

# **Marx's *Capital* after 150 Years**

**A Conference on**

# **Capital in the East**

**International Conference**

**30-31 January 2018**

**Rang Durbar, Swabhumi, Kolkata**

**In Partnership with Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung**



Organised by:

- **Calcutta Research Group**
- **Institute of Development Studies, Kolkata**
- **Jadavpur University**
- **Presidency University**
- **University of Calcutta, Department of Economics**

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## **Pre-Conference Roundtable: *Capital after 150 Years***

**Day: Monday, 29 January 2018**

**Venue: Presidency University**

04:00 pm – 06:00 pm

- **Opening Remarks** - RANABIR SAMADDAR (Calcutta Research Group)
- **Panelists** –
  - ANJAN CHAKRABARTI (University of Calcutta)  
*Theories of Surplus – Value and the Structure of Capital: Three Volumes*
  - SAMITA SEN (Jadavpur University)  
*The Future of Work*
  - UPAL CHAKRABARTI (Presidency University)  
*The Commodity-form and Difference*
- **Discussion**

06:00 pm – 07:00 pm

- **Tea & Snacks**

## PROGRAMME

**Day: Tuesday, 30 January 2018**

**Venue: Rang Durbar, Swabhumi**

09:00 am – 09:30 am

### Conference Registration

09:30 am – 10:30 am

### Inaugural Session

Chair: ACHIN CHAKRABORTY, Institute of Development Studies, Kolkata

09:30 am – 09:45 am      **Welcome Address**

ACHIN CHAKRABORTY, Institute of Development Studies, Kolkata

09:45 am – 10:20 am      **Inaugural Address**

RANABIR SAMADDAR, Calcutta Research Group

#### *Is There a Theory of Population in Marx's **Capital**?*

Marx's *Capital* (volume one), as everyone knows, is about capital: capital as relation, capital as commodity, capital as the progenitor of wage labour, capital as the crystallization of labour, and as realization of surplus labour. Capital also indicates circulation as the site of its own production. It indicates several borders that capital in its own present history must cross in the forms of several exchanges to remain functional as capital, always suggesting thereby the borders labour would have to cross in order to become capital. *Capital* is thus a double story – of labour and capital – in which we shall find the story of transition to a capitalist mode of production, of how labour in order to remain socially relevant has become wage labour, and finally the social and political struggles that have marked this transition. These struggles are the blood marks of this transition. The book in short is an unfolding of logic, but an account of history also, with logic and history sitting at times uncomfortably sitting with each other.

Now if we recall that when *Capital* was being written, it was the high noon of republicanism, popular sovereignty, also the age of excitement about electoral

democracy, and colonial liberalism. It will be an understatement if we confine ourselves only to saying that the picture of the world that *Capital* was drawing was the other scene of democracy flourishing at that time. *Capital* as if pulled and removed to one side the cover over what is known as society, and showed the way the society survived and functioned on the basis of class divisions, class exploitation, and private property regimes. Social structures were reproduced in a particular dynamics, which required the subject's conversion to the logic of capital. It even now amazes us when we see how *Capital* sidestepped the question of the subject and subjectivity, of the question of knowledge, and removed the individual as the *subject* and brought forward the question of class as the subject of history. Yet, we must not quickly draw a conclusion. *Capital* did not foreground any specific class as a condition of the subject's preparation for access to the truth. It conceived the subject not in terms of sovereignty but in social terms, in terms of organization, by which we mean organization of a mode of production, organization of the state, organization of money as medium, and organization of circulation. Till then, the subject had been associated with one or the other kind of spirituality. It had not been thought of in terms of the historical thrust of existence as an embodiment of conflict, struggle, and its requirements.

Hence the ambiguous position the two categories - people and population - occupy in the book, because the book does not share the given postulates of these two terms. "The Machiavellian moment" rejoices the rise of the "people's" moment. But the "Machiavellian moment" was possible because governments also learnt to govern people by turning them into administrative categories. Yet how were these categorizations possible? How did this double operation become possible? Once again we have to go back to Marx to get an idea of this transformation. Yet, as indicated, Marx does not engage with these two categories independently – as if they are simply matters of rule, sovereignty, and management. What causes division of people into fundamental categories? What remains of the notion of people then? Again, what is labour when defined as element of production, social subsistence, and social reproduction? What do we mean when we say that a section of society is a rent seeking aristocrat? Or, that a capitalist is an agent of capital? What causes division of workers in various categories, or categories of production units, or say the division of artisans, mill hands, the wandering band of construction labour, or the idle labour depending on social subsidies, and the employed labour? In other words, what is the dynamics of social relation that will make categorization of people into population groups possible?

In raising and probing these questions, Marx's battle with Malthus was no less acute than it was with Smith or Ricardo.

10:20 am – 10:30 am

**Vote of Thanks**

APALA KUNDU, Calcutta Research Group

10:30 am – 11:00 am

**Tea**

**Capital in the East 4**

## Session 1: Capital as Critique

Chair: SAMITA SEN, Jadavpur University, and Calcutta Research Group

Discussant: ANJAN CHAKRABARTI, University of Calcutta

Paper #1: SATYAKI ROY, Institute for Studies in Industrial Development

### *Global Production Network: The New Template of Power and Profit in the Regime of Empire*

The spatial and functional fragmentation of production facilitated by technological changes that immensely reduce transaction costs gives rise to new international division of labour articulated through global production network. The unbundling of production and sourcing of inputs from across the world, optimise costs, produce the final product through assembling of various stages of intermediate goods, create brands through design and development for global marketing and reaching to the final consumer requires enormous level of planning across territorial boundaries. This has given rise to a new paradigm of a highly leveraged form of managed trade where MNCs and TNCs control production and distribution across borders. The Global Production Network provides a heuristic framework to comprehend the increasing interdependence between countries in the realm of production. Network analyses empirically shows that equitable distribution of gains can hardly be ensured by participation alone rather it requires a continuous process of upgrading and enhancing governance at various stages of value addition. The rent-centric approach focuses on creating and protecting scarcities either in terms of resources or technologies that might allow developing economies to raise their share in the global value added.

