

*Review*

## IDEAS OF DEMOCRATIC SOCIALISM IN INDIAN POLITICAL SYSTEM

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Socialist thought in India, in the present century is the result of three streams of Socialist ideas. The first is the tradition of anarchistic Communitarian Socialism which was aspired by Gandhi and which is being carried forward by Vinobha Bhave in the form of Bhoodan movement and by J.P. Narain in the concept of Communitarian Society. Gandhian concept of a Ramrajya is a stateless Society, based on truth, love and non-violence. It literally means the rule of righteousness as Rama to Gandhi means 'Truth'. This kind of Gandhian Socialism could not suit Indian conditions nor could it be found feasible for any programme of rapid economic growth. It was more utopian than practicable, more idealistic than actual. The failure of Gandhian Socialism to grapple with the needs of the country helped in the emergence of the Second Stream – that of Communism. The surging success of the Russian revolution of 1917, crossed the borders of Russia and its echoes reached India as well. The anti-imperialist aspect of Communism could well fit in the Indian freedom struggle. It captured the imagination of the people, and the leaders of the Congress. J.L. Nehru was infatuated by it. The struggling people of India saw it in the ready made pills for curing the disease of poverty and ignorance in this land. But during the course of time it was discovered that the Indian Communists had extra territorial loyalties and that the policy of the Communist Party of India was determined by events outside India. In 1942 they betrayed the nationalist forces. To-day, because of the debacle of USSR, all the Communist Parties of India are no where to influence the people. The Chinese aggression exposed the camouflage of the loyalty of C.P.I. (M) to India. The totalitarian Society and the monolithic structure of the State hardly appeals to a people who had fought the autocracy of an imperialist rule.

**Keywords:** Democracy, Government, Political, Rules, Society

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### INTRODUCTION

The social, political and economic reconstruction of the country is being directed towards democratic Socialism. It was on Dec. 21, 1954 that Socialism asserts itself, almost inexplicably, as a goal in a resolution of the Lok Sabha. The resolution was adopted at the conclusion of the debate on Industrial Policy. The Second Five Year Plan accepted 'the adoption of the Socialist Pattern of Society

as the national objective (Second Five Year Plan). The subsequent Plans claim to accentuate the progress towards Socialism. Democratic socialism aims at the establishment of a casteless and classless society, based on democracy, dignity of the individual and social justice. Such a society shall come into being through peaceful, cooperative and democratic means. How can these objectives be attained?

There are various means of realizing this objective. We

can have it through educational for socialism, by so planning the courses of study that the virtues of social justice, cooperation and dignity of labour are not only taught through books, but are actually practiced both by the pupils and the teachers. We must increase our production both in the field of agriculture and industries. The national income must not only rise but there should be an equitable distribution of national income and wealth. Political parties in the country must be inspired by this objective, so that they can educate the masses in the direction of socialism. We should aim at the advancement of such institutions as may secure social justice and foster corporate life. All the means, stated above, shall fail if the most important of human agency- the State – is not directed to the realization of this aim. This brings us to the problem of determining the role of this agency and the extent and nature of its control over men, money and material.

## DISCUSSION

The central problem, with which socialism has been ever confronted with, is its attitude towards the State. The reaction of the utopians, against the historical State, has been more sentimental and religious than rational and political. In the eighteenth century when a world new in both its economic and its moral structure emerged several traits of modern Socialism appeared. An increasing importance was attributed to economic life. An entirely lay conception, of the State, was developed. The attitude of the Scientific Socialists also differed. On the one hand the State Socialists sought to create a State as the owner and controller of the means of production thereby creating an octopus against whose encirclement the grave only provided a secure asylum. On the other hand, the anarchists hold the historical State to be the ultimate source of exploitation and maintain that no reasonable social order can be established without its destruction. The State is “an immense cemetery, in which all the manifestations of the individual and local life, all that makes up ‘Society’ comes to be sacrificed, to die and be interred”. (Bakunin, 1948).

