

The Emergence and Development of Communism in India



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Abstract

During 1920s, the left emerged as a dominant socio-political group in India. With its Marxist socialist ideology, it mobilized various sections of the society, especially workers and peasants and took up radical socio-economic issues designed to articulate their specific grievances. It also worked to create unity among the working class against landlordism, capitalism, responsible for the bad condition of the peasantry and industrial workers. The paper tries to highlight the process of emergence and development of Communism in India. It has also analyzed the role of Communist and their relationship with different classes and social groups for the comprehensive understanding of the National Movement.

Keywords: Ideological origin, Marxism, Socialism, Communist International, Downtrodden, Left Bloc, Imperialism, Capitalism, Landlordism.

Introduction

The Communist Movement of India was influenced by the emergence and growth of Communism in Soviet Union as well as in different parts of the world. Under the impact of the Russian revolution and Marxist ideas, a new type of economic critique of exploitation began to synthesize with the national sentiment, producing a powerful vision of Socialist India. This ideological impact resulted in the emergence of two prominent left parties in India – the Communist party of India and the Congress Socialist party.

Review of Literature

To substantiate the arguments of the paper, a brief survey of literature here reflects work of historians on the emergence, development and role of the left in India.

Shashi Joshi's *Struggle for Hegemony in India 1920-47 vol-1*, Sage publication, has discussed the ideological origin of Communism in India. This seminal work has tried to sharpen our understanding of historical events and processes of the national movement. The work also talks about the Communist efforts in organizing workers and peasants in their respective class organizations and thereby transforming them as an active component of the anti-imperialist movement.

J.P.Haithcox; *Communism and Nationalism in India, M.N.Roy and Comintern policy, 1920-1939*, oxford publication, has discussed in detail the efforts of communist international and M.N.Roy in the formation of Communist Party of India and its role in the national movement.

Bhagwan Josh, *Nationalism, Third International and Indian Communists; Communist Party and the united National Front(1934-39)* in Bipan Chandra(ed.), *The Indian Left; Critical Appraisals*, gives a detail idea about the history of Indian Communists during the period from 1925-50.

G.Adhikari (ed.), *Documents of the Communist Party of India, vol.11 PPH*. The document in this volume has talked about the formation of the Communist Party at Kanpur conference; the establishment of WPP and its activities in organizing the trade unions and how it started a new trend in Indian nationalism.

G.D. Overstreet and Marshall Wind miller, *Communism in India*, LLC, 2012, (originally published in 1959). A massive work on the Communist party of India, which traces the origin, its process of development, Communist International guidelines and the Communist policies and its limitations.

D.N Gupta's work, *Communism and Nationalism in Colonial India, 1939-45*, sage, 2008, has immensely contributed towards the

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understanding of the Communist party of India's approach towards the national movement and British Colonialism.

Bidyut Chakervarty's work, *Communism in India: Events Processes and ideologies, 2014*, has analysed on the changing nature of Communist ideology over the past century in India. These are some of the authoritative works on the phenomena of the development of left politics in India which gives insights in to the rise, consolidation and the changing nature of Communism in India.

Objectives of the Study

1. To understand the ideological origin of Communism in India.
2. To study its interaction with the various social groups and classes.
3. To evaluate its role in the Anti- Imperialist Struggle.
4. To analyze why it failed to grasp the Indian political reality.
5. To understand why it could not hegemonize the national movement despite its being most militant and sacrificing for the national cause

The ideological origin of the Communist party of India was actually conceptualized at the Second Congress of Communist International (CI) held in Moscow in 1920.¹ Lenin wanted to promote communist revolution in Asia and so he prepared a draft thesis on the policy to be adopted for the promotion of Socialism and Communism in Colonial areas, where national liberation movements were opposing capitalism. Lenin sought to unite all the existing anti –imperialist forces and tendencies in the world. He focused on international alliance between the (CI) Comintern and bourgeoisie led national liberation movements to promote Socialism and Communism in Asia. Lenin circulated this thesis among the delegates for comments and criticism.²

Manbendranath Roy, who was associated with the revolutionary movements in Bengal, was drawn towards the socialist ideas and Marxist Philosophy.³ He attended the Second Congress of the Communist International as a delegate of the Communist party of Mexico.⁴ Roy responded on Lenin's theses on colonial policy and as a result of this response Lenin invited him to prepare the alternative draft.⁵

The Second Congress of the Comintern adopted both the theses. This was Lenin's first attempt to formulate in a systematic manner, the ideas on how to promote communism in Asia. Roy along with Lenin played a highly significant role in the formulation and development of fundamental communist policy for the under developed areas of the globe in 1920s.⁶

Roy thesis counseled the Comintern to support only revolutionary movement of liberation rather than all bourgeoisies led – democratic liberation movement.⁷ Lenin's generalizations on the progressive role of the colonial bourgeoisie against imperialism on a world scale were rejected by Roy as inapplicable in the case of India. Roy argued that Indian bourgeoisie was reactionary and incapable of sustained fight against imperialism. In this way, Roy

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made distinction between different types of bourgeoisie democratic liberation movements which were incorporated into Lenin's Theses.⁸