This paper first of all aims to critically review the outcomes of participating in GPN and argues that creation of rents and its protection does not depend upon only on the innovative interventions by individual firms but largely on the movement of the average capital in a particular industry, how such innovations cater to the tastes and preferences of the buyers located in the developed countries and also the way the political economy of institutions allow certain 'scarcities' remain protected while others increasingly being drawn into the realm of competition. Drawing from Marx's Capital the paper critically reviews the neo-Ricardian approach of GPN analyses and argues that the rent-centric approach ignores the fact that returns from interventions at specific stages in the value chain is not independent of the entire process of surplus creation and realization. Rents from innovation depend on the movement of the average capital in the particular industry and the way political economy of institutions allow certain 'scarcities' remain protected while others being drawn into the realm of competition. The distributional outcomes are essentially linked to a global process of 'value capture' relying on super-normal profits derived from labour arbitrage that exists because of relative immobility of labour. For firms located in developing countries it is more of compromising the normal profit or pushing down wages at the lower end of the value chain that creates space for survival with rising scale of operation at the other end of the chain. In other words GPN emerges to be the new architecture of Empire that redefines structural asymmetry in the distribution of potential sources of rents and hence gains in developing South are perpetually constrained by such asymmetries.

Paper #2: PRANAB KANTI BASU, Visva-Bharati University

### *Commodity Fetishism*

The interpretation of Dialectical Materialism that we use is based on the concept of overdetermination (OD). OD has two related aspects. One, in place of the idea of sublimation of the lower generalities as we move to higher generalities in Hegelian dialectics, OD introduces the idea of irreducible characteristics of the lower generalities that preclude their conception as merely particulars of the higher universals. Second, each site is constituted by many processes that pull and push in various directions making the direction of change unpredictable in terms of triadic logic. Following this commodity fetishism can be examined from two perspectives. First, it is a complex of universal (exchange at abstract labour values) and irreducible particulars (use values or concrete labours that are allocated through exchange at values). Secondly, this complex displaces the simple analytical frame of direct allocation of concrete labours based either on consent or command through a cultural-political process of constitution of the mobile juridico-legal subjectivity of the *individual* citizen in civil society. With evolution of capitalism the tensions and crises of the OD capitalist order assume different dimensions as the concrete objective of exchange is obscured by the dominance of fictitious commodities culminating (for the time being) in the age of financialisation.

Paper #3: MANAS RANJAN BHOWMICK, Ramakrishna Mission Vidyamandir and ACHIN CHAKRABORTY, Institute of Development Studies, Kolkata

### *Class Process and Cooperatives: A Developing Country Perspective*

There has been a revival of interest in cooperative enterprises as an alternative to capitalist enterprises. After visiting the Mondragon Corporation, the largest workers' cooperative in the world, established in the Basque region of Spain in 1956, the Marxian scholar Richard Wolff wrote an op-ed piece in *The Guardian* where he argues that cooperatives like the Mondragon Corporation must be seen as a central element of a socialist alternative to capitalism. While the conventional understanding of Marx's own writing on cooperative enterprises suggests that such a form as a cooperative enterprise cannot escape the teleological thinking which subsumes it under the forces of monopoly capital, the actually existing cooperatives around the world have occasionally received positive reaction from the Marxian scholars. This paper is an attempt to situate cooperative enterprises in the extant literature on production organisation within the Marxian tradition, keeping in view the ambiguities and contestations about the place of cooperatives within the Marxian scheme of things. In Marx's own words: "...however excellent in principle and however useful in practice, cooperative labor, if kept within the narrow circle of the casual efforts of private workmen, will never be able to arrest the growth in geometrical progression of monopoly, to free the masses, nor even to perceptibly lighten the burden of their miseries". He also writes elsewhere: "The cooperative factories... naturally reproduce, and must reproduce, everywhere in their actual organization all the shortcomings of the prevailing system". In the present paper, we argue that a perspective founded on the class processes, which entails the production, appropriation and distribution of surplus value, could help us understand the nature of a cooperative enterprise vis-à-vis capitalist enterprises. In this perspective the conventional ways of judging 'successes' and 'failures' give way to an understanding based on the *fundamental* and *subsumed* class processes. Drawing on the works of Resnick and Wolff and using the data collected through a survey of the handloom

weavers' cooperatives in West Bengal this paper aims at broadening our understanding of the potential of cooperatives for providing a viable alternative to capitalist production organization.

12:30 pm – 01:30 pm

## Lunch

01:30 pm – 03:00 pm

## Session 2: Commodities and Value

Chair: BYASDEB DASGUPTA, Kalyani University and Calcutta Research Group

Discussant: UPAL CHAKRABARTI, Presidency University

Paper #1: GARIMA DHABAI, Presidency University

*Textures of Commodity: Some Considerations on its Geometrical Dimensions*

This paper will seek to create a dialogue between Marx's theorization of commodity and labour with writings on the visual form. The texts, which have been instructive in this regard are Walter Benjamin's thesis on reproducibility of art with relation to technology, Arindam Datta's historical analysis of design in imperial Britain, and Guy Debord's theorization of modern spectacle as a part of industrial society. Through these writings, among others, one may begin to decipher the new aesthetic regimes, which were entailed under the capitalist mode of production in 20th century and underpinned by Marxian notion of quantifiable 'socially necessary labour'. This abstracted and measurable labour is the point of equivalence between disparate commodities, generating them as surficial forms. Technologies of surface, light, colour and masonry concomitant with industrial production generated an aura of commodity par excellence, without really differentiating it qualitatively. Through a discussion of these processes and developments, the paper will try to understand the textures of commodity in Marxist thought.

Paper #2: SOURAV KAR GUPTA, Independent Post-Doctorate Researcher

*Labour Power as Commodity: Interrogating a 'Value theory of Ideology'*

This paper argues that a fresh renewal of the notion of 'ideology' is possible based on Karl Marx's textuality of value, and that such an analysis can provide critical wherewithal in understanding urgent contemporary questions. Being a preliminary examination in grounding such a thesis, it argues for an outline of a 'value theory of Ideology' chiefly in three registers (or 'moments') to be found in Marx's signal text *Capital* (1867, volume one). These three moments are, the translation of labour-power into commodity through the legal matrix of 'contract' (especially in *Capital* volume 1, Marx 1976), Marx's emphasis on the auto-affecting nature of capital as it takes on different shapes at different stages of its circuit, most importantly as 'money-capital' (in volume 3, Marx, 1981), and the key role played by the phenomenal

form of 'wage' (in volume 1 and 3), through which, within the critique of Marx, living labour-power is exchanged, not for 'money', but for 'moneycapital', i.e. for "a portion of the labour of others which has already been objectified ['dead labour'], ... for a greater quantity of the living labour of others" (Marx 1976, 730).

