

Growth of the Left Movement in India

BACKGROUNDER

In 1917, the Russian Revolution had resulted in the overthrow of the despotic Czarist regime and formation of the first socialist state. Russia had further electrified the world by renouncing its claims in China and other parts of Asia. Socialist ideas became suddenly attractive, especially for the people of Asia. In India, they attracted the non-cooperators, the revolutionaries and the unemployed youth.

Socialist ideas began to take shape in the Indian minds and found chief embodiment in Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhas Chandra Bose. Worker and peasant movements grew rapidly in the 1920s. Socialist ideas gained further popularity during the economic depression of 1930s.

It was against this backdrop that the left parties emerged in India in the late 1920s and 30s, bringing closer together the struggle for independence and the struggle for socio-economic emancipation. Two main parties that arose were the CPI (Communist Party of India) and CSP (Congress Socialist Party).

Within the Congress, left-wing tendency found reflection in the election of Jawaharlal Nehru as president for 1929, 1936 and 1937 and of Subhas Bose for 1938 and 1939 as well as in the emergence of the Congress Socialist Party.

Meaning of the term 'Left'

There is a history as well as an ideology behind the term "Left". During the period of the French Revolution, in the National Assembly of France, there were three groups—a conservative group (which supported the monarch and nobility and did not want to reduce their powers), a liberal group (which wanted limited reforms of the government) and a radical group (which wanted drastic changes in the system of government, such as the adoption of a constitution and limitation of the powers of monarch).

Seating in the French Assembly

Within the French Assembly, the conservatives sat on the right side of the speaker, the radicals sat to his left, and the liberals sat in the centre. Since then, the term 'Left' has been added to the political dictionary.

Leftists: Leftists are such groups (movements and ideology) which stand for radical reforms in socio-economic structure keeping in mind the interests of the oppressed sections of society.

Rightists: the Rightists are such groups which are opposed to any change in the existing socio-economic order because of their own stakes.

Centrists: are those who stand for limited change in the socio-economic order.

Left is generally considered to be **synonymous with socialism**, as socialism is an ideology which aims at the upliftment of the toiling workers and protecting them from the exploitation by their employers, i.e. the capitalists.

Meaning of Socialism

Socialism is an ideology which aims at ending the exploitation of a vast majority of hapless humanity by a handful of powerful minority. It thus aims to establish complete social and economic equality in society. It is a form of society which results from the overthrow of capitalist system by means of a proletariat revolution. Since it is capitalism which creates conditions for the growth of socialist movements, no society can be socialist without having gone through the stage of capitalism.

Socialism destroys private ownership of means of production and replaces it with public ownership of means of production. This means that all sources out of wealth can be created—land, factories, mines, banks, no longer remain property of one person or a group of persons. They become the property of the whole people. However, this does not mean that people cannot own anything individually. In socialist societies, people can own personal belongings like house, vehicle, household things, etc. Only, they cannot use those things (such as means of production) which they can use to deprive other people of the fruits of their labor. In fact, as production increases, through planned production, in a socialist society everyone owns more and more personal belongings, and not just a few people.

In this way, socialism ends the exploitation of one class by another and is based on the equality of all men. This equality is not only political or legal (as in capitalist societies) but also social and economic. Socialism abolishes private property, the root of all inequality and establishes socio-political justice.

Socialism also promises complete separation of religion and politics. It does not mean that people cannot hold personal beliefs. Only, they cannot bring it into public realm, use it in politics or propagate in schools. Socialist societies ensure basic social rights to all people—right to employment, rest and leisure, health protection, security in old age, housing, free and equal education and the right to participate in state administration.

Socialism also grants complete equality to women. It creates the material bases for this equality through shorter hours of work for women with small children, crèches at place of work, public kitchens, etc. Advanced capitalist societies also provide these facilities, but they are heavily charged. On the contrary, a socialist state guarantees these benefits to all women, at minimum cost, as children are considered the responsibility of the entire society. Socialist states also support all national liberation movements and the movements of working people against oppression.

In this way, socialist thought looks at man's life experience not from the view point of kings and rulers but from the viewpoint of the downtrodden. It emphasises the role of the working people in transforming society and seeks to organise the working people for the creation of an equal, human and just society.

Circumstances Leading to the Rise and Growth of Left Ideologies in India

The rise of the Left in India was due to special politico-economic circumstances prevailing in India towards the end of the First World War and the left ideologies got intertwined with the nationalist movement.

1. Post First World War Economic Recession: After the end of First World War, there was a sharp rise in prices of commodities in India, but the employers were unwilling to raise the wages. This led to large scale worker unrest and in the process, the workers became conscious of their political role as well. For instance, in Bombay, the workers organised strikes to oppose the Rowlatt Act. Gradually the nationalist leaders also picked up the cause of the workers—in 1920, All India Trade Union Congress was held at Bombay under the presidency of **Lala Lajpat Rai**.

2. Ideas of Marx and Russian Revolution of 1917: Worldwide, the leftist movement was an outcome of the Industrial Revolution in Europe. Socialist movements first originated and developed in 19th and 20th century Europe. The most important socialist thinker was Karl Marx. The first socialist revolution was the Russian Revolution of 1917 (led by the Bolshevik Party headed by Lenin) resulting in the emergence of Soviet Russia as the first socialist country in the world.

3. Formation of the Third Communist International (or Comintern): In 1919, the government of Soviet Union helped in the formation of an international organization of the Communist parties of different countries, known as the Third Communist International (as two similar bodies had already been formed earlier). Its aim was to assist communist revolutions all over the world.

4. Rise of Trade Unions in India: In India, this movement owes its origin to the impact of socialist movements in other countries like Great Britain and Russia. Industrial development in certain places like Bombay, Calcutta and Madras led to large scale concentration of working population. Gradually, the workers began to organise themselves to demand better working conditions and higher wages. This led to the rise of trade unions which in turn prepared the ground for the formation of Leftist political parties.

