

Marx's Capital after 150 Years

A Conference on Capital in the East



A Report
2018

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Introduction

The first volume of *Capital* was published in 1867, the only volume to be published in Karl Marx's 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 Its analysis was held outdated, fit for only intellectual consumption and curiosity.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 multilinearity. 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?

An Organising Committee was formed, comprising of members from the Calcutta Research Group and faculty members from several institutions in and around the city who met several times to deliberate on and carry out the task of organising a two-day conference titled "Capital in the East", which eventually took place on 30 and 31 January 2018. It not only commemorated the 150th year of the publication of Marx's *Capital*, but also engaged with the questions and concerns raised above, keeping in mind the relevance of *Capital* in and to our times. The members who were part of this committee were Achin Chakraborty (Institute of Development Studies, Kolkata), Anita Sengupta (Calcutta Research Group), Anjan Chakrabarti (University of Calcutta), Arup Sen (Serampore College), Byasdeb Dasgupta (University of Kalyani), Iman Mitra (Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Patna), Mahalaya Chatterjee (University of Calcutta), Paula Banerjee (Sanskrit College), Ranabir Samaddar (Calcutta Research Group), Samita Sen (Jadavpur University), Shyamalendu Majumder (Sivanath Sastri College), Swati Ghosh (Rabindra Bharati University), and Upal Chakrabarti (Presidency University).

This report provides an overview of the entire programme, including details of the pre-conference roundtable discussion organised by Presidency University on 29 January 2018. It is divided into four sections. The first section contains research briefs by researchers and scholars. The second section provides the schedules and reports of the

roundtable discussion and the conference. The third section lists forthcoming publications. The fourth section lists researchers and participants who participated in the programmes. The purpose behind the publication of this report is to make accessible to all the ideas that were put forth and discussed over the two days, the deliberations, arguments and conclusions that were arrived at over the course of the conference. The papers and abstracts of the participant researchers have also been uploaded on the website of Calcutta Research Group and can be accessed by all who are interested. The relevant links are:

http://www.mcrg.ac.in/RLS_Capital/Final_Programme.pdf

http://www.mcrg.ac.in/RLS_Capital/Capital_Conference.htm

Section One
RESEARCH BRIEFS

I. Lectures

- *Is there a Theory of Population in Marx's Capital? / Ranabir Samaddar*

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 not only an unfolding of logic, but an account of history also, with logic and history sitting uncomfortably at times 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?

Capital needs its law of population contingent, of course, on its specific form and time. Producing a relative surplus population is an absolute law of capital. To elaborate further, how life is processed in the dynamics of capital will shape the form of working population. Remember, for capitalism life is working life; population is working population. From research in life sciences, food stuff, agriculture, robotics, and several other things - the idea is to produce life (we call it artificial life, artificial intelligence, strong, sturdy, yet "docile bodies" capable of flexible tasks) so that capitalism can escape the triangulation of life, labour, and capital. Recall also our earlier discussion on the fixed and variable. Capitalism would increasingly like everything as fixed and least variable. Yet in reducing the uncertainties of life and labour, capitalism attempts to create a system which cannot be "fixed as real life". In the floating dynamics marked by flexible arrangements of labour supply, raw material supply, and commodity supply - a kind of flexible arrangement that is enabled by logistical finesse and constant policy shifts- we have the biggest irony. The irony lies in the attempt by capitalism to make labour fixed and capital, which now takes various life forms, variable. It is as an unbearable tension that often breaks out in crises forms and can result in a strategic break down in near foreseeable future. Neoliberalism is trying desperately to defuse the possibilities of such breakdown with its new-found arsenal of making populations resilient. At the same time, it is an evidence of a false dichotomy. We should by now

realise why Marx refused to categorise “people” and “population” as distinctly separate entities in his study of capitalism.

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

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* 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.” Unlike Western theorists, Xu’s original analysis expands on the notion of a particularly Chinese dialectic, exemplified by the 6th-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 favour 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 postcolonial condition is thus the name for the link between an apparatus of area-and-anthropological difference and the regime of capitalist accumulation. 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.

This paper proposes a series of examples for further future discussion. First, we must consider the discussions about Sinification within China in the 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.

The goal of the paper is to understand the postcolonial condition in the 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.

- *Capital in Korea / Seongjin Jeong and Sibok Chang*

Marxism was first imported to Korea during the early 1920s when the country was a Japanese colony. Radical Korean intellectuals played the key role in the importation, translation and dissemination of Marxist literatures to colonial Korea. They also tried to use them as a tool of national liberation struggles against Japanese imperialism. Although no volume of *Capital* was published in Korean during the colonial period, some Korean socialist scholars and activists were able to read *Capital* in Japanese editions. Korean radicals were frequently arrested and persecuted by the Japanese colonial authorities for engaging in national liberation movements or socialist activities. Despite the severe repression of Korean socialist movements and thought, some radical Korean scholars tried to apply *Capital* to the study of the economic history of Korea as well as the colonial situation. Among them, the works of Paek Nam-un (1894-1979) and Pak Mun-gyu (1906-1971) were significant. As soon as Korea was liberated from Japanese rule in August 1945, socialist publications exploded in Seoul and Pyongyang.

Since the colonial period in the early part of the 20th 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. However, the "First Spring of Marxism" was brutally repressed by the anti-communist Syngman Rhee regime in South Korea after 1948. Almost all leftist scholars and revolutionaries, including translators of *Capital*, fled to North Korea before the Korean War, and most of those who remained were physically eliminated by the right-wing forces during the war. After the Korean War armistice in 1953, Pyongyang replaced Seoul as the center of Marxist scholarship in Korea. Kim Il-Sung (1912-1994), the founder and long-time dictator of the North Korean regime, espoused Stalinist

Marxism-Leninism as the ruling ideology of the North Korean regime when he took power in 1946 and sustained it as late as mid-1960s, when he substituted it for his *Juche Idea*, or Kim Il-Sungism. Unlike his successors, Kim Jung-Il and Kim Jung-Eun, Kim Il-Sung seems to have absorbed Marxist works when he was young, and promoted the translation and publication of Marxist works as well as Marxist research and education at least during early days of his rule. Those scholars who had fled from Seoul to Pyongyang therefore played crucial roles in this project of Kim Il-Sung and the publication of the complete Korean edition of *Capital* during the years 1955-59 was its main accomplishment. The North Korean edition of Marx's *Capital* was authentically the first full Korean translation, predating the full Korean translation in South Korea by more than 30 years. Meanwhile, not only socialist politics but also the academic study of Marx was severely repressed in South Korea after the Korean War, under the anti-communist dictatorships of Syngman Rhee (1948-60), Park Chung Hee (1961-79), and Chun Doo Hwan (1980-87). Even simply carrying Marx's books could be punished by up to seven years in prison, if it was seen to be connected with some sort of anti-government or socialist activities. Despite the severe repression of radical thought and activities by the anti-communist regimes after the end of the Korean War, research on Marxism was permitted, though rarely, if it was purely academic or of some use for anti-communist education. The "Second Spring of Marxism" came in South Korea after the Kwangju People's Uprising of 1980 and the Great Democratic Struggle of 1987. In the late 1980s socialist ideas and organizations returned to South Korea after a break of almost 40 years. It was unfortunate that the "Second Spring of Marxism" of the late 1980s in South Korea was so short-lived, as it ended with the demise of the USSR in 1991. After the fall of the Stalinist regimes, the influence of *Capital* plummeted in South Korea. However, the unexpected explosion of the Asian Financial Crisis in 1997 was a moment of awakening for South Korean progressives to the forgotten contradictions of capitalism, emphasized by Marx's *Capital*. With deepening social polarization and inequality under the neoliberal assault on working people after the 1997 crisis, it did not take long for Marx's *Capital* to regain its diminished influence.