The paper situates itself in the context of certain recent developments in the discussions concerning the Marxian concept, 'ideology'. Taking his cue from the *Projekt Ideologietheorie* (PIT), Jan Rehman has argued that a "renewal" of the "ideology-critique" to be found in the works of Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, and (carried over in a sharpened form in the notes of) Antonio Gramsci might show a way out of the more recent poststructuralist trends of 'neutralising' the notion of ideology ("ideology-theory", Rehman includes Louis Althusser, Stuart Hall, Raymond Williams among others, a wide spectrum), which runs the risk of sliding into a "functionalist theory of legitimacy" (Rehman 2015, 435). The attempt of this 'neutral concept' "to overcome the traditional fixation on a criticism of 'false' consciousness" (433) might still be valid, but it has to be interrupted and informed by the specific 'materialist' nuances of the original critical approach to be found in the works of Marx and Engels, contends Rehman. But as his critics have shown, Rehman's fusion of the 'critical' and the 'neutral' concept of ideology is not attentive to the specific argument Marx weaves in his works on political economy, especially in *Capital* (see Best 2015). In her turn, Beverley Best puts forth a "value theory of ideology" which parts with Rehman's proposal at least in two key ways. Firstly, unlike Rehman, Best does not base her reading of a Marxian theory of ideology on the division between 'mental' and 'manual' labour, but instead on 'value' as the "negative'... content" of capital, that "singular substance" which "posits [what she calls] the perceptual economy of capital" (Best, 135). Secondly, she denies any room for the 'neutral conception' within what she calls the strictly Marxian "perceptual economy of capital", and consequently argues that 'ideology', *if one reads this notion* in the text of *Capital*, and especially in Marx's description of different forms of capital (her emphasis is on volume 3), is indeed about the question of "truth and error in general" (109). Agreeing with Best, this paper argues that Rehman misses that the very crux of a value theory of ideology in Marx is based on the commodification of labour power, even if contra Best, it argues that both Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Slavoj Žižek might provide important pointers in such a corrective.

Paper #3: IMAN MITRA, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Patna and Calcutta Research Group

### *Land and the Theory of Rent in Capital: Method, Movement and Fictitiousness*

The theory of 'rent' and its implications in a capitalist society has been a well researched area within Marxian scholarship. At least two of Marx's interlocutors, namely, David Harvey and Enrique Dussel have identified 'rent' as one of the central moments in Marx's commentary on the capitalist mode(s) of production. Though not explicitly discussed in the Volume One of *Capital*, the subsequent discussion on rent in Volume Three and *The Theories of Surplus Value* refers to Volume One repeatedly to explicate the theory in the light of the labour theory of value and primitive/original accumulation. One of the challenges for Marx, as pointed out by both Harvey and Dussel, was to accommodate the phenomenon of 'absolute rent' or 'monopoly rent' within the framework of value, market price and average profit. In that, Marx critically re-examined the Ricardian theory of differential rent and offered a 'historical materialist' explanation of the existence of rent in contradistinction with Ricardo's emphasis on the 'natural powers' of land.

In this backdrop, the proposed paper will attempt to retrace the trajectory of the theory of rent in Marx's exposition of capitalism. As it will be apparent towards the end of the paper, the need for re-evaluating the importance of rent in Marx is crucial to understand the newer forms of capitalism in today's world. The paper will explore five broad themes that are interconnected: (a) the methodological innovation in the deployment of 'rent' within a value-based interpretation of the capitalist mode of production; (b) the productive ambiguity in positing the distinction between rent and interest in a capitalist society, especially in terms of return of 'fictitious capital' (Marx's term); (c) the implications of the difference that Marx makes between absolute rent and differential rent and how that envisages a theory of monopoly capital; (d) the significance of the theory of rent in the contemporary context of valorisation of land, built-in capital and infrastructure; and (e) the politics of 'calculability' through movements across space and time in Ricardo and Marx most clearly demarcated in their respective theories of the 'differential.' The primary objective of the paper will be to think through the highly textured theorisation of rent in Marx's critical engagement with capitalism of his time and to see how it may help us to map the contours of capitalism today, driven by the conjunctive momentum of finance capital and infrastructure.

03:00 pm – 03:30 pm

## Tea

03:30 pm – 05:00 pm

## Session 3: Population in Capital

Chair: ARUP SEN, Serampore College and Calcutta Research Group

Discussant: RITAJYOTI BANDYOPADHYAY, Indian Institute of Science Education and Research, Mohali

Paper #1: ATIG GHOSH, Visva-Bharati University and Calcutta Research Group

*“An Abstract Law of Population Exists for Plants and Animals only”:  
Negotiating the Principle of Reserve Army of Labour in the Postcolony*

As far back as in 1859, Karl Marx challenged the reification of population into a statistical body, a prerequisite that enabled the bourgeois economy to hide the truth. He affirmed that figures could not be considered independently of social classes and the links with production that give them a meaning. The emergence of “demography” as a modernist discipline, though, reaffirmed the reification of population into a statistical body, however disaggregated, and cast Marx in the role of a theorist “fighting a losing battle”. As Yves Charbit asserted in this context, “the *modern* concept of population was well and truly formed [by 1859] and the conditions were just right for the emergence of demography as an independent discipline, political arithmetic having refurbished its tools since the seventeenth century.”

Such obituarism notwithstanding, today postcolonial politics continues to wrestle with the problem of the *people*: the economy does not know how to tackle the presence of people and shape them into a productive agency; politics does not know how to turn people into responsible voters and make them enlightened citizens; Marxists do not know how to make sense of *people* in the framework of an identifiable and definable class. At the same time, the postcolonial condition is considered as marked by lack of adequate industrialisation, hence lack of a numerically strong working class, by inadequate modern class formations and unspecified class struggles.

To understand this impasse, so to speak, this paper attempts to engage with the historical question of relations among classes and the *people*, and the relationships among various population groups— forged, challenged and re-forged through class struggles. This paper attempts to explore how Marx in his writings continuously moved from the terrain of class to that of the *people*, and returned. In this way he analysed the composition of a class or the people at a given point of time, as concretely determined and a concrete determinant. He was, therefore, always alluding to the organic composition of class from the point of society, economy and politics— all that make a *people*. In the same way he was analysing the organic composition of people from the point of class, and thus from the point of production relations. This was how he related class and people to state, government, organs of power, modes of power, army, police, militia and other institutions of governance and rule.

At a deeper level, the paper seeks to substantiate the contention made by Ranabir Samaddar that “class ... will not have the most singular life even when or particularly when it is living, a pure identity to itself. Its inside will always be immersed in the phantasmagoria of the people.”