5. Gandhi and Mass Mobilisation: Gandhi's slogan of Swaraj and Swadeshi gave a new orientation to the national movement. Gandhi set out from the beginning to turn the national movement into a mass movement. Under his leadership, the country saw its first true mass national movement in the form of Non-Cooperation Movement. For the first time, the country woke up to the strength of its masses—its peasants, tribals, workers and women. This provided a fertile ground for the inauguration of socialist movement.

6. Disenchanted Non-Cooperators, Revolutionaries and Unemployed Youth: In India, leftist ideology also attracted the non-cooperators, as well as those who were unhappy with the Gandhian approach and the Swarajist program. A section of radicals felt unhappy with the 'weak and watery reformism' of Gandhi and saw his cult of non-violence as an obstruction in the development of a real revolutionary mass struggle against British imperialism. Revolutionaries like Chandra Shekhar Azad and Bhagat Singh also turned to socialism. A section of educated middle class also felt disenchanted with 19th-century liberalism in the face of growing unemployment.

7. Economic Depression of 1929: In the year 1929, the USA experienced a severe economic slump which spread to the rest of the world in the early 1930s. All the capitalist countries saw a steep decline in production and foreign trade resulting in economic distress and large scale unemployment. On the other hand, the economic situation in USSR was just the opposite. There was no economic crisis, the first two five year plans had been successfully completed and industrial production had increased by more than four times. In this way, the world depression of 1929 brought capitalism into disrepute and drew attention towards socialism and Marxism.

What is Communism?

Communism is the philosophical, social, political, and economic ideology and movement whose ultimate goal is the establishment of the communist society, which is a socioeconomic order structured upon the common ownership of the means of production and the absence of social classes, capital, and the state. It is based on the 1848 publication of '**Communist Manifesto**' by two German political philosophers, Karl Marx (1818-1883) and his close associate Friedrich Engels (1820-1895). Communism as a political system never was implemented anywhere.

What is Marxism?

It refers to the political and economic theories of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, later developed by their followers to form the basis of communism.

Difference between Socialism and Communism: Communism and socialism are economic and political structures that promote equality and seek to eliminate social classes. The two are interchangeable in some ways, but different in others. While Socialism is primarily an economic system that can exist in various forms under a wide range of political systems, Communism is primarily a political system which tends to centre on a one-party state that bans most forms of political dissent. Communism is therefore regarded as a more extreme form of socialism or 'hard left'.

Two Streams of the Left Movement in India

The Left Movement in India developed in two main streams:

1. Communism- It functioned as a branch of the International Communist Movement and was by and large controlled by the Comintern
2. The Congress Socialist Party which functioned as left wing of the INC and aimed to establish democratic socialism.

Both these movements thrived on the anti-imperialist movement going on in India.

FORMATION OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF INDIA

Historical Background

The Communist Party of India was first formed by MN Roy (Manabendra Nath Roy) in Tashkent under the auspices of the Comintern.

MN Roy

The original name of MN Roy was **Narendranath Bhattacharya**. Following his expulsion from high school for participating in the anti-partition movement (1905), Naren joined the Anushilan Samiti. While pursuing his goal as a revolutionary, he travelled to many countries and landed in the USA in the summer of 1916. It was here that he changed his name and also studied Marxist literature. Troubled by British spies, he fled to Mexico where he met the Russian Communist emissary, **Michael Borodin**. Roy helped Borodin organise the Communist Party of Mexico. From here, Roy went to Russia on the invitation of the Russian Communist Leader-Lenin.



MN Roy

Roy-Lenin Debate

In July–August 1920, at Mexico, Roy attended the Second Congress of the Communist International. Lenin was of the view that in colonial countries, the communists should extend active support to the revolutionary movements carried by the bourgeois (i.e. middle class including the propertied classes and the intelligentsia) nationalists. On the other hand, Roy was of the view that the bourgeois nationalists were opposed to progress and that the communists should carry on their struggle against imperialism independently by forming parties of workers and peasants. It was finally decided that even as the communists would extend support to the bourgeois nationalists in the struggle against imperialism, they would also work independently by allying directly with workers and peasants.

MN Roy forms the Communist Party of India at Tashkent (October 1920)

Commissioned by Lenin to prepare the East, specially India for Revolution, Roy left for Tashkent in Russia (now the capital of Uzbekistan) and not very far from Afghanistan in October 1920. Here, he established a **military school** for training the Indian border tribes for an armed revolt against the British rule and also formed the **Communist Party of India (CPI)**. In 1921, the CPI got affiliated with the Communist International also called Comintern). In 1922, Roy began publishing his own journal, the Vanguard, which became the mouthpiece of the CPI.

Peshawar Conspiracy Case (1922–23)

Another significant event at Tashkent was that thousands of Muslim Mujahirs (pilgrims), disappointed with British government's attitude towards the Sultan of Turkey, joined Roy's military school. During their return to India, they were caught by the police and tried at Peshawar. The case came to be known as the Peshawar Conspiracy Case in which several Mujahirs were

sentenced to rigorous imprisonment including—Mian Mohammad Akbar Shah and Gawhar Rahman Khan.

Early Communist Groups

- **Virendranath Chattopadhyaya, Bhupendranath Dutt and Barkatullah:** These revolutionaries working outside India also converted to Marxism.
- **Shripad Amrit Dange:** Some Non-Cooperators also turned to communism after the suspension of Non-Cooperation Movement by Gandhiji. One such non-cooperator was Shripad Amrit Dange, who organised an early communist group in Bombay. In 1921, Dange published a book named **Gandhi vs. Lenin**, in which he showed his preference for Lenin. In 1922, he founded the **Socialist**, the first socialist weekly in India. Through this journal, on 16th September 1924, Dange announced the formation of the **Indian Socialist Labour Party** of the Indian National Congress.
- **Singaravelu Chettier:** Singaravelu Chettier, an old communist lawyer announced the formation of the **Labour Kisan Party of Hindustan** (May 1923, Madras) and founded the **Labour-Kisan Gazette**.



