shadows of leadership analysis - Pareto, the Italian economist who brought society into the equation using Machiavellian tools of analysis [6]. He theorised that there was a circulation of elites in society based on the “residues” (loosely translated: moods or dispositions) prevailing in the minds of people. Based on these residues, either, there would be a preference for the more conservative leaders or lions, or there would be an upheaval where the current rulers or ‘lions’ would be displaced by ‘foxes’ or leaders with new ideas who would appeal to the new aspirations of ideological dispositions of the masses. Why Pareto is relevant in our formulation understanding of leadership is that even with his limited armchair theorising, he made clear, the fact that whether through the force of old ideas like religion or caste etc. or through new ideas like socialism, or development etc. leaders had to come to power only through the consent of masses- not based on their personalised styles of ruling. The ‘lion’ and the ‘fox’ are also relational categories- the newer leadership appears to be meeker, cleverer, while the incumbency laden older leadership appears to be more forceful and archaic in relation [6]. Pareto, could be credited with the genesis of a socially constructed leadership phenomenon that was subtly structuralist in addition. The place where Pareto, McCulloch with his Marxist formulation and Sohm are similar, is the idea that the ruling class is always in control of the society and that masses, or as Pareto calls them, “sheep”, are not really in control and are more deluded by the appearance of certain qualities like “charisma”. Pareto elaborates it in his account of how the lions and the foxes ultimately take turns feeding on the sheep throughout history.

IV. THE MISAPPROPRIATION OF CHARISMA BY WEBER AND OTHERS

Charisma, according to McCulloch and Calas, is something that helps gloss over least understood political phenomena and allows us to see ‘extraordinary’ individuals as responsible for large scale political transformation and upheavals, making sense objectively to those sitting in their cosy armchairs wilfully oblivious of the agency of people located below his/her social location. The problem with such use of concepts like charisma is not only seen in organisational leadership studies, but also in the analysis of political processes in the world, Calas observes. She effectively deconstructs the Weberian notion of charisma to expose how its deployment has undermined other political processes and how it has obscured the routinisation of charisma seen in structural impositions, making it a relational matter and not simply the effect of the extraordinariness of singular individuals. Theorists like Bass [7] see individual charisma as the reasons for political upheaval and maintenance of power, but Calas cuts such observations short with valid interjections that allow us to see how such assertions overlook the larger political movements or processes that facilitate such leaders to articulate the demands of their constituents and be the face of such transformative politics using examples of local leaders in civil rights movements in the US as opposed to the radically transformative role of Martin Luther King Jr [4]. The routinization of charisma is another phenomenon that Calas observes being marginalised in literature- something she observes to be widely misunderstood too. She emphasises how the process of routinisation is misunderstood to be the gradual repose of charismatic leadership into a bureaucratic leadership- rather, she elaborates how charismatic leadership is routinized to create newer modes of governance and rule rather than simply fading into the existing bureaucratic machinery.

Weber’s own theories, House observes [8], have the scope for charismatic leaders with extraordinary qualities innately possessed or attributed by followers, but with no specific psychological aspects or no particular details as to how leaders are charismatic, making Weber’s work at best, a “speculative inquiry” into leadership phenomena. The final dismantling of Weber’s notion of ‘charisma’ or what has been seen as ‘charisma’ by organisational theorists and sociologists alike, comes from Jentges, who uses a Bourdieuan concept of political capital [9] to displace inherent qualities such as charisma in leaders. He does this by putting the focus on the deeper political workings in societies, where on closer inspection, one may find the persistence of actual political effort on the part of politicians and leaders, consisting of bargaining with power, management of rivalries, cultivating one’s networks and social capital etc. rather than sheer charisma emanating from the leader. To understand Political capital, one must first understand the variety of capital described by Bourdieu- namely, Symbolic Capital (resources available to one as a result of his/her recognisability for example a famous actor or celebrity) cultural Capital (resources available to a person that are culturally relevant, for example his/her educational qualification, manners, attitudes etc.) and Social Capital (resources available to one as a result of his/her belonging to a particular group or network for example caste group or association) [10].

Political capital is an amalgam of both symbolic and social capital used by politicians and leaders who acquire some forms of popular celebrity or recognition and cultivate various networks in the form of caste associations of clubs or even extended families [9]. The 'political effort' mentioned above is to acquire more recognition and become a part of greater social groups.

Calas' observations then, make sense, when we look at the operation of political processes in societies, where local equations occupy great importance in the larger political processes, producing the mirage of charisma, but actually muddying the proverbial waters. McCulloch's assertion that charismatic leadership is a "part of a system of patronage, but an extreme one in a crisis where there has been a collapse of the levels of intermediation and the normative structure usually prevailing in stable systems of patronage" [5] finds pertinence in the current argument. His interjections are relevant in that not only does he show the transformative limits of charismatic leadership, but also how such leadership may be used by existing patronage networks to reinvent their hegemony, with there being little or no change in the existing power equations at the local and even macro levels.