Paper #2: RAJESH BHATTACHARYA, Indian Institute of Management, Calcutta

*Primitive Accumulation and Surplus Population: A Critique of Capitalocentrism in Marxian Theory*

Marx's concept of primitive accumulation has traditionally been understood in the context of emergence and eventual universalization of capital in the social formation. I argue, to the contrary, that “primitive accumulation” can be a theoretical category only in the presence of a theorized notion of an “outside” to capital. This “outside” of capital in a social formation is populated by a “surplus population” – another concept that needs to be delinked from the capitalocentric notion of “reserve army of labour”. Once we recognize an ever-present non-capitalist “outside” in a social formation, primitive accumulation becomes central to hegemony of capital over a social formation.

Paper #3: MAIDUL ISLAM, Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta

*Land Acquisition and Notes on Combined Accumulation of Capital in Contemporary India*

Land acquisition is a key feature of both state and capital led economic development in the post-colonial world. Land acquisition in many cases is also characterized by dislocation of agrarian population, artisans and petty producers from land. For Marx, such separation of producers from the means of production accompanied by “fearful and painful expropriation” followed by “forcible methods” is the logic of primitive accumulation of capital. Recently, critical academic scholarship has argued that

primitive accumulation of capital in the postcolonial world creates “redundant surplus population” than forming the “reserve army of labour” waiting to be absorbed by the capitalist enterprises. Moreover, post-colonial development has not been a classical transition from pre-capitalism to capitalism like the western capitalist countries. In such a context, the critical academic scholarship argues that the contemporary mainstream development economics actually tried to depoliticize development and concentrated on inventing the tools of anti-poverty programmes within the larger logic of governmentality to politically manage the victims of capitalist growth. Contemporary India is not an exception to such processes of capital accumulation, governmentality, and depoliticized development discourse. In this respect, this essay attempts to rethink the conceptualization of capital accumulation associated with such land acquisitions in contemporary India. In the current phase of neoliberal capitalism in India, capital often speaks the language of *compensation* and *resettlement*. It also speaks the language of maximum possible *consent* of the affected people before coercive evacuation. Here, capital speaks the language of transaction and business rather than explicitly forced displacement. This paper attempts to argue that such a logic is technically different from the classic Marxian primitive accumulation of capital as originally conceptualized in the *Capital Vol. 1* in the context of 19th century England. It is also different from the “non-classical form of primitive accumulation” that involves “changing one or more of the conditions of existence” due to setting up of modern capitalist enterprises, involving indirect dislocation as argued by recent scholarship in the East. In the case of the compensatory transaction during moments of land acquisition, although the Marxian category of *primitive accumulation* can be noticed, “merciless vandalism” involved in such a process of primitive accumulation as described by Marx is missing due to the subtle coercion and transaction involved between the land possessor (inhabitants) and the land buyer (capital, state or their rented agents). Analysing a number of empirical case studies of land acquisition for mining, big industry, infrastructural development, and real estate projects; this paper would try to conceptualize this process of coercion and transaction as the “combined accumulation of capital” in the 21st century India. In effect, this paper would try to conceptualize this process of combined accumulation of capital by differentiating from both the classical and non-classical forms of “primitive accumulation”.

05:00 pm – 06:00 pm

## Keynote Lecture

Chair: SWATI GHOSH, Rabindra Bharati University

JON SOLOMON, Université Jean Moulin Lyon

*From “Linguistic Context” to “Sinification”: Marx, China, and Translation in the Postcolonial Condition*

*Defend Das Kapital* (2015), a mammoth tome of over 700 pages authored by the contemporary Chinese Marxist theoretician Xu Guangwei (b. 1971), is undoubtedly the most intriguing and sophisticated attempt to theorize what is called in China today the *Sinification* (中国化 zhōngguóhuà) of Marxism. Providing an intellectual infrastructure spanning both the linguistic and institutional aspects of discursive formation, Sinification is variously the name for new degree-conferring graduate

programs established over the past several decades in Chinese universities, an official policy and theoretical line (“Socialism with Chinese characteristics”) authorized and promoted by the Chinese Communist Party, and a general taxonomy of knowledge production based on the anthropological notion of “linguistic context” introduced into China through Hong Kong since the 1990s. Comprised of various practices and institutions, Sinification might best be thought of as an *apparatus of translation* that produces subjective effects through the *spatialization of translational practice into an interface or border* between the putative exteriority of “Marxism” and the ostensible interiority of a “Chinese linguistic context.” In Xu Guangwei’s work, the core of the interface lies in the historicity of the concept of ontogenesis, recalling to mind the way in which ontology has become a central issue for contemporary Western theorists such as Antonio Negri, Alain Badiou, Gilles Deleuze and others (not cited by Xu). Unlike these Western theorists, Xu’s original analysis expands on the notion of a particularly Chinese dialectic, exemplified by the 6<sup>th</sup>-century BCE Taoist classic, *Tao Te Ching (Daodejing)*, that had figured as a central theme a decade prior in Chen Tianshan’s *Chinese Dialectics: From Yijing to Marxism* (2005). Focused on the historical dialectic between theory and practice, Xu Guangwei aims to provide a Marxist account not just for the historical transitions in the mode of production, but also for the epistemological transitions in the social organization of knowledge production, while crucially avoiding the pitfalls of modern materialist ontologies based on bourgeois assumptions pertaining to the identity of the individual as a given point of departure.

Yet what is particularly surprising about Xu’s project is the extent to which resources in *Das Kapital*, such as the concept of original accumulation that has recently received so much renewed attention among scholars outside of China, are abandoned in favor of a static, spatialized, and ultimately given, notion of the *border* that fails to live up to the productivist ontology, or ontogenesis, that occupies a central place in Xu Guangwei’s theoretical enterprise. This essay aims to construct a genealogy of Sinification in relation to the concept of *postcolonial condition* elaborated by Ranabir Samaddar (2017). The condition that we have in mind is precisely the link between the process of valorization and the index of anthropological difference, in which two parallel operations of translation (our word for context-specific ontogenesis) occur: the first being the translation from use value and social value to exchange value, while the second is the translation of social difference, always in a process of becoming, into taxonomies of specific (or species) difference. The postcolonial condition is thus the name for the link between an apparatus of area-and-anthropological difference and the regime of capitalist accumulation.