Roy felt that the united front policy emphasized by Lenin which called for communist support for national movement in colonial and semi colonial areas was not appropriate in India. Hence the theoretical framework that Roy put forward in India was the formation of Communist Party which would establish its leadership over the national movement. He had less trust over national bourgeoisie because of their compromising tendencies⁹. He was of the opinion that it was only through the mass action, the overthrow of the imperialism is possible¹⁰. On the other hand Lenin in his theses mainly emphasized on the alliance between Comintern and the colonial liberation movement. Roy laid greater stress on developing independent Communist party which would organize downtrodden Indian masses peasants and workers for revolutionary overthrow of imperialism than on only supporting existing national movement. Thus, Roy and Lenin's debate in the second congress has an important historical significance as it marks the first attempt within the Comintern to formulate a policy which would successfully merge the revolutionary aspiration of nationalist anti-colonialism and Communist anti- Capitalism¹¹. Thus it was M.N. Roy who first introduced the perspective of social revolution within the colonial society at the theoretical level. The Communist in India inherited both these theses as guidelines.¹²

However, Lenin's basic postulate that a Communist party had to maintain an independent existence was also upheld by M.N.Roy and accepted by the Indian Communist as immutable maxims. As G. Adhkari, the Indian Communist leader and theoretician maintained that Lenin placed the two tasks – of supporting bourgeoisie nationalism while preserving and strengthening the Communist party. The central problem, for the Communist in India, was now to unite the national bourgeoisie, counteract its compromising tendencies and at the same time built an independent Communist Party.¹³

Hence, for the propagation of revolutionary Socialist Programme and to organize the Communist movement in India, M.N.Roy made strenuous efforts throughout 1920s. The copies of the Comintern organ, *International Press Correspondence*, large quantities of Roy's journal the *Vanguard of Indian Independence* were smuggled in to India and were secretly circulated.¹⁴

These literatures found its way into the hands of promising Indians who were also contacted through correspondence. All these literatures provided guidelines and attracted large number of people towards Marxist ideology.¹⁵

In early 1920s Roy also made an effort to penetrate the national movement not only through radical Congress members but also via the *Khilafat Movement*, the members of the Bengal revolutionary societies who joined the Congress after the First World War and were attracted towards the Communist fold and Trade Union members.¹⁶ The secretaries of the important Trade Unions were

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contacted and copies of Roy's journals were sent to them.

In late 1920, an émigré Communist Party of India was organized in Tashkent. The party was formed from among the pan-Islamic followers of the *khilafat movement* – whose aim was to overthrow the British rule. They left India and exiled themselves abroad and among them, some went to Tashkent for military training, where they were greeted by M.N.Roy. He was sent to Tashkent from Moscow as a member of Central Asiatic Bureau. This recently constituted bureau gave him the responsibility for directing revolutionary activity in Asia. Roy established his headquarter at Tashkent and selected a few educated *muhajirun* who responded to the political indoctrination offered by him. They were trained as Communist agents. Seven such Indians, headed by Roy, in October 1929, set up the Communist Party of India.¹⁷

After 1920, the task of guiding the revolutionary activities was taken up by the executive committee of the Communist International and this body was to be assisted by the Communist Party of the Western Colonial Powers.¹⁸ They decided to channel all activities in India through Roy. His headquarter was to be in Moscow where political training would be available to Indians, who on return to India would help establish a Communist Party there.¹⁹

M.N.Roy was assisted by Muhammed Shafiq, who was the general secretary of the party and Abani Mukherjee. The other important members of the party were Shukat Usmani, Fazal Elahi Qurban and Muhammad Ali.²⁰ In April 1922, Roy's centre of activity shifted to Berlin, from where he started publishing his propaganda journal, *the Vanguard of Indian Independence and three books- India in transition, India's problem and its solution and what do we want*. These literatures were dispatched to India.²¹ As a result of these efforts, several small Communist groups sprang up in India by 1922.

In addition to Comintern's aid, the suspension of Non-Cooperation movement by Gandhi in 1922 was a boon for emergence of Communism in India. Many young nationalists, who had participated actively in the Non-cooperation movement, were frustrated with the Gandhian policies and ideas, as well as alternative Swarajist's Programmes. After Feb. 1922, the Congress had no effective programme to carry on any mass movement in India. Consequently, left ideology became much more relevant.²² Number of Communist groups and organizations had begun to come in to existence after the abrupt termination of the Non-cooperation movement.

The leaders of these groups were Sripad Amrit Dange in Bombay, who published a pamphlet *Gandhi vs Lenin* and started his first Socialist weekly. In Bengal Mujaffer Ahmed brought out *Navyug* and later founded the *langel* in cooperation with poet Nazrul Islam. In Punjab Gulam Hussain and others published *Inquilab*, and in Madras, M. Singarevellu Chettiyar founded the *labour kisan gazette*.²³

As early as 1922, Roy, continuously set before the Communists in India to form the political

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organ of the proletariat – a real Communist party to lead the nationalist revolutionary struggle. He wrote to Dange in Bombay and Muzaffer Ahmed in Calcutta and other Communists to form a Secret Communist party. At the same time they were to develop an open party which would be called either the people's party or Workers and Peasant Party.²⁴

In December 1922, at the Gaya session of the Congress, the programme of the Communist Party of India, drafted by M.N.Roy, was circulated for its propagation. Roy advocated that the programme of the Indian Communists should be to combine the independence movement, the labour organization, the peasant leagues into one struggle and directed Communist groups to be linked together with the left wing of the Congress and Trade Union Movement.²⁵ The idea of forming such a party on the basis of the programme at the Gaya session was discussed by Dange, Singarevellu Chettiyar, Abani Mukherjee and Dr Manilal.²⁶

In 1925, the individual Communist groups that had emerged in Bombay, Madras, Bengal and in the north, united together into a Communist party of India at the first communist conference at Kanpur. In this conference a properly constituted Communist Party and its central committee was established. The CPI called upon all its members to enroll themselves as members of the Congress, cooperate with other radical nationalists and transform Congress into a radical mass based organization. The initiative to hold the first and foundational conference was taken by the official Communist group, then functioning in different parts of the country and not by Satya Bhakta as held by some. Dange though in jail by that time, played an important part in this.²⁷

