

GS Foundation 2024: Modern India

Handout 36: Rise of Left

Nikhil Sheth

'I am a socialist and a republican, and am no believer in kings and princes, or in the order which produces the modern kings of industry, who have a greater power over the lives and fortunes of men than even the kings of old, and whose methods are as predatory as those of the old feudal aristocracy.'

- Pandit Nehru

During the later phase of 1920s and during 1930s, a powerful Left-wing movement arose in India and within Congress. Socialist ideas took root in Indian soil.

The early nationalists were aware of socialism, but their outlook was not consistent with socialist thoughts. The moderates believed in efficacy of concessions and reform while socialism was too radical to them. They deliberately avoided class issues. The extremists believed that swaraj would be the panacea to all the sufferings. Gandhiji believed in the idea of class-collaboration and trusteeship. He was convinced that exploitators would realize their mistakes sooner or later and the sufferings of working class would disappear. He was not in favour of complete departure from tradition and radical restricting India socio-economic life.

Causes for the rise of leftist ideas in National Movement

The emergence of socialism was response and reaction to socio-economic and political environment prevailing in India. The contemporary international developments were also responsible for emergence of socialism.

- **Emerging class and class consciousness**

- Increasing industrialisation leading to the creation of workers' class.
 - By the opening decades of 20th century, a number of modern Industries had emerged in India but the condition of working class in these factories was far from being satisfactory. The suffering of working class pushed them towards socialism.
- Growth of awakening among peasants was also responsible for emergence of socialism.
 - There was an emergence of Kisan Sabha movement against exactions by Zamindars. (e.g. UP Kisan Sabha, Awadh Kisan Sabha). This growth of awakening carried Indian peasantry and their leadership towards socialism.
- Successful Russian revolution of 1917 and formation of USSR popularized socialist ideas of Marx.

- **Economic dislocations**

- Post-WW 1 consequences: Price rise etc.
- Effect of the Great Depression of 1929-30 and unemployment

- During this period, when capitalist world was suffering immensely, the Russian socialist economy was growing with leap and bound. This convinced Pandit J.L Nehru and S.C Bose that socialism was best ideology for India as well.
- **Political condition**
 - The beginning of the phase of mass politics brought 'people' in the national movement. But there was a section of youth which was dissatisfied with Gandhian techniques.
 - Sudden withdrawal of NCM/CDM convinced many peasants and working class leaders as well as youth that Gandhian method of struggle was too weak to be effective and they developed faith in socialism.
 - Rise of new youth icons who developed leftist visions like S.C. Bose, J.L. Nehru, Bhagat Singh. Other leaders were Acharya Narendra Dev, J.P Narayan and Achyuta Patwardhan, Indulal Yajnik etc.
 - Rise of leftist organisations, newspapers, journals etc.
- **Role of foreigners**
 - H.L. Hutchinson, B.F. Bradley, P Spratt in Meerut Conspiracy Case

There was emergence of three major streams of Left ideology in India:

- Communist Party of India (1925)
- Congress Socialist Party (1934)
- Other party organisations: HSRA, Royists, Forward Bloc etc.

All this led to radicalization of the Congress. The objective of national movement was also redefined. The goal of political independence acquired a clearer and sharper social and economic content. Thus, there was a coming together of political and socio-economic stream.

Communist Party of India

The Communist Party was originally formed at **Tashkent** in 1920 at the initiative of **M.N. Roy**. Roy founded military and political schools in Tashkent with the help of Lenin to prepare revolutionaries. In 1920, as he formed the Communist Party of India, he contacted his revolutionary colleagues in India.

However, the government had banned all communist activity, which made the task of building a party in India very difficult.

Peshawar Conspiracy Case	1922-27	Russian-trained muhajir communists were put on trial.
Kanpur Bolshevik Conspiracy Case	1924-25	Communists were seeking "to deprive the King Emperor of his sovereignty of British India, by complete separation of India from Britain by a violent revolution."

The All-India Conference of Communist Party took place at **Kanpur**. Its founders included MN Roy, his wife Evelyn Trent, Abani Mukherjee, and MPT Acharya. SV Ghate was the first secretary, and the president was M. Singaravelu in 1925. This is the official beginning of the communist movement.

Communists formed the **Workers' and Peasants' Party** within Congress (1925-30) as a front organization. It made alliances with other left elements inside the Congress, including Jawaharlal Nehru. However, it was wound up by 1929-30.

Meerut Conspiracy Case	1929-33	Arrests of WPP, CPI and other labour leaders
------------------------	---------	--

Contribution:

- Working as a pressure group under the Congress.
- To make Indian nationalism more inclusive through organizing farmers and workers.
- To establish mass support in Punjab, Andhra Pradesh and Kerala.