The notion of “linguistic context” enters Chinese-language through a translation, *yujing* (语), loosely attributed to Malinowski then Skinner, that covers a semantic range from condition to border. Inspired by Samaddar, we might look at the ambivalence of the Chinese translation as an experiment in what happens when the postcolonial condition is articulated to a certain concept of a *linguistic border mediated by a representational, spatialized scheme of translation*. In the manner of bourgeois presuppositions about the individual, so-called “cultural difference” is treated as an ontological given, a series of properties that inhere in an individual subject in an originary way prior to the chaos of social relations. This codified form of “difference” supposedly pre-exists the colonial encounter and hence pre-exists the capitalist mode of production that developed in historical synergy with colonialism. On the basis of this assumption, intellectual critique perennially grapples with the question of the relation between a national historical tradition, understood in terms of subjective interiority, and its outside. Yet this is invariably an outside that has been posited from *within* the presuppositions of an inside which itself is – to an extent still to be determined – the product of a singular encounter between “outside” and

“inside” that produced such revolutionary state apparatuses as the standardized national language known as Mandarin Chinese. The potentially tautological aspect of the spatialized representation of social difference reminds us of the problems of historiographic knowledge in the wake of primary accumulation; it reminds us especially of the extensive contemporary international discussion about primary accumulation as not so much an historical stage but as a permanent feature of the way in which capitalist social formations deal with the positing and appropriation of various forms of “outsides” through dispossession, extraction, commodification, and financialization. Curiously, this by-now extensive discussion has not gained any traction in Chinese Marxist discussions. This absence is all the more surprising given the extensive development seen over the past several decades in the “translate-and-introduce” industry of local import agents in Chinese academic publishing that assures the logistics of translational flow.

If, as Xu Guangwei holds, the theory of ontogenesis is a crucial site for understanding the interface between Marxism and China, then we cannot afford to exclude either of those terms from the genetic indeterminacy that characterizes the production of subjectivity. In order to fully grasp the relation between regimes of accumulation and *the apparatus of area and anthropological difference* that is characteristic of the postcolonial condition, it is imperative to return to the moment of indeterminacy that characterizes translation both as an operation of valorization and as an operation of meaning-production. The key link between the two occurs in relation to subjectivity. The production of subjectivity through linguistic translation parallels the production of subjectivity through the commodification of labor. In terms of what this means for “China,” the implications could not be clearer: *Sinification*, whether in relation to the anthropological coding that occurs during the commodification of labor or during the production of knowledge, cannot be understood as an exclusively *Chinese* phenomenon or event, but must be understood as an integral part of the apparatus of area and anthropological difference central to the regimes of accumulation that characterize the postcolonial condition. In other words, our understanding of the postcolonial condition will be impossibly burdened by the presuppositions and assumptions that constitute the legacy of the postcolonial condition as a *history of individuation* if we simply accept the bourgeois forms of cultural individualization – particularly the nation-state and the civilizational area – that it has produced.

Given a limited amount of space and time, this presentation aims not to develop this line of inquiry with the attention and nuance it deserves (we are talking about a corpus of texts that is quite large and theoretically dense), but to propose instead a series of examples for further future discussion. First, we must consider the discussions about Sinification within China in light of discussions about the sinification of Marxism outside of China/Chinese language. It does not take long to discover that the ontological presuppositions about cultural individuality that constitute the basis of the discourse of Sinification in China are equally present in Western intellectual production. These presuppositions thus form a kind of infrastructure for the division into discrete civilizational areas and nation-states inherited from the colonial-imperial modernity. Second, we might profit from a detour back to older resources in the supposed “Chinese linguistic context” that were overtly inspired by Marxism and yet came to very different conclusions about how to understand cultural nationalism in relation to capitalist production. One thinks in particular of the staging of the relation between the institution of finance and the institution of literature in Mao Dun’s classic revolutionary novel *Midnight* (1933) and the contemporaneous writings during the early 1930s about language and translation by Qu Qiubai, an early Trotskyist leader of the CCP. Third, in order to further illustrate the culturalist turn that contemporary Chinese intellectual production has taken, we would do well to analyze the first volume of Liu Cixin’s *The Three Body Problem*trilogy (2006 - 2010), the award-winning contemporary science fiction

trilogy by Liu Cixin, as an example of the fetishization of the postcolonial condition in terms of a border-image mediated by the modern regime of translation.

Our goal is to understand the postcolonial condition in light of the modern regime of translation, and to understand the how the regimes of accumulation are related to the apparatus of area and anthropological difference that characterizes the postcolonial world, while at the same time accounting for and learning from the extraordinary forms of experimentation occurring in Chinese Marxism today, as in the past.

## SCHEDULE FOR CONFERENCE

**Day: Wednesday, 31 January 2018**

**Venue: Rang Durbar, Swabhumi**

10:00 am – 11:00 am

### Special Lecture

SEONGJIN JEONG, Gyeongsang National University

*Capital in Korea* (co-authored with SIBOK CHANG, Mokpo National University)

Since the colonial period in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the vicissitudes of the translation and reception of Marx's *Capital* in Korea have been closely related with the Korean people's struggles against imperialist oppression, military dictatorship and capitalist exploitation. Marx's *Capital* had already provided a powerful theoretical weapon for the national liberation movement against Japanese imperialism before it played central roles in each "Spring of Marxism", first, during 1945-1948, and second, during 1987-1991. The translation and dissemination of Marx's *Capital* have been led by the radical activists rather than scholars, and have always been an essential part of popular anti-systemic movements in Korea. As a result, it was inevitable that Marx's *Capital* has been received politically or tendentiously and in liaison with Marxism and Leninism, etc in Korea. Marx's *Capital* has always been read through the "orthodox" Communist party-line in Korea, as is shown in the predominantly "logico-historicist" or "stageist" way of reading among South Korean Marxists. However, one of the pitfalls of the "political" reading of Marx's *Capital* was the underdevelopment of the philological and scientific study of *Capital* in Korea. While South Korean Marxism might be strong in its application and politics, its basics, including Marxology, have been disappointingly underdeveloped. After the global economic crisis of 2008, the attractiveness of Marx's *Capital* increased again, as many people came to see how the ever-deepening economic crisis, poverty, and inequality were the consequences of the contradictions of capitalism, as depicted in *Capital*. Marxist scholarship and politics, which had retreated since the collapse of the USSR began to revive. However, there is still a long way for Marx's *Capital* to go before it emerges from its hitherto marginalized state in South Korea, which was more due to the general retreat of anti-capitalist movements than to political repression. Marx's *Capital* will not become a counter-hegemonic idea in the near future without the revival of progressive social movements, especially workers' movements, which have been seriously weakened under the neoliberal assaults of the conservative governments of Lee Myung-bak (1941-...) and Park Geun-hye (1952-...). Hopefully, the recent explosion of the South Korean peoples' candlelight movement against corruption and abuse of power by Park Geun-hye, culminating in her imprisonment, could be the signal of the coming of the "Third Spring of Marxism".

