

Communism in India in Early Phase

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The Communist inherited the progressive, anti-imperialist and revolutionary traditions of the Indian people. Since its formation in 1920, by a small group of determined anti-imperialist fighters inspired by the October Socialist Revolution in Russia, the Party had set before itself the goal of fighting for complete independence and basic social transformation. The Party pledged to work for the establishment of a socialist society in India, free from class exploitation and social oppression. True to the cause of proletarian internationalism, the Party consistently supported the national liberation movements against the imperialist order and the struggles for democracy and socialism the world over, which were major features of the twentieth century. The Party adopted the principles of Marxism-Leninism as the guide to action for winning national independence, to attain the objective of socialism and to advance towards the ultimate goal of communism.

Key Words- Communist, Revolutionary, Russia, socialism, Marxism

Introduction

Communism, the political and economic doctrine that aims to replace private property and a profit-based economy with public ownership and communal control of at least the major means of production (e.g., mines, mills, and factories) and the natural resources of a society. Communism is thus a form of socialism—a higher and more advanced form, according to its advocates. Exactly how communism differs from socialism has long been a matter of debate, but the distinction rests largely on the communists' adherence to the revolutionary socialism¹

Causes responsible for communist movement in India

Impact of Russian revolution before the Russian revolution, socialism was only an idea, but the success of socialist revolution in Russia led the downtrodden people of the world to look towards the new Russian for inspiration for emancipation. The transformation of the greatest monarchical imperialism into the rule of worker deeply stirred the imagination of the oppressed people, Lenin who consistently upheld the principle of national self determination and supported the struggle of subject nation for nations for national independence ,combine the class struggle

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of workers and peasant and the national liberation movement in a subject country in to a dialectical whole ,arguing that the two kind of struggle were supplementary to each other insofar as both of them pitted against imperialism. in this context ,the tried to make the third international the co-ordinating centre of revolutionary struggle of genuine internationalist proletarian revolutionaries who, in the case of colonial countries ,launched class battle while simultaneously advancing the cause of national liberation this made the soviet an ally of national liberation movement, besides the working class movement, and enthused the nationalist forces in different colonies² .At this stage a few educated Indians ,inspired by the ideals of Russian revolution ,started grouping towards Marxism, their motive being a desire to promote the national struggle more effectively. simultaneously came the Hijrat movement which was to provide .along with other exile in Europe and Asia, a group of educated Indian who were indoctrinated i communist strategy and tactics in USSR and who were later sent back to organise worker in India .this group, acting under the initiate and economic actives of the third communist group in 1921-22,fist abroad at Taskand (USSR)and subsequently in India. the programmatic basis of these young communist group was provided by the colonial theses of the 2nd congress of the international (1920)A few communist that there were at this stage whole heartedly supported the Non Co-operation movement started under the inspiring leadership of Mahatma Gandhi but the young educated Indians who were thus drawn to the masses could not necessarily remain within the confines of the Gandhians solution either of political or of the social and economic grievances' of the masses. As in other matters, some of them turned to the west, and to the socialist and labour movement there³ The reorientation

of the revolutionaries as from political compulsion .Britain being regarded common enemy not only of Hindu revolutionaries and pan- Islamic Muslim but also of the Soviet union .therefore, the collaboration of these three agencies Russian communist leaders, Indian revolutionaries and Pan- Islamic Muslim became instrumental in spreading communist movement in india⁴

The communist movement in India was a product of the radical impetus coming out of the national liberation struggle. Though the Communist Party of India was first organized in Tashkent by 'migrate' Indian revolutionaries, the seeds of class politics and the ideology of scientific socialism sprouted in the soil of the subcontinent once the message of the October Revolution reached its shores.

From the outset, the colonial state unleashed repression on the communists. The conspiracy cases in Peshawar, Lahore and Kanpur were meant not to crush an organized movement, but to suppress the very possibility of communism taking root in India.

The communist movement, with its strong ideological moorings, influenced virtually all other streams. This contributed to the rise of radical trends even inside the Congress in the post-First World War period. The militant anti-imperialist stand of the communists attracted various revolutionary fighters. Among them were the Gadar fighters of Punjab, the colleagues of Bhagat Singh, the revolutionaries of Bengal, the militant working class fighters of Bombay and Madras presidencies and radical anti-imperialist Congressmen from different parts of the country.

