
UNIT 25 POLITICAL THOUGHT OF JP AND NARENDRA DEV

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25.0 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you should be able to:

- Discuss the basic philosophy of Jayaprakash Narayan and Acharya Narendra Dev
- Comment on Narendra Dev's Socialist programme
- Discuss the socialists' activities in the post-Independence period.

25.1 INTRODUCTION

The socialists have played a very crucial role in the history of national movement in our country. In the 1930s and 40s, they were the people who surfaced at leadership as well as the grass-roots level. The logic of Indian politics under the leadership of Gandhi unleashed these forces. Mass politics was initiated by Gandhi when he gave a call for the non-cooperation movement. Small groups turned active in rural and urban politics in mobilising social classes. They were of the opinion that bringing popular classes into nationalist politics would bring about a radical orientation. The leadership could not remain in the hands of the middle classes who were engaged in politicking. This form of mass and class politics brought some concrete results towards the end of the 1920s when the national leadership was forced to give a call for Purna Swaraj at the famous Lahore session in 1929. In the following lines you will be reading more about the socialist movement in India.

25.2 JAYA PRAKASH AND NARENDRA DEV

A section of the middle class leaders turned radical and started talking the language of classes. Nehru and Acharya Narendra Dev rose to be the two prominent leaders of the nationalist politics and got recognition as radical progressive leaders. This stream snowballed into force in 1930s. JP, who had a Marxist orientation while he was studying in the USA, came back and joined this rank. He came in close contact with Nehru and Narendra Dev and worked with them in the Congress organisation at Allahabad. JP's radical consciousness helped him to be a close confidant of Nehru.

Interestingly, JP had good relations with Gandhi because his wife Prabhvati was working in Gandhi's Ashram while he was abroad. JP's personality turned out to be interesting and complex and he acquires a unique position in the history of national movement.

25.2.1 Basic Philosophy of JP and Narendra Dev

Both JP and Narendra Dev wanted to work within the national congress and create political platform for socialists and other left wingers. They realised that the congress was a platform which needed a new orientation. There was no point in creating another political party. According to them the Congress party offered enough space for accommodating different ideological groups. It was also the class character of the Indian national movement that helped in maintaining such a complex ideological framework. Acharya Narendra Dev said "for a subject, colonial state political independence is the first step on the road to socialism. In a middle class revolutionary movement, for socialism to stay away from the nationalist movement would be fatal. It is also essential, for the success of the national movement, to base itself on the support of the people together with middle class. The economic well-being of the common people must, however, find a central place in the programme of the movement. The Congress Socialist Party must not divorce the national movement from the revolutionary aspirations of workers, peasants and the middle class." This was the famous speech given by Acharya Narendra Dev at the CSP's first conference at Patna in 1934. Both JP and Narendra Dev recognised the importance of the congress party as the leader of the anti-imperialist struggle. Secondly, they recognised the importance of class politics in the congress. Thirdly, the fact that the ideology of socialism was going to play a significant role in the national movement. Fourthly, the CSP was going to function as a pressure group in the congress. It would be neither a political party nor an alternative to the congress. JP made it all this very clear in his speech which is given below.

"Our work within the congress is governed by the policy of developing into a true anti-imperialist body. It is not our purpose, as sometimes it has been misunderstood to be, to convert the whole Congress into a fullfledged socialist party. All we seek to do is to change the content and policy of that organisation so that it comes truly to represent the masses, having the object of emancipating them both from the foreign power and the native system of exploitation." Furthermore, JP understood the class context of congress leadership and the conservative orientation of the leadership who were scared of the slogan of socialism. As JP stated, "The congress at present is dominated by upper class interests and its leaders are uncompromisingly opposed to admitting into its objectives any programmed aimed at the economic emancipation of the masses."

Check Your Progress 1

Note: i) Use the space given below your answer

ii) Check your answer with that given at the end.

1) What is the basic philosophy of JP and Narendra Dev?