11:00 am – 11:30 am

**Tea**

11:30 am – 01:00 pm

## **Session 4: Reception of Capital**

Chair: MAHALAYA CHATTERJEE, University of Calcutta

Discussant: IMAN MITRA, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Patna and Calcutta Research Group

Paper #1: RAJARSHI DASGUPTA, Jawaharlal Nehru University

*Capital in Bangla: Postcolonial Translations of Marx*

Few have paid attention to the relationship of communist politics in India to the material nature of Marxist discourse in our context, which is mediated by a range of vernaculars and regional cultures. Some do recognize that it involved a complex process of postcolonial translation of Marx but this mainly conceptual recognition seldom involves a close reading of the translated works or texts. This paper will offer such a reading in the context of Bengal. It will talk about the first unabridged Bangla translation of Capital, especially volume one, and more specifically, the translated section on commodity fetishism, titled *Panya Pouttalikata Ebang tar Rahasya*. The next part of the paper will situate this text in a larger background of creative and vernacular translations of Marx since the late colonial period in Bengal. We will conclude with some general remarks on comparative strategies of translation and the shifting nature of Marxist discourse in the postcolonial period.

Paper #2: MITHILESH KUMAR, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Patna and Calcutta Research Group

*Karl Marx—From “Modern Rishi” to “Naye Yug Ka Vidhata”*

Lala Hardayal wrote the first extant biography of Karl Marx calling him a “Modern Rishi.” The nomenclature captured the conflict inherent in the colonial and postcolonial reception and representation of Marx. Rahul Sankrityayan called him no less than a “vidhata:” god himself of a new age. Marx became the harbinger of a liberating modernity but firmly located in the idiom of the tradition. In this paper, I want to trace the many ways in which Marx, his life, and his teachings were interpreted in India, especially among Hindi scholars, intellectuals, and activists. When Leninism and subsequently Mao Tse-Tung Thought and later Maoism became the mode of radical politics, Marx’s place became a little ambiguous, his revolutionary potential circumscribed in governments’ rhetoric. This paper will also dwell on how Marx has been used and interpreted in party documents and pamphlets in the Hindi speaking region of India. The paper will also trace the evolution of Marxist writing in Hindi establishing a unique tradition of literary criticism, cultural theories, and political economy. Finally, the paper will also look into the problems of

translation of Marx in Hindi. In this, I would look at the ways in which the translators of USSR's Progress Publisher had to depend on a very "governmental" understanding of "pure" and "formal" Hindi and how it affected the content and style of Marx's writings.

Paper #3: KOTESH DEVULAPALLY, Independent Researcher

*Reception and Dissemination of Marx's Capital in Telugu: Language Politics and the Communist Movement*

In India, the dissemination and reception of Marxism as a philosophy in general and Marx's Capital as a text in particular did not happen in a linear and homogeneous fashion. It entailed a complex and heterogeneous process, amidst contestation from multiple socio-political groups' movements towards transformation from historically ordained pre-modern graded inequality, in the form of Brahminical patriarchy, to emerge into the modern egalitarian socio-political subjectivity.

This paper will investigate the historical background of why and how Marxism disseminated in India through the dominant regional languages in line with the rise of the different regional linguistic movements. In this context, the paper will examine the specific case of Telugu language formation and the translation of Marxist thought into Telugu. I shall contextualize the translation of Marxist thought into Telugu in the backdrop of the fetishization of the language through Bhashabhimaanam by the regional elite at the cost of suppression of the larger social formation in order to determine their regional hegemony. The paper will also examine the politics of translation of Capital in the light of the nexus between the pan-Indian English-educated nationalist elite and the English-educated Telugu regional elite. Finally, the paper will study the relation between the politics of translation of Capital and the communist movement in Telangana.

01:00 pm – 02:00 pm

## Lunch

02:00 pm – 03:30 pm

## Session 5: Globalisation, Finance, Inequality and Labour

Chair: RITAJYOTI BANDYOPADHYAY, Indian Institute of Science Education and Research, Mohali

Discussant: ARUP SEN, Serampore College and Calcutta Research Group

Paper #1: SUBHANIL CHOWDHURY, Institute of Development Studies, Kolkata

*Inequality in India: A Marxist Perspective*

With the publication of the paper by Chancel and Piketty (2017), the debate on the nature and causes of economic inequality in India has been regenerated both in academia as well as in popular press. Chancel and Piketty (2017) show that the

income share of the top 1% of India decreased significantly between 1940 and 1980, and increased steeply since 1980 to a historic high of 22%. In other words, the inequality graph in case of India is U-shaped. Responding to this article, Ghatak (2017) argues on the basis of the Kuznets curve that the relationship between inequality and growth is in the shape of inverted U. Hence the current increase in inequality is because of growth which will decline with time, as with capital accumulation wages will rise.

The empirical literature on inequality and growth has generally hovered around whether the inverted U shaped Kuznets curve exists or whether it is actually a U-shaped curve. This paper is an attempt to engage in a critical debate with the literature on growth and inequality, particularly in the context of India. It is argued that the results of the Chancel and Piketty (2017) paper can be interpreted through a Marxist reading going beyond both Chancel and Piketty (2017) as well as Ghatak (2017).

We argue that the increasing inequality in India cannot be understood within the parameters of the existence or non-existence of the so called Kuznets curve. Rather, we argue, on the basis of Marx's analysis in *Capital*, that at least three processes are intertwined within the growth process of contemporary capitalism in India which can explain the phenomenon of rising inequality—a) the reserve army of labour, b) primitive accumulation of capital and c) centralization and concentration of capital. The paper shows how globalization has hastened up these processes towards rising inequality. We provide empirical illustrations to augment our Marxist perspective on inequality in India.

**Paper #2: BYASDEB DASGUPTA, Kalyani University and Calcutta Research Group**

### *A Re-Visit to the Idea of Finance Capital*

Marxian notion of finance capital as can be found in *Capital* is closely related with his ideas of money as he narrated in *Capital*. More particularly, the very idea of finance capital is embedded in the M-M' circuit. However, it is not that simple to understand what Marx has identified as "finance capital" and also, its relevance in the context of present capitalist global economy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In the existing Marxian literature, often finance capital is dubbed as fictitious capital and the monetary circuit in which such capital is accumulated is referred to as characterised by cheap money. The present paper will make an endeavour to decipher the very Marxian notion of finance capital, how finance capital is accumulated and what is its inter-connectivity with labour processes all over the world and also, exploitation of labour. Lastly, an attempt will be made in the context of the present Global Economic Crisis how finance capital is accumulated and how it affects the functioning of the global capitalist economy with a hint to the new imperialism of late.

