

Marxism, Analytical Philosophy and Intellectual Sovereignty: A Philosophical Perspective from the Global South

Saman Pushpakumara

University of Peradeniya, Peradeniya, Sri Lanka
saman.pushpakumara534@gmail.com



Abstract. An interview with Dr. Saman Pushpakumara, University of Sri Lanka, discusses the relevance and significance of Marxist philosophy in global and national contexts. The discussion is structured around three key themes. First, Dr. Saman Pushpakumara highlights the historical trajectory of the adaptation of Marxist ideas in Sri Lanka, tracing the path from the anti-colonial struggle to the contemporary political life of the state. Second, the significant political influence of Marxism is confirmed by the recent electoral success of a Marxist-oriented party. Thirdly, this influence illustrates the synthesis of universalist narratives of Marxism and their national interpretations. S. Pushpakumara continues the

idea of the transformation of the universal, defending the idea of *conditional absolutes* balancing between universal principles and contextual interpretation. In this logic, he considers the idea of class justice, which exists today not only as a moral category, but also an instrument for promoting group interests, a form of moral entrepreneurship. In his discussion of higher education, S. Pushpakumara attributes the dominant position of Western analytical philosophy in higher education to the colonial past of South Asian countries. He notes that the dominance of analytical philosophy threatens to marginalize alternative philosophical traditions. This universalist paradigm of globalized science is opposed to sovereign science, which defends the autonomy of regional intellectual thought. Russia is cited as an example of effective resistance to Western dominance. The interview concludes with an argument for developing and strengthening dialogue between Russia and the countries of the *Global South*. Such dialogue is presented as an alternative project of Eurasian philosophy, promoting the decentralization of knowledge production, in which there will be room for a broader discussion of existential, ethical, and cultural issues.

Keywords: Marxism, Sri Lanka, moral absolutes, sovereign science, analytical philosophy, global South

For citation: Pushpakumara, S. (2025) 'Marxism, Analytical Philosophy and Intellectual Sovereignty: A Philosophical Perspective from the Global South', *Concept: Philosophy, Religion, Culture*, 9(3), pp. 178–185. (In Russian). <https://doi.org/10.24833/2541-8831-2025-3-35-178-185>

Интервью

Марксизм, аналитическая философия и интеллектуальный суверенитет: философская перспектива Глобального Юга

Саман Пушпакумара

Университет Перадени, Перадения, Шри-Ланка
saman.pushpakumara534@gmail.com

Аннотация. В интервью с доктором наук Саманом Пушпакумара из университета Шри-Ланки обсуждается актуальность и значимость марксистской философии в глобальном и национальном контекстах. Обсуждение выстраивается вокруг трёх ключевых тем. Во-первых, доктор Саман Пушпакумара высвечивает историческую траекторию адаптации марксистских идей на Шри-Ланке, прослеживая путь от антиколониальной борьбы до современной политической жизни государства. Значительное политическое влияние марксизма подтверждается недавним электоральным успехом партии марксистской ориентации, который наглядно иллюстрирует синтез универсалистских нарративов марксизма и их национальных интерпретаций. С. Пушпакумара продолжает мысль о трансформации универсального, отстаивая идею «условных абсолютов», балансирующих между универсальными принципами и их конкретной (и потому всегда контекстуальной) интерпретацией. В этой логике он рассматривает идею классовой справедливости, которая существует сегодня не только как моральная категория, но и инструмент продвижения групповых интересов и даже форма морального предпринимательства. Говоря о системе высшего образования, С. Пушпакумара объясняет доминирующее положение западной аналитической философии в высшей школе колониальным прошлым стран Южной Азии. Он отмечает, что доминирование аналитической философии грозит маргинализировать альтернативные философские традиции. Эта универсалистская парадигма глобализованной науки противопоставляется суверенной науке, отстаивающей автономию региональной интеллектуальной мысли. В качестве примера эффективного сопротивления западному доминированию называется Россия. Интервью завершается аргументом в пользу развития и укрепления диалога между Россией и странами Глобального Юга. Такой диалог представляется альтернативным проектом «евразийской философии», способствующим децентрализации процесса производства знаний, в котором найдется место для более широкого обсуждения экзистенциальных, этических и культурных вопросов.

