

Timeless Ideals: The Enduring Influence of Karl Marx's Thought on Social Change and Development Across Eras

Mohammed Abdul Jalil¹

Jr. Deputy Registrar, World University of Bangladesh, Dhaka, Bangladesh

E-mail: info.ajmasud@gmail.com

Abstract

The paper subjected this philosopher, Karl Marx, to a critical review of the impact of his teachings on social change and development based on the issues of historical materialism and dialectical materialism. The examination of the most fundamental Marxist concepts, such as classes, the struggle of classes, surplus value, and proletariat against capitalist dichotomy, as well as the role of the proletariat in the adoption of socio-economic change in the future, concludes this study of evaluating the applicability of the Marxist idea in the past and the contemporary economic and societal developments. The manuscript uses a qualitative method of literature review to synthesize the old and new views, thus emphasizing the generality of Marxism in varied historical backgrounds and at various phases of societal development. This is evident in the findings that Marxist analysis has remained relevant in the analysis of inequality, exploitation of labor, and structural contradictions in the developing and developed world.

Keywords: *Karl Marx, historical materialism, dialectical materialism, class struggle, surplus value, proletariat, capitalism, social evolution, exploitation, feminist Marxism, ecological Marxism*

1. Introduction

Karl Marx (1818-1883) is still one of the most diverse thinkers in social, political, and economic history. His radical criticism of capitalism and projection of a society without classes still has a critical response and drives activism (Atikur et al., 2023). The influence of Marx is not limited to the disciplinary, not to mention national contexts; Marx left a particularly significant imprint on sociology, political science, economics, history, and even on

literary criticism (Ali et al., 2023). This paper attempts to cast a critical view over the ability of the Marxist theory to stay relevant in various eras and situations, especially when it comes to analyzing social change and development (Bin Latif et al., 2024).

This study aims to discuss the theoretical and practical relevance of the thought of Marx as a critical theory of understanding capitalistic societies and the contradictions entrenched in them. The problem underlying the research is the perception of Marxist principles that were initially derived under the industrial revolution and how they can be applied to the current globalized neo liberalistic, automated, and ecologically challenged economies (Latif et al., 2024). Such a question is crucial in our world, where income inequality, precarious employment and environmental destruction continue to occur even after the sufficient promises of market capitalism and liberal democracy (Md Sayed et al., 2023).

This paper seeks to deconstruct some of the major elements in the theory by Marx, namely historical materialism, dialectical materialism, the notion of the class, surplus value, as well as exploitation (Latif et al., 2014). It also looks at the contemporary variations of Marxism like feminist Marxism, postcolonial Marxism and ecological Marxism. These developments do not only prove how current Marxist critique remains relevant, but also how dynamic it is when it is called to face contemporary crises (Latif et al., 2021).

This study cuts across the classical works of Marxism, the main interpretive authors, and case studies within the Global South. The value here is the fact that Marxist analysis can be used both as a diagnostic and as a transformative resource when analyzing the flow of power, class, and resistance in contemporary societies (Islam et al., 2025; Sehrish Taj, 2023).

2. Literature Review

The general theoretical input of Marx is based on two concepts, which are interconnected: historical as well as dialectical materialism. The view that the material conditions of the society are the principal determinants of the social structure and history is what is referred to as historical materialism or a view of the society in terms of modes and relations of production (Choudhury et al., 2019). Dialectical materialism takes this further and discusses the importance of contradiction as a force of historical change. All history, according to Marx and

Engels (1848) is the history of the class struggle, and the development happens as a result of the resolution of the contradiction between conflicting social forces (Latif et al., 2024).

The Marxian perception of class and the ill feeling between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie is the most common concern in the criticisms regarding capitalist systems. The bourgeois owns the means of production and profits using the work of the proletariat, whose exploitation takes the form of surplus value. The mechanism of capitalist profit is based on the surplus value, or the amount of the value produced within labor that is not paid back through the wages (Marx, 1867).

The other critical part of the Marxist theory is the theory of social evolution, which argues five phases that are Primitive Communism, Slavery, Feudalism, Capitalism, and Communism. Different stages involve certain class relations and modes of production. As opposed to linear transitions, these transitions are dialectic with internal contradictions and class struggle that influence them (Wood, 1995).

These traditional grounds have been elaborated by the representatives of modern Marxism. The Marxist ideas have been applied to the field of urban development and spatial inequalities by David Harvey (2010) and the question of the complexity of classes in contemporary economies by Erik Olin Wright (2015). Terry Eagleton (2011) and Ellen Meiksins Wood (1995) offer a critical reading of the works of Marx and underline their relevance to the contemporary world in the context of neoliberal globalization.

Analysis of gendered labor and social reproduction came into Marxist theory through feminist Marxists such as Silvia Federici and Angela Davis. The work of Federici brings into action the role of unpaid domestic work in sustaining capitalist economies, and in her work Davis (1981) criticized the racial and sexual aspects of capitalist exploitation.

The realities of the Global South and colonialism have been incorporated into Marxist thought by postcolonial Marxists like Frantz Fanon and Samir Amin. Indeed, it is Fanon who formulated the psychological and cultural aspects of colonial domination and claimed that only revolutionary praxis, based on the experiences of the colonized, can be used (Fanon, 1961; (Sahrish Taj & Sandhu, 2022)).

Ecological Marxism is developed by John Bellamy Foster (2000), its metabolic rift examines the space between human society and nature generated by capital production. This

The method highlights the role of the Marxist theory in criticizing environmental destruction and the introduction of sustainable solutions based on common property and environmental harmony.