Communists played the principal role in transforming the demand for independence from the vaguely-enunciated idea of Swaraj to a pro-people concept of freedom not just from the colonial regime, but also from social and economic exploitation and sectarian strife Despite its organi-

zational limitations, the CPI, guided by the Communist International (Comintern), forced attention on the class exploitation of workers and peasants.

However, the sectarian stand of the communists restricted the Party's growth. The Comintern's stand, particularly after the Sixth Congress in 1928, isolated the Party from the main current of the anti-colonial movement.

The Meerut conspiracy case trial provided a common platform for all the communist groups to sit together and to initiate the process of self-introspection. The Party took a new turn politically and organizationally, and this prepared the ground for the massive people's movements led by the communists in the coming years⁵. (<http://www.leftword.com/>)

CPI officially stated that it was formed in 25 December 1925 at the first Kanpur Party Conference. But as per the version of CPI(M), the Communist Party of India was founded in Tashkent, Turkestan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic on 17 October 1920, soon after the Second Congress of the Communist International. The founding members of the party were M.N. Roy, Evelyn Trent Roy (Roy's wife), Abani Mukherji, Rosa Fitingof (Abani's wife), Mohammad Ali (Ahmed Hasan), Mohammad Shafiq Siddiqui, Rafiq Ahmed of Bhopal and M.P.B.T. Acharya.^{6 7} CPI says that there were many communist groups formed by Indians with the help of foreigners in different parts of the world and Tashkent group was only one of them.

The CPI began efforts to build a party organisation inside India. Roy made contacts with Anushilan and Jugantar groups in Bengal. Small communist groups were formed in Bengal (led by Muzaffar Ahmed), Bombay (led by S.A. Dange), Madras (led by Singaravelu Chettiar), United Provinces (led by Shaikat Usmani) and Punjab (led by Ghulam Hussain).

However, only Usmani became a CPI party member.⁸

During the 1920s and beginning of 1930s the party was badly organised, and in practice there were several communist groups working with limited national coordination. The British colonial authorities had banned all communist activity, which made the task of building a united party very difficult. Between 1921 and 1924 there were three conspiracy trials against the communist movement; First Peshawar Conspiracy Case, Moscow Conspiracy Case and the Cawnpore Bolshevik Conspiracy Case. In the first three cases, Russian-trained muhajir communists were put on trial. However, the Cawnpore trial had more political impact. On 17 March 1924, M.N. Roy, S.A. Dange, Muzaffar Ahmed, Nalini Gupta, Shaikat Usmani, Singaravelu Chettiar, Ghulam Hussain and R.C. Sharma were charged, in Cawnpore (now spelt Kanpur) Bolshevik Conspiracy case. The specific charge was that they as communists were seeking "to deprive the King Emperor of his sovereignty of British India, by complete separation of India from imperialistic Britain by a violent revolution." Pages of newspapers daily splashed sensational communist plans and people for the first time learned, on such a large scale, about communism and its doctrines and the aims of the Communist International in India.⁹

"The downfall of Tsardom has ushered in the age of destruction of alien bureaucracy in India too", commented the Dainik Basumati, then a leading nationalist daily from Calcutta, just ten days after the event. "Our hour is approaching, India too shall be free. But sons of India must stand up for right and justice, as the Russian did" – declared the Home Rule League's pamphlet *Lesson From Russia*, published from Madras in late 1917. And so on and so forth, exclaimed the exuberant Indian nationalists, find-

ing a new inspiration, a new path in the great November revolution. It was from among them that the first batch of Indian Communists emerged. They came mainly from two backgrounds: (a) the Congress mainstream, e.g. S.A Dange of Bombay, Singaravelu M Chettiar of Madras etc.; and (b) national revolutionary organisations, e.g. MN Roy who had been a responsible cadre of Anushilan Samity and Yugantar, Virendranath Chattopadhyay and Bhupendranath Dutta (younger brother of Narendranath Dutta, better known as Swami Vivekananda), both leading members of the "Berlin Committee", Ghadarites operating from the USA, such as Ratan Singh and Santokh Singh and so on. Many who were serving the nationalist cause in other ways also played a pioneering role, such as Muzaffar Ahmed of Calcutta, then a co-editor of the literary-political magazine Navyug (the other editor was the revolutionary poet Kazi Nazrul Islam), and Ghulam Hussain, a professor from Peshawar who became a whole time TU organiser¹⁰.

