



Legacies crucial for the commons

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Legacies crucial for the commons-Why Gandhi and Marx are more relevant now than ever before

- The 150th birth anniversary year of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi and the 200th birth anniversary of Karl Marx went by this year.
- Such anniversaries can become occasions of tokenism — for instance, the Indian government has set up a committee with more than 100 members to coordinate celebrations of Gandhi's anniversary, crammed with political bigwigs from various parties, a few academics and Gandhian workers.
- And so too perhaps for Marx, at least where the celebrations are being led by so-called revolutionary governments in those parts of the world where Leftist parties still hold power.
- This does not mean that these two figures are of no relevance now.
- On the contrary, they are even more so than before.
- Their legacy is crucial for the majority of the world's population, marginalised by capitalism, statism, patriarchy and other structures of oppression.
- As it is for the rest of nature, so badly abused by humanity.
- And it is a legacy that is still alive and thriving, not so much in the orthodox Gandhian and Marxist organisations and in academic circles where the tussle between the two 'ideologies' is more dominant than the urge to make them relevant to the struggles of the marginalised, as in these struggles themselves.

Resistance and construction

- And so we must turn for hope to the many movements of sangharsh (resistance) and nirman (construction) throughout the world.
- These movements realise that the injustices they are facing, and the choices they must make, are not bound by the divides that ideologues play games with.
- What is found of significance in many resistance and alternative

movements is the exploration of autonomy, self-reliance, people's governance of politics and the economy, freedom with responsibility for the freedom of others, and respect for the rest of nature.

- While these movements do often call for policy interventions from a more accountable state, there is also an underlying antipathy to the centralised state, as there is in both Gandhian swaraj and in Marxist communism and in many versions of anarchy.

Bridging gaps

- And while Gandhi was weak on challenging capital, and Marx on stressing the fundamental spiritual or ethical connections amongst humans, these movements often tend to bridge these gaps.
- Insofar as many of them integrate the need to re-establish ecological resilience and wisdom, some even arguing for extending equal respect to other species, they also encompass Marx's vision of a society that bridges humanity's 'metabolic rift' with nature, and Gandhi's repeated emphasis on living lightly on earth.
- With this they also challenge the very fundamentals of 'development', especially its mad fixation on economic growth, reliance on ever-increasing production and consumption, and its utter disregard for inequality.
- This is not to suggest that Gandhi and Marx can be happily married; there are points of tension (for instance, on the issue of non-violence as a principle).
- There are points of ambiguity in recognising that indigenous peoples have already lived many elements of their dreams.
- We would do well to honour their legacy by identifying common ground and building on the struggles and creativity of 'ordinary' people in communities across the world.