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 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".

- *Capital in Myanmar and Thailand / Bertil Aroid Lintner*

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 3rd 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. Saya 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 have 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. 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.

II. Sessions

- *Global Production Network: The New Template of Power and Profit in the Regime of Empire / Satyaki Roy*

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 Global Production Network provides a heuristic framework to comprehend the increasing interdependence between countries in the realm of production. Network analyses empirically show 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 critically reviews 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 allows 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 are 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 allows 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.

- *Commodity Fetishism / Pranab Kanti Basu*

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, the paper examines commodity fetishism 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.

The paper subscribes to the readings that ascribe the logic of overdetermination (OD) to Marxian analysis. Althusser first indicated that this OD logic of Marx marked his distance from Hegel's dialectics and, he contended, it was never simply a matter of putting matter in place of spirit. The author disagrees with the reading by Althusser at this moment: materiality itself is overdetermined and contradictory, so the displacement of idea by matter itself implies a different logic process. There are important political implications of the dethroning of the dialectics of Hegel as a constituent of dialectical materialism that Althusser has elaborated in different places. As the paper elaborates the departure of Marxian OD logic through the problem of Commodity Fetishism (CF), it simultaneously shows the role of interpellation and so of the need of intertwining cultural counter-hegemonic strategies with the political counter-hegemonic practices of those organising to affect social change.

- *Class Process and Co-operatives: A Developing Country Perspective / Manas Ranjan Bhowmick and Achin Chakraborty*

There has been a revival of interest in co-operative enterprises as an alternative to capitalist enterprises. After visiting the Mondragon Corporation, the largest workers' co-operative 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 co-

operatives 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 co-operative enterprises suggests that such a form as a co-operative enterprise cannot escape the teleological thinking which subsumes it under the forces of monopoly capital, the actually existing co-operatives around the world have occasionally received positive reaction from the Marxian scholars. This paper situates co-operative enterprises in the extant literature on production organisation within the Marxian tradition, keeping in view the ambiguities and contestations about the place of co-operatives within the Marxian scheme of things. In Marx's own words: "...however excellent in principle and however useful in practice, co-operative 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 this paper, the authors 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 co-operative 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' co-operatives in West Bengal, this paper aims at broadening our understanding of the potential of cooperatives for providing a viable alternative to capitalist production organization.

- *Texture of Commodity: Some Considerations on its Geometrical Dimension / Garima Dhabhai*

This paper seeks 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 attempts to understand the textures of commodity in Marxist thought.

- ***Labour Power as Commodity: Interrogating a 'Value theory of Ideology' / Sourav Kargupta***

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 to be found in Marx's signal text *Capital*. These three moments are, the translation of labour-power into commodity through the legal matrix of 'contract', 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', and the key role played by the phenomenal form of 'wage', through which, within the critique of Marx, living labour-power is exchanged, not for 'money', but for 'money capital', 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".

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 Antonio Gramsci might show a way out of the more recent poststructuralist trends of 'neutralising' the notion of ideology which runs the risk of sliding into a "functionalist theory of legitimacy". The attempt of this 'neutral concept' "to overcome the traditional fixation on a criticism of 'false' consciousness" 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*. 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". 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', is indeed about the question of "truth and error in general". 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 Zizek might provide important pointers in such a corrective.

- *Land and the Theory of Rent in Capital: Method, Movement and Fictitiousness/Iman Mitra*

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.

Against this backdrop, this paper retraces the trajectory of the theory of rent in Marx's exposition of capitalism. As it becomes 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 explores 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 is 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.

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

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 engages 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 explores 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 substantiates 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.”

- *Primitive Accumulation and Surplus Population: A Critique of Capitalocentrism in Marxian Theory / Rajesh Bhattacharya*

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.

- *Land Acquisition and Notes on Combined Accumulation of Capital in Contemporary India / Maidul Islam*

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 paper rethinks 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 argues that such 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. Analysing a number of empirical case studies of land acquisition for mining, big industry, infrastructural development, and real estate projects, this paper conceptualizes the process of coercion and transaction as the “combined accumulation of capital” in the 21st century India. In effect, this paper conceptualizes this process of combined accumulation of capital by differentiating it from both the classical and non-classical forms of “primitive accumulation”.

- *Capital in Bangla: Postcolonial Translations of Marx / Rajarshi Dasgupta*

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 conceptual recognition seldom involves a close reading of the translated works or texts. This paper offers such a reading in the context of Bengal. It talks 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 situates this text in a larger background of creative and vernacular translations of Marx since the late colonial period in Bengal. It concludes with some general remarks on comparative strategies of translation and the shifting nature of Marxist discourse in the postcolonial period.

- *Karl Marx – From “Modern Rishi” to “Naye Yug Ka Vidhata” / Mithilesh Kumar*

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. This paper traces 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 also dwells on how Marx has been used and interpreted in party documents and pamphlets in the Hindi speaking region of India. It traces 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, the paper 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.

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

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 investigates 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 examines the specific case of Telugu language formation and the translation of Marxist thought into Telugu. The author contextualizes 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 also examines 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 studies the relation between the politics of translation of *Capital* and the communist movement in Telangana.

- ***Inequality in India: A Marxist Perspective / Subhanil Chowdhury***

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. The argument is that 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 engages 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 Chancel and Piketty (2017) as well as Ghatak (2017).

It argues 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, it argues, 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. It further shows how globalization has hastened up these processes towards rising inequality. Empirical illustrations have been used to augment the Marxist perspective on inequality in India.

- *A Re-Visit to the Idea of Finance Capital / Byasdeb Dasgupta*

Marxian notion of finance capital as can be found in *Capital* is closely related to Marx's ideas of money as he narrated in *Capital*. More particularly, the very idea of finance capital is embedded in the 'M-M1' 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 21st 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 to explain how finance capital is accumulated and how it affects the functioning of the global capitalist economy with a hint to the new imperialism of our time.

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

Control over workday has been a central tenet of capitalism. The notion of the work-day 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 as 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 find 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.

- *The Problem of Reproduction: Waged and Unwaged Domestic Work / Samita Sen*

The paper focuses 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? These are some of the questions that the paper addresses.

- *Sources of Unpaid Labour in India: A Marxian perspective / Mahalaya Chatterjee*

India is a country of continental dimension – not only in 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’ to the informal sector – and no 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 resorted to 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. The paper develops the idea of exploitation with examples from the field surveys done by the author in parts of West Bengal and also secondary data of different sources.

[CRG plans to publish some of the research papers under the CRG research paper series Policies and Practices. Additionally, CRG plans to bring out an integrated volume publication with select papers.]