Shripad Amrit Dange (founder member of the CPI and a key leader of the Indian Trade Union Movement)

Kanpur (Cawnpore) Bolshevik Conspiracy Case (1924)

The British government in India was hostile towards the Indian communists. In 1924, the government initiated a conspiracy case against four leading communists—**Muzaffar Ahmad, SA Dange, Shaikat Usmani and Nalini Gupta** alleging that they had started a revolutionary organization with the aim of overthrowing the British rule in India. This case came to be known as the Kanpur Conspiracy Case as the trial was held at Kanpur. In May 1924, all four accused were sentenced to four years' rigorous imprisonment.



Flag of CPI (Marxist)

Formation of the Communist Party of India (Kanpur, 26th December 1925, Kanpur)

On 1st September 1924, at Kanpur, **Satyabhakta** announced the formation of the Indian Communist Party, with himself as Secretary. Its provisional constitution declared attainment of complete independence and reorganization of Indian society along communist lines as goals.

On 26th December 1925, Satyabhakta organised an All India Conference of the Communists at Kanpur. It met under the presidentship of Singaravelu Chettier. The Kanpur Conference is regarded as the formal beginning of the Communist Party of India. The conference constituted a Central Committee of the Party with SV Ghate and JP Bergarhatta as Joint Secretaries. The CPI asked all its members to enrol themselves as members of the Congress and form a strong left-wing within the Congress. 1925 onwards, the British communists started coming to India for

organising the Indian Communist Movement. The CPI was formally affiliated to the Communist International in 1930.

Formation of Workers' and Peasants' Parties (WPP)

The main political work of early communists was to organise several parties of peasants and workers within the Congress to function as front organisation of the CPI. Hence, WPPs were formed in Bengal, Bombay, Punjab and Meerut.

- **Labour-Swaraj Party (Bengal, 1925–26):** It was the first organization of the INC comprising peasants and workers and was later renamed as Peasants' and Workers' Party of Bengal. It was organised by **Muzaffar Ahmed** with the help of **Kazi Nazrul Islam** (then a havildar in the 49th Bengal Regiment, later gained popularity as a Bengali poet). Ahmed also brought out a magazine, **Navayug**.
- **Congress Labour Party (Bombay, 1926):** It propagated its program and ideology through the use of press and published its main organ **Kranti** in Marathi.
- **Kirti Kisan Party (Punjab, 1926):** The party was headed by Sohan Singh Josh and included many Ghadar members of 1914. Its main journal was **Kirti** (worker) earlier founded by Bhai Santokh Singh. **Mihnatkash** (worker) in Urdu was another important journal.
- **WPP (Meerut, October 1928):** Formation of this party was attended by British communist **Philip Spratt**.
- By 1928, all these provincial organisations were renamed as Workers' and Peasants' Party (WPP) and transformed into an all India party. All communists were members of this party. Its main aim was to work within the Congress, radicalise its program and make it a true 'people's party'.

Along with Jawaharlal and Subhas Bose, the WPPs played an important role in creating a strong left-wing within the Congress and giving a leftist touch to the national movement. The Communists also increased their influence rapidly over trade unions. During 1927, in Kharagpur, the communists led Railway Workshop Workers' strike. During 1928, the Bombay WPP led a general strike culminating in the formation of **Girni Kamgar Union**.

Government Repression of the Communists (1929)

In the year 1928, worker strikes reached alarming proportions and government decided to behead the trade union movement and remove communist influence from the national movement. Consequently, the communists were severely repressed in the year 1929:

- **Public Safety Ordinance:** On 13th April 1929, Viceroy Lord Irwin passed the Public Safety Ordinance for the purpose of deporting subversive elements (the Bill was introduced in the Legislative Assembly but was defeated and therefore had to be passed in the form of an ordinance).
- **Trade Disputes Act:** At the same time, the Trade Disputes Act was passed. This legislation provided for compulsory appointment of tribunals (Courts of Enquiry and Conciliation Boards) for settling industrial disputes, made strikes illegal in public utility services (like Postal Service, Railways, Water and Electricity Departments) unless each individual worker

planning to go on strike gave an advance notice of one month to the Administration, and above all, forbade trade union activities of coercive or purely political nature and even sympathetic strikes.

- **Meerut Conspiracy Case, 1929–33:** On 14th March 1929, the government of Lord Irwin carried out the most severe anti-communist measure in the form of arrest of 31 communists (later one more was arrested). The communists were tried at Meerut allegedly for acting under the direction of Communist International to deprive the British Monarch of his sovereignty over British India by means of general strikes and armed uprising.

The 32 accused included three Englishmen—two communists **Phillip Spratt** and **BF Bradley**, one journalist named **Lester Hutchinson**. Others were Indian communists including **Radharaman Mitra**. The trial went on for four years and was universally criticised. Far from being a setback for the communists, the Meerut case soon became a cause célèbre. It made heroes and martyrs out of the communists. Their speeches in court widely appealed to the anti-British sentiments, familiarised the people with communist ideas and further raised the popularity of the communist movement.

The Congress set up a Central Defence Committee and the defence case was pleaded by eminent nationalists like **Jawaharlal Nehru**, **KN Katju** and **FH Ansari**. Gandhiji visited the prisoners in jail and expressed sympathy with the communist leaders. In such an atmosphere, the Congress members of the Central Legislative Assembly successfully opposed the Public Safety Bill (directed against the communists). The trial lasted for 3.5 years and ended in the conviction of Muzaffar Ahmed, Dange, Joglekar, Spratt, Bradley, Usmani and others. The trial dealt a heavy immediate blow to the left movement.

Suicidal Sectarian politics of the Communists (1929)

As if this blow was not enough, the communists inflicted an even deadly blow on themselves by suddenly taking turn towards sectarian politics. The Sixth Congress of the Comintern (1928) revised its **policy of United Front in the colonial world**, i.e. forming alliances with national bourgeoisie in colonial countries. Consequently, the Communists broke their connection with the INC, declaring the Congress as class party of the bourgeoisie. They alleged that the bourgeoisie was aiming to strike a compromise with the government to gain control over the masses. Congress left leaders, such as Nehru and Bose were described as 'agents of the bourgeoisie within the national movement'. The communists condemned the non-violent struggle of the Congress as a sham and advocated armed struggle against imperialism. The Gandhi Irwin Pact of 1931 was described as proof of Congress betrayal.

