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Socialist Movements in India – A Critical Study

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Abstract

Acharya Jawadekar held that although Indian socialism had imbibed principles of western socialism, this imbibing was not done blindly. India had produced the India made socialism which the Indian culture had evolved through Indian freedom struggle. Hence, it was important to see how the socialists and Congress had come into contact with Indian freedom struggle.

INTRODUCTION .

(A) CONGRESS AND INDIAN SOCIALISM :

Although Congress was established in 1885, among the first generation leaders of the Congress was Dadabhai Naoroji who recognised in 1870 that the growing poverty in India and the economic exploitation that the British were indulging in, would generate a revolutionary movement in near future and in that British rule in India would come to an end. Karl Marx and Dadabhai Naoroji were contemporaries. Marx had recognised that one class exploited the other class and revolution would take place there and he worked all through his life for the revolution. Dadabhai Naoroji understood that if one nation exploited other nation, the revolution would take place. He tried to see that such a revolution took place peacefully with the cooperation of generous leaders of both countries. The former's efforts resulted into Communist revolution and rise of dictatorship and the latter's efforts resulted into Satyagrahi revolution and it created favourable atmosphere for the emergence of socialists democracy.

In the second generation of National leaders Lokmanya Tilak and Gopalkrishna Gokhale came forward and played an important role in the Indian politics and both of them were proud of Dadabhai Naoroji's work. They took it as an honour to claim that they continued the work of Dadabhai Naoroji. But none of them had the all-party recognition that Dadabhai Naoroji had enjoyed.¹

The first generation of Congressmen laid stress on the democracy, social equality and individualism and not on nationalism and that was why they were famous by the name of social reformers. The second generation laid more stress on nationalism and gave secondary importance to democracy and social equality. It declared 'National Freedom' as its aim. National pride, independence and hatred of dependence became the source of their inspiration. This party had decided to concentrate all its energies on one point, that India should become independent. Lokmanya Tilak's generation spread nationalism in India. According to Acharya Jawadekar it was not right to say that Lokmanya Tilak was against the social equality and democracy, because the preceding generation had laid more stress on social equality and democracy and given secondary importance to National Freedom. He struck the pendulum to the other side. He gave prime importance to national freedom. According to Acharya Jawadekar he understood the characteristic of Indian politics. Tilak realised that in the dependent nation Nationalism should be given prime place and all the freedom seeking forces should unite. Nationalism was a uniting bond that revolutionised the soul of India.

The third generation of the national leaders included Mahatma Gandhi and Pandit Nehru. Although Gandhiji and Lenin were contemporaries, Lenin brought Marxist philosophy in reality. He did not have his own philosophy. The philosophy that Mahatma Gandhi had given was superior to the philosophy of Marx. According to Acharya Jawadekar Gandhi's philosophy gave new insights and Indian socialists should develop their philosophy keeping in view Gandhian perspective.²

During 1922-27 the impact of communist philosophy on Indian people was growing. Because at that time Indian Freedom Movement was slightly slowed down. The Congress had to take note of growing influence of the Communist ideology. Nehru himself was impressed by the Communist ideology.

In fact Gandhian philosophy was a part of socialism because its aim was to establish one-class society by abolishing castes and class divisions in the society. Gandhism was not the result of mere intellectual theorisation but it was the outcome of the observations of daily needs and life of common people, and it was a socialism produced through traditional spiritual view-point. 'I myself am a socialist' said Gandhi. As a result, one group within the Congress was influenced by the socialist ideas. But they believed in the principle on non-violent Satyagrahi revolution of Gandhiji. And out of it socialist party was formed within the Congress in 1934-35. But the policy of this socialist party was to first achieve independence. Acharya Jawadekar was of the opinion that this group was of the opinion that they should increase their influence gradually and force the Congress to accept the socialist policy. But in 1948 the Congress decided as a policy matter that there should not be internal party groups within the Congress. Hence, there was no option left for the socialists but to pull out of the Congress. By so pulling out of the congress, the socialist group established 'The Socialist Party'. Even after Independence Nehru took a complementary stand on socialism. Initially Acharya Jawadekar felt that socialism would be established by Pandit Nehru. But later he was disillusioned. Acharya Jawadekar wrote : "Pandit Nehru came as a leader of Socialist Party before Indian people. But in 1934 when the Socialist Party was established, Nehru did not accept the membership of that party. The Congress accepted him as Gandhiji's heir. But most of the leaders in Congress did not agree with his socialist ideas". Acharya Jawadekar was of the opinion that in 1951 although Nehru called himself a socialist, he never said that socialism or democratic socialism was the aim of his party, because many of the leaders and members of his party did not agree with socialist aims. Hence, he could not establish socialist party. Acharya Jawadekar criticised the Congress and Nehru and wrote :