Ashok Mehta (Mehta, 1959) has broadly divided the Socialists, with reference to their attitude towards the State, into two groups – those who are with a critical attitude and those with a favourable attitude (Ibid). Among the favorable are the Fabians, Social Democrats, and the State Socialists. The Guild Socialists, Syndicalists, and even the Communists are critical of the State. They reject the State as an instrument of oppression, an engine of exploitation and an agency of coercion and compulsion. He characterizes this as ‘an anti-political form of Socialism (Ibid). The critical are further split into two categories the consistent and the ambivalents. Among the consistently critical are the Guild

Socialists and the communists. Their thesis is that the capitalist State has to be fought, but once the revolution succeeds and a proletarian State is established, all must cooperate with it. “They are critical to-day and favourable tomorrow if it suits them (Ibid).

Among the favourables it must be noted that they are favourable to the State, so long as it helps the workers in the amelioration of their condition and emancipation from exploitation. “To organize the working classes politically and develop them as a democracy, and to fight for all reforms in the State which are adopted to raise the working classes (Bernstein, 1909). The State for him represents a partnership in which all should and will yet share (Ibid). He further believes that if you do not make use of the State as an instrument, you will encounter it as an obstacle. “For the emancipation of the workers, all the power of the State is needed. Lassalle follows the same tradition. “The workers of themselves, cannot affect the transition for this, they must look to the State, whose business and task it is to further the great cause of free association among workers and whose sacred duty it is to provide the necessary means.

Democratic Socialists belong to the category of the favourables. The dividing line between the favourable and the critical is that the former have full faith in the State as an instrument for carrying out the objectives. The State has therefore a positive role to play. The sphere of its activity is determined and hence limited. To them it is an instrument of social change. It is the State alone which has the power to turn an indeterminate crowd into a closed whole. To the critical the State is neither necessary nor desirable. It may be tolerated as a necessary evil.

The democratic Socialists, therefore believe in the instrumentality theory of the State. The State is a human device designed for human needs. If the State is to function as a mechanism to be used for ends higher than itself, then it must be democratic. If it is to be conceived as a web of associative life, as a network of community organization, it will have to be democratic. If it is not, the State is bound to become a class State and will thus become an instrument of exploitation in the hands of the ruling class. The democratic basis of the State will help it in developing a positive content. “Only a positive State can be a Socialist State. No matter what class is in power, socialism is inconceivable except in terms of a positive State. The positive approach to the State has been defined as an attempt “to endow the State with adult suffrage, civil liberties, representative government and the web of associative life (Mac Iver, 1947).

The favourable attitude and the positive content of democratic Socialism should not confuse it with State Socialism. The philosophy of State socialism, if it has any philosophy, is that of welfarism from the top and not of a socialist way of life lived in every home. If Socialism means welfarism from above, the development of the

community at the bottom has neither any social significance nor any chance of success. In that case the base and the super-structure are likely to contradict each other and because the top will be powerful the superstructure will undermine the base.

So, the concept of State Socialism implies wholesale nationalization of industry and agriculture. Nationalization is now increasingly rejected as the only alternative to private capitalism. "The State under most democratic theory and practice will become too huge, too cumbersome, if it seeks to control all economic activity (Thomas, 1953). There is danger of Statism inherent in total nationalization. It will lead to State capitalism and concentration of economic power and consequently political power as well. Thus nationalization will not only create economic monopolies but also political monopolies in the bureaucratization of the State. The question will then arise : When the State itself is a monopolist, who will protect the individual against the State ?

The totalitarian Socialists deny the distinction between State and Society. Their assumption is always in favour of the State, because it is credited with omnipotence and omniscience. Here the State organizes and controls not only the sensitive areas of economy and education, but even the personal lives of the citizens. The democratic socialists make a clear cut distinction between 'State' and Society. Like true socialists, their aim is society, its progress and welfare. The State is merely an instrument of social change. The desirable ends of social action should be the happiness of the common man. The state can be used to preserve this happiness. It may, however, be pointed out that State is not the only means for bringing about socialism. Society is also an agency through which the pace of socialism can be expedited.

Thus they do not have a doctrinaire approach to the State. Their approach is empirical. Experience and expediency is their guide in determining the functions of the State. One who wears the shoe knows where it pinches. The role of the State would not be the same everywhere. In spite of a certain amount of flexibility, which is natural in the situation, there are certain fundamental political principles and ideals which are now accepted by the Socialist parties everywhere and which represent the theoretical outcome of a long period of development of the socialist movement.

