

CONTRIBUTION OF INDIA PHILOSOPHERS TOWARDS THE SOCIALISM

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ABSTRACT

Socialism in India grew as a plan for social and economic reconstruction and as an ideology of political liberation from the shackles of ruthless foreign imperialism. Socialist ideas gained a foothold in India during the period of the two World Wars. Indian socialists endeavoured to introduce a new set of values in Indian society and to organise the working millions under new modernity oriented leadership dedicated equally to the cause of Indian democracy and Socialism. The main aim of the Indian Socialists had always been to reconcile Socialism with nationalism from 1934; they sought to prove that the achievement of national freedom and an egalitarian society were inseparable objectives, but they were unsure of the means they adopted to achieve the end and moved to and fro like a weaver's shuttle between the Gandhian and socialist ways. They could neither accept Gandhi wholeheartedly nor could reject him altogether. Their dilemma seemed to cripple their movements on many occasions, particularly at the time of the partition of India. The socialists were frantically searching for an equilibrium solution.

KEYWORDS – Socialism, World-Wars, Gandhi, Partition.

As an ideology, Socialism seeks to propound the cause of the downtrodden and equality in society. The history of the 19th and 20th centuries is an almost continuous progress record of the Socialism as an overpowering social, political and economic movement. Although, Socialism has many definitions and it does have not any unanimously acceptable definition. But in a good way, we can define Socialism as the goal of a society in which society or the state will hold all the instruments of production and distribution aiming at equal distribution of wealth. In the comprehensive and systematic forms, Socialism has its origin principally in the works of Karl Marx, who is regarded as the father of Scientific Socialism. After Marx, the socialist movement gained regional colouring with social characteristics, which emerged as syndicalism in France, Fabianism and Guild Socialism in Britain and Bolshevism in Soviet Russia. In India, it grew into democratic Socialism, and after the fusion of Marxism and Gandhism, it is known as Gandhian Socialism.

Many writers, leaders, and intelligentsia have significant contributions to the origin and growth of any socio-political movement for a radical change. French Revolution (1789) and Russian Revolution (1917) the lively examples. The socialist movement in India is not an exception.

Socialist ideas influenced some of the Indian scholars and reformers of the 19th century. However, that ideology was unable to receive the attention of the general public. Here it is very important to point out that – Karl Marx (1818-1883) was the contemporary of the Keshav Chandra Sen (1838-1884) and 'Dada Bhai Naoroji'¹ (1825-1917). However, the socialist ideas hardly figured in any Indian thinking before the outbreak of the First World War (1914-1918), when politics was the only hobby of the educated mass in India.² Socialist thought could not impact

¹ Munni Rawal, *Dadabhai Naoroji, Prophet of Indian Nationalism, 1855–1900*, Anmol Publications, New Delhi, 1989

² K.S. Padhy & PK Panigrahi, *Socialist Movement in India*, Kanishka Publishing House, New Delhi, 1992 p.44

India during the 19th century, though some of the Indian thinkers had friendly terms with the British Philosophers-such as Dada Bhai Naoroji (1825-1917) with Henry Mayers Hyndman (1842-1921), Gopal Krishna Gokhale (1866-1915) with Martha Beatrice Webbs (1858-1943), Lala Lajpat Rai (1865-1928) with Colonel Wedgewood (1872-1943), and Bal Gangadhar Tilak (1856-1920) with George Lansbury (1859-1940).

Keshav Chandra Sen³ (1838-1884) had a clear socialist vision. He began to raise his voice for the uplift of the lower classes of India more than 15 years before the publication of the English translation of *Das Capital*.⁴

Aurobindo Ghosh (1872-1950) wrote seven articles in the *Indu Prakash*⁵ under the title 'New Lamp for Old' in the series of articles; Ghosh condemned the then congress policy of petition, pray and protest and called for strong, honest and fearless leadership. In such articles, Ghosh severely condemned the class orientation of the Indian National Congress (1885) and argued for the betterment of the proletariat class in his speeches and writings.⁶

In a letter (November 1896) to Miss Mary Hale, Swami Vivekanand (1863-1902) wrote,

"I am socialist not because I think it is a perfect system, but half a loaf is better than no bread. The other systems have been tried and found wanting. Let this one be tried if for nothing else, for the novelty of the thing. A redistribution of pain and pleasure is better than always the same person having pains and pleasures".⁷