Ключевые слова: марксизм, Шри-Ланка, моральные абсолюты, суверенная наука, аналитическая философия, Глобальный Юг

Для цитирования: Pushpakumara S. Marxism, Analytical Philosophy and Intellectual Sovereignty: A Philosophical Perspective from the Global South // Концепт: философия, религия, культура. — 2025. — Т. 9, № 3. — С. 178–185. <https://doi.org/10.24833/2541-8831-2025-3-35-178-185>

Doctor Saman Pushpakumara, we are delighted to interview you and let us start with a traditional question. We met at a conference. Will you tell us how you learnt about it?

Attending the XI International Scientific Conference, *Creativity as a National Element: The Problem of Good and Evil* in 2025 in St. Petersburg marked my second visit to Russia. My first visit was on February 16–17, 2024, when

I participated in the Eurasian Congress of Philosophy in Moscow, where I presented a paper titled *Hegel and Asia*. The intellectual connections I established during that congress paved the way for my participation in the XI International Scientific Conference in St. Petersburg. This conference's dedication to the anniversaries of Russian and German philosophers, poets, revolutionary leaders, historians, and literary theorists like Hegel, Schelling, Venevionov, Lossky, Lenin, Spengler and Bakhtin motivated me to attend this conference. Some of them are my favourite philosophers and revolutionary leaders. I was informed about this conference by Prof. Olga Masloboeva, who had likewise taken part in the Moscow conference.

Your report at the conference showed your interest not only in the topic of creativity, but also enthusiasm about the spirit of Marxist social doctrine. How popular is Marxism in Sri Lanka today? What aspects of this teaching are of interest to you personally?

Marxism was introduced to Sri Lanka (then Ceylon) in the early 20th century, largely influenced by British colonialism, labor movements, and intellectual circles. Early Sri Lankan Marxists drew inspiration from European socialist thought and the Russian Revolution of 1917, which demonstrated the potential for workers' and peasants' uprisings. Marxist ideas initially spread through trade unions, political journals, and study circles among both the educated elite and workers.

The Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP), founded in 1935, was the first Marxist party in Sri Lanka. Combining Trotskyist ideology with anti-colonial nationalism, it played a crucial role in labor mobilization and the struggle for independence. The Communist Party of Ceylon (CPC) emerged soon after, following the Soviet model and advocating Marxism-Leninism. Student organizations and intellectual circles in universities also became important centers for Marxist thought.

After independence in 1948, Marxist parties actively participated in parliamentary politics and social movements, influencing policies on labor rights, social justice, and nationalization. Marxism in Sri Lanka continues today through parties such as the People's Lib-

eration Front (Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna) and the Frontline Socialist Party, combining Marxist ideology with anti-imperialist and populist agendas. Its popularity often rises during times of political discontent, as seen during the 2022 economic crisis and the subsequent rise of leftist movements.

In September 2024, Anura Kumara Disanayake, leader of the Marxist-leaning JVP, was elected President of Sri Lanka. His party, the National People's Power (NPP), later secured a two-thirds majority in the November parliamentary elections, winning 159 of 225 seats—a significant shift in the nation's political landscape. During my university student years, I was also an activist in a Marxist political party and later contributed articles to pro-Marxist journals, engaging directly with the country's Marxist intellectual and political tradition. Currently, I am teaching Marxist philosophy to undergraduate students at my university.

This year the theme of the conference *Creativity as a National Element* was the question of good and evil. Do you think it is possible to think about some kind of moral absolutes in the modern world? Can we speak about class justice as a social and a moral category? Or is it some moral entrepreneurship when some groups define good and bad, push new moral standards depending on what benefits them?