The Socialist International, in its statement of principles at Frankfurton-Main, in 1951, declared the aims of the Socialists as striving "to build a new Society in freedom and by democratic means." Thus democratic Socialism is committed to the ideals of equality, freedom and fellowship. Much before their acceptance, the Indian Constitution had incorporated them in the Preamble of the Constitution. The Indian leadership could not have survived if they were not committed to society based on social justice. This leadership had fought against a colonial rule and in doing so they had denounced

despotism, decried dictatorial devices and condemned capitalism. It was natural that on the attainment of independence, they should decide for democracy, favour freedom and aspire for an equalitarian Society. As a leadership of liberalism, the Congress attained some degree of success, but as a leader of Socialist forces, they failed. The failure was because of their lack of expertise in the exercise of power and also due to lack of understanding of the mechanism of power. They did not give much time and effort to building up organizational instruments which alone could give flesh and blood to the ideals of socialism.

We may now ponder on the problems of democratic Socialism in India. Some of these problems are a legacy of the British rule and the others are the consequences of a developing economy. The worst of the political legacies of the British was the dangerous disease of the cancer of communalism. It not only partitioned the country but still thrives on religious wrangles and threatens to disintegrate the Indian polity. We have sought to crush communalism and remove religious rancours by establishing a secular State through Indian constitution. "As long as the provisions relating to religion retain their present form it is difficult to envisage any fundamental rejection of secularism (Smith 1963). We have provided the three sets of relationship, which are essential in a Secular State. We have provided for the fundamental right to freedom of religion (Avt. 25, 26, 30(i), basing the right to citizenship on the idea that the individual is the basic unit (Art. 15, (1) (4) 16 (1) (2) (4) and (5) 29 (2) 325, 330 (2) and 32 (1) and the separation of State and religion in such a manner that both the freedom of religion and right to citizenship is preserved (Articles 27, 28(1)(2) & (3).

The Indian constitution has been able to provide a positive content to the State. We have been able to guarantee fundamental right, independence and supremacy of the judiciary, civil liberties, periodic elections and representative government. But we have not guaranteed a socialist State. Perhaps we could not possibly do so, as the Constituent Assembly was inspired more by the ideals of liberalism than by the objects of Socialism. Sometimes the echoes of socialism were heard in the Assembly, but they were too weak to be recorded in the constitution. The framers were alive to the forces of socialism and hence they have provided for flexibility in favour of socialism, in the form of the Directive Principles of State Policy.

The economic nationalism of the country had rejected the laissez faire techniques. "The State is now more and more recognized as the national organ for taking care of national needs in all matters in which individual and cooperative efforts are likely to be so effective and economical as national effort. This is the correct view to take of the true function of a State (Ranade, 1898). The pre-independence Plans also pointed in that direction. In

1944, the Bombay Plan or the Tata Birla Plan envisaged a national government “which will be vested with freedom in economic matters”(Bombay Plans). It further stated, State control appears to be more important than ownership or management.... Well directed and effective State Control should be fully adequate (Ibid).

The early Indian economists – Dada Bhai Naoroji, M.G. Ranade, G.K. Gokhale and R.C. Dutt – sought to utilize the State machinery for the economic uplift of the country. “In their view, there was an economic purpose embodied in the state as an organization for enabling the mass of men, to realize social good on the largest possible scale (Gopal Krishna 1959). During the freedom struggle political leadership was so involved in the national movement that they had little time to think on economic problems. What they had in mind was only a State armed with more effective legal powers and with more monopolistic economic units owned by the State and directed to public interest (Ibid). The Second Five Year Plan defined the attitude towards the State. “The State has, therefore, to assume direct responsibility for the future development of industries over a wide area. (2<sup>nd</sup> Five Plan).