**Paper #3: SUPURNA BANERJEE, Institute of Development Studies, Kolkata**

### *A day in the Life of the Plantation Workers: Understanding Working Day and its Limits through a Reading of Capital Vol. I*

Control over workday has been a central tenet of capitalism. The notion of the workday has been extensively discussed by Marx in the longest chapter of *Capital* Volume I, "The Working Day" (Part III, Chapter X). The value of labour power like that of all other commodities, is determined by the working time necessary to its production. The amount of surplus labour that the capitalist can extract over above the necessary

labour from the workers determines the surplus value he can accumulate i.e. the profit he can accrue. The importance of the work-day is recognised under several of the Indian labour laws which specify that a regular workday cannot exceed 9 hours and a work-week 48 hours for an adult worker (e.g. Factories Act, 1948; Minimum Wages Act, 1948; Plantation Labour Act 1951). The paper examines the notion of workday in the unique labour arrangements of tea plantations where the workers live and work within the same physical space. Using and problematizing the framework of “The Working Day” in Capital, the paper explores the strategies devised by the owners of the plantations to maximise surplus value without openly violating the law.

The working day is fluid but within certain limits i.e. the minimum time required for essential non-work activities such as sleeping, eating and the like (Capital, 2010: 223). But the peculiarity of the plantations, with a certain blurring of the workspace and domestic, makes it possible to control the workers’ lives such that maximisation of workday can be achieved. The paper explores the various subtle mechanisms through which control was extended not just to work but also non-work hours. The factory bell sounding at regular intervals through the course of the day was not just about indicating different periods of the work day, but it also sought to regulate the everyday life of the workers in such a way that they would organise their entire life around the work-day. Control over workday thus leads to a control over the workers’ lives. Other aspects like incursion of supplementary elements of work such as weighing during break times, using incentives such or setting a task (*thika*) of the minimum amount of tea leaves to be plucked in each segment of the workday are some other strategies employed by the management to maximise the labour they can extract from the workday. Following Marx (Capital Vol I: 225) we can see therefore that apart from extremely elastic bounds, the nature of the exchange of commodities itself imposes no limit to the working day, no limit to surplus-labour.

03:30 pm – 04:00 pm

## Tea

04:00 pm – 05:30 pm

### Session 6: Labour Process and Unwaged Work

Chair: PAULA BANERJEE, Sanskrit University and Calcutta Research Group

Discussant: ILINA SEN, Retired Professor, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai and Calcutta Research Group

Paper #1: SWATI GHOSH, Rabindra Bharati University

*In Search of ‘Work’ as we knew it: Informality, Corporeality and Wage*

Work as we know it, is productive labour, and in the Marxian lexicon, abstract labour producing necessary and surplus value to be paid by wage only for the necessary part. Surplus value obtaining to the employer is exploitation and structurally inherent to the system of capitalist production. This economic order of production is primarily reserved for man, and woman excluded from this domain, find her place in the reproductive. Woman’s reproductive role is performed in the private domain, invisible and unwaged.

In the meanwhile, there have been important changes taking place with respect to feminist conceptualizing on women's unpaid work, post-*workerist's* theorization on productive labour and there are the effects of 'flexibility' looming large on the labour market. Post-1990s saw a gradual disappearance of formal wage labour and crowding-in of informal labour, large number of them being woman. Various labour-forms, other than abstract wage labour, became conspicuous and women solely occupied several of them. In this paper, I am in search of labour forms that engage women, where women perform both productive and reproductive roles simultaneously at work, irrespective of her reproductive burden at home. That is, labour forms which may be categorized as paid labour but, technically, remain outside of the pure wage-labour category and are also not counted as reproductive work of the housewife. In brief, the paper aims to examine those complex labour forms which are performed as work and exchanged in the market for a price, yet which cannot be classified as abstract labour producing surplus value.

In my view most of the income earning activities that women engage in today, such as construction work, piece-rated home-work or personal services, operate as an interface of both the productive and the reproductive, on the one hand deploying her in paid work while utilizing her reproductive role without paying for it. This entails use of labour power and body/sexuality with exploitation and oppression doubly inscribed upon her at work. In this paper, I try to problematize the complexities of work performed by women, and identify the exploitative traits, therein.

Paper #2: SAMITA SEN, Jadavpur University and Calcutta Research Group

### *The Problem of Reproduction: Waged and Unwaged Domestic Work*

The presentation will focus on feminist debates, which have sought to address and substantially reformulate the question of reproduction as explicated by Marx in Capital. Beginning with Rosa Luxemburg's attempt to address colonialism through the concept of 'enlarged reproduction', Marxist Feminist scholars have sought to explore how reproduction of labour as well as the labour of reproduction may explain the dilemma of women's work in contemporary (and prior) stages in capitalism. In recent years, the changing nature of work has given more impetus to earlier debates over unpaid housework of the 1980s. Thus, affective labour as a subset of immaterial labour, and the new concept of care work seek fresh insights into shifting frontiers of labour and commodification, such as surrogacy. Given that feminism opened up the category of 'work' most productively in the history of that category and that it continues to do so, how far are these new issues and debates relevant to current questions before us? At present, labour studies is dominated by the question of the future of work, which appears to have great traction with earlier feminist concerns about rethinking value and visibility of labour. If there is not to be, as historians will assert with confidence, an end of work, are there already fundamental changes in the nature of work? How may the entry of more and more of the work of social reproduction into exchange relationships affect future landscapes of labour?

Paper #3: MAHALAYA CHATTERJEE, University of Calcutta

### *Sources of Unpaid Labour in India: A Marxian perspective*

India is a country of continental dimension – not only its physical and geographical spread but also in the variety of ethnic, religious and linguistic kind. But more surprising is the variation in economic system that is still found in different corners of the country. Capitalism of the colonial kind was prevalent till independence, followed by 'planned development' of another forty years and 'liberalised' regime of

another quarter century. But none of them could wipe out the variations in economic productive system. This is because a major portion (about 90%) of the production system is in the unorganized sector. And, this is outside the purview of the legal system, the employer determines everything – the state has almost ‘no entry’ in any aspect of it. So, the entry-exit of labours, the terms and conditions of work, the rate and frequency of payment is ‘informal’. Even the formal sector reduces its cost by ‘subcontracting’ the informal sector – and not labour legislation is applicable there. Another prevailing system is a replication of ‘pre-industrial putting-out system – where sub-contract is awarded to the family and the female members of the family are actual producers. Examples are many – but they point to one particular incident. The major part of the productive system in the country is prevailing on ‘unpaid’ (sometimes underpaid) labour. Now, this system of ‘unpaid’ or ‘underpaid’ labour is actually different from Marxian proposition. Here the underpayment/non-payment is not by the employer only to create the surplus value. But this deprivation has many dimensions and affects the production relations not only between individuals but also within the family and the community. The layers and subcontracts within the production (and service) structure have a hierarchy which is almost similar to the system of middlemen in the semi-feudal agricultural system. The semi-developed capitalist system has been able to take advantage of the legal gaps and ‘exploit’ the labour to survive. This discourse will develop the idea with examples from the field surveys done by the author in parts of West Bengal and also secondary data of different sources.