Antonio Gramsci and Louis Althusser are representatives of cultural Marxism, which is preoccupied with ideological apparatuses that uphold capitalist hegemony. The aspect of cultural hegemony by Gramsci illustrates that the dominating classes do not always uphold their hegemony through economic power but through consent and ideology: this makes the domination of classes natural and unavoidable (Gramsci, 1971).

These are the various streams of thought that existed within Marxism, which clearly show the versatility and analytical capability of the theory. As opposed to a codified set of beliefs, Marxism can be thought of as a living heritage of criticism and struggle that is sensitive to the present challenge and that can generate ways of renewing its central values in new situations (Raj et al., 2019).

3. Methodology

The research methodology of the study is based on qualitative research using the extensive literature review of the classic works of Marxism and modern approaches. This is expected to synthesize the diverse points of view of scholars to determine whether Karl Marx philosophy remains relevant today in trying to understand modern social change and development (Latif et al., 2023).

Three large criteria were used in the selection of sources: historical importance, theoretical input, and applicability to the modern times. The works by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, like The Communist Manifesto (1848), and Capital (1867) are primary texts through which the analysis is based. Venues such as peer-reviewed academic journals, monographs by Marxist theorists, contemporary case studies that attempt to employ Marxist analysis to contemporary problems like labor exploitation, environmental degradation, and ideological hegemony are complemented by these.

The method of analysis used in this study derives from dialectical and historical materialism. This model focuses on the interconnection between economic base and superstructure and the functions of internal contradiction, creating a social change. Using this lens, the study aims to reveal how the recent phenomena, including neoliberal globalization, digital labor, and ecological crises, could be described in terms of the same structural

contradictions that Marx identified in 19th century capitalism (Latif et al., 2015).

Thematic analysis is used to identify recurring motifs in Marxist scholarship, including class struggle, surplus value, proletariat vs. capitalist antagonism, and the transition between stages of social evolution. Particular attention is given to emergent themes such as feminist and ecological Marxism, which offer critical expansions to the traditional class-based analysis (Karim et al., 2019).

The interdisciplinary aspect of the study falls in political economy, sociology, philosophy and development studies. As much as it concentrates on the Marxist theory, it also incorporates criticisms and reconsiderations to make the research almost equilibrated and dynamic. To lay theoretical observations in confronting practical battles, the case studies are reviewed in Latin America, South Asia, and Africa, creating evidence that the Marxist view can be a helpful perspective to critique in varied geopolitical zones (Akhter et al., 2023).

The weaknesses of this paper are that it is secondary research and the findings may not be totally objective as there can be certain bias in interpretation. Also, as the use of quantitative data is excluded, the study goes more towards the theoretical depth rather than the generalizability. However, the qualitative approach gives one the possibility of examining the Marxist theory as a dynamic, rich outlook whose context is contingent (Ahmed & Latif, 2018).

This paper will seek to do this by placing the Marxist thinking in a theoretical and critical framework of thought and hence give a valuable contribution to the ongoing discourse on issues of inequality, resistance, and social transformation.

4. Results:

This thematic synthesis highlights how Marxist ideas still provide a strong framework for understanding modern forms of caste and social contradictions. The case studies demonstrate how key theories introduced by Marx—such as class struggle, surplus value, historical materialism, and dialectical change—remain relevant when analyzing current societal changes. Furthermore, with newer developments in Marxist thought, like ecological and feminist Marxism, elements of Marxism can be applied to issues such as climate change and sex work. (Latif, Islam et al., 2016).

Table 4.1 Key Insights

Theme	Case Study Focus	Key Insights
Class and Class Struggle	Cuba, India, China	Persistent and evolving class formations, labor resistance, and hybrid structures
Surplus Value & Exploitation	Global Gig Economy, China, India	Digital labor exploitation, surplus value extraction, and informal economies
Dialectical Materialism	China's reforms, Cuba's dual economy	Synthesis of capitalist tools within socialist frameworks
Historical Materialism	India's agrarian protests, Global automation	Material conditions driving social movements and economic shifts
Social Evolution Stages	Cuba, China, Postcolonial states	Non-linear transitions and hybrid models
Ecological Marxism	Global South environmental crises	Metabolic rift between capital and nature, sustainability imperatives
Cultural Hegemony	India, China	Ideological control via media, education, and nationalism

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The review in this manuscript betrays the timeless importance of Karl Marx's thought in criticizing and explaining the working of contemporary capitalistic communities. Since Marxist ideas were born in the proletariat of the 19th-century industrial world, to the gig economy today, and the feudal economy before this post-industrial information capitalism, it is fitting to say that Marxist thought resonates as the structures of exploitation, inequality, and resistance reveal themselves. Class, surplus value, historical materialism, and dialectical transformation can and still continue to serve as the tools to criticize and know more about the existing socio-economic order (Latif et al., 2014).

The effectiveness of Marxist theory in accommodating the new trends in history is given in this study by the introduction of various strands like feminist Marxism, postcolonial theory and ecological criticisms. The global case studies display the manner in which the struggle among classes varies in various regions, but all the time returning to structural contradictions peculiar to capitalism. Moreover, due to the changed employment environment of automation, digitization, and environmental crises, Marxist analysis can play a highly important role in providing an understanding of the new formats of surplus output and ideological manipulation

(Sizan et al., 2022).

In the end, the paper claims that Marxism is not a dead past phenomenon but an existing theoretical tradition that can deal with contemporary and future problems. Its demand of a classless, just, and sustainable ecological society is as pertinent and timely today as in the days of Marx. With more challenges in facing severe inequalities and ecological boundaries, the applicability of the vision of Marx on social change brings itself closer.

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