Though the Kanpur conference was allowed to be held legally, the Indian Communist knew that the party would not be allowed by the imperialist to function and carry out its mass activities. The idea was therefore, mooted by M.N.Roy and Dange independent of each other to organize an open legal mass party – a Workers and Peasants party to be formed within the Indian national Congress and to take up through it, the work of organizing militant Trade Unions and peasant masses for their urgent demands.²⁸

A beginning in this direction was made by the combined efforts of the Communist and left wing Congress men, working together in the national Congress. Thus between 1926-28, a loose organization within the Indian national Congress was organized in India - known as Workers and Peasant Party, referred as WPP, while the Communist Party remained virtually non-existent. The WPP was to serve as a vehicle through which masses, including the working class were to be mobilized politically.²⁹

The first such organization was the Labour Kisan party of Hindustan formed by Singarevellu of Madras in 1923.³⁰ In November 1925, in Calcutta, the labour Swaraj Party of INC was organized by Muzaffer Ahmed, Qazi Nazrul Islam and Hemant Kumar Sarkar. Later in late 1926, a Congress labour party was formed in Bombay and Kirty Kisan party in Punjab.³¹ By 1928, all these provincial organizations

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were knit in to an all India party, whose units were also set up in Ajmer, Marwar, and Delhi. Thus initiated the period of the Communist Party's early mass activities in 1926-29. All Communists were the member of this party.³²

The basic objectives of the WPP was to work within the Congress to give it a more radical orientation and make it a party of the people and independently organize Workers and Peasants in their class organization – Trade Unions and Kisan Sabhas. To establish first for achievement of complete independence and ultimately of Socialism.³³

The early Indian Communists Dange and Sigarvelli in India fully accepted the Gandhian leadership and his method of struggle including non-cooperation, passive resistance constructive programme which was in sharp contrast to the attitude of Roy and Comintern. They believed that for Indian political condition, the primary requirement was ideological political education and development of mass anti- imperialist consciousness for revolution and creation of socialist state³⁴.

With this initial programme, the WPP registered its success and established a strong left wing organization within the Congress. In Bombay, work among the industrial workers commenced. The work of political education and propaganda also took off with the publication of three organs of WPP, *the Kranti* in Bombay, *Ganvani* in Bengal, and *Mehnetkesh* in Punjab³⁵ Moreover, the members of the Communist party of Great Britain (CPGB) provided guidance and actively participated in the organization of Trade Unions and WPPS in various provinces³⁶. *Philip Spratt, Ben Bradley and Hutchinson* played the role of political organizer, educator and acted as a catalytic agents for the formation of WPPS in the provinces. The WPP then put forward the programme of action to be utilized in the interest of masses before the AICC through its members. The programme advanced the slogan of complete independence, transformation of the Congress to take steps for emancipation of masses from exploitation and oppression. The significant aspect of its programme was organization of trade union which was systematically undertaken.³⁷

This perspective of transforming the Congress rapidly acquired the shape of a left bloc in the Congress. Members of the WPPS were elected to the provincial and all India Congress committee, acquired position of influence in the Congress organization and functioned as left Congressmen within it; they cooperated with other left and radical persons in the Congress like Bose and Nehru who were not associated with the WPP. They functioned as an ideological political group on the initiative of J.L.Nehru.³⁸

The notion that freedom could not be defined only in political terms but must have a socio-economic content began to be associated with his name. In 1927, he attended Brussels Congress of the *league against Imperialism* as a delegate of INC and came in contact with Communists, the anti- Colonial fighters of all over the world. The contemporary international situation, socialist ideas and various

shades of progressive thoughts, which he encountered during his participation, influenced his ideas. The same year, he visited Soviet Union and was deeply impressed by the new socialist societies and began to accept Marxism in its broad contours. But he emphasized the unsuitability of the Russian Revolution model having transferred blindly without due regard to the facts and the political conditions in India. In 1928, Nehru joined hands with Subhas Chandra Bose to *organize Independence of India league* to fight for complete independence.

Political freedom was his first priority and that could alone lead to the economic emancipation of the masses. It was only through the prism of national movement that Nehru viewed and discussed the role of various classes in society. He neither put forward the goal of dictatorship of proletariat nor the necessity of an independent Bolshevik political party of working class – the essence of Leninism.³⁹ The main task for him was to transform the Congress in Socialist direction by working under its banner and bringing workers and peasants to play a great role. During this period, his writings and public pronouncements on socialism inspired and educated the youths. Students and youth organizations were organized all over the country during 1928 and 1929. Nehru and Bose attacked on imperialism, capitalism and landlordism.⁴⁰

The decisive influence of the left wing group on the national politics became apparent at the annual session of the Congress in Madras in 1927. The resolution at this session declaring complete independence as the accredited goal of the Congress was moved by the WPP members – Jogleker and Nimberker and supported by Nehru, and was passed unanimously. It was a turning point in the history of the national movement. This was for the first time that the party's goal was the attainment of complete independence rather than dominion status. The Madras session of the Congress showed a pronounced move towards the left.⁴¹

The radicalization of the Indian politics proceeded further. There emerged a close cooperation between the Congress, the WPPs and the fast developing students and youth organizations in the provinces. This was evident in the joint demonstration on various national political issues.⁴² They jointly organized massive anti-Simon Commission demonstration in Bombay and Calcutta which created panic in Government circles.⁴³ Meanwhile, the WPP, independence of India league, led by Nehru and Bose expressed criticism on the Nehru reports focusing on dominion status. These efforts radicalized the Congress and gave national politics a left orientation. This was due to the new consolidation of the various left forces in the late twenties⁴⁴.