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25.3 JP AND THE FORMATION OF THE CONGRESS SOCIALIST PARTY (CSP)

The Congress socialist party was formed in the Nasik Jail when JP, Lohia, Ashok

Mehta, Achyut Patwardhan and Minoo Masani decided to float an organisation. Left wing intellectuals because of their political conviction floated a forum. At the same time, mass politics in the civil disobedience movement got radicalised. Kisan Sabha and All India Trade Union Congress became two powerful class fronts. Combination of social forces with intellectuals created a powerful socialist movement in India. JP, as a Marxist intellectual wrote a book — 'Why Socialism', which helped the Left wing people all over India to clarify their doubts regarding the concept of socialism. This book was published on behalf of the congress socialist party. In this work, he developed four important theses:

- 1) The foundations of socialism
- 2) What the congress socialist stands for
- 3) Alternatives
- 4) Methods and techniques

At the age of only thirty two, he attained nation-wide stature through this revolutionary document.

25.3.1 JP and the application of Marxism in India

He demonstrated in his book that parting company with the comintern and the Indian communists was in no way a disenchantment with Marxism. As JP said, "Socialism has a single form and a single principle and that is Marxism." He tried to apply Marxism in Indian conditions. As he observed, "It is often said that India's conditions are peculiar. Of this it is meant that the basic principles of socialism have no validity in India, it would be difficult to imagine a greater fallacy. The laws by which wealth accumulates hold as true in India as elsewhere and the manner in which this accumulation can be stopped is the same here as elsewhere." He tried to explain the nature of Indian political economy in the Marxist way. The process of appropriation of social surplus is done by the owners of property in the same manner as in other capitalist countries. Unequal distribution of wealth is the root cause of class formation. Only the government can bring a radical restructuring in property relations. Indian socialists had a tremendous faith in the state structure. They did not want to destroy the state. By tapping state power, they would be able to bring radical changes in the society. JP in his book stated, "No party can build up socialism unless it has the machinery of the state in its hands, whether it has come to acquire it through the will of the electorate or by a coup d'etat is irrelevant. The coercive powers of a socialist state, if they exist at all are bound to be derived from popular support." Both JP and Narendra Dev had a similar opinion on the means of achieving socialism. Although Narendra Dev, from the beginning made it clear that democratic means were the only way of achieving socialism. There is no need of changing the state structure.

Check Your Progress 2

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answer.
ii) Check your answers with that given at the end.

- 1) How did JP interpret Marxism?

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25.4 SOCIALIST PROGRAMME AND NARENDRA DEV

The Socialist Party brought out a socialist programme which clearly indicates their viewpoint. First, for nationalisation big capital was necessary, but not abolition of private property. Secondly, their main emphasis was on the abolition of the Zamindaries in rural India. Land reforms should be implemented which would bring land to the tiller. In other words, they pleaded for the growth of the peasant proprietor and small industrial capital.

Narendra Dev was much more clear in the concept of democratic socialism. Democracy cannot survive without socialism and vice versa. Human Freedom is the basis of acquiring a socialistic pattern of society.

25.4.1 Socialism and Democracy

He said socialism for which we stand is democratic because: (i) It is opposed to hierarchical conception of society; (ii) It is opposed to the control of social power, political or economic by a single person or a privileged class in any form of despotism, dictatorship, feudalism or capitalism; (iii) It is opposed to imperialism and foreign domination in all forms and recognises the entire right of democratic freedom; (iv) It favours democratisation of social relations and behaviours; (v) It establishes the control of the working people over social, economic and political powers; (vi) It provides for self govt. in all social, political and economic affairs; (vii) It evolves order on the basis of liberty, i.e. free participation of all concerns; (viii) It provides for democratic decentralisation of power and responsibility; (ix) It assures social equality and justice by attaching priority to the needs as claims for full physical, mental as moral development of all; (x) It provides social happiness, of which individual happiness is a constituent; (xi) It regards the people as a source of authority and recognises their right to revolt in case a single person or a minority group or class attempts to seize or retain control over government, institutions or social power and (xii) it favours a democratic organisation for peace and international relations.