Section Two
PROGRAMMES

I. Capital after 150 Years

A Roundtable Discussion

(29 January 2018)

A pre-conference roundtable discussion on Marx's *Capital* was organised by Presidency University on 29 January 2018, at A.J.C. Bose Auditorium. The roundtable discussion served as a prelude to the two-day conference on "Capital in the East". Three different aspects of Marx's *Capital* were deliberated upon in the discussion - "Theories of Surplus-Value and the Structure of Capital: Three Volumes", "The Future of Work" and "The commodity-form and difference". The discussion was a two-hour long programme, the schedule and brief report of which follows hereafter.

Programme:

Day: 29 January 2018

[Chair: Suhrita Saha, Presidency University]

4:00 pm – 6:00 pm

- **Opening remarks by Ranabir Samaddar (Calcutta Research Group)**
- **Speakers –**
 - 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**

6:00 pm – 7:00 pm

Tea & Snacks

Brief Report:

Opening Remarks:

Professor Samaddar, at the very outset, reminded the audience that the *Capital* is a text that has been repeatedly engaged with all over the world. It has been discussed by countless people on countless occasions. Why is it that people refer to it again and again? What impels us to return to it with such force? These are some of the points of enquiry that would be addressed at the conference. The conference was envisioned such that it took into consideration dual aspects of 'capital' – Marx's seminal text, and its reception in the countries of the East, and its relation to the Communist movements here. The conference shall look to answer such questions as whether the East holds a mirror to the arguments or logic presented in the book *Capital*. It will also address the politics of translations of *Capital* against the context of larger politics in the East.

Speakers:

Anjan Chakrabarti: The speaker drew our attention to the significance of the subtitle to Marx's *Capital*, asserting that Marx gave due recognition to political economy in renditions of capitalism and history. Marx's *Capital* is also a note on the political economists of the times – Malthus, Smith and Ricardo. Dr. Chakrabarti pointed out that enormous progress has been made in the field of research on Marx's economic theory, using the readings of Stephen Restich and Richard Wolfe as examples. He postulated that the uniqueness of Marx and his work lay in the new conceptualization of class as the focus of analysis, in defining class as process of surplus labour. This new path was followed up by Althusser who posited that there could be no capital without surplus labour. Volume I of *Capital* talks about the performance and appropriation of surplus labour, while the distribution and receipt of surplus labour is dealt with in Volume III. Marx moves away from deterministic epistemology to a non-deterministic epistemology of over-determination, in the process moving away from Hegel. The second contribution that Marx makes through *Capital* is the presentation of capital as the product of social exploitation, which he saw as unjust. It is Marx, said Dr. Chakrabarti, who first drew attention to the common thread between feudalism, slavery and capitalism, which is the exploitation and exclusion of surplus labour. The crux of Marx's criticism of political economy is that capitalism is wrong by virtue of what it is – its very premise of procreation is unjust. The inequality in distribution of income is merely a symptom, claimed Dr. Chakrabarti. The heart of the disease is the system or structure of production wherein surplus value is appropriated. The way in which surplus labour is extracted from the producer is different in different forms of economic society. The fundamental concept for Marx was surplus labour, not surplus value, for it was important to Marx that it be recognised that the non-performer appropriates the profits from the producer through exploitation. The economy is not equivalent to capitalism,

rather, it produces capitalism. That when produced community passes through the market, surplus labour transforms into surplus value, is the crux of volume I of *Capital*.

Upal Chakrabarti: The speaker began with the claim that he was fascinated by the section in Volume I of *Capital* which begins with commodity and ends with the production of surplus value, a section that he feels defines the problem for the rest of the volume, because it gives us an interesting way to think about identity and difference. Marx tells us that an object becomes a commodity when it can be substituted for another. This capacity for replaceability is assumed by the objects only when it can stand for or as concealed human labour. This is possible only by setting into motion a relation between the abstract and the concrete. Marx, right at the outset, sets into motion some kind of relationship between the abstract and concrete, in explicating the commodity-form, said Dr. Chakrabarti. The abstract – concrete opposition is turned into a question of how difference is produced out of apparently a condition of equivalence, when Marx enters the process of circulation and ends that process by talking about the production of absolute surplus. Even when he explains fetishism, he implies that this particular relationship between abstract and concrete that creates Value is concealed by the commodity-form. Such is the enigmatic nature of this form that it hides the object as social fund of labour to produce the object as a repository of value, and this it produces as a natural property of the object. In the domain of exchange then, the commodity appears as having different magnitudes of value. Here, the speaker finds, theoretically and philosophically, a double bind of play and arrest. Marx in his theorisation of circulation talked about how more money can be made out of money, or rather, how money can be turned into Money Capital. In other words, how can one produce difference from something that appears to be an equal exchange. To Quote Marx, “if equivalences are exchanged, there is no surplus value and if non-equivalences are exchanged, we still have no surplus value. Circulation or the exchange of commodities creates no value.” However, the problem is that surplus value cannot originate anywhere else than in the process of circulation. This process constitutes the totality of commodities.

Samita Sen: The speaker began by addressing the air of fear and anxiety about impending change as far as work is concerned. A critical aspect of change is the nature of work as we have known it for 200 years. A topic that is at least 500 years old has become the talk of the hour everywhere, claimed Dr. Sen. Such debates were anticipated in 1996 by Jeremy Rifkin in a book called *The End of Work*, where he pointed out that politicians blamed outsourcing for the disappearance of jobs, work was actually going to the robots. Rifkin had shown that manufacturers in every industry were rapidly shifting to automation. He predicted that there would be an end of mass factory wage labour created by the Industrial Revolution in the next 30 years. At the centre of the discussion on loss of work is digitalization, automation and artificial intelligence. The chief challenge being talked about now is the displacement of workers. In 1930, John Maynard Keynes had coined the term “technological unemployment”, a phenomenon

that is reality today. In 1992, Newsweek had predicted trends in work for the next two decades. The hot growth areas would be “healthcare and computer related work”, quoted Dr. Sen. Things looked less rosy for workers, copy machine operators, typists and anyone whose job, could be vaporised by automation. In Volume I, Marx had a lot to say about the machine and what it means for human labour, asserted Dr. Sen. Historically, the machine is related to the Industrial Revolution in many ways. The machine is wielded not by human power, hence the machine supersedes the workman. Modern industries require machines to construct machines. The labourer becomes a mere appendage to an already existing material condition of production. In other words, a) machine replaces human labour power with other sources of power b) machines render labour in common by erasing the singularity of the industrial worker c) the limit of the efficacy of machine is one of cost. Since the 1960s, in what is termed the Thomsonian turn in labour History, there has been a renewed focus on what kind of work can be commoditised but not mechanised, as in artisan labour or mental labour. With artificial intelligence producing machines that duplicate human thinking capabilities, and make the singularity of human labour redundant, the air of change resides in the stretching of this limit.