The British chief of intelligence, Williamson concluded that Communism as an ideology had acquired roots in India, as many articles in the Indian press were published about the power of mass action as political weapon.⁴⁵ Saklatwala, the Communist member the parliament of Britain campaigned in India in 1927, got enthusiastic response from youths and earned appreciative comments from several

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responsible quarters. The Communist and WPP members increasing influence and popularity within the Congress were a vindication of the politics of transformation.⁴⁶ Similarly, leaders of the WPP achieved success remarkably and rapidly in organizing workers in Trade Unions.

The rapid advance that occurred in the Indian trade union movement during this period was essentially rooted in the very basic work of improving existing organization and establishment of new unions. Though, few Congress leaders were active in the all India trade union Congress (AITUC), but the Congress had generally ignored the Indian labour movement despite its potentialities as political weapon.⁴⁷ However, the Indian Communists grabbed this opportunity by unionization of the working class. The members of the WPP, Communist working together with other trade unionists, not only controlled the movement but acquired a definite hold over the workers themselves in Bombay and Calcutta. They also became active among workers of Sholapur and Kanpur, in the iron steel workers of Jamshedpur in Bihar, the jute workers near Calcutta and rail road workers throughout northern India. The Indian Communists were also able to capture a number of trade unions and secure influence within the AITUC.⁴⁸

However, the moderate, reformist or the constitutional trade unionist like N.M.Joshi, Dewan Chamanlal, V.V.Giri, Shiva Rao were the major section of the existing trade union leadership. They worked to promote the working class organization along constitutional lines before the left wing entered the scene. The Colonial Govt. also sought to support constitutional trade unionism as to direct the movement along safe lines.⁴⁹ Moreover, the working class was not very much active in anti- imperialist struggle before the left penetrated the movement. The WPP left bloc combined brought anti-imperialist politics to the working class.⁵⁰ They emphasized that the interest of all sections of society were common *vis-a-vis* imperialism and tried to make the workers conscious of the fact that their abject poverty and bad condition was due to the foreign government. Thus, by 1928 the working class organization were transformed from being a vehicle of defensive economic struggle, in to becoming an active component within the anti- imperialist movement. Then the working class agitated with the peasants during the *Bardoli* movement (1928); On the issue of boycott of Simon Commission, on the question of dominion status and many such issues of national concern.⁵¹

Further, the influence of the left bloc was felt during the seventh session of the AITUC in 1927. For the first time the radical resolutions like anti-imperialism, international solidarity and the militant assertion of the basic demands of the working class etc. were adopted which also owed greatly to large support received from the left nationalists who were not members of the WPP.⁵²

It was in this type of intervention in the politics of the working class and the national movement that became the basis of the emerging left bloc forging solidarity between different groups in

society and drawing the radical currents together. It was this left bloc for which the constitutional trade unions felt, they were becoming hostage to and wanted their secession from the AITUC. The split in the AITUC was due to the attitude of constitutional trade union to keep working class movement – apolitical and that divided them from militant left nationalist.⁵³

Further, between 1927-29, the progress registered by the workers movement was reflected in increase in membership and affiliation of unions. In Kanpur session of the 1927, the Congress (AITUC) commanded the affiliation of 59 unions and membership of 1, 25000 workers whereas the Nagpur session of 1929, it represented 1, 89436 members – the largest number of organized workers so far in the records of the AITUC.

A similar increase was evidenced in the percentage of affiliated unions paying affiliated fees⁵⁴ thus, the work of unionization of workers had achieved a tremendous leap forward as a result of cohesive action by the left wing in the AITUC.

The period witnessed a new wave of mobilization of the working class which was reflected in unprecedented number of strikes in all most all industries especially in railways and textile, in⁵⁵ the rapid growth of youth movement as a potential cadre of the left. The youths, under the influence of Marxism and socialist ideas, joined various organizations like youth leagues, Seva Dals and volunteer organizations. The emergence of youth organizations in provinces and the role they were playing in supporting the militant policy in freedom movement, and participating in national revolutionary activities was recorded in the documents of the WPP.⁵⁶

Thus the combined strength of the radical youth leagues, the massive strike wave and mobilization of labour, spelt doom to the continuation of the British rule. David Patrie, the director intelligence, assessed this cooperation between the communist and the left congressmen as alarming for the continuation of the British rule.⁵⁷ The youth movement was an active component of the emerging left bloc in the country and was considered by the Govt., as a new and dangerous phenomenon in the Indian politics.

Similarly, the revolutionary nationalists led by Bhagat Singh and Chandra Shekher Azad also turned towards socialist ideology and they renamed their organizations as *Hindustan socialist Republican Army of India (HSRA)*. Bhagat Singh helped in establishing the Punjab *Nauzaban Bharat Sabha* in 1926 to carry out open political work among the youths, peasants and workers.⁵⁸

Further, the 44th session of the Congress held at Lahore in 1929, was the finale to the phase of the radicalization of the Congress and the National Movement which had begun in early 1927. The address of J.L. Nehru confirmed transformation of the Congress. One year ultimatum to the government expired at the midnight of December 31st, 1929. The Nehru report was declared to have elapsed and the resolution was passed interpreting *Swaraj* as complete independence. It marked a definite break

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with the past many years. At Madras session, independence had been declared as a distant goal, at Lahore, it became an immediate objective.⁵⁹