Communism, like concepts of modern nation state, representative democracy and modernism in general, is no doubt of European origin. But in scope and orientation it was, and will always be, a universal ideology. In the second and third decades of the nineteenth century, when freedom fighters in India and other backward countries like China and Vietnam were looking beyond their national frontiers for the correct path, Marxism too was developing beyond its initial European paradigm to embrace the conditions of those colonial and semi-colonial countries. Marx had left behind some deep insights on the conditions and revolutionary potentials of these countries including India, but it was Lenin who played the key role in this evolution. In a series of articles and pamphlets like *Backward Europe and Advanced Asia* (1913) and *Imperialism, the High-*

est Stage of Capitalism (1917), he gradually developed a holistic vision of national liberation struggles as an integral part of international socialist revolution. The theory was enriched in the Second World Congress (1920) of the Comintern (Communist International or CI) with active involvement of emerging communists from backward countries, most notably MN Roy. Roy's cooperation and comradely controversy with Lenin produced the famous co-documents known as "Colonial Theses" and "Supplementary Theses", and these laid a foundation on which the communists in India developed, brick by brick, their theory of Indian revolution.¹¹

Development of communist organisation in India

The 'international press correspondence of the 16th November reported a speech by Zinoviev claiming that organised political (communist) parties had been formed in India and other countries. On the 11th November, speaking before the colonial Commission of the communist International, M.N. Roy had stated that the Central Committee of the Indian Communist party was established at Bombay with branches in Peshawar, Calcutta, Madras and Allahabad. Roy was speaking with an optimism, then somewhat lightly founded, but since amply justified by the growth and activities of the communist groups which now exist in almost every province of India.¹²

Bombay:- In Bombay one S.A Dange appeared to be the head of socialist group with communist or quasi-communist views. In 1922 he entered into correspondence with Roy probably in consequence of the latter's 'Vanguard' propaganda. In August he proceeded to publish the 'Socialist' a fortnightly, now a monthly organ of scarcely veiled communism. Singaravelu Chettiar and Dange attended the Gaya congress at which the former showed himself to be an extremely

active communist propagandist. he was appointed to the committee formed to carry out the congress.

Madras:-On the 11th April Madras Communist were reported to have adopted a 'Labour-Swaraj' Manifesto drawn up by Mani Lal and to have practically secured the approval of C.R Das for it. Muni Lal was said to be in touch with Mr. Saklatvala M.P. The manifesto is a comparatively mild document and this report may be an indication that the Madras Communist are, in Roy's terminology, working both 'legally' and 'illegally'

Punjab:-The Punjab or Lahore group of communists came into existence in consequences of a visit paid to Kabul in June 1922 by Gulam Husain of Peshawar a school master interested in communism. He and Shamsuddin Hassan started a newspaper 'Inqilaab' in October, and in November and December published translation of the articles which from Roy's proscribed 'India's problem and its solution. they also distributed communist pamphlets free of charge

Bengal:-Muzaffar Ahmaad was building up an organisation in Bengal with the help of members of the old revolutionary party and others. They had also started direct propaganda. This has developed considerably and three prosecutions of their special news paper 'Dhumketu' have resulted in an apology and in the conviction of two editors.

United provinces:-Muhammad Shakut Usmani of Bikaneri, a Moscow trained agent has been in India for more than a year. About the September he established a nucleus of students in Banaras and secured the co-operation of Sampranans a political ex-convict. In February Maulana Abdul Quadir Azad Subhani of Conpore, a well known agitator, published a Swaraj scheme which exhibited distinct traces of communist influences.