Discussion:

The discussion witnessed several questions and queries being levelled at the speakers by members of the audience. Nirmalya Banerjee, a journalist wished to know whether the succeeding conference would shed some light on the agrarian question, which he considered particularly important in the context of the East, particularly in light of the Singur and Nandigram incidents in West Bengal. Arup Sen, Professor of Economics at Serampore College, too enquired if the concept of primitive accumulation would be discussed at the conference in the context of the agrarian question, keeping in mind the statement of Marx – primitive accumulation precedes capitalistic accumulation. Anjan Chakrabarti responded to both the questions saying that there is already extant an extensive body of literature on such areas as dislocation through such processes as primitive accumulation. One reason why the organisers of the conference chose not to bring it into focus at the conference was because such themes have already been dealt with. Instead, many adjoining issues which have traditionally not been discussed, such as surplus value, population and the reception of *Capital* in the East, would be taken up at the conference.

Garima Dhabai of Presidency University addressed her query to Dr. Samita Sen. She wished to know what the coordinates of affective labour were, so to say, and if there was a binary that worked between affective and mechanised labour. Samita Sen replied that while automation has reduced labour in manufacturing and is coming to jobs previously deemed impossible, labour in the health care sector would fall under the domain of affective labour. Artificial intelligence may be able to duplicate or replicate human intelligence, but human sentiment or affection and a political subjectivity are things that machines will never have.

II. Marx's Capital after 150 Years

A Conference on *Capital in the East*

(30 - 31 January 2018)

On the 30th and 31st of January, 2018, Calcutta Research Group, in collaboration with several institutions - *viz.* Institute of Development Studies, Kolkata, University of Calcutta, Department of Economics, Presidency University and Jadavpur University - organised a two-day conference to commemorate the occasion of the 150th year of publication of Volume I of Karl Marx's seminal text, *Capital*.

The conference had four lectures - an inaugural one, a keynote lecture, a special lecture and a valedictory one, interspersed with six panels of presentations, addressing the following themes:

- 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 question of population
- 8) Commodity and forms of value
- 9) Surplus value and processes of production

The programme schedule and brief reports of the sessions at the conference follow hereafter.

Programme:

Day 1: 30 January 2018

09.00 am – 09.30 am: **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 Lecture**

Ranabir Samaddar, Calcutta Research Group, *Is There a Theory of Population in Marx's Capital?*

10.20 am – 10.30 am: **Vote of Thanks**

Apala Kundu, Calcutta Research Group

10.30 am – 11.00 am: **Tea**

11.00 am – 12.30 pm: **(Session 1): Capital as Critique**

[Chair: Samita Sen, Jadavpur University, and Calcutta Research Group; Discussant: Anjan Chakrabarti, University of Calcutta]

- Satyaki Roy (Institute for Studies in Industrial Development, New Delhi) – *Global Production Network: The New Template of Power and Profit in the Regime of Empire*
- Pranab Kanti Basu (Visva-Bharati University) – *Commodity Fetishism*
- Manas Ranjan Bhowmick (Ramakrishna Mission Vidyamandir) and Achin Chakraborty (Institute of Development Studies, Kolkata) – *Class Process and Cooperatives: A Developing Country Perspective*

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]

- Garima Dhabai (Presidency University) – *Textures of Commodity: Some Considerations on its Geometrical Dimensions*
- Sourav Kar Gupta (Independent post-doctorate researcher) – *Labour Power as Commodity: Interrogating a 'Value theory of Ideology'*
- Iman Mitra (Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Patna and Calcutta Research Group) – *Land and the Theory of Rent in Capital: Method, Movement and Fictitiousness*

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 Bandopadhyay, Indian Institute of Science Education and Research, Mohali]

- 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
- Rajesh Bhattacharya (Indian Institute of Management, Calcutta) – *Primitive Accumulation and Surplus Population: A Critique of Capitalocentrism in Marxian Theory*
- Maidul Islam (Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta) – *Land Acquisition and Notes on Combined Accumulation of Capital in Contemporary India*

05.00 pm – 06.00 pm: **Keynote Lecture**

[Chair: Arup Sen, Serampore College and Calcutta Research Group]

Note: The paper was read *in absentia* by Priya Singh, Calcutta Research Group.

Jon Solomon, Université Jean Moulin Lyon 3, *From “Linguistic Context” to “Sinification”: Marx, China, and Translation in the Postcolonial Condition.*

Day 2: 31 January 2018

10.00 am - 11.00 am: **Special Lecture**

[Chair: Anita Sengupta, Calcutta Research Group]

Seongjin Jeong, Gyeongsang National University, *Capital in Korea*

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]

- Rajarshi Dasgupta (Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi) – *Capital in Bangla: Postcolonial Translations of Marx*
- Mithilesh Kumar (Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Patna and Calcutta Research Group) – *Karl Marx – From “Modern Rishi” to “Naye Yug Ka Vidhata”*
- Kotes Devulapally (Independent Researcher) – *Reception and Dissemination of Marx's Capital in Telugu: Language Politics and the Communist Movement*

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]

- Subhanil Chowdhury (Institute of Development Studies, Kolkata) – *Inequality in India: A Marxist Perspective*
- Byasdeb Dasgupta (Kalyani University and Calcutta Research Group) – *A Re-Visit to the Idea of Finance Capital*

- 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*

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, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai and Calcutta Research Group]

- Samita Sen (Jadavpur University and Calcutta Research Group) – *The Problem of Reproduction: Waged and Unwaged Domestic Work*
- Mahalaya Chatterjee (University of Calcutta) – *Sources of Unpaid Labour in India: A Marxian perspective*

05.30 pm – 06.40 pm: **Valedictory Session – Capital in South East Asia and the Far East**

[Chair: Samita Sen, Jadavpur University and Calcutta Research Group]

05.30 pm – 06.10 pm: **Valedictory Lecture**

Bertil Arvid Lintner, *The Capital in Myanmar and Thailand*

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

Brief Reports:

Day I: 30 January 2018

Inaugural Session: (Chair: Achin Chakraborty)

The conference was inaugurated by Professor Prasanta Ray, President of Calcutta Research Group. The welcome address was delivered by Professor Achin Chakraborty from Institute of Development Studies, Kolkata. He expressed his hope that the two days would yield fruitful discussions about Marx's *Capital* and that we would be able to take away from the conference new ideas that would be subjected to further research and eventually contribute much to the archive of knowledge.

Inaugural Lecture: Ranabir Samaddar - *Is There a Theory of Population in Marx's Capital?*

Professor Ranabir Samaddar delivered the inaugural lecture titled *Is There a Theory of Population in Marx's Capital?* Professor Samaddar defined Marx's capital as relation, capital as commodity, capital as the progenitor of wage labour, and as realization of surplus labour. He narrated 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. Capital contrived to show the way the society survived and functioned on the basis of class divisions, class exploitation, and private property regimes. Two positions were delineated in the book on the basis of class struggle, people and population. “The Machiavellian moment” rejoices the rise of the “people’s” moment, said Professor Samaddar. Marx does not engage with these two categories independently – as if they are simply matters of rule, sovereignty, and management. The book discussed 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? 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? These are some of the questions that Professor Samaddar engaged with in his reading of Marx’s *Capital*.

Vote of Thanks:

The vote of thanks for the inaugural session was offered by Apala Kundu of Calcutta Research Group.