Nehru's plea for Socialism was much more influential than the ordinary communist propaganda. The government viewed the formation of workers and peasant party with great alarm and found it more dangerous than the formation of CPI. However, the WPP movement was clearly seen by the government as left bloc and not the organization of few Communists – a movement with wide ranging future growth.⁶⁰

To prevent this growth, the government, took effective steps. Legislations like public safety bill 1928, to target the British Communist agents working with remarkable effect within India, trade dispute bill 1929, designed to prevent strikes and series of conspiracy cases like Peshawar conspiracy case 1922-24, Kanpur Bolshevik case, 1924, were the government's strategy to diffuse the explosive combination. Moreover, the government ultimately struck a severe blow by arresting thirty one top party and trade union leaders in Meerut conspiracy case in 1929 and tried to isolate the Communists from the National Movement⁶¹. The effects of the Meerut conspiracy case on the Communism in India were ambiguous. These arrests were disastrous for the party. The WPP become defunct as all its leaders were in jail.⁶²

In addition to Government's repressive measures, the Communist inflicted more deadly blow on themselves by adopting the framework of the sixth Congress of the Comintern. The earlier notion of M.N.Roy that Communist could alone lead the national liberation movement by capturing Congress Organization was now also advanced by the Comintern. It called upon all Communists for ruthless exposure of the national reformism of the Congress and complete break with the nationalist movement. Consequently, workers and peasants must be liberated from the influence of the nationalist bourgeoisie.⁶³ By late 1928, the Communists working within the WPP adopted this new Comintern policy. Now, the notion of correct programme for any Marxist had to be abolition of landlordism and capitalism by revolutionary method was being accepted. Any short of this programme was seen deviating from the Marxist principle. Hence the polarization in to Communist and non- Communist became imperative. The demand for separation from all other left and socialist tendencies which did not accept fixed conception of correct programme and revolutionary method was seen as dissolving the very basis of the left bloc⁶⁴

Now, the Congress was characterized by the Communists as a petty bourgeoisie organization under bourgeoisie leadership demanding concession from the government. *The independence for India league* was also attacked. Its members were called counter revolutionary whose object was to impede the development of mass movements the Indian communists decided to adopt the colonial theses of the sixth Congress OF CI as the basis for their work.⁶⁵

Thus the surrender of many initially, original minds who earlier advocated for Gandhian method of struggle (Dange and Singaravelu) and non application of Bolshevism to Indian condition , was seen complete by 1929. Now they stand for complete application of Leninism to the Indian condition and complete adherence to the Comintern.⁶⁶

Thus, a small group of Communist, internalizing Marxist premises, were left outside and marginalized. Moreover, the CI injunctions to dissolve the WPP on the ground that its programme was not a Communist Programme, as it had failed to take cognizance of the deepening agrarian crisis and had done no work among the peasantry, finally dissolved the WPP. The tenth plenum of the in July 1929, directed the Communists to disband the WPP and to eschew all relations with the INC and the Independence of India league.⁶⁷ At the end of 1930s a document was published in international press correspondence entitled a draft platform of action of the CPI, which called for the denunciation not only of Gandhi but also of left nationalist reformists.⁶⁸

This shift of the Communist political line isolated them from the national movement at the very moment when it was gearing up for the Civil Disobedience Movement. The success and effectiveness of the boycott and other methods of the Congress showed that the guidelines developed by CI and blindly adopted by the Indian Communists was far from the demand of the Indian reality or even irrelevant to the Indian political situation.⁶⁹ Further, G. Adhikari, on behalf of the Communist group in Meerut jail, sent reports to the Communist International of fragmentation, and rapid disintegration of the Communist influence during this period. CPI at this time hardly existed outside Bombay, Calcutta and only consisted of inexperienced student leaders. Its influence among the workers which they had secured in the initial period was on decline and had no contact with the villagers.⁷⁰

Meanwhile, M.N.Roy who was considered as a doyen of the Indian Communism, returned to India in 1930. He was expelled from the Communist International in 1929 because of his opposition to Stalin's ultra-left policies. He opposed the new political line of the Comintern as sectarian and rebuked the Indian communists of their wrong ways of following the new directions and abandoning of Lenin's united front policy. He urged the Indian Communist to reject it and advocated a much more realistic policy that they must work through national mass organization – the national congress, youth leagues, student's organization and volunteer corps – as the condition in India was not at all ripe like Soviet States.⁷¹

From December 1930, to July 1931, in this brief period of seven months, Roy and his group of Communist got remarkable success in radicalizing politics and made strong impact on trade union movement. He was arrested by the British govt. in July 1931.⁷² His views and doctrines made successful endeavour's to impregnate the Congress and its leaders and he gained many more adherents in Bombay, Calcutta and united provinces and in other

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parts of India. In a very short span, Roy built up contacts with radical left congressmen, luring J.L. Nehru and others in his fold.⁷³

Further, in the trade union field, Roy and his group of Communist made greater gains and started operating in Bombay, Calcutta, Madras, and Nagpur while inroads had been made in up Bihar Orissa and Central Province. They were able to form alliance with the nationalist trade unionists and secure the support of Subhas Chandra Bose, who was president of AITUC in 1931. By 1933, Roy followers consolidated their position in the AITUC and secured the affiliation to it of some forty labour organization of various strength. They were able to capture Girni kamgar union (GKU), railway men's union and made inroads into GIP railway union and organized the Bombay dock workers union.⁷⁴

Further, Roy's aim was radicalization of the Congress and its lower echelons. At that time countryside was disturbed due to worldwide economic depression that led to fall in the agricultural prices. He wanted the Congress left to grab this opportunity by championing the demands of the peasants. He toured the United Province with Nehru in March 1931. It was his inspiration, and impact that Nehru decided to launch no- tax campaign at the end of Nov. 1931 in UP. Roy and his group of Communists were active in the peasant agitation 1930-31 and attempted to provide Congressmen in the villages with a concrete programme of action.⁷⁵

The United Province government was alarmed by the propagation of Communist ideology in the course of peasant agitation and as result of the agrarian disturbance; the provincial government had to announce certain reduction in rent.⁷⁶ Further, Roy and his group of communist succeeded in radicalizing the Congress and its policies.