The communists also dissolved the WPPs and instead gave a call for the formation of an independent and illegal communist party. Taking advantage of this situation, the government **banned the CPI** on 23rd July 1934, forcing the communists to function underground or under the guise of the Congress and the newly formed Congress Socialist Party. Thus, the CPI was saved from the disaster as communists participated actively in the Civil Disobedience Movement and communist ideas continued to spread in the country.

Dutt-Bradley Thesis

In August 1935, in Moscow, the Seventh Congress of the Comintern took place and once again the communists radically changed their earlier position, deciding to take part in bourgeois led nationalist movement in colonial countries. It planned to organise a '**Front Populaire**' (Popular Front) with all parties that opposed fascism and not limit themselves to forming a United Front with those parties based in the working class.

Thus, the Indian communists once again decided to participate in the national movement led by the INC. The theoretical basis for this change in India was laid down by a document entitled "The Anti-Imperialist People's Front in India", known as Dutt-Bradley Thesis (1936). The document stated that "the National Congress could play a great part in the work of realising the anti-imperialist people's front". Once again, the communists called upon its members to join the Congress, utilize its solid organization, strengthen the left wing within the Congress (CSP) and oust the right wing. Once again, the communists recovered their image as the most militant anti-imperialists.

PC Joshi: leader of the CPI (1939), wrote in the party weekly, **National Front**, "the greatest class struggle today is our national struggle, of which Congress was the main organ".

Difficulties faced by the Early Communists in India

The infant communists faced hostility of the British government as well as the upper strata of Indian society; they also faced paucity of funds and cadres.

FORMATION OF THE CONGRESS SOCIALIST PARTY (BOMBAY, OCTOBER 1934)

During 1930–34, the initial moves towards formation of a socialist party were made in jails by a group of young Congressmen disenchanted with the politics of Gandhi as well as the communists. Consequently, in 1931, the Bihar Socialist Party was formed by JP Narayan and Phulan Prasad Varma. In September 1933, the Punjab Socialist Party was formed.

In 1934, after the suspension of the Civil Disobedience Movement, a section of Congressmen took to council politics. At this point, the Congress socialists wanted to form a socialist party within the Congress to prevent the loss of revolutionary character of the Congress due to council entry. Thus, in May 1934, at Patna, the First All India Congress Socialists' Conference was convened by Jayaprakash Narayan and was presided by Acharya Narendra Dev. The Conference passed a resolution asking the Congress to adopt a socialist program. Henceforth, the Congress socialists made great efforts in organising an All India Congress Socialist Party.

Ultimately the Congress socialists came together and formed the Congress Socialist Party (CSP) in October 1934, at Bombay, under the leadership of **Jayaprakash Narayan**, **Acharya Narendra Dev** and **Minoo Masani**. The first annual session of the All India Congress Socialist Party was held under the presidentship of **Sampurnananda**. Congress socialists Nehru and Bose did not join the CSP.

From the very beginning, the Congress Socialists agreed upon four basic propositions. These were as follows:

1. The primary struggle in India was the national struggle for freedom.
2. The socialists must work inside the Indian National Congress.
3. They must give the Congress and the national movement a socialist direction (They wanted the Congress to incorporate radical socio-economic program for upliftment of the toiling masses. They stood for abolition of capitalism, zamindari and princely states).
4. To achieve this, they must organise the workers and peasants and make them the social base of the national movement.

Independence and socialism emerged as the twin objectives of the Party. The session adopted a comprehensive blueprint of a socialist society in India, including-

- Transfer of all power to the masses.
- Economic life of the country to be planned and controlled by the state.
- Abolition with compensation of princes and landlords and other classes of exploiters.
- Liquidation of debts owed by peasants and workers.
- "To everyone according to his needs" is to be the basis of distribution of economic goods.
- The state shall not discriminate between religions, caste or sexes.

The Congress socialists were inspired by Marxism and Democratic Socialism. They worked hard to secure acceptance of their programme by the Congress.

Jayaprakash Narayan Srivastava (1902–1979): Popularly known as JP or **Lok Nayak**, he rose to be a key leader of the national movement. Born in Chapra Bihar (at present Balia district, UP), JP went to the USA for higher studies, returned in 1929 as a Marxist, joined the INC the same year under the mentorship of Gandhi and won special fame during the Quit India Movement. He wrote the book- **Why Socialism?**. He was the recipient of the Magsaysay Award for social service (1965) and the **Bharat Ratna** (posthumously, 1999).



Jayaprakash Narayan
Srivastava

Meerut Thesis of the Congress Socialist Party (1935)

The thesis laid down that the task of the CSP was to 'wean the anti-imperialist elements in the Congress away from its present bourgeois leadership and to bring them under the leadership of revolutionary socialism.' However, this notion was soon found to be unrealistic and the socialists instead agreed on composite leadership or alternate Left leadership of the Congress. It was later realized at Congress Sessions at Tripuri (in 1939) and at Ramgarh (in 1940).

MINOR LEFTIST PARTIES

In the 1930s, particularly in 1939, several other left currents emerged. Most of these centered around personalities and became near defunct once the central figure disappeared.

The Forward Block (1939)

Subhas Bose and his followers founded the Forward Block after Bose was forced to resign from the presidentship of the Congress owing to differences with Gandhi. Bose opposed the Congress attitude of cooperation with the British war effort and went abroad to seek military help to fight the British in India.

Revolutionary Socialist Party (1940)

The party stood for violent overthrow of British imperialism and establishment of socialism in India. In the Gandhi-Bose tussle, RSP supported Bose.

