

Socialism in India

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Recently, in one movie it is projected that the word socialism is introduced in the preamble of the Constitution of India at the behest of the Soviet Union which was earlier known as the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. Conclusion is also drawn in the movie that before 1966 India was free from Russian influence. There are other farfetched projections thrown at the public but that is not the subject of this article. The poor fellows who made such conclusions are unaware of the simple fact, that the 1965 war of India and Pakistan was fought by India mostly by using Russian weaponry and Russia had so much influence in the Asian subcontinent that post war deliberations were made by both countries in Russia. The scope of this article is to point out that the basic structure of the Constitution of India is itself based on principles of socialism. Not only this, during the freedom struggle of India all the principal political parties were unanimously agreeable on the issue of invoking socialism to financially uplift the poor population of the country, though they had their own definition and ideology of socialism.

Introduction

The term "socialism" was created by Henri de Saint-Simon, one of the founders of what would later be labelled "utopian socialism". Jurist Simon coined the term as a contrast to the liberal doctrine of "individualism", which stressed that people act or should act as if they are in isolation from one another.

The history of socialism has its origins in the 1789 French Revolution and the changes which it brought, although it has precedents in earlier movements and ideas. The Communist Manifesto was written by Karl Marx & Friedrich Engels in 1848 just before the Revolutions of 1848 swept Europe, expressing what they termed "scientific socialism". In the last third of the 19th century, social democratic parties arose in Europe, drawing inspiration mainly from Marxism. The Australian Labor Party was the world's first elected socialist party when it formed a government in the Colony of Queensland for a week in 1899.

Prominent freedom fighters and their ideas of Socialism

Mahatma Gandhi

Gandhiji has a holistic idea of socialism. He has written about socialism -

“Real socialism has been handed down to us by our ancestors who taught: ‘All land belongs to Gopal, where then is the boundary line? Man is the maker of that line and he can therefore unmake it.’ Gopal literally means shepherd; it also means Lord Krishna. In modern language it means the State, i.e., the People. That the land today does not belong to the people is too true. But the fault is not in the teaching. It is in us who have not lived up to it.” He also considered Marxism as a good pattern of socialism and mentioned “ I

have no doubt that we can make as good an approach to it (Socialism) as it is possible for any nation, not excluding Russia, and without violence.”

He was aware about the poverty of India and was looking to socialism as one of the answers in socialism. He wrote;

“No man should have more land than he needs for dignified sustenance who can dispute the facts that the grinding poverty of the masses is due to having no land that they can call their own.”

As an ardent supporter of socialism, he wrote;

“I have claimed that I was a socialist long before those I know in India had avowed their creed. But my socialism was natural to me and not adopted from any books. It came out of my unshakable belief in non-violence. No man could be actively non-violent and not rise against social injustice, no matter where it occurred. Unfortunately, Western socialists have, so far as I know, believed in the necessity of violence for enforcing socialistic doctrines. I have always held that social justice, even unto the least and the lowliest, is impossible of attainment by force. I have further believed that it is possible by proper training of the lowliest by non-violent means to secure redress of the wrongs suffered by them. That means non-violent non-co-operation.”

Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose

It will be appropriate to mention here that though most of the leaders in Congress were unanimous on adapting socialism in the governance of the country, however, there were sharp differences as to which form of socialism shall be adopted on achieving freedom and staunch supporter of socialism, whose ideas of socialism were akin to Marxism was none other than Subhash Chandra Bose.

Chandra Kumar Bose while writing in Sunday Guardian 22 November, 2019 mentioned that Netaji's second principle after nationalism was socialism. He quotes Netaji's words

“I have no doubt in my mind that the salvation of India, as of the world, depends on socialism. India should learn from and profit by the experience of other nations – but India should be able to evolve her own methods in keeping with her own environment. In applying any theory to practice, you can never rule out geography or history. If you attempt it, you are bound to fail. India should therefore evolve her own form of socialism.”

Abhijeet Sengupta while writing about Netaji's view of socialism mentioned that Netaji's socialism was not to blindly apply socialism of Karl Marx though he had studied Marxism in its theory as well as its practical approachability.