In March 1899, Swami Vivekanand (1863-1902) wrote on the social transformation of India in such a way,

"The first glow of the dawn of this new power has already begun to break slowly upon the western world, and the thoughtful are at their wit's end to reflect upon the final issue of this new phenomenon. Socialism, Anarchism, Nihilism, and other like sects are the vanguard of the social revolution that is to follow."⁸

In India, Marxian Socialism took some time to become popular because the working-class movement was in its initial state. After the first decade of the 20th century, the situation changed. In 1907, Sardar Singh Rana (1870-1957) and Madame Cama (1861-1936) attended the International Socialist Conference held at Stuttgart as representatives of Indian Socialists. At the meeting, Cama unfurled the first Indian flag.⁹

In March 1912, Lala Hardayal (1884-1939) wrote: "*Karl Marx: A Modern Rishi*" (an article in *Modern Review*) and of the same year in August, Ram Kishne Pillai (1878-1916) published a short biography of Karl Marx (1818-1883) with an exposition of the main tenets of his socialism in Malayalam.¹⁰

After coming from America on 20 February 1920, Lala Lajpat Rai (1865-1928) began to popularize socialist ideas actively. The preface of his book was written by Sidney Webb (1859-1947), a famous British socialist. In his opinion, not a single member of society should suffer from the lack of healthy food, sanitation and house; every child should get good opportunity for education and development on its own lines; everyone enjoys an equal political status;

B.R. Nanda, "Socialism in India 1919-1939, A Retrospect", in BR Nanda (ed.), *Socialism in India*, Vikas Publications, Delhi, 1972, p.1

³ Manilal C Parekh, *Brahmarishi Keshub Chundra Sen*, Oriental Christ House, Rajkot, 1926.

John A. Stevens, *Keshab : Bengal's Forgotten Prophet*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2018.

⁴ Indian History Congress: Proceedings of the Ranchi Session, 1964, vol. 2, p. 221.

⁵ *Indu Prakash*, weekly, edited in Bombay by Aurobindo Ghosh's Cambridge friend K. C. Desh Panday.

Rishabha Chand, *Shri Aurobindo: His Life Unique*, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 1981, p. 89

⁶ With us it interest...with our sincerity, our foresight, our promptness of thought and action...theorist and triffer, though may be called, I assigned as our first and holiest duty the devotion and enlightenment of the proletariat.

V. P. Verma, 1981, pp. 304

⁷ Swami Madhwanand (ed.), *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekanand*, vol. VI, Advaita Ashram Sri Gauranga Press, Calcutta, 1966 (1919), pp. 381-382.

⁸ Swami Madhwanand (ed.), 1966 (1919), pp. 381-382.

⁹ S P Sen (ed.), *The Dictionary of National Biography*, vol. 1, Institute of Historical Studies, Calcutta, 1972, p. 241.

¹⁰ Girja Shankar, *Socialist Trends in Indian National Movement (Being a Study of the Congress Socialist Party)*, Twenty-First Century Publishers, Meerut, 1987, p. 2.

men and women have treated alike with equal rights and others. Subject to this principle, if any one of a community earns more wealth, he is welcome to have it or enjoy it if thereby he causes no injury to others.¹¹

Lala Lajpat Rai was very critical of communism. His attitude towards Bolshevism was very unsympathetic. According to him, "Bolshevism was lack of any definite aim".¹² He was a very critical opponent/antagonist of imperialism and capitalism. It may be said that before Jawahar Lal Nehru (1889-1964), Lala Lajpat Rai (1865-1928) was talking about the significance of Modern socialism and Bolshevism.¹³ Further, Lala Lajpat Rai was the First Indian writer and leader who discussed the problem of Socialism, Bolshevism, and Capitalism.¹⁴

M. N. Roy (1887-1954), the most important personality in India's history of socialist thought. He stated that he supported a critical approach to Marxism from the beginning and maintained that there had been pragmatically proved errors and inadequacies of the Marxist Political theories and social doctrines. M. N. Roy observed that capitalism had exhausted all its possibilities, and it must be replaced by a higher form of society so that humanity could progress, and it is possible only in a socialistic society. He further observed that "if his presupposition of our very striving for socialism were not there, then we would be mere utopians romantic visionaries".¹⁵