The radicalization found expression in the Karachi resolution of 1931. Roy attended Karachi session of the Congress at Nehru's invitation. The Karachi session was noteworthy for passage of resolution on the fundamental rights, national economic programme, socio- economic reforms, state ownership of industries, transport and also included important provision in the area of labour rights and agrarian reforms drafted on socialist lines. British intelligence suspected Roy's influence had been decisive on Karachi resolution which was very much similar to Roy's minimum programme.⁷⁷

However, his work did not go forward after July 1931, with the same momentum as before, because he was arrested by the British government. He was considered by the intelligence wing of the government to be the man who could make Communism the real danger in India.

Further, from 1933, Meerut Communist began to be releases and towards the end of 1933, there was a sudden revival of activities when CPI formed a united front with Royist to exploit the labour unrest especially in Indian textile industries. The all India textile workers conference was held in Bombay in Jan 26-28, 1934, in which the Communist and Royist joined hands for an all India general strike to meet the offensive of the employers. Due to their

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influence the strike spread to other locations also.⁷⁸ There were strikes in Sholapur, Kanpur, Nagpur and Delhi but the strike collapsed, as dissensions began in the strike committee. Consequently, the Govt. adopted stiff measures and not only arrested Communist leaders but also declared the CPI, an unlawful organization in 1934, on the ground that they posed a danger to the public peace.⁷⁹

However, despite the Govt.'s ban the arrest of its leaders, the CPI worked for the labour movement of Bombay textile industry, Bengal jute industry and Kanpur cotton industry. They also established contact with the newly formed Congress Socialist party. Through this association, the Communists won valuable support in the labour movement and gained entry in the Congress. The Communist dropped the exposure aspects of their programme on the basis of their concrete experience which was definitely a beginning a pragmatic step.⁸⁰ In October 1934, efforts were made to build united front between CPI and CSP. The newly formed Congress Socialist party allowed the Communists to become members of its party as CPI was banned by the government. In Jayprakash Narayan, the party had an eloquent exponent of left wing unity. In practice, the CSP was acting more or less a left wing platform for various left oriented groups.⁸¹ The CPI joined the CSP and at the same time they were careful to maintain their separate organizational identity.

In the meantime, the seventh congress of Comintern met in July 1935 and announced a new policy of people's front. As it was obvious that as a result of the Comintern's policy laid down in 1928-29, Communist parties throughout the world and particularly in India had been badly weakened.⁸² At the same time there was a serious threat to rise of powerful enemy in Fascism from 1933. Consequently, the seventh congress of CI rejected its former strategy and tactics. The new policy on the colonial question was worked out by the Chinese leader Wang Ming. He criticized the CPI of isolating itself from national movement against imperialism led by the Congress and exhorted the Communist to cooperate with the Congress and its affiliated organization and at the same time to maintain its independent organizational identity.⁸³

This new Comintern line for the Indian Communist in the form of concrete policy was worked out by R.P.Dutt and Ben Bradley in *Dutt- Bradley* theses printed in Imprecor in Feb. 1936. According to these theses, the national Congress could play a foremost part in the anti- imperialist people's front.⁸⁴ The Communist party, now took on to its new tactics and was reorganized itself under the leadership of P.C. Joshi and changed their estimation of the Congress party. It was noted as a central mass political organization against imperialism. The Communist once again occupied an important position within the Congress organization and became the AICC members.⁸⁵

The immediate project of the United Front policy was to consolidate the left forces and influences the policies of the Congress. Further, to coordinate the *kisan movement*, both CSP and CPI

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forged a close alliance with the kisan leaders – Sahjanand Sareswati, Indulal Yagnik and N.G.Ranga to organize an *All India Kisan Sabha (AIKS)* in 1936.

This All India organization stood for ultimate economic and political power for the producing masses and advocated for united active participation in the national struggle for winning complete independence.⁸⁶ Under the guidance of both CSP and CPI, the AIKS championed proposals for agrarian reform- more drastic than those espoused by the Congress. The Congress activities among the peasantry were directed towards creation of an additional pressure against the British rule. They visualized Kisan organization in the provinces -*kisan sabhas* as an ancillary to the national movement. But CSP, CPI viewed it not only as a weapon aimed at the British rule, but also as an instrument of class struggle and vehicle for pressing exclusive class demands of the peasantry. The CSP and CPI wanted to develop them in to a powerful class organization which could provide them power base within the Congress party.⁸⁷

The Congress party in 1936, met at Faizpur Village for its session, to symbolize its aim of identification with the peasantry. The Faizpur session of the Congress adopted the radical agrarian programme (like moratorium on debts, cancellation of arrears of rent etc.) the influence of the left was apparent in most of its resolutions which was written directly under the inspiration of Jawahar Lal Nehru.⁸⁸

Meanwhile, the left wing in the Congress opposed vehemently the government's offer of taking part in the constitutional experiment for self-government under the government of India Act 1935. The lead was given by Nehru and socialist who felt that office acceptance under the state constitution by the Congress would be retreat from radical politics and going back to non-mass movement phase of pre-1919 years. The CSP planned a campaign against office acceptance and formed Anti-Ministry committee under the president ship of Sardul Singh Caveeshar, M.R.Masani, and Rafi Ahmed Kidwai.⁸⁹