25.4.2 Opposition to the Third International

Narendra Dev stoutly opposed the policy of the Third International which split and weakened the anti-imperialist forces and sought to discredit Indian nationalism and its leaders. He said that nationalism was a potent social force and it was not meant to create a head-on-clash between nations or class struggles.

25.4.3 Socialism not a borrowed ideology

Socialism was not a borrowed ideology for Narendra Dev. He never abused Gandhi's constructive programme. He only felt that it must be supplemented by a class organisation for the abolition of vested property rights. He was prepared to accept Satyagraha as an instrument of class conflict in India. But he felt that it would be unrealistic to believe that feudal landlords who levied unlawful exactions upon their tenants and capitalists who cared more for profits than for protection could become dependable trustees of national resources.

The failure of the civil disobedience movement could not be explained in terms of the moral inadequacy of the Satyagrahis. The freedom movement was only an expression of the educated middle class. If it had to gain strength, it must evoke new response from the people working in fields and factories. Political freedom must be translated in terms of long delayed relief of economic and social leaderships.

25.4.4 Student of Eastern and Western Thought

Narendra Dev was a keen student of both, eastern and western thought. His study of ancient Indian culture was deep and wide. He could easily claim to be a scholar of Buddhist Philosophy. While he had a great regard for the cultural heritage of India, he was also conscious that "many old ideas had become effete and obsolete by the afflux of time would have to be discarded." In his opinion, "the task before us is the presentation of careful and scientific analysis of our culture, the preservation of its vital elements and their synthesis with modern thought." In his thinking, he has kept enough space for understanding Indian religious traditions: viz., what is the source and essence of Bharatiya Dharma? It will be better to quote him: "People of different races and culture migrated to India from time immemorial and made it their home. They were absorbed in the Indian community and the religion of land, its customs and ideas. Different communities following different ways of life have lived together in amity and religious feuds and conflicts are rare in Indian history. The Indian spirit had tried through the ages to seek unity in diversity. It was the catholic spirit of Hindu religion that made this miracle possible. Hinduism is not a credal religion. It does not forcibly impose its way of life upon others. It does not believe that the only true way of life is the one which is professed by it..... Truth manifests itself in many ways and therefore, no individual religion has the monopoly of truth. Hinduism is perhaps the only religion which believes that followers of other religions can also attain salvation.

It does not attach much importance to external forms and penetrates the inner spirit of man. It is also because of this comprehensive charity that Hinduism does not believe in proselytisation. Hindu Saints have, therefore, initiated their Muslim or Christian followers into spiritual sadhana without demanding of them renunciation of their faith and practice. "Indian religious traditions have integrated the best elements from all religions Hindu Saints, Muslim Fakirs and Sufis, who preached oneness of the Supreme being and *bhakti* (devotion) as a means of reaching him, did not recognise caste, community as external forms of worship. They were a continuation of the Sharman culture which disregarded external norms and emphasised good deeds."

25.4.5 Cultural Marxist

Narendra Dev was basically a cultural Marxist. He was deeply influenced by the Indian cultural traditions, specifically Buddha. He was much influenced by the gospel of love as Ahimsa preached by Buddha. He spent more than a decade working on his book on Buddhist philosophy—'Buddha Dharma Darshana' a treatise of considerable historical value. Interestingly, he had a profound understanding of Indian religious traditions. But at the same time, he was not in favour of religion and politics being combined. For him, religious traditions are a millennia old phenomena which comprise the collective consciousness of people. Marxists must bring certain democratic elements of religions to make the human being an ethical being.