Other Left Parties

The Bolshevik party of India (1939) was founded by N Dutt Mazumdar, the Revolutionary Communist Party (1942) was launched by Saumyendranath Tagore and the Bolshevik-Leninist Party was announced in 1941 by Indra Sen and Ajit Roy. Each of them was a dissident communist group.

MN Roy, the pioneer of communist movement in India had come back to India in 1930 and had organised a strong group of 'Royists'. However, in 1940, he organised the Radical Democratic Party after his complete disillusionment with Marxism. He now upheld the idea that Indian Revolution could be brought about not by proletariats alone but by the leadership of a multi class party.

WEAKNESSES OF THE LEFT MOVEMENT

Despite the fact that the leftists were among the most militant and sacrificing of freedom fighters, they failed on several fronts, like:

- They failed in their basic goal of establishing the hegemony of socialist ideas and parties over the national movement.
- They also failed to make a deep study of the Indian reality. With the exception of Jawaharlal Nehru, the leftists saw the Congress leadership as bourgeois and compromising with the imperial forces to retain control of over the masses.
- They also failed to understand the Gandhian strategy of struggle.
- They invariably fought with the Congress leadership over the wrong issues.
- They constantly overestimated their support among the people.
- The different left factions failed to work unitedly over long periods. Even Nehru and Bose could not together for long and went their separate ways in 1939.

CONGRESS REACTION TO THE FORMATION OF CONGRESS SOCIALIST PARTY

The Congress gave a mixed reaction to the formation of the Congress Socialist Party. The Right Wing Congressmen criticised the socialist talk about confiscation of property and class war. Even Mahatma Gandhi rejected the idea of class war. He did not believe in the need for abolition of capitalism, zamindari or princely states. What he advocated was the need for a change of heart in the capitalist, zamindars and the princes so that they considered themselves not as owners but as trustees for their workers, tenants and subjects.

However, with the intervention of young leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhas Chandra Bose, socialist ideas received impetus and gradually influenced the political behaviour of the Congress.

GROWTH OF SOCIALIST IDEAS IN THE INDIAN NATIONAL CONGRESS: ROLE OF NEHRU AND BOSE

Socialist ideas acquired considerable following by the beginning of 20th century, in many parts of the world. Yet, these ideas did not acquire prominence within the Congress for many years. However, socialist ideas first received impetus with the efforts of young leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhas Chandra Bose and gradually came to influence the programme and political activities of the Congress.

Growth of Socialism in the Indian National Congress

In INC, seeds of socialism first came through Indian intellectuals and militants living in Europe and other Western countries. These included, Madame Cama, Shyamji Krishna Verma, Shapurji Saklatvala, Virendra Nath Chattopadhyaya, Bhupendra Nath Dutta, Lal Hardayal, MN Roy and a host of others. But none of these functioned within the framework of the main political organization of India—the Indian National Congress. In fact, socialism had no influence over the INC till the end of the First World War. However, after this, the socialist ideas began influencing Congress policies.

In the beginning, socialism seemed to intimidate the early Congress leaders. This is quite understandable as most of them belonged to the upper strata of Indian society—the English educated middle class which included the rentiers, professionals and entrepreneurs. Such elements, at most, sympathised with the misfortunes of the common man from a distance; that too to the extent that their own interests were not threatened. Consequently, the INC largely remained a preserve of the elite, and made hardly any attempts to reach out to the Indian masses, with the sole exception of the Swadeshi Movement (1905–08).

The first stirrings of change were witnessed only after the emergence of Gandhi who set out from the beginning to turn the national movement into a mass movement. Under his leadership, the country saw its first true mass national movement in the form of Non-Cooperation

Movement. For the first time, the country woke up to the strength of its masses—its peasants, tribals, workers and women. The disunity in the years following the withdrawal of the movement raised some significant questions—

- What could be done to ensure maximum possible participation of the people in the freedom struggle?
- How could the various classes and communities of people be united politically?
- What precisely are the goals that the national movement should strive to attain?

It was this intense intellectual and political exercise that gave rise to Socialist ideas within the Congress.

Jawaharlal Nehru (1889–1964): Born in Allahabad as the son of Motilal Nehru (of Kashmiri Pandit community), he studied law at Trinity College Cambridge. Upon his return, he practiced law at Allahabad High Court, and emerged as a key leader of the Left Wing faction of the INC in the 1920s and eventually of the INC itself under the mentorship of Gandhi. He finally rose to be the **first Prime Minister** of free India.



Jawaharlal Nehru

Role of Jawaharlal Nehru

The young Jawaharlal was one among those who brainstormed over the future of India. He has actively participated in the Non-Cooperation Movement and had also worked closely with the peasants of Pratapgarh and Rae Bareilly in UP during the movement. Though committed to Gandhiji's leadership and his non-violent struggle, he was gravely disappointed at the withdrawal of the Non-Cooperation Movement and was attracted neither by the no-Changers or the pro-changers.

In 1926, he went to Europe, mainly for medical treatment of his wife, Kamala, in Switzerland. During his year and a half long sojourn in Europe, Jawaharlal came in contact with political thinkers and socialist ideas. In February 1927, he represented the INC at the International Congress Against Colonial Oppression and Imperialism held at Brussels. There he met delegates from Africa, Latin America, Mexico, China and other Asian countries. The Brussels Conference had set up an organization named '**The League Against Imperialism and for National Independence**'. Jawaharlal was appointed member of the executive committee of the League. He now came to understand how development in Europe was led by industrial development which in turn needed continuous supply of raw materials and new markets. This had led to imperialism and race for colonies and intensified exploitation in Asia, Africa and Latin America. He could now see how India's freedom struggle was in reality a part of an international fight against imperialism.

In November 1927, Jawaharlal was invited to visit Soviet Union. Here he was greatly impressed to see the novel experiments in governance and social reconstruction. By the time he returned to India in December 1927, Jawaharlal had for all practical purposes, turned a socialist.