It is possible to think about moral absolutes in the modern world, but this requires careful clarification of what *absolute* means in a contemporary, pluralistic context. Moral absolutes are principles or rules that are universally valid, independent of culture, time, or circumstance. However, global diversity, cultural relativism, and ethical pluralism raise questions about whether a single moral standard can apply everywhere.

Immanuel Kant argued that moral laws could be absolute through reason. His categorical imperative, *Act only according to that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law*, provides a framework for understanding universal moral duties. Modern frameworks, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, also imply a set of moral absolutes, including the rights to life, freedom, and human dignity, even if their implementation varies across contexts.

There are, however, significant challenges to the idea of moral absoluteness. Cultural relativism emphasizes that morality is often shaped by culture, history, and social norms; what one society considers absolute, another may reject. Ethical pluralism suggests that multiple legitimate moral frameworks may exist rather than a single universal set of rules.

From my perspective, a viable approach is to adopt conditional absolutes: principles that are broadly universal but allow for interpretation according to context, balancing universality with practical and cultural realities.

Class justice is often analyzed within Marxist theory, where justice is understood in terms of relations of production, inequality, and exploitation. Philosophically, however, class justice can also be framed as a moral issue: it concerns what is right or wrong in the distribution of resources, opportunities, and recognition among different social groups. The concept of moral entrepreneurship refers to the process by which groups define moral standards in ways that serve their own interests. Applied to class *justice*, this suggests a risk: claims of justice may be strategically framed to advance the interests of certain classes rather than to reflect principles of universal fairness. In this sense, class justice can be instrumentalized as a form of moral legitimacy, blurring the line between genuine moral concern and strategic self-interest.

In connection with the previous question, let me clarify: does modern Marxism have a specific term for *national element*? And how does it coexist with the general vector of internationalism, characteristic of historical Marxism?

Marxism has historically emphasized internationalism, understood as the solidarity of the working class across borders. At the same time, Marxists have long recognized the importance of the national question. Classic thinkers such as Lenin, Luxemburg, and Gramsci grappled with the relationship between class struggle and national self-determination. In the 20th century, this question became especially prominent in the context of anti-colonial and anti-imperialist struggles. While Marxism has not introduced a new technical term for the *national element*, it continues to reinterpret the framework of the national question in

modern contexts.

Marx and Engels argued that capitalism creates a global working class, and that its ultimate emancipation must be international. Yet, class struggle always takes shape in national forms. Lenin highlighted this tension, insisting that internationalism does not negate national struggles but instead reframes them. Today, many Marxist movements articulate versions of national-popular Marxism, as seen in Latin America, particularly in Venezuela and Bolivia. In South Asia, including Sri Lanka, leftist politics often combine Marxist class struggle with national and anti-imperialist narratives. In this way, the *national element* persists as a strategic expression of class struggle under specific historical conditions, while the horizon of internationalism remains central to Marxist theory.

I dare to suggest that for you Marxism is not only a philosophy of creativity, but also a practical teaching. Do you think that in this case this philosophy acts as an ideology?

As a philosophy of creativity, Marxism functions as a method for understanding history, society, and human activity. It emphasizes human beings as active, world-transforming agents, highlighting praxis as the unity of thought and action. Here, creativity refers not merely to artistic production but to the broader human capacity to transform nature, society, and themselves. As a practical teaching, Marxism insists that philosophy should not remain at the level of contemplation; it becomes a guide for political action, which involves organizing workers, advancing class struggle, leading revolutions, and building socialism or communism.

Marx and Engels criticized *ideology* as a system of ideas that masks real material relations, which they termed *false consciousness*. In *The German Ideology*, they describe ideology as the dominant class's worldview, which presents its own interests as universal truths. In this sense, Marxism seeks not to be an *ideology* but rather a science of history, grounded in historical materialism. Yet, once Marxism takes the form of a practical movement, it inevitably generates an ideology of its own: a worldview that shapes collective consciousness, articulates values and goals, and legiti-

mates political struggle.