25.4.6 Opposition to combining Religion and Politics

He was dead opposed to mixing up religion with politics, as mentioned already. Once he contested a by-election where the congress party put up a religious man to defeat him. Narendra Dev felt very sad and castigated the political opportunism of the Congress which according to him had mixed religion with politics. Political opportunism was opposed by him always. After independence, he left both the congress and the socialist parties. Once the socialist party split, he remained till death with the PSP (Praja Socialist Party).

Check Your Progress 3

- Note: i) Use the space given below for your answer.
ii) Check your answer with that given at the end of the unit.

- 1) Briefly discuss Acharya Narendra Dev's views on socialism.

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25.5 JP AND THE ACHARYA: SOME MORE DETAILS

Both JP and the Acharya wanted to give a nationalistic orientation to socialism. They did not agree that the socialist movement had anything to do with the international communist movement. They were basically against the Soviet State and Stalin's terror. They did not agree with Lenin's method of capturing state power; Narendra Dev in an article entitled 'Soviet Russia's Policy in Asia' observed that for a Bolshevik, the political principles of Bolshevism were of primary importance — all else irrelevant. Soviet Russia was an opponent of nationalism — if it extended its support to an independence movement, then it was only for the reason that thereby imperialism would suffer a setback and Bolshevism gain a new field to take root and

grow in. Socialists in general were very critical of the Soviet State and its foreign policy. They felt that the internationalism of Soviet Russia would affect the growth of the nationalist movement in India.

At the same time the congress socialist party worked as a forum for different ideological groups. In 1936, the communists were allowed to work within the organisation. Royists and Punjab socialists were made part of the organisation. Congress socialist party functioned as a platform for broadly left people. It worked well till 1939. With the declaration of the second world war, the platform collapsed. Communists went out of the Party. Communists and socialists turned into bitter critics of each other.

25.6 SOCIALISTS AND THE SECOND WORLD WAR

The Nationalistic perspective gave a chance to them to take a very correct stand on the second world war and on the 1942 movement. Furthermore, their characterisation of Fascism as a reactionary political trend proved historically true. Their uncompromising stand on Fascism gave them a crying place in Indian history. The day the world war started, the socialists held a meeting at Patna under the chairmanship of Narendra Dev, where JP said, "This is an imperialist war. We will oppose it. We are going to take advantage of this war to win independence for ourselves."

25.6.1 Socialist Pressure on Gandhi and the Congress leadership

Socialists pressurised Gandhi and the Congress leadership to start the movement against British imperialism. They succeeded in persuading Gandhi to accept the proposal of the socialists and gave the call for the Quit India Movement. Socialists remained at the helm of affairs. They organised the mass movements against the colonial state. In January 1943, JP gave a call in an open letter 'To all Fighters for freedom'. "There is no compromise between the slogans of 'Quit India' and of 'National Government'. The masses have now learnt from experience that the imposing edifice of the police and magistracy and law courts and prisons which goes by the name of British Raj is but a house of cards when hurt against either collective power. This lesson is not likely to be forgotten and it constitutes the starting point for next offensive." JP's call created a ripple among young socialists and many jumped into the nationalist fray. The Guerrilla squads were formed by the socialists to attack the state property with an aim to paralyse the machinery of the British Govt. Three systems were singled out for destruction:

- 1) Disruption of communication lines including telegraphs, telephone, mail and wireless lines, railways, roads, bridges and motor-vehicles of the enemy.
- 2) Disruption of industrial plants, factories, mills and airports and
- 3) Incendiary activity, which covered destruction of Govt. documents, buildings, petrol pumps, arms and ammunition by fire.

The 1942 movement was the most violent movement against British imperialism. State structure virtually collapsed under the attacks of the militants.

Check Your Progress 4

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answer.
ii) Check your answer with that given at the end of the unit.

- 1) Discuss the activities of the Indian socialists on the eve of the Second World War.