In 1927, when Jawaharlal returned, India was witnessing a noisy debate over the character of Swaraj. The Simon Commission, an all white commission to recommend further reforms in the constitutional development in India, was rejected by all groups and parties. The Simon Boycott Movement brought to the forefront the issue of the type of constitution or kind of independence that India should obtain for itself.

So far, by Swaraj, the Congress had meant Dominion Status for India within the ambit of British Empire (similar to the status of self governing Australia, New Zealand and South Africa). To Jawaharlal, on the other hand, Dominion status only meant perpetuation of British exploitation of India from the back door.

Matters came to a head at the All Parties Conference (Feb 1928), at the Conference it was agreed that in framing the constitution for India, the principle of Dominion Status should be kept in mind. Now Jawaharlal had no alternative but to build up an opposition and gain support for the demand of purna swaraj or complete independence. The young Subhas Chandra Bose (one of the General Secretaries of the Congress in 1928, like Jawaharlal), was one among those who helped him in this task.

After 1929, Jawaharlal became a symbol of socialism in India. He became the president of the historic Lahore Congress where he declared in his presidential speech, "**I am a socialist and a republican and no believer in kings and princes.**" He also championed the cause of **Praja Mandal Movement** in Indian states against the tyranny of the princes. Nehru was reelected to the post in 1936 and 1937.

Praja Mandal Movement (also known as States' Peoples' Conference Movement): It refers to the **national movement in princely states** which started only after 1920 after the non-cooperation movement. During this time, subjects of princely states had formed peoples' organizations called '**Praja Mandals**'. The movement brought together representatives from hundreds of Indian princely states including Bhopal, Baroda, Travancore and Hyderabad. The movement was directed against both-feudalism as well as colonialism. The people fought against the feudal princes as well as the British administration simultaneously for their rights. Activities of the movement included implementation of constructive program of the Congress in princely states. The INC also joined hands with the Peoples' Conference and brought it under the fold of the national movement.

He emerged as the most popular leader of the National movement after Gandhiji. Nehru popularised the ideas of socialism through his countrywide tours, through his books (**Autobiography and Glimpses of World History**), articles, and speeches. He popularised the notion that **political freedom was meaningless without economic freedom**.

Nehru vs. Gandhi: It was during these years that Nehru developed a complex relationship with Gandhiji. He criticised Gandhiji for refusing to recognize class conflict and for putting forward the theory of trusteeship. In fact, he devoted an entire chapter in his Autobiography, arguing against some aspects of Gandhian ideology. Yet he defended Gandhiji against other left-wing critics and appreciated his ability to reach out to the hearts of the masses.



Nehru and Gandhi (1942)

Nehru's approach towards Gandhiji has been well worded by Mohit Sen, "Nehru believed that the overwhelming bulk of the Congress was composed of amorphous centrists, that Gandhiji not only represented them but was also essential for any genuinely widespread mass movement, that on no account should the Left be at loggerheads with him or the centrists, but their strategy should rather be to pull the centre to the left."

At the same time, Nehru recognised the primacy of anti-imperialist struggle led by the Congress and Gandhiji and was therefore not in favour of any separate organizations independent of the Congress. He thought it best to propagate socialism while remaining under the banner of the Congress.

Note: In 1918, Gandhiji founded the Ahmedabad Textile Labour Association (TLA) with 14,000 workers on its roll, making it perhaps the largest single trade union of its time. Often, Gandhiji's principle of trusteeship (the capitalist being the trustee of the workers' interest) and arbitration had been dismissed as class collaborationist, and mistakenly so. In the words of Acharya JB Kripalani, one of the staunchest followers of Gandhiji, explained that "trustee" by the very term meant that he was not the owner. The owner is one whose interest he is called upon to protect.

Gandhiji's philosophy on labour, in fact, reflected the need of the time; giving primacy to the anti-imperialist movement which could ill-afford an all-out class war among the different classes of an emerging nation.

Role of Subhas Chandra Bose

Subhas Chandra Bose had certain apparent similarities with Jawaharlal Nehru. Both came from upper middle class background and received education abroad. Both were intellectuals who had committed themselves to the cause of the nation.

Subhas Bose had been a political activist since student days and rose to fame when he rejected to join the esteemed Indian Civil Service to which he was selected on the basis of merit (1921). His political mentor was not Gandhi but Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das who had declared in 1922 that India should secure "swaraj of the masses and not of the classes".

Subhas was also disappointed at the withdrawal of the Non-Cooperation Movement and briefly joined the pro-changers because of his loyalty. His main focus during this time were the civic affairs of Calcutta, of which he was the Chief Administrative Officer (July to October 1924) as was the case with Jawaharlal at Allahabad (Chairman April 1923 to April 1925).

Though Subhas was not as clear and sure about socialist ideas as Jawaharlal, he had no difficulty in endorsing Jawaharlal's anti-imperialist views and extended full support to him in favour of purna swaraj, even as he did not share Jawaharlal's commitment to Gandhiji's leadership or his belief in non-violence as a technique in anti-imperialist struggle.

CONGRESS MARCH TOWARDS SOCIALISM

Formation of the Independence of India League within the Congress (August 1928)

In August 1928, the 'Independence of India League' was launched by J. Nehru with the support of Subhas Bose (Nehru and Bose as secretaries and S. Srinivas Iyengar as President), as a pressure group within the Congress with the aim of-

- Countering the concept of Dominion Status
- Pleading for complete independence of India from the British, and
- Working for establishment of an Indian Republic on Socialist lines

Congress adopts 'Complete Independence' as goal (1928-29)

At Calcutta Session of Congress, December 1928, Jawaharlal and Subhas jointly moved a resolution to replace Congress goal of 'Dominion Status' by 'Complete Independence'. This year they achieved only limited success and they certainly succeeded creating awareness about the goal. Their real success came a year later at the Lahore Congress (1929), when the Congress adopted 'complete independence' as goal.