Marxist thinkers such as Gramsci explicitly acknowledged this. Gramsci argued that Marxism should be understood as a *philosophy of praxis* and that it must produce a counter-hegemonic ideology capable of challenging and displacing the dominant bourgeois ideology.

Does it seem to you that historical philosophical Marxism has walked into the same trap as German philosophy, which Marx spoke about in his early work *The German Ideology*: philosophy that had no roots in a viable and ontologically existing idea degenerates into doomed attempts at an ideological reconstruction of the world? And after all, in your opinion, what is the power of an idea?

In *The German Ideology*, Marx and Engels famously criticized German philosophy, particularly the Young Hegelians, for producing abstract systems divorced from concrete social and material conditions. Their central charge was that philosophy, when not rooted in practical, material, and historical life, degenerates into ideology: illusory reconstructions of the world that substitute ideas for actual social relations. When we turn to historical-philosophical Marxism, the tradition of Marxist theorizing after Marx, it is possible to see how certain strands fell into a similar trap. In seeking to systematize Marxism as a total worldview or *philosophy of history*, some interpretations risked drifting away from the concrete material analysis that Marx himself emphasized.

This tendency was especially evident when Marxism was treated less as a critical method of inquiry and praxis, and more as a closed philosophical system or an abstract *science of the laws of history*. Detached from its materialist grounding in praxis, Marxism could mirror the very tendencies Marx had criticized in German philosophy. It then risks becoming an ideological worldview, an abstract, quasi-metaphysical system, that no longer engages with living social contradictions but instead attempts to *reconstruct the world* based on predetermined philosophical categories.

This dilemma helps explain why later Marxist thinkers such as Gramsci, Lukács, and Althusser wrestled so intensely with the philosophical status of Marxism: whether it should be understood as a science, a philosophy, or a

praxis. Each, in different ways, was attempting to prevent Marxism from lapsing into the very *German philosophy trap* of abstraction without material grounding.

Our Journal is devoted to culture in its most general sense. Do you think the topic of culture is popular in the area of philosophy that you are involved in?

Every major philosophical tradition has engaged with the question of culture, though from different perspectives. Enlightenment thinkers such as Kant, Herder, and Hegel placed culture at the center of history and human development. Hegel, for instance, understood culture (*Bildung*) as the process through which Spirit realizes freedom. In nineteenth and twentieth-century philosophy, culture became the central focus. Nietzsche critiqued European culture as *decadent*, while Marxist philosophers examined it both as a product of material conditions and as a site of ideological struggle. Later, members of the Frankfurt School like Adorno, Horkheimer, and Marcuse made culture a key category for analyzing domination and resistance under capitalism. In more recent thought, figures such as Foucault, Derrida, and Gadamer, along with contemporary feminist and postcolonial philosophers, have treated culture as a crucial site where power, meaning, and identity are formulated.

Let's move from philosophy to its institutional forms. How is the education at Peradeniya University organized? What language are the classes taught in? Which regions of Sri Lanka do the most students come from? Are there any students from abroad?

The University of Peradeniya organizes its academic programs through a structured system of faculties, departments, institutes, and affiliated centers. Each faculty is subdivided into departments responsible for specific disciplines—for example, Philosophy, Sociology, and Political Science in the Faculty of Arts; and Physics, Chemistry, and Mathematics in the Faculty of Science. Departments are the core academic units: they design and deliver lectures, tutorials, seminars, and research in their subject areas. For instance, the Department of Philosophy offers courses in both Western and Eastern philosophy, including Marxism, Bud-

dhist philosophy, and continental thought.

Undergraduate programs typically last between three and five years, depending on the faculty. Students take core courses within their chosen discipline and may also select optional courses from other departments. The Faculty of Arts, in particular, has a strong tradition of allowing students to combine subjects: for example, Philosophy, Political Science, and Sociology.