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25.7 SOCIALISTS IN THE LARGELY POST-INDEPENDENCE PERIOD

Socialists committed the biggest mistake by not participating in the 1946 elections which were the basis of formation of the constituent Assembly. Later JP lamented over the matter. He admitted that it was the biggest blunder they had committed. After independence, the congress high command gave a call that no other ideological group had any place in their organisation. That is why the socialists decided to leave the congress party in 1950 and to oppose it as well. They decided to strengthen the democratic system by creating a strong opposition. Socialist party contested the 1952 general elections and was virtually routed. 1952 became the historical moment in the history of Indian Socialist Politics. JP and Acharya Narendra Dev both got disillusioned with electoral politics. Narendra Dev remained as the leader of Praja Socialist Party till his death whereas JP joined the Bhoodan Movement under the leadership of Vinobha Bhave. JP remained next to Vinobha in the Bhoodan movement. JP played a very active role in making the Bhoodan movement a success.

25.7.1 JP after Independence

Active involvement in the movement helped him to draft an essay on "The Reconstruction of the Indian Polity." He gave an alternative to the present political system based on the party system. He put forth the theory of party-less democracy. In his scheme, village panchayats play crucial role allowing people to participate in the decision-making process. Decentralisation of political power helps people to achieve *Loka Shakti*. "The Programme of Sarvodaya is above Party affiliation. We are neither for nor against any particular party. We desire a polity without parties. The ideals of Sarvodaya are close to those of socialism and communism though we stress the independence and power of the common people — we stress the decentralisation of economic and political power so that it resides in collective organisations of the people."

JP's Stress was on the change of heart which would bring about real non-violent social order.

The 1974 student movement in Bihar and Gujarat gave him a chance to take the leadership of the movement. He propounded the concept of 'Total Revolution'.

In his Prison Diary, he made it clear that "Total Revolution is a combination of seven revolutions — social, political, cultural, ideological or intellectual, educational and spiritual." JP's total revolution is an extension of his theory of Sarvodaya society and party-less democracy. Here he had stressed the cultural and moral dimensions. Decentralised politics and economy would allow people to participate in the decision-making process. Self-government is the best Government where people manage themselves. Village Panchayats are a subsystem within the larger social system and can work because the collective consciousness of people would make it functioning.

25.7.2 JP's Concept of Total Revolution

JP's total revolution is basically an extension of his concept of Sarvodaya, where he was for village Swaraj. Indian society is basically a village society. Villages should be the nucleus of public administration. All the elders of the village must sit together and settle their problems. This is possible only if the village economy has an egalitarian character. Unequal distribution of wealth is not going to create democracy. For democracy at village level here, rural economy needs an egalitarian character. Rich landowners should voluntarily give up their land to the poor. Non-violent social order creates space for real radical democracy. Violence breeds hatred and conflict. The structural basis of violence should be abolished. That is why he was for the concept of party less democracy. That parties monopoly. Parties monopolise political power which creates tensions. Political violence negates the basis of any democratic political order. He was in agreement with the cause of the Naxalites. But the means that they adopt. he was opposing.

Check Your Progress 5

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answer.

ii) Check your answer with that given at the end of the unit.

- 1) Briefly discuss JP's concept of total revolution.

25.8 LET US SUM UP

Acharya Narendra Dev and JP both contributed to Indian socialist thought substantially. Although JP has changed ideas from socialism to Sarvodaya and later extended it to total revolution, Narendra Dev remained a Marxist till his death and tried to apply Marxism to Indian conditions in an imaginative manner.

25.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress Exercise 1

- 1) See Section 25.2 and subsection 25.2.1

Check Your Progress Exercise 2

- 1) See subsection 25.3.1

Check Your Progress Exercise 3

- 1) See section 25.4

Check Your Progress Exercise 4

- 1) See section 25.6

Check Your Progress Exercise 5

- 1) See section 25.7.2

25.10 SOME USEFUL BOOKS

Barik, R.K. 1977, *Politics of the JP Movement*, Radiant Publishers, New Delhi

Pantham, Thomas and Deutsch K.L. 1988, *Modern Indian Political Thought*, Sage Publications.