Roy has also written about Gandhism and evaluated how Gandhism was related to socialism. He observed that a good deal of heated discussion had taken place over the question of whether "Gandhi is a Socialist."¹⁶ Before going deep into the topic of discussion about whether socialism can be found in the domain of Gandhian Philosophy, he questions, "Is Gandhi a 'socialist' or whether there is anything common between Gandhi and Socialism."¹⁷

M. N. Roy further says that Gandhi was a devoutly religious man. He believed in God and again said that "it is only in prayer that the human being can find the strength and inspiration necessary for correct guidance in the world's affairs. In all, the philosophical aspect of Gandhism is spiritual, which is in contradiction to Marxism and socialism".¹⁸

Coming to the economic aspect, M. N. Roy says that the entire economic program of socialism is the abolition of Private property in the means of production, distribution, and exchange. However, socialism, according to Roy, does not propose to abolish private property as such, and in everything, socialism proposes to abolish only such private property, the possessions of which makes the owner an exploiter of others, who would depend on him for their existence.¹⁹

On Mahatma Gandhi's views, Roy says that Gandhi agrees with the Socialists in condemning the masses' poverty and wishes they should not be exploited. He (Gandhi) even condemns capitalism. From the socialist point of view, the solution made by Gandhi is no solution. He does not recognize the root cause of the present condition he wishes to change. He tries to appeal to the natural goodness of the man.²⁰

When M. N. Roy compares Gandhism with Socialism, he adopts most of the principles of Marxian socialism and strongly refutes Gandhism as a socialist ideology. M.N. Roy says,

"I think I have made it sufficiently clear that there is nothing common between Gandhism and Socialism. Even the similarity of the ideal is only superficial. Gandhi may be anything, but he is certainly not a socialist."²¹

¹¹ Lajpat Rai, *India's Will to Freedom : Writings and Speeches on the Present situation*, Ganesh & Co, Madras 1921, p. 33-38.

¹² Lala Lajpat Rai, *The Political Future of India*, B. W. Huebsch Inc., New York, 1919, p. 206.

¹³ K.S. Padhy & PK Panigrahi, 1992, p. 46

¹⁴ V. P. Verma, 1981, p. 292.

¹⁵ M. N. Roy, *The Future of Socialism*, Renainssanse Publishers, Calcutta, 1943, p.11

¹⁶ M. N. Roy, *Gandism: Nationalism: Socialism*, Bengal Radical Club, Calcutta, 1940, p. 52

¹⁷ M. N. Roy, 1940, p. 52

¹⁸ M. N. Roy, 1940, p. 56

¹⁹ K.S. Padhy & PK Panigrahi, 1992, p. 48

²⁰ K.S. Padhy & PK Panigrahi, 1992, p. 48

²¹ M N. Roy, *Gandhism: Naturalism: Socialism*, Bengal Radical Club, Calcutta, 1940, p. 72

Jawahar Lal Nehru²², another important figure in the growth and development of socialism in India. His short visit to Soviet Russia in November 1927 helped him to know about that country's achievements in education, female emancipation, the betterment of the conditions of the peasants, and many others. However, in his 'Soviet Russia' written in 1928, he refused to take any categorical attitude towards Russia.²³

Inspired by the Marxist approach to the cosmos and history, Nehru observed in his Autobiography that he derived from the communist philosophy of life comfort and hopes to explain the past and offered hope for the future.²⁴ The scientific, anti-theological, and anti-superstitious approach of the Marxist philosophy of history greatly impacted him.

The intellectual mass widely supported the Marxist conception of a link between technology, economy, polity, culture, and the law. However, when some of the critics of Marx criticized him for having exaggerated the influence of the economic factor in historical information, Engels defended Marx by stating that they (he and Marx) never meant to undermine the importance of the casual role of the non-economic factors. Nehru has faithfully accepted Engel's explanation and subscribes to this as the true view of Marx.²⁵

Jawaharlal Nehru presided over the annual conference (1929) of the Indian Trade Union Congress and the Indian National Congress. Nehru tried to utilize his position to persuade the labour class to cooperate with the Indian National Congress (1885) and help it adopt a more radical ideology and resolve social and economic issues.²⁶ He urged the whole labour class to be ready themselves for the struggle that was organised further and not to lose their energy and passion in the mutual conflict.²⁷