Peradeniya also hosts several postgraduate institutes that conduct Master's, MPhil, and PhD programs. Much of this research is linked to national development needs. Instruction is primarily in English, though Sinhala and Tamil are also used in some faculties, particularly in the Arts.

Most students come from the Western, Central, and Southern provinces, as these regions have more high-performing schools and a larger student population. However, Peradeniya is a truly national university: students from all nine provinces live and study together in hostels, which is a defining feature of its cultural and social life.

The university also admits foreign students, though their numbers remain relatively small compared with local enrolments. International students may apply for both undergraduate and postgraduate programs, with admission generally based on academic qualifications. Proficiency in English is often required since most courses are conducted in English. Some foreign students come under bilateral scholarship schemes: for example, from India, Bangladesh, Nepal, and other neighboring countries. The university provides residential facilities, including hostels, which help integrate international students into campus life.

Please tell us about your university. What faculties are there? Is philosophy taught everywhere? What philosophical trends are represented among your colleagues besides Marxism? Is there a division between philosophy and sociology? Is continental metaphysics widespread and appealing? (By the way, I think Marxism is part of continental metaphysics).

The University of Peradeniya is Sri Lanka's largest residential university, situated on a 700-hectare campus of verdant hills bordered by the Mahaweli River. It is renowned both

for its scenic setting and its long-standing academic tradition. The university is organized into faculties, departments, postgraduate institutes, and affiliated units. At present, it comprises eight faculties, approximately seventy-two academic departments, several postgraduate institutes, and serves nearly 11,000 undergraduate and postgraduate students.

The eight faculties are: Arts, Science, Medicine, Engineering, Dental Sciences, Veterinary Medicine and Animal Science, Agriculture, and Allied Health Sciences. The Faculty of Arts alone contains sixteen academic departments. Among them, the Department of Philosophy has existed since the university's inception in 1942. Today, philosophy is taught primarily within this department, though related themes also appear in the curricula of other departments such as Sociology, Political Science, English, and Buddhist Studies.

Within the Department of Philosophy, teaching and research are broadly divided between Western and Eastern philosophy. Some colleagues specialize in Indian philosophical traditions and Far Eastern thought, with Buddhist philosophy being a particularly prominent and distinctive area of focus. In the Western tradition, British analytic philosophy was long dominant, reflecting the training of the department's early professors in England. However, since 2010, with the introduction of continental philosophy courses (including my own contributions), the department has expanded its scope. A distinctive strength of the department today is its focus on the philosophy of Marxism, which is offered not only to philosophy majors but also as an elective to students from other disciplines. At present, I am responsible for teaching this subject.

Analytic philosophy is popular in many universities today. What is your personal attitude towards this?

Analytic philosophy continues to dominate most philosophy departments worldwide, particularly in the Anglo-American context, where it remains the prevailing tradition. Departments in these universities place strong emphasis on logic, philosophy of language, philosophy of mind, epistemology, and ethics, all pursued in an analytic style. This dominance is partly historical: the professionalization of philosophy in the twentieth century

was shaped by figures such as Frege, Russell, Wittgenstein, and the logical positivists. Many early departments in former British colonies, including those in Sri Lanka, India, and parts of Africa, were established on this analytic model.

By contrast, Marxist philosophy has exercised less institutional dominance but has had significant influence in continental Europe, Latin America, South Asia, and within critical theory traditions. In many Western universities, Marxism is approached primarily as a branch of political philosophy or social theory rather than as a comprehensive philosophical framework. Nevertheless, while analytic philosophy continues to set the tone in most mainstream departments, continental philosophy, critical theory, and Marxist thought have gained increasing influence, particularly in interdisciplinary fields.