The developing economy of the country requires that in relation to certain key industries – all future development should be the responsibility of the State. This category should include defence industry, atomic energy, iron and steel, heavy plants and machinery required for basic industries, heavy electrical plants, coal, mines and mineral oils, metal ores etc. Still another category of industries were expected to be progressively State owned; the State was generally to take the initiative in establishing new undertaking in this category. This includes machine tools, ferro alloys and tool steel, basic and intermediary required by chemical industries, antibiotics and other essential drugs and fertilizers. Regarding the private sector the Report States, “it will be open to the State to start any industry even in this Sector” (Ibid). It further stated, “industrial undertaking in the private sector have necessarily to fit into the framework of social and economic policies of the State and will be subject to control and regulation in terms of the Industries (Development and Regulation) Act and other relevant legislation (Ibid).

The extension of public sector and the expansion of cooperatives are not by themselves socialist measures. They become socialists only when the machinery organizing and running the public sector enterprises and the cooperation comes to be democracy controlled that is controlled by the people at large and not under the effective control of the landlords or other sections of the rural bosses or of big business and high paid bureaucrats. If they are under the control of the latter they would become the instruments of the rich and powerful elements in the landlord-capitalist classes. If the State owned sectors become the bulwark of a reactionary

regime, if the power gets into the hands of the monopolist national companies, the State capitalism becomes State monopoly capitalism and there is every likelihood that the monopolists would try to use the power of the State against the people – and in that case both democracy and socialism will be in danger.

Monopolists are on the increase and fattening at the cost of the common man. V.K. Krishna Menon gave vent to this reality at the Jaipur Session of the Congress. Monopoly controls most of the press, influences elections and corrupts the administration. It creates imbalances that lead to rise in prices. It sustains wrong social values. It takes away from the community the power to determine the priorities in production. It makes economy of ‘power’ for itself rather than of plenty for the peoples as a whole. President Kamaraj mentioned in his address to the Bhubanswar Congress about “the concentration of wealth and economic power in fewer hands resulting in monopolistic control over certain industries” (Hindustan Times). He proposed to meet this dangerous trend by setting up a Monopolies Commission on the British pattern.

The Monopolies Commission was set up and its report confirmed the worst fears and yet the ruling party refuses to take concrete measures for checking the growth of monopolies. Nationalization of banks and the extension of the public sector to the food grain trade etc., are rejected on the ground that they would retard the developing economy of the country. The curbs on monopoly would reduce the profits earned by the capitalists and this would kill the incentive of the producer and thus obstruct the normal rate of growth of economy. As a matter of fact incentive is needed, not for the microscopic minority, but for the teeming-toiling millions.

Democratic socialists believe in the organic conception of the State. To them State is like a living organism, subject to perpetual change and adopting itself to the social and economic conditions. The individual, as an integral part of the State, was to develop his personality in such a way that he may enrich the life of the State. The state, on its part, was to add to the enrichment of the social and individual’s life. “Without social freedom and socialistic structure of society and the State neither the country nor the individual could develop much (Nehru, 1958). Thus the State is more and more of a socially functioning organism, working for the good of society and of the individual. If the State and the individual are properly integrated and organized, there is no conflict, as both have a common object and that there is interdependence for the realization of that objective.

Thus in India the state should first provide the primary needs of the people – food, cloth and shelter. Then the secondary needs be provided. But in doing so we should accept the principle of State function – of interfering to protect rather than of keep away. In a developing economy there is a tendency in certain groups of vested

interests, to override the interests of the larger groups by whatever methods they have. There must, therefore, be a balance between the centralized authority of the State and the assurances of freedom and of opportunity.

## CONCLUSION

The ideological starting point for the socialist movement in India was Marxism and also the democratic socialism of the West. It was for this reason that the primary role of the State in the construction of a socialist society was accepted, without question. This has brought us face to face, with the problem of reconciling between the liberty of the individual and the 'Social controls'. The State has to extend all such autonomy to the different functional groups which are engaged in production, so as to enable them to function efficiently and cooperatively. This will be possible through the diversification and diffusion of political power. The socialist idea of the diffusion of power is distinct from the decentralization of power. They believe that the State power resides at the base of the social and economic organization. It is these 'bases' which would delegate the State power to the higher units of the organization. Under the scheme of decentralization the delegation of authority is from the top to the base. Thus power must vertically develop from the base of territorial and functional organizations progressively upwards, each stratum of organization receiving only the

residuary powers delegated to it by the lower units concerned, until the central authority of the State is left with the last group of residuary power delegated to it by all the lower units.

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