Official leadership of the congress and Prime-ministership is in the hands of Pandit Nehru, and he tells that today nation does not need any particular kind of 'ism' but the prime question today is of peace and giving a government stability fulfilling the needs of food, clothing , and producing food grains in an important question. It is an important question to have national integration. And nationalization is not necessary at least for 10 years. It is not an important question whether he preferred or did not prefer the socialist ideas as a principle but today the Congress does not follow the socialist policy can be clearly seen. It is possible that to establish just society it is necessary to accept principles of socialism, but today Congressmen say that to solve day-to-day problems facing the country, socialism is not necessary.³

The Congress and Nehru's leadership was not taking a single step towards socialism, because the Congress feared the opposition of capitalists and factory owners. Congress Party had not remained socialists and revolutionary party. Some socialists were still there in the party but all the policy decisions were in the hands of Pandit Nehru and Sardar Patel both of whom thought that it was not right time to implement the policy of economic and social revolution. Nehru was a socialist and head of the cabinet. Therefore, the people fondly believed that he would bring about socialist revolution. An example of Britain is sufficient to clear this misconception. "It is true that Ramsey Macdonald organised the socialist party in Britain but he realised that it was not practical to establish socialism due to the pressure of American capitalists; he got disillusioned, then he forged alliance with Baldwin and became a leader of national party. And the leadership of Labour Party came to Mr. Atlee and the Labour Party in Britain was divided and became weak. Due to this the influence of Fascism grew all over the world. The Congress in India became narrow- minded political party and Pandit Nehru became the leader of this party. Because of this, the socialist strength in India got weakened and the work of social and economic progress was relegated to secondary importance. As a result the communal force would rise in strength.⁴

In this way, the Congress and Pandit Nehru were drifting away from socialism. But from 1952-53 Acharya Vinoba Bhave started Bhoodan Movement. According to Acharya Jawadekar the rise of the revolutionary power influenced the Congress. Today Congress did not possess the strength of producing revolutionary movement. But the Congress had to take the note of revolutionary force that emerged from Bhoodan Movement. This kind of a situation had arisen and there was no alternative but to accept socialism. Hence, in 1955 at Awadi session the Congress officially declared that the establishment of socialist pattern of society was the goal of the Congress. Acharya Jawadekar opined that it was the result of Bhoodan movement. The Congress in its revolution had not clearly enunciated the nature and the method of establishing socialist society in India. Hence, Acharya Jawadekar wrote :

Though this event is important in the history of the Congress Party, there is one group within the Congress that is opposed to the socialist policy. There are some Congressmen who oppose the socialism from the theoretical point of Gandhism. If this was not so, the Congress would have declared immediately after independence its aim to establish socialist economy.

Therefore, Jawadekar held that we should be cautious about the Congress declarations.⁵

Acharya Jawadekar had critically studied the Congress policies and leadership of Nehru and pointed out his limitations regarding establishment of socialist society. The Communist Party in India was established in 1922. It believed in class-war and violent revolution. But this view was contradictory to India's history, culture and ethos.

(B) THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF INDIA AND ITS LIMITATIONS :

Marxism entered in Indian politics a few years after the First World War. In 1920 Mahatma Gandhi started non-violent non-cooperation movement. From 1922 Comrade Dange and other Communist brought together like-minded people and formed a communist party. Till 1928 it spread among the working classes of big industrial cities. After a few days the boycott movement against the Simon Commission assumed militant form and in 1930 the same was transformed into civil disobedience movement. In 1930 the Communist Party did not cooperate with the movement. In 1934 accepting ideology of Marxism, but in agreement with national Freedom Struggle, the socialist party was formed within the Congress. Later, on the basis of Marxism, Comrade manvendra Roy formed a third party. This 'Royist Party' was abolished very soon. In 1953 Socialist Party of India and Kisan Praja Party got together and formed 'Praja Samajwadi Party'. Socialist accepted the revolutionary nature of Gandhism and its revolutionary non-violence and tried to revise Marxism. According to Acharya Jawadekar after their own introspection the party started its work but the Communist Party went on in its own way and did not draw any lesson from Gandhism or the revolution that had recently occurred, but it followed its own way of Marxism. Acharya Jawadekar thought that there would be no place for orthodox Marxist Party in India.⁶

The Congress began its struggle against British in 1930. Till 1934, this struggle was continued in the form of two Satyagrahas. But Communists did not participate in either of these. The third struggle started in 1940 and continued upto 1944 till the release of Gandhiji. This struggle could be called the final struggle for the Indian Independence. The Communist Party did not participate even in this struggle. By this time Second World War had been started and Russia and Britain joined hands and immediately the Communist in India started opposing those, who started a struggle against the British power in India. If we took the history of the Politics of the Communist Party into consideration, Acharya Jawadekar wrote, "Whenever the Congress launched national movement the Communists either remained neutral or opposed them. Hence the masses in India blamed them. Even the working class the party which had a good following, is losing its influence".⁷

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