Session 1: Capital as Critique (Chair: Samita Sen; Discussant: Anjan Chakrabarti)

Satyaki Roy: In his paper *Global Production Network: The New Template of Power and Profit in the Regime of Empire*, Roy critically reviewed the outcomes of participating in GPN and argued that creation of rents and its protection does not depend solely 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 allows certain ‘scarcities’ to remain protected while others are increasingly being drawn into the realm of competition. He reviewed the neo-Ricardian approach of GPN analyses and argued that the rent-centric approach ignores the fact that returns from interventions at specific stages in the value chain are not independent of the entire process of surplus creation and realization.

Pranab Kanti Basu: Basu in *Commodity Fetishism* interpreted Dialectical Materialism using the concept of over determination (OD). OD has been discussed from two different aspects - one, the idea of sublimation of the lower generalities moved to higher generalities in Hegelian dialectics, and two, 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. Commodity fetishism was also examined from two different perspectives - first, a complex of universal and irreducible particulars and secondly, this complex displaced 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. His paper postulated that, evolution of capitalism, the tensions and crises of the OD capitalist order have different dimensions as the concrete objective of exchange by the dominance of fictitious commodities culminated in the age of financialisation.

Manas Ranjan Gupta and Achin Chakraborty: 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. The authors in *Class Process and Cooperatives: A Developing Country Perspective* attempted 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. They argued 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. With the data collected through a survey of the handloom weavers' cooperatives in West Bengal, this paper aimed at broadening our understanding of the potential of cooperatives for providing a viable alternative to capitalist production organization.

Anjan Chakrabarti: According to the discussant Anjan Chakrabarti, the paper of Pranab Kanti Basu looked at commodity fetishism from a methodological perspective. It did so by looking at commodity exchange from neo classical or Marxian perspective. The crux of the exchange problem is the quantitative equalization of unequal commodity and the basis of this solution problem. Basu's equalization takes place in social and historical condition and encloses the individual, what Basu calls class struggle. Pranab Basu targeted economic determinism to be that of humanism, to be that of Hegelian and neoclassical ones. Basu clearly mentioned that commodity fetishism is not a case of false consciousness, but the production of the subject is the real condition for the capitalism to emerge as a national capital. Roy's paper was a critique of global production networking from Marx's perspective. Using empirical evidence, Roy showed that anticipation or interaction need not give rise to higher net gain in terms of value added domestically. The gain from production has been shifted to developed countries from developing countries. The possible explanation of this is the GPN. Chakrabarti is concerned about the exchange that takes place on the basis of equivalence of value, as Marx emphasized throughout. He talked about socially necessary labour time. He suggested that one must look into the effect of circulation in the creation of value in terms of socially necessary labour time.

Session 2: Commodities and Value (Chair: Byasdeb Dasgupta; Discussant: Upal Chakrabarti)

Garima Dhabai: Dhabai in *Textures of Commodity: Some Considerations on its Geometrical Dimensions* engages in a dialogue between Marx's theorization of commodity and labour. Her paper deciphers the new aesthetic regimes, which are entailed under the capitalist mode of production in 20th century and underpinned by Marxian notion of quantifiable 'socially necessary labour'. The 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. She also pointed out Marx's geometrical dimensions of the commodity and its measure of equivalence. This geometry provides an abstraction of these physical dimensions, which can only be expressed in terms of relation between certain variables like base and altitude. Through a discussion of these processes and developments, Dhabai tried to understand the textures of commodity in Marxist thought.

Sourav Kargupta: Kargupta in *Labour Power as Commodity: Interrogating a 'Value theory of Ideology'* outlined the "value theory of Ideology" chiefly in three moments. These three moments are the translation of labour-power into commodity through the legal matrix of 'contract', Marx's emphasis on the auto-affecting nature of capital as it takes on different shapes at different stages of its circuit and most importantly as 'money-capital', and the key role played by the phenomenal form of 'wage', through which, within the critique of Marx, living labour-power is exchanged, not for 'money', but for 'money capital'. According to Kargupta, Marxian theory of ideology can be divided between 'mental' and 'manual' labour. The paper criticized the Marxian theory of "perceptual economy of capital". It also argued with the theories perpetuated by Rehman and Chakravorty Spivak. Though this paper was chiefly based on a reading of certain theoretical aspects of the textuality of value in Marx's *Capital*, it remained attentive to the idea that the key revolutionary intervention of this momentous text is in theorizing 'praxis'.

Iman Mitra: Mitra in his paper titled *Land and the Theory of Rent in Capital: Method, Movement and Fictitiousness* attempted to retrace the trajectory of the theory of rent in Marx's exposition of capitalism. He argued why Marx is crucial to understand the newer forms of capitalism in today's world. The broad interconnected themes that he explored in his paper included (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) and (c) the implications of the difference that Marx makes between absolute rent and differential rent and how that envisages a theory of monopoly capital.

Upal Chakrabarti: Chakrabarti extolled the fact that three very different subjects were taken up in the three papers, where the use of conceptual vocabulary of the text was very rich in reanalyzing the objects. According to him, Saurav Kargupta had made a clear distinction between transcendental and transcendent, not opposed to the transcendent when the ideology is a sublimation of heterogeneity that per capita contains in the process. Garima Dhabai's reading of commodity as a geometrical circle seemed to be somewhat rigid if one considers that data and tracks the development. Otherwise her approach to commodity fetishism in a geometrical point of view generated much interest among the listeners. Iman Mitra's paper on rent was also well received, and Chakrabarti requested him to think about and reformulate within his paper, the question of difference in Marxian perspective from Malthusian and Ricardian perspectives, if rent were to be produced outside the commodity structure.

Session 3: Population in Capital (Chair: Arup Sen; Discussant: Ritajyoti Bandyopadhyay)

Atig Ghosh: In his paper, titled "*An Abstract Law of Population Exists for Plants and Animals only*": *Negotiating the Principle of Reserve Army of Labour in the Postcolony*, Ghosh engaged with the postcolonial question of relation between class and people, and how it is continuously shaped and re-shaped through class struggle. The paper tackled this issue with reference to Marx's understanding of the concept of people from the point of society, economy and politics that constitute people as more than statistical data and figures. Further, Ghosh dealt with Ranabir Samaddar's point 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."

Rajesh Bhattacharya: In his paper titled *Primitive Accumulation and Surplus Population: A Critique of Capitalocentrism in Marxian Theory*, Bhattacharya attempted to establish "primitive accumulation" as a theoretical concept. He posited that the general understanding of the term is limited in the sense that it does not engage with the question of "coercive state, force and violence" that are associated with primitive accumulation. He interrogated the dominant reading of Marxian political economy and argues that this theorization can only occur in the simultaneous theorization of an "outside" to capital. This "outside", he further stated, is constituted of surplus population in a social formation which needs to be understood separately from the idea of "reserve army of labour".

Maidul Islam: This paper, entitled *Land Acquisition and Notes on Combined Accumulation of Capital in Contemporary India*, presented empirical case studies of land acquisition for mining, infrastructural projects and real estate etc. to make a critique of neoliberal capitalism based on coercion and forced displacement. This paper offered an argument in order to distinguish this model from the classical Marxian primitive accumulation of capital as has been shown by Marx in case of 19th century England in *Capital Vol. I* as well as from the present line of argument in the East on "non-classical form of primitive

accumulation" that leads to changes in the "conditions of existence" as a result of contemporary capitalist enterprises.