Emergence of the Leftist camp within the Congress

Nehru and Bose along with their followers soon emerged as the leftist camp within the Congress. In the years that followed, on several occasions, Jawaharlal and Subhas expressed their concern for the toiling people and condemned the exploitative nature of imperialisms. Their talks on socio-economic justice stirred the imagination of the youth (through the Youth League, the Hindustani Seva Dal, the Naujawan Bharat Sabha and the Volunteers' Movement), the students and the workers (through the All India Trade Union Congress whose presidentship was taken over by Jawaharlal in 1929 and by Subhas in 1931).

Congress Resolution on Fundamental Rights and the National Economic Program (March 1931)

In March 1931, at the Karachi Session of the Congress, a declaration on Fundamental Rights and the National Economic Program was adopted. The resolution declared: "In order to end the exploitation of the masses, political freedom must include real economic freedom of the starving millions." It was originally drafted by Jawaharlal and became the basic document of Congress' socio-economic programme for later years. The resolution was indeed a significant step in the Congress march towards socialism.

Formation of the Congress Socialist Party (October 1934)

Both Jawaharlal and Subhas were unhappy about the withdrawal of the Civil Disobedience Movement. In the years following the withdrawal, Jawaharlal reoccupied himself with the agitation of the U.P. peasantry while Subhas associated himself with the working-class movement. Both continued to arouse the imagination of the youth, the students and the working class and infused them with a radical militant temper. This eventually facilitated the formation of the Congress Socialist Party (May 1934) within the framework of the Congress organization. Though neither Jawahar nor Subhas joined the party, they welcomed its formation and drew its support whenever necessary.

Lucknow and Faizpur Sessions of the Congress (1936)

At Lucknow Session of Congress in April 1936, Jawaharlal espoused the cause of socialism in his presidential speech- "I see no way of ending the poverty, vast unemployment, degradation and subjection of the Indian people except through socialism."

At Faizpur Session of Congress (end of 1936), held under the presidentship of Jawaharlal, the Congress adopted an agrarian program, including items such as reduction of rent and revenue, abolition of feudal dues and levies, provision of cheap credit, security of tenure for tenants, introduction of cooperative farming, living wages for agrarian labourers and the right to form peasant unions.

In 1936 itself, Jawaharlal inducted three Congress Socialists-Jaya Prakash Narayan, Narendra Dev and Achyut Patwardhan into the Congress Working Committee.

The Congress Socialists played an important role in Kisan movement. For instance, Prof. NG Ranga, Indulal Yagnik and Swami Sahajananda Saraswati played a key role in the organization of All-India Kisan Sabha and the first All India Kisan Congress met at Lucknow (1936), under the presidentship of Sahajananda Saraswati. The Congress Socialists also took part in the democratic movements in princely states.

The Election Manifesto of the Congress in 1936 (which declared that the Congress would take steps for the settlement of labour disputes and take effective measures for securing the rights to form unions and go on strike), convening of First All India States' Peoples' Conference (1936), formation of All India Students' Federation and the Progressive Writers' Association were some other achievement of the Left.

The impact of socialist ideas on Congress was also seen in the increasing shift of Gandhi towards radical positions on economic and class issues. Gandhi, along with Nehru, argued in favour of public sector in large scale industries in order to prevent concentration of wealth in a few hands. He accepted the principle of land to the tiller declared in 1942 that "the land belongs to those who work on it and to no one else". In 1945, the Congress adopted a resolution on abolition of landlordism.

Jawaharlal and Subhas Bose continue to work for Socialism: Jawaharlal continued to advocate that in order to attain independence from foreign rule, it was necessary for Congress to

mobilise all sections of Indian people, particularly the downtrodden. The British exploiters had their native allies everywhere in India, and therefore the freedom struggle had to be combined with freedom of the poor from their immediate internal oppressors. For this, he insisted that the Congress must have a blueprint of the future of a free India which would include the following:

- Elections on the basis of adult franchise
- A Constituent Assembly for drawing up a constitution to guarantee the rights and privileges of all individuals
- Eradication of long-standing socio-economic injustices
- Achievement of economic independence on modern industrial lines

Jawaharlal persistently pleaded for Democratic Socialism in India eventually succeeded in influencing the Congress in taking a pro-socialist turn.

Subhas left his Socialist mark on the Congress by laying emphasis on industrialisation and planned economic growth for India. In 1938, when Bose was president, the Congress committed itself to economic planning and set up a **National Planning Committee** under the chairmanship of Jawaharlal. In 1938, Bose was elected president of the Congress and re-elected in 1939, despite Gandhi's opposition. Yet, Gandhi and his followers compelled Bose to resign from the presidentship. He and his followers now founded the Forward Block. By now, socialism had emerged as the accepted creed of most of the youth of India, both within and outside the Congress.

To sum up, we see that socialist ideas within the Congress did not always find favour and some prominent Congressmen were even opposed to them. Yet the importance of the role of Jawaharlal and Subhas Bose should not be judged by their ultimate success or failure but by the sincerity and commitment with which they pursued their convictions.



Subhas Chandra Bose with Gandhi during the Haripura Congress Session (February 1938)



Previous Years' Questions – Preliminary Exam

1. In October 1920, who among the following headed a group of Indians gathered at Tashkent to set up a Communist Party of India? **[UPSC 2005]**

- (a) H.K. Sarkar (b) P.C. Joshi
(c) M.C. Chagla (d) M.N. Roy

2. Consider the following statements:

[UPSC 2010]

1. The 'Bombay Manifesto' signed in 1936 openly opposed the preaching of socialist ideas.

2. It evoked support from a large section of business community from all across India

Which of the statements given above is/are correct? Choose the correct answer from the following options.

- (a) 1 only
(b) 2 only
(c) Both 1 and 2
(d) Neither 1 nor 2



Practice Questions – Preliminary Exam

1. Which of the following reveal influence of socialist ideas upon Congress?

1. Adoption of agrarian program at Faizpur Session of the Congress.
2. The Election Manifesto of the Congress in 1936.
3. Induction of Jaya Prakash Narayan, Narendra Dev and Achyut Patwardhan into the Congress Working Committee.