Central provinces:-in February S. Satyabhakta

editor of the *Pranvira* wrote to Dange (Bombay)

saying that he was already a subscriber to some communist newspaper but wanted more. he intended to start a special news paper for peasant and workers. In April he was regularly publishing communist literature and was about to produce a new vernacular paper the "Sharamajiva" (Labourer). he was recently written to Sylvia Pankhurst for literature likely to be of use in the formation of a communist group.¹³

These two processes – an advanced section of nationalists reaching out for Marxist theory and the latter developing into an inspiration and guide to the national liberation movement across the globe – were fused into a real movement only when the internal conditions got ripened. That happened in 1922-23, when in a matter of just one year all the four early communist groups of our country sprang up in the four major industrial cities of Calcutta, Bombay, Madras and Lahore. They emerged locally without any interconnections or any grand plan, and came together in the founding conference of the CPI held in the industrial city of Kanpur on 25-28 October 1925. Here it should be mentioned that a "CPI" in exile was formed in Russia in 1920-21, but having no roots in the masses of India. This event remained just a footnote in the annals of communist movement of our country.¹⁴

Now what was so special about the period starting with mid-1922, which saw a sudden spurt in organised communist activity? It was in 1922 that Gandhi called off the non-cooperation movement at its peak. This generated in all nationalist circles angry debates and a search for an alternative path, for a way out of the leadership crisis, and the quest led the most radical freedom fighters to the crimson path heralding a new dawn on earth, as we have noted above.

At a particular confluence of national and international factors was thus born, on the soil

of India, the communist wing of the national liberation movement. The great hallmark of this radical alternative to Gandhism was that from the very outset it strove to combine the twin tasks of national liberation from imperialist yoke and social liberation of the toiling masses from feudal and capitalist exploitation and oppression¹⁵.

Roy had announce the despatch of his pamphlet *What Do We Want* in November (it was published in Geneva, 1922) this pamphlet pointed out the goal can be attain in stages-first, 'political Independence' -Were determine to overthrow foreign rule"-and that the assistance of 'bourgeois' will be accepted for this first step. when foreign rule has been replaced by Indian 'bourgeois' rule, second stage will be entered upon-that of 'economic Emancipation' .demand will be made ,such as 'expropriation without compensation', which the Indian bourgeoisie,, 'will not readily accept' :the will be force to do so by mass action'-first demands, then 'mass demonstration', finally the development that is thus described:"mass action thus begun, will begin to develop in to organised agrarian strikes, in to food riots, the plunder of corn stock and assault upon large estates with the idea of confiscation...What burst out spontaneously at Gorakhpur. Rai Brailli, Chauri Chaura Malabar, Central India and what is going on in the Punjab must be develop by every possible means. Peasant revolt must spread like wild fire from end of the country to the other"...The result of this will be the overthrow of the Indian bourgeois Government and the attainment of the third and final stage , 'Social Emancipation' in the form of the 'Dictatorship of proletariat'. The programme is summarised in the concluding .It is our task to infuse consciousness in these toiling masses-to develop the spontaneous awaking and intensify their rebellious sprits by leading by their struggle

for the redress of their immediate grievances. our object should be to create discontent everywhere against the present system of exploitation, and to intensify it wherever it exists. Thus will the ideal of Swaraj may be brought within the understanding of the worker and peasant of India .Let us lead them forward under the slogans 'Down with Foreign Rule': Down with all exploitation': Land to peasant and Bread to the Worker'¹⁶

Conclusion

General trend of all communist activities is directed to perverting the Indian national independence movement so that it may be a means implementing the fundamental communist programme in accordance with the original programme of the communist party of idea (section of the communist international). the communist party in India has no more than a few hundred member .but its influence is to be measured not so much by its size as by its ability to guide other group and organisations; it is not so much the open activities of communists and the direct influence of the illegal communist party which call for serious attention as the insidious and sedition manner in which Communist are able penetrate other organizations ,and the indirect hold which communist teaching exert over the national movement¹⁷. they are trying to the economic ,social and culture progress of the Indian people demand the complete separation of India from imperialist Britain. To realise this separation is the goal of revolutionary nationalism .this goal, however can not be attain by negation nor by peaceful means.....freedom or slavery, there is no middle course... The Indian people must be free or be crushed to death by British imperialism: there is no middle course. and the people of India will never liberate themselves from the present slavery without a sanguinary struggle.¹⁸....

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