Ritajyoti Bandyopadhyay: The discussant Ritajyoti Bandyopadhyay began by stating how the first panelist Atig Ghosh shows Marx's encounter with Malthus' principle of population via John Burton's improvement of the same in 1817. By a detailed discussion of Malthus' principle of population, he stated how poverty and unemployment is a result of a worker's natural propensity to look for livelihood. Next, he brought attention to the changing composition of capital (technical composition, value composition and organic composition of labour that is the correlation between the two is explained in the context). Moreover, Ghosh apparently suggested a more fundamental continuity between Malthus and Marx and Engels as opposed to dominant historiography. The second presenter, as Bandyopadhyay stated, built up his argument on the rupture between Malthus' and Marx' principle. Bhattacharya's central problem of theorizing primitive accumulation within the framework of Marxian Political Economy is based on a distinction between surplus population and reserve army of labour; he further argues that in the absence of a universalized capitalist class relation in the historical social formation, the notion of surplus population needs to be understood in its historical concreteness. Bhattacharya has also posited that though primitive accumulation needs a separation of labour from the means of production and a flow of same from the non-capitalist to capitalist processes, the former class structures are not completely abolished. Thus, primitive accumulation creates unequal distribution of surplus labour across class structures. The third paper discussed, according to the discussant, the transactional nature of primitive accumulation. Islam, through his paper, seemed to suggest a transformation in the self-perception as a result of a neoliberal reordering of the self; at the heart of this new subject modality that is termed as "entrepreneurial subjectivity", lies individual responsibility and business initiatives. This is, as the discussant stated, where primitive accumulation returns to the structural course. Bandyopadhyay, however, had questions regarding Islam's reading of certain crucial passages of *Capital* and suggests to elaborate the modalities and operational structure of land acquisition.

Keynote Lecture: Jon Solomon - From "Linguistic Context" to "Sinification": Marx, China, and Translation in the Postcolonial Condition.

(Chair: Arup Sen)

Note: The paper was read *in absentia* by Priya Singh of Calcutta Research Group.

Jon Solomon attempted to understand the Sinification (zhongguohua) of Marxism which is, simultaneously, a programme established over past decades in Chinese universities, an official policy of the Chinese Communist Party ("Socialism with Chinese characteristics) and a knowledge system based on the anthropological idea of "linguistic context" that has been imported from Hong Kong since the 1990s. This analysis was

done with reference to XuGuangwei, a contemporary Chinese Marxist theoretician's attempts at theorizing Sinification in his book named *Defend Das Kapital* (2015). Solomon himself describes the concept as an *apparatus of translation* that results in subjective effects through the *spatialization of translational practice into an interface of border* between the exteriority of "Marxism" and interiority of a "Chinese linguistic context". Solomon explained how Xu's work provides a Marxist account for both historical transitions in the mode of production and epistemological shifts in the social organisation of knowledge production but avoids the disadvantages that arise due to a fixed and given notion of the border; thus, the theory fails to live up to the productivist ontology, or ontogenesis, which forms the pivot of Guangwei's theoretical enterprise. Solomon's essay looked to build a genealogy of Sinification in relation to Samaddar's concept of postcolonial condition, which provides the link between an apparatus of area-and-anthropological difference and the regime of capitalist accumulation wherein two parallel operations occur: first, the translation from use value and social value to exchange value, and second, the translation of social difference into taxonomies of specific (or species) difference.

Special Lecture: Seongjin Jeong - *Capital* in Korea

(Chair: Anita Sengupta)

This lecture dealt with the translation and reception of *Capital* in Korea. While briefly mentioning the translation and publication of Marx and Engel's works in North Korea, Jeong focussed on South Korea. In his lecture, by using power point presentation, he charted a chronological import of *Capital*, its translation, publication and reception in his country. The presentation states that Marxism first arrived during the period of Japanese imperialism and colonialism, i.e. 1905-1945; 1920s was a crucial period as it followed the March 1st (1919) Independence Movement. The period from 1945 to 1948 is known as "The 1st Spring of Marxism". The first and second volumes of *Capital* were published in Seoul; freedom from colonialism saw increased publication in various other Marxist and socialist literature. The 2nd spring of Marxism began in 1987 with the onset of Democratization Movements and ended in 1991 with the collapse of the Soviet Union. This period, Jeong informed, witnessed as many as seventy publications of Marx and Engel's. Besides Marx and Engels, works of Lenin, Stalin, Mao and Trotsky also became available. The period after 1991 is described by Jeong as a period of "drift from Marxism to Post-ism", with theories such as postmodernism, postcolonialism gaining rapid grounds. Neo-Marxism, as the presenter states, was not an option due to the de-establishment of neo-marxists such as Frankfurt School by "orthodox" Marxism. There, however, were serious attempts to "return to Marx" following the East Asian Crisis of 1997 and end of the 'Miracle of Korea'; the launching of *Radical Review* and *Marxism 21* are examples. The presentation came to an end with a note on the marginalization or absence of anti-capitalist movements in Korea. A development in progressive movements such as workers' movement is required for Marxism to regain a stronghold, argued Jeong.

Session 4: Reception of Capital (Chair: Mahalaya Chatterjee; Discussant: Iman Mitra)

Rajarshi Dasgupta: Rajarshi Dasgupta's paper, titled *Capital in Bangla: Postcolonial Translations of Marx*, discussed the first unabridged translation of *Capital* in Bengali. It was particularly interested in exploring Volume I and the section on commodity fetishism that in Bengali was translated as *Panya Pouttalikata Ebang tar Rahasya*. The next part of the paper dealt with the larger picture of creative and vernacular translations since the late colonial period. It concluded with observations on comparative strategies of translations and changing discourse of Marxism in postcolonial times.

Mithilesh Kumar: Mithilesh Kumar, in his paper entitled *Karl Marx- From "Modern Rishi" to "Naye Yug ka Vidhata"*, attempted to understand the various ways in which Marx has been interpreted in the Indian subcontinent, particularly among Hindi scholars, intellectuals and activists. He also talked about how Marx's ideas have been circumscribed in governmental rhetoric, reflected in the party pamphlets and documents in the Hindi-speaking belt. Further, the paper tried to trace the development of Marxist writing in Hindi and subsequent growth of a tradition of literary criticism. Lastly, Kumar looked at Hindi translations of Marx and the problematics of it.

Kotesh Devulapally: Devulapally's paper, titled *Reception and Dissemination of Marx's Capital in Telugu: Language Politics and the Communist Movement*, investigated the rise of regional linguistic movements vis-à-vis the dissemination of Marxism in India through dominant regional languages. The case in study was Telugu language formation and the translation of Marxist ideas into the same and was contextualized against the backdrop of fetishization of the language through *Bhashabhimanaam*, creating a hegemony of the regional elite. The paper also attempted to study the nexus between English-educated regional elite and pan-Indian English-educated nationalist elite. And lastly, it studied the relation between the Telengana movement and the translation of *Capital*.

