

## HISTORICAL NOTE

### MARX AND DARWIN CONNECTION IN LONDON

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Charles Robert Darwin (1809-1882 AD) started living in Central London initially in 1837 and then moved to his own newly-bought house – “Down House”- at Downe, Kent, in 1842, and lived there till his death on April 10, 1882. Karl Heinrich Marx (1818-1883 AD) arrived in London in late 1849 as a political refugee and spent the rest of his life (more than half) in London till his death on March 14, 1883. Marx was nine years younger than Darwin and died one year after his death. They were contemporaries. There is a blue plaque to commemorate Marx’s first long-term residence in Dean Street, Soho, Central London.

It seems Marx and Darwin never met personally. Correspondence seems to be the only formal contact between them. Intellectually, they were much closer.

The first volume of Marx’s celebrated work- *Das Kapital* was personally sent to Darwin by Karl Marx himself with a dedication inside, which reads, from “his sincere admirer Karl Marx, 16, June, 1873”. This copy of *Das Kapital* (English translation, 1867) has been kept in the Darwin Museum at Down House, Downe, Kent, England, UK.

Marx consulted Darwin’s books (especially on the *Origin of Species*) while drafting *Das Kapital*. He added an appreciative footnote to the second German edition (the one he sent to Darwin). He spoke of natural selection as “the history of natural technology, that is, the formation of the organs of plants and animals, which serve as the instruments of production for sustaining their life”<sup>1</sup>.

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Darwin wrote to Marx on October 1, 1873, to thank him for his letter. He concluded his letter:

“.....

I heartily wish I was more worthy to receive it, by understanding more of the deep and important subject of political economy. Though our studies have been so different, I believe that we both earnestly desire the extension of knowledge and that in the long run is sure to add to the happiness of mankind. I remain, Yours faithfully, Charles Darwin.”

Marx and Darwin were the two most remarkable thinkers of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Frederick Engels (1820-1895 AD), Marx’s lifelong intellectual companion who came from Germany to live in England in 1842, to look after his family’s textile business in Manchester, England, is reported to have read Darwin’s *Origin of Species* within two weeks of its publication in 1859 and commented: “Excellent”. Marx read it a little later. Engels rightly said in his speech at the graveside of Karl Marx on March 14, 1883:

“.....

Just as Darwin discovered the law of development of organic nature, so Marx discovered the law of development of human history.”<sup>2</sup>

### **Legacy of Darwin and Marx**

There are more similarities than differences in the works of naturalist, Charles Darwin, and social scientist, Karl Marx. Common themes echo and re-echo in the pages of their works. What actually brought Darwin and Marx intellectually nearer(?) ‘Laws of Nature’. Both tried to explore the essence of those laws from their own perspectives — Darwin in biology and Marx in sociological economics.

Charles Robert Darwin did not invent the idea of biological evolution, anymore than Abraham Lincoln (1809-1865 AD), the 16<sup>th</sup> President of the United States of America, who happens to share his birthday on February 12, 1809, invented the idea of freedom. What Darwin provided in his *Origin of Species* (1859) was a powerful theory for how biological evolution could occur through natural forces, thereby liberating scientists to explore the glorious complexity of life, rather than merely accept it as an impenetrable mystery- “the mystery of all mysteries.”

That light, which began as a glimmer in the mind of a young naturalist on a voyage (1831-1836 AD) around the world aboard H.M.S. Beagle, today casts a beam so bright that we can read the very text of our life by it.

On the other hand, in the sociological evolution of the society Marx found scientific evidence of support of his socio-economic philosophy in Darwin's works. Laws of Nature are the same for both biological and socio-economic evolution of the society. In *Das Capital*. Vol. I, Marx explored the special quality of labour power and exposed the secret of capitalist exploitation. In order to humanize the relation between neighbours in the society, his eternal dictum- "from each according to his ability, to each according his needs" (Critique of the Gotha Programme, 1875) is the most egalitarian one. Marxism is a dynamic theory and according to the French existentialist, Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980), Nobel Laureate in Literature, 1964 (but declined)-is a living philosophy. Marxism represents a union of theory and practice-praxis — not simply a discourse or a body of academic knowledge, but a living project. This living project still continues to flourish around the world, even today.

Both Darwin and Marx would be overjoyed to see how much they did not know at their time, and how much we have yet to learn and achieve. As with Darwin's biological evolution, Marx's socio-economic evolution has still a long way to go to reach its ultimate goal.

### References

1. Browne Janet (2002): Charles Darwin –the Power of Place. Pimlico (London), Ch.10 (Darwin in the Drawing Room), p. 403.
2. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels Selected Works Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1968, p.429.

### Suggested Further Reading

1. Sisir K. Majumdar, The Genius of Darwin: Two Hundred Years. *Indian Journal of History of Science*, 44.1 (2009) 117-125.
2. Sisir K. Majumdar, History and Social Science: The Genius of Darwin: Two Hundred Years. *Bulletin of the Calcutta School of Tropical Medicine*, 1 (2009) 20-23.
3. Sisir K. Majumdar, Evolution v. s. Creation: Darwin-Two Hundred Years. *Frontier*, Kolkata, 41 (2009) 8-12(May 31-June 6).
4. Sisir K. Majumdar, The Genius of Darwin: Two Hundred Years. *Bulletin of the Platinum Jubilee Re-Union (175<sup>th</sup> Year) (2009) The Medical College, Bengal (Est/ 1835).*