As far as I can see, high academic standards in the humanities and social sciences all over the world today are connected with somewhat omnipresent and dominating analytic philosophy. At the same time, this way of philosophizing tends to ignore original philosophical traditions and reshapes national creativity in sciences according to its own standard. Thus, the discussion of ultimate questions shrinks to the debates on things-in-themselves, restricted by using strictly scientific methods and categories. However, this approach inevitably enforces universal cultural optics and any view that doesn't fit is labeled as a departure from genuine science. It seems to me that this is neither good nor bad in itself, but in the long term there may be a loss of the original cultural diversity that feeds philosophy, among other things. What do you think about this? Are there specialists at your university who work with the topic of scientific knowledge? Are they interested in research into the so-called *provincial science* that does not catch up with or diverges from the world centers of knowledge production? In the Russian segment of scientific knowledge today, there is a lot of talk about sovereign science. What do you think about this?

Analytic philosophy, with its emphasis on clarity, logic, precision, and argumenta-

tion, has become the dominant benchmark for what counts as *rigorous* in the humanities and social sciences. By presenting itself as a universal standard, it often marginalizes non-Western, indigenous, or alternative traditions of thought, such as Indian, Chinese, African, or Latin American philosophies. In many former British colonies, philosophy departments were modeled on the Oxford/Cambridge analytic framework, sidelining local intellectual traditions. At the University of Peradeniya in Sri Lanka, for instance, British analytic philosophy shaped the Philosophy Department for decades.

The consequence has been a narrowing of philosophy under a strictly *scientific* or positivist lens. Larger existential, metaphysical, and cultural questions, such as the meaning of life, freedom, morality, the Absolute, or the role of culture, are often set aside in favor of technical debates over issues like Kant's *things-in-themselves* or the existence of abstract categories. Philosophy risks becoming self-enclosed, detached from lived experience, history, and cultural diversity. Inquiry is judged primarily by the standards of the natural sciences: clarity, verification, logical form, and empirical testability.

As a result, philosophy loses vital dimensions of imagination, creativity, historical consciousness, and cultural specificity. Under this *universal cultural optic*, the Western scientific-rationalist worldview becomes the only legitimate framework, while other modes of thought, such as Buddhist emptiness, African relational ontology, or Marxist dialectics, are dismissed as unscientific or irrational. Apart from a few specialists, such as Sandra Harding, who examine *provincial science* practiced outside dominant global centers, most universities continue to approach knowledge within this narrow scientific framework.

In this context, Russia's current focus on *sovereign science* is noteworthy. It emphasizes that scientific development should be independent of Western or global centers of knowledge production, thereby reclaiming intellectual autonomy and challenging the dominance of a single universal standard.

What would you like to wish to the readers of our magazine?

I would like to share an important message with the readers of your magazine: the need to strengthen philosophical and intellectual exchanges between Russia and the Global South, centered on the idea of *Eurasian philosophy*. Eurasian philosophy highlights dialogue among Western, Eastern, and indigenous traditions, resisting the dominance of a single universalist framework such as analytic or strictly Western rationalist philosophy.

Russia, positioned as a bridge between Europe and Asia, has its own distinctive traditions like Russian idealism, religious philosophy, Eurasianism, Soviet Marxism, and post-Soviet thought. The Global South, meanwhile, is home to rich and diverse traditions like

Buddhist, Hindu, Islamic, African, and Latin American liberation philosophies that have long been marginalized in mainstream academic philosophy.

A sustained philosophical dialogue between Russia and the Global South could open space for alternatives to Western epistemic dominance and foster sovereign intellectual development. To support this exchange, new initiatives such as academic journals, edited volumes, and digital platforms should be dedicated to advancing a vibrant Eurasian-Global South dialogue.

Информация об авторе

Saman Pushpakumara — PhD in Philosophy, Senior Lecturer, Department of Philosophy. University of Peradeniya, Peradeniya, 20400 (Sri Lanka)

Информация об авторе

Саман Пушпакумара — PhD (философия), старший преподаватель кафедры философии, Университет Перадени, 20400, Перадения (Шри-Ланка)