Iman Mitra: Mitra, the discussant, at the very outset commented on the Marxian observation of translation being equated with exchange. Next, he elaborated on the longer history of translation projects and the creation of a vernacular niche based on familiarity and comprehensibility, which he thought was of immense significance, though none of the papers had attempted a trajectory of the history. He then raised questions regarding the disjuncture or lack thereof between the scientific/pedantic and popular language in the pedagogical moment of translation. He posed three questions for each speaker- to Dasgupta, he enquired about how the postcolonial moment differs from that of the colonial moment; to Devulapally, he asked if the idea of *navayuga* is any way derived from the sense of progress that is born from the revolution; lastly, to Mithilesh, he asked about the importance of issues like caste, race, etc. in the works of translation. If the papers addressed each of these questions during the process of revision, they would emerge stronger, suggested Mitra.

Session 5: Globalization, Finance, Inequality and Labour (Chair: Ritajyoti Bandyopadhyay; Discussant: Arup Sen)

Subhanil Chowdhury: Titled *Inequality in India: A Marxist Perspective*, Chowdhury's presentation was broadly categorized under the following aspects: the political economy of income inequality, problem of the falling share of labour income, causes of rising income inequality, its fallouts, income inequality in India, explanation of income inequality through Kuznet's Curve and placing it in the context of class struggle and distribution.

Byasdeb Dasgupta: *A re-visit to the Idea of Finance Capital* by Dasgupta focused on three main points: whether finance capital can be seen as delinked from surplus labour, how and why is it not treated as an analytical category in *Das Capital* and finally, the changing face of finance.

Supurna Banerjee: In her paper "A day in the life of the Plantation Workers: Understanding Working Day and its Limits through a Reading of Capital Vol. I", based on her field survey of two tea plantations in North Bengal, Banerjee discussed the strategies that owners of tea plantations employed to maximise surplus value without openly violating laws. She also drew attention to the ways in which the owners encroached upon the non-work hours of the labourers that eventually led them to control all aspects of the lives of the workers. She made her observations in the light of Marx's chapter "The Working Day" in *Das Capital* where he explains labour manipulation by capital for profit maximization.

Arup Sen: Sen commended the solid statistical evidence on which Chowdhury based his paper in examining the current economic scenario regarding income inequality, and to some extent, wealth inequality and the fall in the labour share in national income. The basis point of the paper was the limitation of the mainstream language of growth theory to understand its dynamic. Sen highlighted the important points on the margin of the paper, which argued that the relationship between growth and inequality is not merely an economic relationship but rather determined by political, economic and class processes. He suggested that the margins of Mr Subhanil's paper, like the role of the state, the rise of the global right or the collapse of the Soviet regime, could be developed further and integrated into the broad statistical critique put forward by him. Sen regarded the second paper by Dasgupta as a revisionist paper in the sense that it was a departure from the classical Marxist reading of finance. Dasgupta talked about the autonomous domain of finance capital and a qualitative change in the role of finance from being an intermediary between the deficit units and the surplus units and its increasing dissociation from the real sector of the economy. In this context, Sen outlined an important point from Chowdhury's paper where he argued that the proportion of contract labour is rising in the formal sector and that the proportion of contract labour is much more in the export-led sector. As for the third paper Mr Sen expressed his doubts about how far the labour discipline in the tea plantation can be read along the lines

suggested by Marx in *Das Capital*. The figure of the 'Sardar' as pointed out in the paper is at the heart of the disciplinary mechanism in tea plantations but he can also be negotiated with. Work is only one aspect. Mr Sen pointed out that many things are promised in the Plantation Labour Act but most are violated. Many tea owners have left the garden plundering the accumulated wages. Sen's idea was that the coexistence of capital accumulation and primitive accumulation could be taken care of without necessarily considering them as disconnected.

Session 6: Labour Process and Unwaged Work (Chair: Paula Banerjee; Discussant: Ilina Sen)

Samita Sen: Titled *The Problem of Reproduction: Waged and Unwaged Domestic Work*, the paper problematized the nature of household work and carework. The presentation was divided into the following segments - problem of reproduction, interconnection of waged and unwaged labour with regard to reproduction, affective labour and affective value and the concept of care work. The second part of Sen's presentation was a case study of Bengal in so far as domestic work is concerned. In engaging with the average middle class Bengali household, and the position of the maid in it, she brought in aspects of gender identities, class issues, along with a rethinking of the value and visibility of work.

Mahalaya Chatterjee: In *Sources of Unpaid Labour in India: A Marxian Perspective*, Chatterjee discussed women's work in the unorganized sector, and issues of non-payment and underpayment of such workers. Her presentation was based on field surveys done in semi-urban areas of West Bengal such as Bankura and Birbhum where women were employed in a variety of work like handicraft and others. In her paper, she showed how the prevailing system of the replication of 'pre-industrial putting out system' - where sub-contract is awarded to the family while the female members of the family are actual producers - and the semi - developed capitalist system have been able to take advantage of the legal gaps and 'exploit' the labour to survive.

Ilina Sen: The discussant gave a broad overview of the situation of women's labour in India. The NSS data in particular has shown that there has been a great extension of the putting out system and a rise in women's informal work. According to her, this needs to be taken together with rural to urban migration and also the large extension that seems to have taken place in the statistics in female-headed households. Taking up Mumbai as an example, she said that there has been a 35% increase in female-headed households in the last 7 years. However, she cautioned that while the phrase female-headed household seems quite impressive and at one level it would seem to be a marker of women's empowerment, it is essentially a large army of destitute women who are flocking to the cities to find some employment. Many of them are abandoned, singled and seeking survival for their children. They are insecure, lowly paid, undervalued. In the census for many years, there was the unrecognized category of women in the household. Sen placed this in the historical context, particularly the Socialist praxis and the concept of

family wage. The concept of family wage came into existence between the two world wars when there was a global recession. She spoke of her experiences during her association with the *Chattisgarh Mines Sramik Sangh* where women for something like 25 years made a bid to survive with the trade unions on their own right but mechanization and a drive towards departmentalization ultimately pushed the women out of the workforce. The women engaged in domestic work give their services to the dispersed middle class which, because of their upper caste origin or their rentier origins, does not feel it appropriate to engage in menial household chores. She talked about Delhi as having a large number of Bengali domestic workers who, even as they are engaged in care work, struggle to provide care to their own families. She also mentioned the pogroms carried out in Mumbai in which Bengali speaking women and in some cases, men were characterized as Bangladeshis and were deported to the Bongaon border. She also highlighted the plight of Sri-Lankan, especially Tamil women who, ravaged by the conflict, have been working in the Gulf with middle class Indian families or with Sheikhs. The most horrendous story from these situations is the story of Rizana Nafiq. She was a 17-year old girl from a very poor Sri-Lankan Tamil family who went to the Gulf and two months into her employment was accused of having murdered the child of her Arab employer. Supposedly, there was a confession which she was made to sign without being explained the terms and was eventually executed. Sen pointed out the class dimension involved and what happens to women as they become part of the care economy. She highlighted the need for generating substantial data that does not exist in our system.