The kind of analysis required in truly deconstructing the political field is therefore not entirely present in the mode of analysis put forth by Weber in his study of charismatic leadership. The social field, of which the political field is only a part, needs to be unfurled and studied for the uneven terrain of congealed capital that it is with people possessing varying quantities of social, cultural and symbolic capital [10]. It is only through such a methodology that we may be able to find the ways in which political leaders are able to acquire and maintain power and prestige that they convert into electoral victories of mass support [9]. The most important form of capital for a politician is social capital- as many anthropological studies on leadership have shown us, using which they call upon their constituents to vote for them or support them and using which they are able to bargain for services with leaders above them [11]. Weber himself has spoken of how the followers of political leaders may withdraw support if their concerns are not addressed or their demands are not met- "above all if his leadership fails to benefit his followers, it is likely that his charismatic authority will disappear" [1]. Thus it is clear that Weber was aware of the inability of charisma to sustain political success. Charisma without the right networking skills is useless in maintaining the hegemony of the leader. Yet, as pointed out by multiple theorists, Weber's methodology is often misused to provide the effect of an almost uncritical acceptance of the leader's image without much care for one's own welfare in the equation [4].

V. POLITICAL WORK AND BOURDIEU

In his "Politics as a Vocation" [12], Weber describes the professional politician- a product of modernity- someone who practices politics for the sake of politics. The politician, like the capitalist and the worker who were studied by Weber in his phenomenal "The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism" [13] is directed by 'the calling' that he/she feels towards his/her vocation. Even Banerjee notes the existence of such a figure whose work is politics in her essay on the political leader in a village in Bengal [11]. The character of the professional politician is important to our concerns here as such an archetype reaffirms the existence of people for whom politics is a vocation and collecting political capital- a mix of social, cultural and symbolic capital [9]- is absolutely essential. Thus, we may be able to find a theoretical middle ground between the Weberian ideal type and the Bourdieuan agent laden with capital. Bourdieu's idea of a socially constituted "libido" [10] towards the acquisition of greater capital- may be similar to Weber's concept of "the calling", where the agent is directed towards greater acquisition of a socially constituted form of capital. The political field, for such an agent, forms the arena for acquisition of power in the form of greater amounts of political capital. With many such competing agents, who struggle to acquire greater symbolic and social capital, the field of politics becomes a more and more professional arena, with its own set of rules and historic congealment of capital. The Charisma displayed by a leader may be in relation to other players in his/her political field, or due to some extraordinary achievement on his/her part.

Often, it is a mix of a number of factors, with structural differences visible between various political opponents, making some appear to be more charismatic than others and proving charisma and/or symbolic capital to be a socially constituted, relative phenomenon [2]. Thus, Bourdieu's structural analysis of taste [14] may also be relevant to the theorising of political leadership if we see how the social libido of people is realised through their expressions of their taste for certain kinds of leaders over others in a given situation where they had to choose. While we usually reserve the concept of 'taste' for more aesthetic arena like music or books or art, Bourdieu's method of analysis is relevant to understanding how taste or the dispositions towards certain things in a structural field can work in the arena of democratic politics. Rahkonen has shown how taste forms the basis of struggle in the works of Nietzsche and Bourdieu [15]- these struggles taking place between classes as Bourdieu has elaborated in his seminal work *Distinction* very subtle judgements in our daily lives such as food, clothing or music, may have reflections in the political arena. I contend in addition to this, that classes express their antagonism towards each other in the political arenas too by expressing their taste for certain kinds of political leaders and abhorrence for other kinds. Jaffrelot has observed this among the middle classes of India

who have great contempt for people who vote along caste lines and for leaders who have a rustic look with a rustic accent [16]. This very abhorrence where the 'other' is seen with disgust and made impossible to choose is exactly what Rahkonen shows to be the effect of cultivated taste among classes or castes as per Bourdieu and Nietzsche [15]. Another noteworthy concern may be that whether the language of taste may be applicable to the economically weaker sections of society as their very existence depends on their very limited choices. Bourdieu sorts this problem in his *Distinction* where he states that their respective habitus are structured to unconsciously make the prudent choice for themselves without being too aware of the scarcity of their resources all the time. It becomes a disposition for them, that they almost involuntarily exercise while making choices for themselves. The scientific mechanics of such phenomena then need to be figured out if we are to truly deconstruct the political behaviour of the people involved in this process of choosing political leaders.