05:30 pm – 06:40 pm

## Valedictory Session

Chair: SAMITA SEN, Jadavpur University and Calcutta Research Group

05:30 pm – 06:10 pm      **Valedictory Lecture**

BERTIL ARVID LINTNER, Journalist

### *Capital in Myanmar and Thailand*

Despite the fact that communist cells had been active in Thailand (then Siam) since the 1920s, and the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) was founded in 1942, there was no Thai translation of Karl Marx’s *Capital* until 1999. The CPT, which went underground after World War II to wage guerrilla warfare against the Thai state, was staunchly Maoist and, in the beginning, dominated by ethnic Sino-Thais. Thousands of young intellectuals, and a few Thai trade unionists, joined the CPT’s forces after a massacre at Bangkok’s Thammasat University in October 1976. The armed struggle came to an end following a general amnesty in 1980, and those who then returned to the cities and towns recall that the book everyone had to study while in the jungle was Mao’s Little Red Book, not anything written by Marx.

On the other hand, the hero of and role model for the young activists who went underground in the 1970s was the Thai intellectual Chit Phumisak. Although he was born, in 1930, into a poor family of low-level government officials in Prachinburi, a province in eastern Thailand, he managed to enter the prestigious Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok, where he studied philology. In 1953 he was hired by the US embassy in the Thai capital to assist William Gladney, an American linguist, to translate Marx’s and Engels’ *The Communist Manifesto* into Thai. The purpose was

to convince the Thai government that it would have to take firmer action against the country's small cells of communist cadre. But the outcome was the opposite. Chit became influenced by Marxism, and was arrested in 1957. He remained in jail until 1963, and, two years later, joined the CPT's guerrilla forces in the northeast. On May 5, 1966, Chit was shot dead in the Phuphan mountains in northeastern Thailand, then a communist stronghold. He became the first martyr of Thailand's communist movement, and his writings, more than those of Marx and Engels, and even Mao Zedong, inspired many young pro-democracy and anti-establishment activists in the 1970s and 1980s. His most famous work is *The Face of Thai Feudalism (Chomna saktina thai)*, which has also been translated into English. More than 50 years after his death, Chit remains an icon among many young Thai political activists.

The Thai translation of Marx's *Capital* was done from English and Chinese version, not the German original, by Matee Eamwara who until then was known mostly for writing dictionaries. Although influenced by Marxism, he was not a member of the CPT. Matee managed to complete the translation of volumes 1 and 2, but not the 3<sup>rd</sup> volume. In 2016 an abridged version of all three volumes, translated by Boonsak Sangrawee, was published in Bangkok. Matee's first translation was influenced by the Chinese version and difficult to read. Matee's abridged and somewhat simplified version has reached a wider range of people in Thailand, but Marxist literature, by Marx himself and others, have not been as widespread as in neighbouring Myanmar, where it had a profound impact on that country's struggle for independence from British colonial rule.

In 1930, a peasant revolt, led by Saya San, broke out in central Myanmar (then Burma) from where it spread to other parts of the country. Says San's followers styled themselves as *galons* (after the garuda, a powerful bird in Hindu mythology) and believed that their tattoos and amulets would make them invulnerable to British bullets. Saya San was not a Marxist but the traditional *minlaung* (pretender) to the old Burmese throne, a figure often produced in times of crises.

The rebellion was eventually crushed and Saya San was executed, but it paved the way for a more ideologically motivated independence movement. Radical ideas had entered Burma from India and Britain, and royalties from a book ostensibly written by Saya San funded the establishment of a library of the first Marxist literature to reach Burma. A number of book clubs, notably the *Nagani* ("Red Dragon") Book Club, were set up in the then capital Rangoon (now Yangon) and elsewhere. One of the young independence activists, a student leader called Thakin Nu, translated portions of *Capital* into Burmese, but never a complete version of Marx's work. Thakin Nu, later known as U Nu, served as independent Burma's first prime minister, a post he held most of the time until he was ousted in a military coup d'état in 1962.

In August 1939, some of the *thakins* (an honorific used by the nationalists) formed the Communist Party of Burma (CPB) and its first general secretary was Aung San, the father of today's state counsellor, Aung San Suu Kyi, and considered the father of Burma's independence movement. What appealed to those young Burmese activists in the writings of Marx and Engels was, as historian Trevor Ling puts it, "not so much the doctrine of historical materialism, but the criticism by Marx of the grossly materialistic capitalism of the West." Marxism merged with Buddhism, and some leftist leaders in the 1950s maintained that socialism was "nirvana on earth". U Ba Swe, a socialist leader at that time, wrote that "Marxist theory is not antagonistic to Buddhist philosophy. The two are, frankly speaking, not merely similar. In fact, they are the same in concept."

The CPB, which went underground to resort to armed struggle shortly after independence in 1948, became gradually more influenced by Mao Zedong and his

theories of peasant guerrilla warfare. But after the collapse of the CPB in 1989, and the opening of the country in 2011-2012, there is a renaissance for Marxist thinking among many urban intellectuals and activists. Marxist literature is once again available in Yangon bookstores, but there is, to date, no complete translation into Burmese of Marx's *Capital*.

150 years after the publication of *Capital*, Marxism is not dead in Southeast Asia. It continues to influence young, and some old, activists and social reformers. In Myanmar as well as in Thailand, where the countries' respective militaries are still powerful, Marxist theory is seen by many as an "antidote" to military rule.

06:10 pm – 06:30 pm

**Closing Remarks**

ANJAN CHAKRABARTI, University of Calcutta

06:30 pm – 06:40 pm

**Vote of Thanks**

IMAN MITRA, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Patna  
and Calcutta Research Group

### **Conference Committee Members:**

- Achin Chakraborty , Institute of Development Studies, Kolkata
- Anita Sengupta, Calcutta Research Group
- Anjan Chakrabarti, Calcutta University
- Arup Sen, Serampore College
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