

Marx, Colonialism, and India

by Ranabir Samaddar

The way the colony features in Marx's thoughts as an object of knowledge also makes the colony a part of the global history of capital, and goes beyond the usual binary of colonialism/nationalism or colony/nation, and forces us to think of associated questions of primitive accumulation, borders, universalism, concrete, etc. Colonies were founded not merely by nations; they emerged in the time of empires in whose history the given history of the nation form was scripted. Marx repeatedly raised the problematic of capitalist expansion in the time of colonialism and in that context raised the issue of colonial governance. In this way his writings on colonialism, particularly Indian colonialism, suggested the need to study the history of modern governance that combines coercion and management of conditions of accumulation.

Marx's writings on colonialism anticipate a theory of the colonised as the political subject. In his writings he was not only going beyond the colonial state, but also reflecting on the representation of the political subject in the modern colonial age. From a politics of class struggle he had to shift to a definition of political struggle, in which not the class but the colony (that is the anti-colony) gestures towards the new subject. This was the point at which he started thinking about religion in the colony, the problem of passivity, faith in the "celestial" state or the *mai-bap Sarkar* (mother-father government), and the hard consideration as to which class would lead the "national" revolt, and a harder realisation that as yet no class was ready, the nation was not ready, and yet the war for independence must begin sooner or later. There was no place of immanence in the search for an answer. The closure would be opened up only by the way the nation would develop. This was the exasperating dilemma that gnawed at him. It was the dilemma of class and the nation that still afflicts the postcolonial world.