The political field would be laid out both horizontally as well as vertically. The distribution of capital would happen between members belonging to that field (may be a constituency or a ward) creating the image of a horizontally plain field, but as Bourdieu has pointed out, each agent embodies certain historically congealed forms of capital- social, cultural or symbolic which simultaneously make the field vertically structured. Some would have greater cultural and/or economic capital, while others may have only visible amounts of one of the four seminal forms of capital- cultural, social, economic or symbolic [10]. Each agent, carrying certain kinds of cultural capital is bound to have some information or attitude which predisposes him/her to choose someone who fits closest to that attitude embodied by the agent. The attitude is further affected by the possession of social capital (social networks which are useful for numerically dominant caste/religious groups to cultivate certain kinds of attitudes in their members), or economic capital (which allows one to acquire certain kinds of cultural or social capital resulting in certain types of dispositions towards certain kinds of leaders). The leaders, who also form a part of the political field, use their available resources- their cultural, economic and social capital, to cultivate in the field, a certain symbolic presence. This symbolic capital that they accrue or are born with, orient voters towards them. The person who is able to accrue the most symbolic and social capital usually stands out. However, the investigation of this phenomenon has to be deconstructed carefully, by taking into account the various kinds of people in a field, the types of leaders being fielded and the numbers of people who belong to dominant groups etc.

VI. CONCLUSION

While Weber's methodology provides us with archetypes and even relevant figures such as the professional politician etc., the ideal type model may not always be desirably deconstructive of the social. Bourdieu's almost mechanical model of calculation and structural differentiation allows far greater possibilities of deconstruction, with the possibility of prediction too, if used seriously, along with being the perfect methodological amalgam bridging the differences between Weber's methods and McCulloch's proposed Marxist method with concepts like symbolic capital doing justice to the former and social and economic capital doing justice to the latter.

REFERENCES

- [1]. Weber, Max. 1978. *Economy and Society- An Outline of Interpretative Sociology*. New York: University of California Press.
- [2]. Joosse, Paul. 2014. "Becoming a God: Max Weber and the Social Construction of Charisma." *Journal of Classical Sociology* 266-283.
- [3]. Treat, Shaun Robert. 2004. *The myth of charismatic leadership and fantasy rhetoric of crypto-charismatic memberships*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University.
- [4]. Calas, Marta B. 1993. "Deconstructing Charismatic Leadership: Re-reading Weber from the Darker Side." *Leadership Quarterly* 305-328.
- [5]. McCulloch, Andrew D. 2014. *Charisma and Patronage: Reasoning with Max Weber*. Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Limited.
- [6]. Pareto, Vilfredo. 1966. *Vilfredo Pareto: Sociological Writings*. London: Pall Mall Press.
- [7]. Bass, Bernard M. 1990. "Charismatic, Charismalike and Inspiational Leadership." In *Bass and Stogdill's Handbook of Leadership Theory: Theory, Research and Managerial Applications*, by Bernad M. Bass and Stogdill, 184-221. New York: Free Press.
- [8]. House, Robert J. 1999. "Weber and the Neo-Charismatic Leadership Paradigm." *Leadership Quarterly* 563-574.
- [9]. Jentges, Erik. 2014. "Political Charisma as Performance and Projection." *Political Capital and the Dynamics of Leadership: Exploring the Leadership Capital Index*. Salamanca: ECPJ Joint Session. 1-38.
- [10]. Bourdieu, Pierre. 1986. "The Forms of Capital." In *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, by J. Richardson, translated by Richard Nice, 241-258. New York: Greenwood.

- [11]. Banerjee, Mukulika. 2010. "Leadership and Political Work." In *Power and Influence in India: Bosses, Lords and Captains*, by Pamela Price and Engelsen Ruud, 20-44. New Delhi: Routledge.
- [12]. Weber, Max. 1946. "Politics as a Vocation." In *From Max Weber*, by Max Weber, translated by H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, 77-128. New York: Free Press.
- [13]. Weber, Max. 2005. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. New York: Routledge.
- [14]. Bourdieu, Pierre. 1984. *Distinction: a Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. London: Routledge.
- [15]. Rahkonen, Keijo. 2011. "Bourdieu and Nietzsche: Taste as a Struggle." In *The Legacy of Pierre Bourdieu: Critical Essays*, by Bryan Turner and Simon Susen, 125-144. New York: Anthem Press.
- [16]. Jaffrelot, Christophe. 2008. "Why Should We Vote?": The Indian Middle Class and Functioning of the World's Largest Democracy." In *Patterns of Middle Class Consumption in India and China*, by Peter van der Veer and Christophe Jaffrelot, 35-55. New Delhi: Sage Publications India.

IOSR Journal Of Humanities And Social Science (IOSR-JHSS) is UGC approved Journal with Sl. No. 5070, Journal no. 49323.

Satanik Pal. "Charisma vs. Capital?" IOSR Journal Of Humanities And Social Science (IOSR-JHSS) 22.7 (2017): 51-55.