The Communist on the issue of office acceptance, declared that wrecking the slave constitution was its first and immediate task, which would be done only through a widespread militant mass movement based on the demands of toiling masses. The election was transformed into a large scale anti-imperialist mass mobilization. They tried to avoid split within the national movement and declared that they would actively support those Congress candidates, who would pledge to implement the demands of workers and peasants.⁹⁰

Roy also supported the Congress right wing policy of participating in election on the pretext that it would definitely widen and broaden the mass base of the party.⁹¹ Though the Congress decision to enter the council was based on harsh realities that the party could not start immediate mass movement, when the tide was on ebb. They also rejected the constitution and decided to contest the election, not to cooperate with the British govt. but to combat it and seek to end it. Their sole idea behind the acceptance of ministerial office was to transform its political force into a political power, which was not completely understood by the

left wing,⁹² though the Congress manifesto for 1937 election had profound left impact.

The manifesto reaffirmed the fundamental rights resolution adopted at Karachi session and agrarian reforms such as reduction in revenue and rent and exemption of uneconomic holding from payment of rent etc.

After the formation of Congress Ministries both CSP and CPI pressurized the Congress government to implement its pro-people promises. The Congress Ministry did make effort at socio-economic reforms. Attempts were made for pro-peasant agrarian legislation in provinces from 1937-39. The Congress government also ensured an atmosphere of civil liberties for extra parliamentary movement which was utilized by the Communists and Socialists.⁹³

In UP the Communist mobilized industrial workers and started prolonged strikes in number of mills of Kanpur for better wages. They were supported by the radical section of the provisional Congress. The process of radicalization of the Congress was sufficiently advanced during this period. It produced an umbrella to the working class to fight for its demand.⁹⁴ Similarly, in Bengal, the Communist played a considerable role in Calcutta jute mill strikes in 1937, which involved large number of workers.⁹⁵

In Bombay, the Communist led associations were placed under a ban by the previous government and that was removed by the Congress Ministry. The Communists then started massive strike in textile mills, Docks and other mills for better wages. The Congress government appointed an enquiry committee which recommended increase in the wages which was accepted by the mill owners.

However, in Bombay government imposed severe restrictions on the right to strike. The Communist weekly *kranti* in Marathi was restarted in 1937 under the editorship of S.A Dange. Through their journals, the Communist campaigned for release of political prisoners, and demanded lifting the ban on CPI. In Bihar, The agrarian agitation started in late 1937-38 under the left led kisan sabha which took the form of direct action for reduction of rent and restoration of *bakasht* land. Peasants forcibly occupied lands from *zamindars* on which they had become the sharecropper.⁹⁶ Consequently, the Congress Ministry in Bihar had to impose section 144 to tackle the agrarian agitation which disrupted the harmony between the left and the Congress Govt. The CSP and CPI were highly critical of the government's handling of the popular protest. Some professed to see little difference between the Congress rule and British Raj.⁹⁷

Similarly, in other parts of the country like Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Orissa the Communist and Socialists were able to acquire strong and even dominant influence over the Congress organization. The CPI, Royest and the CSP grew in numbers and were able to develop workers and peasants organization, Student movement, Progressive Writers Association and published journals, newspapers, popularized Marxism on a large scale and garnered sympathy and support for the Soviet Union.⁹⁸

Thus the formation of the Congress Ministry brought out the differences between the radical and more conservative forces within the national movement and led to a confrontation between the two wings which culminated in the events of 1939. The climax of the crisis occurred at the annual session of the Congress held at *Tripuri* in March 1939. Subhas Chandra Bose and his left supporters had confrontation with Gandhi and the right wing of the Congress, when Bose charged the member of the working committee that they were compromising on the issue of federation.

However, the CPI and CSP did not support Bose as they realized that such an effort would weaken the national movement and would isolate them from the mainstream. They realized that masses could be mobilized only under Gandhi's leadership. Thus at *Tripuri*, the Socialist and Communists chose nationalist unity under Gandhi rather than left wing hegemony under Bose. However, due to failure of the Socialists and Communist to unite behind Bose, the left wing suffered a debacle at *Tripuri*.⁹⁹

Moreover, dissensions cropped up in the united front. Parallel to the process of transformation a process of alienation of the organized working masses was also being created under the leadership of the Communists.⁹⁹ The national executive of the CSP leadership took strong objection to this tactics. Some of its members in the provincial carder were suspended for serious deviation from the party line.¹⁰⁰

The CSP as a result of this alliance, nearly lost control of its own party. From 1937, the member of the CPI was holding a number of high offices in the CSP. Two of them – *EMS Namboodripad* and *Sajjad Zaheer* were joint secretaries of the CSP, and by 1939, twenty members of the AICC were Communists. Gradually, the CSP leadership came to realize that the real root of this mistaken policy was of uniting Marxist groups without asking them dissolve their own separate organization. This made the functioning of the united front difficult.¹⁰¹

There was an absence of genuine desire for unity among the other groups. *Royist* in March 1937 resigned from the CSP expressing dissatisfaction with its policies. Unlike *Royist* the Communist did not leave the CSP until they were forcibly expelled from the party in 1940.

