

The Frankfurt School of Social Research and Critical Theory, with Special Reference to Max Horkheimer

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The main objective of this research is to explore the practical aims and contributions of the Frankfurt school, the most important and influential group of leftist intellectuals, philosophers, and social theorists in twentieth century Germany. This paper focuses on the Frankfurt school of social research and critical theory with special reference to Max Horkheimer (1895-1971), who was the Director of the Institute of Social Research of the University of Frankfurt. The Frankfurt school of social research is a school of thought and their critical theory expressed an explicit interest in the abolition of social injustice. Members of the Frankfurt school were affiliated to the Institute of Social Research which was established in 1923 and Max Horkheimer was appointed as its second Director in 1931. Max Horkheimer introduced critical theory which focuses on neo - Marxist social theory, social research, philosophy and a genuine interest in a radical change in contemporary society. No projects hold a more prominent place in the development of modern European thought than Critical theory and its practical commitment towards building a better society. Though there are numerous members - Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, Herbert Marcuse, Eric Fromm, Friedrich Pollock, Leo Lowenthal, Walter Benjamin, Habermas and others who contributed to this school, this study focuses mainly on Max Horkheimer's contribution to social research with special reference to his *Traditional and Critical Theory* (1937) and its distinction of traditional and Critical theory. Max Horkheimer emphasized the rejection of 'static' traditional methods and insisted on a new commitment to social research in a critical mode. Critical theory recognizes the historical nature of such inquiry and acknowledges the potential for ideological critique leading to social and political change. This research contributes to promote our social and political research with the genuine critique of modern society and politics in order to solve major problems in the present context.

Quantitative and qualitative methodologies are used in an integral manner in this research. Max Horkheimer's original writings- *Traditional and Critical Theory* (Horkheimer, 1937) and his other major writings such as *Eclipse of Reason* (Horkheimer, 1947), *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (Horkheimer and Adorno, 1947), *Critique of Instrumental Reason* (Horkheimer, 1967), are evaluated in phenomenological hermeneutic methodology. The quantitative method is used to identify the same problems in our present social and political context and the integral methodology is used for the complete evaluation of this research.

Max Horkheimer's distinction between traditional and critical theory is in one sense, merely repetition of Karl Marx's dictum that philosophers have always interpreted the world and the point is to change it. The Institute of Social Research and the Frankfurt school, in its critique of ideology, have criticized some issues of the philosophical currents especially positivism, phenomenology, and Existentialism with an implied critique of contemporary Marxism which had turned dialectics into an alternative science or an ideological dogma. Owing to its interdisciplinary character, critical theory has been enormously influential and controversial in its claims. This study will employ the emancipatory and interpretatory function of critical theory against its predominant forms of expression. Critical theory is not a system, or reducible to any systems of prescription, but seeks to reinvigorate the interdisciplinary character in social research. This model can be introduced to our social research with the critical perspectives to overcome the negative influences of certain philosophical ideologies and to solve social and political problems.

Critical theory was originally conceived by Max Horkheimer as a materialist enterprise but his version of materialism did not reject the issues of critique inherited from idealism and the commitment to the enlightenment heritage

became evident in Horkheimer's famous claim that critical theory inherently involves the attempt to actualize the materialist content of idealist philosophy. Critical theory in this sense continues the theoretical innovations undertaken by George Lukacs and Karl Korsch in the early twenties. Both thinkers had also promoted a dialectical critique of crude materialism of orthodox Marxism and Positivism as well as fixed and finished philosophical systems. Horkheimer's critical materialism anticipates what has now become known as post metaphysical thinking. The use of 'critical theory' as code word became evident in his early writings enabled a certain interpretation of Marxism to enter academic discourse. His *Italicise and Critical Theory* focuses on the distinction of traditional and critical theory. *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* is clearly a critique of enlightenment undertaken from the standpoint of enlightenment itself and it remains a landmark in radical thought. Horkheimer expressed that he could philosophically maintain his commitment to emancipation only by turning away from the given historical reality.

This study also identified in our country, the problems and the influences of orthodox Marxism and Positivism in the fields of education, research, social sciences, social and political cultures undermine the genuine progress of our society in its practical fields. The social sciences and social research should have critical approach with new rational revolutionary focus in order to have progressive change in the society and in the field of political culture.

References

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