Valedictory Session: (Chair: Samita Sen)

Valedictory Lecture: Bertil Arvid Lintner - *The Capital in Myanmar and Thailand*

Lintner began his lecture by commenting on the lack of a Thai translation of Marx's *Capital* despite the presence of a communist cell in then Siam since the 1920s and a Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) that was formed in 1942. He then mentioned that the armed struggle which ended with a general amnesty in 1980 had followed Mao's *Little Red Book* and not any work of Marx. The Thai translation of *Das Capital* was done by Matee Eamwara and was done from English and Chinese versions instead of the original German edition. Eamwara had translated the 1st and 2nd Volumes; an abridged version of all the three volumes was published in 2016, translated by Boonsak Sangrawee. In neighbouring Myanmar, Lintner observed that Marxist literature, written by Marx himself and others, have not been widespread but has had an impact on the struggle of independence from British rule.

Radical ideas had reached what was then Burma from India and Britain and royalties from a book written by Saya Sen (who had led a peasant revolt in 1930) was used to establish a library containing Marxist literature, which then reached Burma. Thakin Nu, later known as U Nu, independent Burma's first Prime Minister, translated portions of *Das Capital* into Burmese. The Communist Party of Burma (CPB) was formed in 1939

and the first general secretary was Aung San. Marxism, in Burma, merged with Buddhism and for some leftist, socialist leaders such as U Ba Swe, they were “not merely similar” but “same in concept”. With the collapse of CPB in 1989 and opening of the country in 2011-2012, there has been a new line of Marxist thought (as opposed to earlier influence of Mao Zedong); Marxist literature is available in the bookstores of Yangon but till date, no complete translation of *Capital* into Burmese exists. He concluded the paper by observing that both in Thailand and Myanmar, Marxism is viewed as an “antidote” to military rule.

Closing Remarks:

The closing remarks were delivered by Dr. Anjan Chakrabarti. In his closing remarks, Chakrabarti emphasized that the reception of Marx is varied and that no one interpretation of Marx has emerged from this conference. If one looks at Marx’s own trajectory then one would find a constant evolution, for example, his rendition of primitive accumulation in capital and the turn that late Marx gave to this concept when he met the Russian question. Late in his life he turned away from Europe, to non-European societies and its transitions and ended with a vast notebook that has now come out as the *Ethnological Notebook*. Chakrabarti pointed out that one of the best things about Marx was that he was non-dogmatic in a sense that he not only questioned others fiercely but was also willing to question his own position, revise it, rethink new questions and move into new modes of engagement. Chakrabarti stressed that the conference needed to be taken in similar spirit. We need to understand that there will be differences and that differences are welcome in Marxism.

Regarding the topic of the conference, he said that *Capital in the East* should not be taken in the literal sense or in strict geographical terms. It needs to be understood as moving away from Europe to this part of the world. In a theoretical sense, it would mean how we in the East engage with the categories of *Capital*. He pointed out that the segment on the reception of *Capital* and the issue of its translation was particularly interesting. The way *Capital* has been engaged with or Marx has been engaged with has been an integral component of the way social struggle from the leftist perspective has evolved. He emphasized that translation was essentially a political work; it involves sacrifice, complete dedication and pooling of collective resources to really engage with it.

One of the core areas of *Capital* that the conference dealt with was commodity, value, labour and finance. However, the other core, which is not discussed generally, is population. According to Chakrabarti, this is one of the most integral interventions in Marx’s *Capital* but is also largely ignored. Population, however, was a unique focus of this conference. Primitive accumulation is attached to the debate around rent and population. He drew attention to the fact that a lot of work still needs to be done in this regard.

On a lighter note he added that one of the few people who suffered the worst in Marx's hand in *Capital* was Malthus. A lot of papers presented at the conference practically went after Malthus. He underlined that to think of *Capital* only as an economic text is wrong. There are political, social and cultural aspects which make it a unique classic text. He was also dealing with nature and ecological devastation on the question of agriculture. It was a political position that Marx took in differentiating himself from Ricardo or Smith.

Chakrabarti identified as the political position of Marx, the return of the outside, the return of the foreclosed. Capitalism, as he pointed out was not about freedom or equality but inherent and integral to its reproduction is class exploitation and injustice. He emphasized that when we think of political change then it is necessary to connect the alternatives to this outside. The transition cannot happen without the change in the structure in which surplus is performed and appropriated, distributed and received. It is important then to think of models which make such politics realizable. "Nirman" itself, as he said, is a mode of "sangharsh" where the presence of the particular materiality announces a different kind of eruption. That does not nullify the importance of capitalism as a system and the need to engage with the power of capitalism. The question he posed was - How do we synergize a kind of organizational-based political transformation on a macro level from ground level? He concluded with the idea that political, social and self-transformation are the three pillars of such transformation.

Vote of Thanks:

The vote of thanks was delivered by Iman Mitra of Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Patna and Calcutta Research Group.

Section Three
LIST OF PUBLICATIONS

List of Publications

The following lead papers presented at the Conference on Capital in the East will be published under the research paper series Policies and Practices:

- Iman Mitra - *Land and the Theory of Rent in Capital: Method, Movement and Fictitiousness*
- Jon Solomon - *From "Linguistic Context" to "Sinification": Marx, China, and Translation in the Postcolonial Condition*
- Pranab Kanti Basu - *Commodity Fetishism*
- Ranabir Samaddar - *Is There a Theory of Population in Marx's Capital?*

Calcutta Research Group also plans to bring out an integrated volume publication with select papers.

Section Four

**THE RESEARCH COLLECTIVE:
RESEARCHERS, DISCUSSANTS AND
CHAIRS**

List of Researchers, Discussants and Chairs

Achin Chakraborty, Institute of Development Studies, Kolkata

Anita Sengupta, Calcutta Research Group

Anjan Chakrabarti, University of Calcutta

Apala Kundu, Calcutta Research Group

Arup Sen, Serampore College and Calcutta Research Group

Atig Ghosh, Visva - Bharati University and Calcutta Research Group

Bertil Arvid Lintner, Journalist

Byasdeb Dasgupta, Kalyani University and Calcutta Research Group

Garima Dhabai, Presidency University

Ilina Sen, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai and Calcutta Research Group

Iman Mitra, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Patna and Calcutta Research Group

Jon Solomon, Université Jean Moulin Lyon

Kotesh Devulapally, Independent Researcher

Mahalaya Chatterjee, University of Calcutta

Maidul Islam, Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta

Manas Ranjan Bhowmick, Ramakrishna Mission Vidyamandir

Mithilesh Kumar, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Patna and Calcutta Research Group

Paula Banerjee, Sanskrit University and Calcutta Research Group

Pranab Kanti Basu, Visva - Bharati University

Priya Singh, Calcutta Research Group

Rajarshi Dasgupta, Jawaharlal Nehru University

Rajesh Bhattacharya, Indian Institute of Management, Calcutta

Ranabir Samaddar, Calcutta Research Group

Ritajyoti Bandyopadhyay, Indian Institute of Science Education and Research

Samita Sen, Jadavpur University

Satyaki Roy, Institute for Studies in Industrial Development

Seongjin Jeong, Gyeongsang National University

Shyamalendu Majumdar, Sivanath Sastri College

Sourav Kargupta, Independent Post-Doctorate Researcher

Subhanil Chowdhury, Institute of Development Studies, Kolkata

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