With the outbreak of the Second World War, national politics took a new turn. England declared war on Germany on September 3rd 1939, India was proclaimed a belligerent country without consulting Indian opinion. The Congress working committee declared its inability to cooperate with the war effort and called upon the congress provincial ministries to resign.¹⁰²

The entire left strained for militant anti-war struggle and the CPI demanded that the war be converted into a revolution. This radical line was stated in an official resolution of the polit-bureau, adopted at its October 1939 meeting. They also declared that their task was to mobilize masses for utilization of war crisis for achievement of national freedom. This was to be declared policy of CPI until the end of 1941.

A document circulated by the Communists immediately after the war emphasized to seize initiative in making preparation for struggle through Congress Committees and thereby swing the entire national movement to the path of revolutionary struggle.¹⁰³ The Communist were of the view that the participation of workers, peasants and students masses in the struggle for independence with their own form of struggle – strike, no rent, mass action could upset Gandhian plan for any honorable settlement, on the other hand Gandhi wanted to keep proletariat out of the political action as he feared that proletariat technique of action would spell death for Gandhian non-violence.

However, the Communist hope for transforming economic general strike by the workers especially in Bombay as a precursor of national struggle, failed miserably. Heavy repression by an ever vigilant Government thwarted their attempt of converting economic general strike into a type of insurrection. The government strategy to contain Communism was successfully applied.¹⁰⁴

By feb.1941, the government arrested a substantial portion of the office bearers of GKU, AIKS, and AITUC, other national and provincial leading Communist of Madras, Bombay, Bihar, up, Delhi, and Punjab. They were arrested for anti-war activities under the defense of India rule and detained in Deoli camp. The party was completely paralyzed.

However, Hitler's attack on Soviet Union and subsequent entry of Japan into the war changed the imperialist war into people's war. Britain was now considered as the ally of the world's only socialist state. The Indian Communist accepted Comintern's line and offered their assistance to British war efforts without linking it to the demand of India's independence.¹⁰⁵ This change in political line on one hand gave it an opportunity to gain legal status in July 1942, and to get its cadre released from jail. On the other hand, it helped the party to emphasize its international character.¹⁰⁶ However, they had to pay the price for their change in stand during 1942-45. It not only drove a permanent wedge between the Congress and the Communist but also to a considerable extent soiled the anti-imperialist image of the party.

Conclusion

However, they did succeed in making a basic impact on Indian society and politics. They built up class-consciousness among the workers and peasants, aroused awakening and eroded engrained attitude of fear and respect for the existing power nexus. This changed attitude asserted their weight (workers and peasants) in the anti-imperialist struggle. The Communist dedication, initiative and tremendous energy in building trade unions, students and youth organizations, peasant movements, literary unions was phenomenal.

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 4. Roy met soviet emissary Michale Borodin in Mexico, who laid the foundation of his Marxist thought. He became the member of the Mexican Socialist Party, converted it into a communist organization and won affiliation with the Communist international (CI), J.P.Haithcox, *Op.cit.*, P10.
 5. Shashi Joshi, *Op.cit.* p44; J.P.Haithcox, *op.cit.*, p12
 6. Shashi Joshi, *Op.cit.* p44; J.P.Haithcox, *op.cit.*, p12
 7. J.P.Haithcox, *op.cit.* p 13; G.Adhikari, *op.cit.*, vol-1 pp180-86; Shashi Joshi, *op.cit.* p 44.
 8. J.P.Haithcox, *op.cit.* p 13; G.Adhikari, *op.cit.*, vol-1 pp180-86; Shashi Joshi, *op.cit.* p 44.
 9. Indian Bourgeoisie according to Roy would compromise with the rulers and settle for something less than complete independence.
 10. J.P.Haithcox; *op.cit.* p15.
 11. Shashi Joshi *op.cit.* Pp 44-5
 12. J.P.Haithcox; *op.cit.*, p18.
 13. *Ibid*, pp 12-13.
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 16. Muhajirun was mosem pilgrims. They left India in 1920 to establish their homes in Moslem country or to join Mustafa kamal pasha's rebel army in Turkey.
 17. J.P.Haithcox, *op.cit.*, pp20-28; Workers welfare league of India, established in 1917, was a communist vehicle for influencing its ideology among the trade unions.
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30. *Ibid*.
31. G.Adhikari, *Documents*, *op.cit.* vol111, p118.
32. Mujaffer Ahmad, *op.cit.* PP22-3
33. *Ibid*, p 161.
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44. *Ibid*.
45. Shashi Joshi, *op.cit.* p 83.
46. David Patre, *Communism in India*, *op.cit.* chapter 13.
47. G. Adhikari, *Documents*; vol-111B, p196 (see introduction of the role of Left Wing and WPP), p30.
48. Gandhi hoped to avoid as far as possible the mixing of politics with the trade union activity and abjured the use of strikes as conducive to violence. J.P.Haithcox, *op.cit.*, p97.

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57. Home Department, *Political File No 179/29(Report by intelligence Department, cited in Shashi Joshi, op.cit. p130,(in Bombay youth League was led by Yusuf Mehrally youths were mobilized in central Province, Punjab, Madras and United Province.)*
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70. *Documents, op.cit vol-11 p 135.*
71. *Expulsion of Roy from the Comintern, Imprecore, ix 1929; Roy, while in Berlin, rejected the new Comintern line especially as it was applied to India and contributed articles to International Press Correspondence. ECCI decided on 19th December to expel Brandler organization of Germany as member of CI and Roy, by contributing to the Brandler Press and supporting Brandler organization – considered expelled from CI. M.N.Roy, Our Differences, Calcutta Saraswati Library, 1938, p 4; J.P.Haithcox, op.cit., p133., Roy's views on India clashed with Stalin's Post 1927 colonial policy..*
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73. *Ibid*, Williamson, *India and Communism, op.cit.*, p164
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