

***Capital* in the East**  
**A Conference on Marx's *Capital* after 150 Years of Its Publication**  
**(30-31 January 2018)**

The first volume of Karl Marx's *Capital* was published in 1867, the only volume to be published in his life time. For long it was considered by the working class movement and progressive intellectuals throughout the world as the most important guide to understand the ills of capitalism, the origin of the working class, and the materiality of the exploitation of the workers. The book was translated worldwide in numerous languages, and arguably became the most important book in the last two centuries. Then in the last three decades as socialism collapsed and neoliberal capitalism spread to various corners of the globe, *Capital* became a redundant treatise to many. Its analysis was held outdated, fit for only intellectual consumption and curiosity. In the postcolonial countries, *Capital* became even more redundant. With developmentalism overwhelming the national agenda in these countries, countries competed with each other in inviting foreign capital. Capital became the most precious invitee. On the other hand, working class was being formed anew in these countries, but anti-capitalist struggles were discouraged. In this condition *Capital* became an outsider to postcolonial social thought.

However, the world financial crisis of 2008 brought *Capital* to renewed attention of critical theorists, social scientists, and the progressive movements. Its analyses are being considered even more relevant today. Newspapers have focused attention on the contemporary relevance of many of its arguments. In the developing world the drive towards developmentalism, expansion of market, financialisation, weakening of state's welfare services, rampant privatisation, and boundless exploitation of natural and human resources have stoked what some have called "southern insurgencies". In this milieu *Capital* has returned to attention.

Yet we have to enquire, what does this return to attention signify? What are the new questions demanding attention in the same analytic and political spirit with which *Capital* was written? What are the old questions brought to life again by contemporary time, with which Marx himself had struggled, for instance the relation of rent and accumulation? Given the current intensity of exploitation and newer modes of accumulation and labour forms, what is this historic capitalism we are facing today, capitalism as a historic social formation? Emulating Marx, how shall we undertake today a "critique of political economy", of which *Capital* remains even after 150 years of its publication a model? What are the different fault lines, such as gender, caste, race, along which capitalism functions and develops today, because these are the fault lines along which the wage form of work also gets modified according to the needs of capitalism? Likewise what are the institutions such as family, household, or global regulating agencies that play a determining role not only in consumption but also in the reproduction of labour power in today's capitalism?

*Capital* demands our attention at another level. The book explicitly poses the problematic of multi-linearity. During Marx's own life time he said that Russia, India, and many other non-Western societies may take different paths. Thus even within global capitalism postcolonial countries may present different experiences of capitalism and different ways of negotiating, bypassing, struggling against it, and transforming it. *Capital* also makes reference to the close relation between the genesis of industrial capitalism in Europe and colonialism. This reference comes immediately after the account of primitive mode of accumulation. This is the account of the historic genesis of capitalism as a global system juxtaposed in the same book to the analysis of commodity described as the cell-form of capitalism.

This brings us to the last point about the book. The analytic strategy and narrating device are placed side by side in the book. The preface to *Capital* makes distinction between inquiry and exposition. Is it also the way in which clarification and self-clarification continue?

The conference will be structured in seven plenary sessions around seven major themes built around the questions and issues indicated above. It will be held in Kolkata on 30-31 January 2017.

Some of the possible themes to be addressed in the conference are:

- 1) Reception of *Capital* in the East
- 2) Abstract labour and forms of labour
- 3) Labour process and unwaged work
- 4) Primitive accumulation
- 5) Capitalism and the question of transition
- 6) Interrogating class in *Capital*
- 7) The population question
- 8) Commodity and forms of value
- 9) Surplus value and processes of production