Choose the correct answer from the following options.

- (a) 1 only (b) 1 and 2
(c) 1 and 3 (d) 1, 2 and 3

2. Which of the following pairs is/are incorrectly matched?

1. Labour-Swaraj Party- Muzaffar Ahmad
2. Indian Socialist Labour Party - Shripad Amrit Dange
3. Congress Socialist Party-Minoo Masani

Choose the correct answer from the following options.

- (a) 1 only
(b) 1 and 2
(c) 3 only
(d) None of the above

3. With regard to the Congress Socialist Party, which of the following are true?

1. The first annual session of the Party was held under the presidency of Jayaprakash Narayan.
2. It was formed as a new party outside the Congress.
3. Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhas Bose did not join the party.

Choose the correct answer from the following options.

- (a) 1 only (b) 1 and 2
(c) 2 and 3 (d) 3 only

4. Which of the following statements are true with reference to the Indian Socialists of 1920s?

1. They opposed Dominion Status and stood for complete independence for India.
2. Several of them were former non-cooperators who got disenchanted with Gandhian politics.
3. They mobilised peasants and workers and worked independent of the Congress.

Choose the correct answer from the following options.

- (a) 1 only
(b) 1 and 2
(c) 1, 2 and 3
(d) None of the above

5. Consider the following statements with regard to the Communist Party of India-

1. It was formed on 26th December 1925 at Kanpur.
2. The CPI asked all its members to enrol themselves as members of the Congress and form a strong left-wing within the Congress.

Which of the above statements is/are true? Choose the correct answer from the following options.

- (a) 1 only (b) 2 only
(c) both (d) neither

6. Which of the following was not associated with the Left movement in India?

- (a) Kanpur conspiracy
(b) Peshawar conspiracy
(c) Delhi conspiracy
(d) Meerut conspiracy

7. Which of the following statements are false with regard to the Congress Resolution on Fundamental Rights and the National Economic Program, 1931?

1. It was passed during the Lahore Session of the Congress.
2. It revealed the influence of socialist ideas on Congress political behaviour.

Choose the correct answer from the following options.

- (a) 1 only (b) 2 only
(c) both (d) neither

8. Which of the following pairs is/are incorrectly matched?

1. Peshawar Conspiracy Case-Muslim Mujahirs
2. Kanpur Conspiracy Case- Phillip Spratt
3. Meerut Conspiracy Case- SA Dange and Nalini Gupta

Choose the correct answer from the following options.

- (a) 1 and 2 (b) 2 and 3
(c) 1 and 3 (d) 1, 2 and 3

9. Examine the following statements with reference to the Congress Socialist Party-

1. It was a party formed outside the Congress to prevent the loss of revolutionary character of the Congress due to council entry.
2. Nehru and Bose were the main leaders of the party.
3. Satyabhakta and Singaravelu Chettier were other important leaders.

Which of the above statements is/are correct? Choose the correct answer from the following options.

- (a) 1 only
(b) 1 and 2
(c) 1, 2 and 3
(d) none of the above

10. Which of the following may be seen as achievements of the Left-

1. Foundation of the Progressive Writers' Association.
2. Formation of All India Students' Federation.
3. Convening of First All India States' Peoples' Conference in 1936.

Choose the correct answer from the following options.

- (a) 1 and 2 (b) 2 only
(c) 1 and 3 (d) 1, 2 and 3

11. Consider the following circumstances with reference to the rise of the Left movement in India.

1. Mass mobilization by Gandhi.
2. Industrial development in certain places like Bombay, Calcutta and Madras leading to large scale concentration of working population.
3. Economic boom of the 1920s.

Which of the above statements is/are true? Choose the correct answer from the following options.

- (a) 1 only (b) 1 and 2
(c) 2 only (d) 1, 2 and 3

12. Which of the following are the elements of socialism?

1. Complete separation of religion and politics.
2. Socialism abolishes private property and people cannot own anything individually.
3. Socialism grants complete equality to women.

Choose the correct answer from the following options.

- (a) 1 and 2 (b) 2 only
(c) 1 and 3 (d) 1, 2 and 3

13. Which of the following is incorrectly matched?

- (a) Communist Party of India-National Front
(b) Muzaffar Ahmad-Navayug
(c) Singaravelu Chettier- Labour-Kisan Gazette
(d) Minoo Masani-Gandhi vs. Lenin

14. 1. The National Planning Committee was set up under the chairmanship of Subhas Chandra Bose.
2. The Congress adopted an agrarian program at Faizpur Session of Congress.

Which of the above statements is/are true? Choose the correct answer from the following options.

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- (a) 1 only (b) 2 only
(c) both (d) neither
15. Which of the following items were included in the Karachi Declaration on Fundamental Rights?
1. Freedom of association
 2. Neutrality of the state in regard to all religions,
 3. Elections on the basis of universal adult franchise
 4. Free and compulsory primary education.
- Choose the correct answer from the following options.
- (a) 1 and 2 (b) 1 and 3
(c) 2, 3 and 4 (d) 1, 2, 3 and 4



Practice Questions – Main Exam

1. Why do you think the early Congress leaders were hesitant in adopting Socialist ideas in India? What was the role played by Nehru and Bose in giving impetus to socialism within the Congress? Explain.
2. Explain the circumstances which led to the rise and growth of the Left movement in India.
3. Write Short Notes on the following:
(a) Independence of India League
(b) Congress Socialist Party
4. Why did the British government try to suppress the communist movement in India? What measures did they adopt? Discuss.
5. The Meerut Conspiracy turned into cause célèbre for the communists. Evaluate.

Answers

Previous Years' Questions – Preliminary Exam

1. (d) 2. (a)

Practice Questions – Preliminary Exam

- | | | | | |
|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| 1. (d) | 2. (d) | 3. (d) | 4. (b) | 5. (c) |
| 6. (c) | 7. (a) | 8. (b) | 9. (d) | 10. (d) |
| 11. (b) | 12. (c) | 13. (d) | 14. (b) | 15. (d) |