From the presidential platform of the Lahore Congress (December 1929), he categorically announced his commitment to socialism and republicanism. He said,

"I must frankly confess that I am a socialist we must realize that the philosophy of socialism has gradually permeated the entire structure of society ... India will have to go that way, too, if she seeks to end her poverty and inequality, though she may evolve her own methods and may adopt the ideal to the genius of her race".²⁸

During the 1930s, Nehru was very close with a group of radical thinkers in the U.P., and together they drew up a program of agrarian socialism and raised his voice against the feudal elements of Zamindari and Taluqdari systems of the period, which were very oppressive to the farmers. He also went to Europe and imbibed more radical

²² Jawaharlal Nehru was mainly responsible to provide a great deal of push to the activities of the Socialists within the Indian National Congress. Although Nehru was not a formal member of the C.S.P., the Socialists within the Congress had always found in Nehru a co-traveler. They also thought that Nehru would be a crucial link between the young and the old within the Congress.

²³ Jawaharlal Nehru, *Soviet Russia*, Allahabad Law Journal Press, Allahabad, 1928, p. 4.

He wrote that- She (Soviet Russia) is today too much of live wire to be touched without a violent reaction.

²⁴ V. P. Verma, 1981, p. 551

²⁵ In reply to Lord Lothian's letter Nehru writes in January 17, 1936, It may be that Marx over states the case for the materialist or economic interpretation of History. Perhaps he did so for the simple reason that it had been largely ignored, or at any rate very much overstated till then. But Marx never denied the influence of other factors in the shaping of events. He laid the greatest stress in one does not make much difference. The facts remains, I think, that his interpretation of history is the only one which does explain history to some extent and gives it meaning. It helps us to understand the present and it is quite remarkable how many for his predictions have comes true.

Jawaharlal Nehru, *A Bunch of Old Letters*, Asia Publishing House, Bombay, 1958, p. 143.

²⁶ Nehru's Presidential Address to the Tenth Session of the All India Trade Union Congress, 30 November 1929. Indian Annual Register, 1929, Vol - 2, pp 425-28

²⁷ Muzaffar Ahmad, *The Communist Party of India and Its Formation Abroad*, The National Book Agency, Calcutta, 1962, p. 33.

²⁸ Presidential Address to the Indian National Congress, 1929, (https://books.google.co.in/books/about/Presidential_Address.html?id=ynqgzQEACAAJ&redir_esc=y) (accessed on 1 nov, 2019)

ideas of social and economic emancipation. Nehru participated in the meetings of the league against Imperialism in Brussels. There he demonstrated his own sympathy for the ideology of the 'Third International'.

In 1936, Jawaharlal Nehru once again became the president of the Congress, he wanted to fill up the gap Congress Working Committee mainly with prominent Socialists, but soon he found that the Old Guards of the Congress-led by Sardar Vallabhbhai Jhaverbhai Patel (1875-1950), Prasad (1884-1963) and Rajagopalachari (1878-1972) would not simply allow it. Despite much opposition, he brought Jaya Prakash Narayana (1902-1979), Acharya Narendra Deva (1889-1956), and Achyut Patwardhan (1905-1992) in the Congress Working Committee.²⁹

After Nehru, Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948) was another important figure in the history of the socialist movement. Gandhi accepted the spiritual orientation to politics, sociology, and economics. He said that truth and 'Ahimsa' must incarnate in socialism because the first condition of non-violence is justice all around in every department of life.³⁰

“This socialism is as pure as crystal. It, therefore, requires crystal-like means to achieve it.hence the prince and the peasant will not be equalized by cutting off the prince's head, nor can the process of cutting off equalize the employer and the employed. One cannot reach 'Truth' by untruthfulness. Truthful conduct alone can reach 'Truth'.”³¹

The western theory of socialism, according to him, was born in an atmosphere full of violence. Satyagraha was the only means to bring about true socialism.³² Gandhi believed in the overall development of rural Indian Countryside. He felt that the disastrous consequences of British capitalism had threatened the very existence of the rural economy. Gandhi also felt that a strengthened and economically sound village would revitalize the Indian Democracy. He condemned the nineteenth-century doctrine of 'laissez-faire'.³³ He advocated the revolutionary doctrine that "Land belongs to him who tills it."³⁴ In the Charkha, he found not the symbol of crudeness but the means and instrument in helping the Indian people get the barest morsel of food.