Limitations:

- The communist party couldn't transform itself according to the Indian condition. Unlike the communist party of China, it didn't chalk-out its programs according to the Indian condition.
- Factors like economic division, social division, gender division and caste exploitation were clearly visible in India, but the communist party failed to take advantage of them.
- The model of the violent revolution was suitable for an autocratic government of Soviet Russia but not for India. Here the model of democratic socialism could have proved more suitable than the Communist model.

Role of Jawahar Lal Nehru and Subhash Chandra Bose

The youth leaders, like J.L Nehru and S.C Bose, were widely influenced by socialist ideas. Both of them imparted a socialist vision to the national movement and emerged as symbol of socialism in India after 1929.

Pandit Nehru:

- 1920-21: Developed an interest in economic questions, came in touch with the peasant movement in eastern UP
- 1927: Attended the international Congress against Colonial Oppression and imperialism, held at Brussels
- 1927: Visited the Soviet Union and was deeply impressed by the new socialist society. He remained in touch with communists and anti-colonial fighters from all over the world.
- 1928: Independence for India League (with Bose) to fight for complete independence and 'a socialist revision of the economic structure of society.'
- 1929: J.L. Nehru presided over the Lahore session of Congress. There, he declared himself to be a socialist and a democrat.
- 1936: He presided over the Lucknow session of Congress. There, he encouraged socialist consciousness among the youths. While addressing the session he declared that I think there is only solution to the problem of India and the world was socialism.
- 1937: He presided over the Faizpur session of Congress and introduced progressive programs for the peasants.



Subhas Chandra Bose:

- The Haripura session of Congress was presided over by S.C. Bose in 1938. A 'National Planning Committee' was set up during this session.

Congress Socialist Party

Some youth leaders in **Nasik jail** planned to form the Congress Socialist Party in 1933 (finally formed in 1934.) Prominent leaders were Acharya Narendra Dev, Jayaprakash Narayan, Ashok Mehta, Sampurnanand Singh, Meenu Masani etc.



This party decided to work within the Congress and to channelise the Congress policy and programme towards socialism. Thus, the socialist phase was concurrent to the Gandhian phase. Socialist represented Leftist within Congress. Throughout the course of National struggle, the socialist were under the leadership of Gandhiji but their ideas of National struggle were significantly different.

Contributions:

The emergence of socialism greatly radicalized anti British struggle, Congress adopted new aims as well as new methods.

- **It radicalized the objective of national movement** (from political freedom to economic and social freedom).
 - The socialists stood for Purna swaraj. It was under the pressure of socialist leaders, Congress adopted Purna swaraj resolution in 1929 at Lahore.
 - Socialist idea of Purna swaraj was not just political but social and economic as well they believed that political freedom would be meaning less in the absence of social and economic freedom.
 - The Congress linked itself to the programs of workers and peasants.
 - The socialists were in favour of extension of freedom movement into native states. The leaders like Pandit Nehru believed that native states cannot remain aloof to the development going on British India. They wanted national struggle would assume **true pan India character**.
 - The Congress adopted socialist programs during its Karachi session (socio-economic freedom) (1931), Lucknow session (1936), Faizpur session (Agrarian program) (1937) and Haripura session (National Planning Committee) (1938) etc.
 - In 1936 at its Faizpur session, Congress adopted an agrarian program which emphasized:
 - Land revenue should be reduced.
 - Feudal privileges should be abolished.
 - Tenant-cultivators should get guarantees of safety of their tenure.
 - Forced labour should be abolished.
 - In 1945, congress adopted a resolution in which it demanded abolition of zamindari system.
- **Social base**
 - The social base of National movement was greatly widened by emergence of socialism. The peasants and workers started participating in nationalist activities

in large no because the policies and programs of socialist were in consonance with their needs and aspirations.

- **Impact on Gandhi**

- **Difference with Gandhian method**

- The socialists were not happy with Gandhian philosophy of STS and wanted continuous mass struggle till time independence. Thus, socialists were in favour of sustained struggle.
 - Socialists were non-violent in nature, but their idea of non-violence was pragmatic. They did not want nonviolence to be a weakness of nationalist struggle. They believed that stray violent acts should not punish the entire movement.

- **The radical outlook of socialist leaders influenced Gandhiji as well. He also became more and more radical with the passage of time.**

- In the summer of 1942, Gandhiji was far more radical than the socialist leaders including Pandit J.L Nehru because at this time even Pandit Nehru was not in favour of landing a mass movement. It was Gandhian pressure that forced Congress to start the movement.
 - The emergence of socialism transformed anti British struggle into all-out war. QIM was never suspended or called off.

Limitations:

- Socialist and Communist parties couldn't establish their hegemony in the Indian national movement.
- The Congress Socialist Party remained vague in its objectives. Its primary goal was Indian independence whereas a socialist transformation remained to be a secondary one.
- It couldn't form a united front with CPI even during the time of crisis.