Gandhi accepted the concept of economic equality. All persons should be supplied with the necessities to satisfy their natural needs. He subscribed to the Marxian Formula: "To each according to his need."³⁵ The consequent elements of the economy were a balanced diet, a decent house to live in, medical relief, and a facility for children's education for every family.³⁶ Gandhi advocated leading a simple life, as opposed to large-scale industrialism and mechanization, and condemned western commercialization, imperialism, and secularism as 'disease.' Later, Gandhi became realistic enough in the context of the future Indian society to advocate a reconciliation of large scale and small scale industries, nationalization of key industries, and the organization of urban centres to fulfil the interest of the village which is considered to be the soul of India.

²⁹ Narayan Hazari, "Democratic Socialism and Jawaharlal Nehru", *The Indian Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 26, No. 4, Oct-Dec, 1965, p. 101.

³⁰ M K Gandhi, *Harijan*, July 13, 1947, in Gandhi, *Socialism of My Conception*, Bhartiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, 1957, p. 2

³¹ ³¹ *ibid*, p. 2

³² M K Gandhi, "*Harijan*", on 20 July, 1947, CWMG, Vol. 96, p.25.

³³ MMK Sardarana, "Economic Thoughts of MK Gandhi and Adam Smith", *Second Shri Chandra Shekhar Memorial Lecture*, Institute for Studies in Industrial Development, New Delhi, 8 December, 2009, p. 2

³⁴ M K Gandhi, "*Harijan*", 31 March, 1946, in *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Navajvan Publishing House, Ahmedabaad, 1958, Vol. 90: 25 February, 1946 - 19 May, 1946, p, 348

³⁵ M K Gandhi, "*Harijan*", 31 March, 1946, in *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Navajvan Publishing House, Ahmedabaad, 1958, Vol. 90: 25 February, 1946 - 19 May, 1946, p. 135.

³⁶ M K Gandhi, "Constructive Programme", in M K Gandhi, *My Socialism*, Navajvan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 1959, p. 25-26

Gandhi writes, "Economic equality is the master-key to non-violent independence. Working for economic equality means abolishing the external conflict between capital and labour. It means the leveling down of the few rich in whose hands is concentrated the bulk of the nation's wealth on the one hand and a leveling up of the semi-starved naked millions on the other.

“But I am a socialist enough to say that such factories (the factories which produce instruments like sewing machines) should nationalized and state-controlled. The saving of the labour of the individual should be the object, and not the human agreed the motive.”³⁷

Gandhi also accepted the theory of spiritual socialism and said that swaraj could not be complete unless the lowest and the humblest sections got “all the ordinary amenities of life that a rich man enjoys.” In the Gandhian concept of socialism, the peasant and the prince, the rich and the poor, the employee and the employer were to be treated equally. While giving a comprehensive note on socialism and Gandhism, Sitaramayya says, “Socialism with the majority of people as a tendency, but Gandhism is a stern.”³⁸

“Socialism is a beautiful word and so far as I am aware in socialism all the members of society are equally- none low, none high. In the individual body the head is not high because it is the top of the body, nor are the soles of feet low because they touch the earth. Even as member of the individual body are equal, so are the members of society. This is socialism.”³⁹

Indian leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru, Subhas Chandra Bose, and Ram Manohar Lohia made profound contributions to the socialist movement, shaping India’s economic and social policies toward equality and justice. Nehru’s policies emphasized state-led industrialization, aiming to reduce poverty and foster self-reliance. Lohia advocated for decentralized socialism, focusing on bridging socio-economic disparities. Leaders like Bose championed labor rights and social welfare, pushing for a just and inclusive society. Together, these leaders’ socialist ideals laid the groundwork for India’s mixed economy and policies that continue to address social inequities, influencing India’s journey toward a fairer, more progressive society.

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³⁷ M K Gandhi, *Towards Non-violent Socialism*, Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 1951, p. 29

³⁸ B. Pattabhi Sitaramayya, *Socialism and Gandhism*, The Hindustan Publishing Co. Ltd., Rajahmundry, 1938, p. 60.

³⁹ M K Gandhi, “*Harijan*”, 13 July 1947, *CWMG*, Vol. 95, pp. 403-404.

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