Ram Manohar Lohiya

Ram Manohar Lohiya, who is an icon of some of the political parties, who claim themselves socialists, is believed to be a prominent figure in socialist politics. Much of his career was devoted to combating injustice to the development of a distinctly Indian version of socialism. In 1934 he was an active member of Congress Socialist Party (CSP) , which was a group of left ideologists within Indian National Congress. Ram Manohar Lohiya was not

happy with the manner in which Congress was inculcating the idea to implement socialism. Lohiya therefore, left the Congress with other members of CSP. In 1955 Lohiya established a new socialist party. He advocated for various socio-political reforms. In 1963 he was elected to Lok-sabha and was a strong critic of the Congress government over the nature of socialism it had adopted to shape up the nation.

Leftist, centrist and rightists

Indian National Congress adopted socialism as an ideology for socio economic policies in 1936 from the ideology of socialism. After independence Indian National Congress under the leadership of Jawaharlal Nehru adopted drastic steps according to socialistic principles, the prominent of which is amending the Constitution and curtailing fundamental right to property in order to pave the way for distribution of land to the peasants by taking away land from the feudal lords who were holding thousands of acres of land. After independence the first amendment to the constitution was result of socialistic ideology of the country. Vinoba Bhave and Jaiprakash Narayan worked for peaceful land redistribution movement under Sarvodaya movement in 1960 this was also the socialistic ideology. The Congress however continued to work as centrist by balancing the policies, on one side to uplift the people from poverty and on the other side to help industrialists and other rich people to grow their properties. Of course, growth of industries was also necessary for creating jobs for the poor. The policies of the government can however be considered as centrist.

The present government in India is referred to as a rightist government, however ideology of the party does not deny the requirement of principles of socialism for governance of the country. I have therefore explored and researched the thoughts of a prominent personality of the party, who was politically active in the pre-independence era and the ruling party believes him to be one of the ideals.

Pandit Dindayal Upadhyaya

Pandit Dindayal Upadhyaya projected the official political philosophy of the then Jan Sangh which is present Bharatiya Janata Party. He propagated indigenous formulation of socialism distancing his party from the vague commitment of Congress to Gandhian socialism. In his attempt to build a framework of consensus politics he distinguished validity and utility of western sciences but rejected western way of life. He projected an ideology making a fundamental distinction between State and society. He emphasised the coexistence of a number of institutions both in the State and in the society. Rejecting the centrality of State, he was focused on society as he comprehended continuity of Indian civilisation marked by predominance of dharma. In short Pandit Dindayal Upadhyaya's ideology of socialism was the evolution of equality within the society by the society itself.

Leftists

The Indians who were influenced by Karl Marx's ideology of socialism had their close ties with Russia. The Communist Party of India was founded in Tashkent in 1920. In 1923 Labour Kisan Party was founded in Madras. In 1925 a Communist Conference was

organised at Kanpur. There are many Marxist parties in India who advocate Marxist brand of socialism. Marxism is a method of Socio-economic analysis that views class relation and social conflict using materialistic interpretation for social transformation of society. As per the ideology of Marxism the labour and means of production are the material forces creating wealth. All other super structures of the society are there to regulate this material production. The natural resources and material production is required to be distributed by the State to achieve equality. In India before the advent of the British, all the natural resources were owned by Kings and feudal lords supporting the King. All the material production by the peasants used to automatically vest in the feudal lords and the King. The Kings used to fight with each other to have dominance over the area with a sole purpose to extend their wealth by securing control over material production in that area. Communist Parties flourished in India and their agenda was to implement socialism by prominently securing the rights of the workers in the prisons. These parties were unable to gather sufficient strength to rule the country and with time, influence of these parties became limited to few States.

Percolation of doctrine of socialism in Indian Constitution

After the British dominion western ideology of acquisition and consumption of wealth, possessing and protecting the wealth i.e. the principle of privatisation of the wealth came into existence at least in the urban centres, where the trading and manufacturing activities were established. In rural areas exploitation of peasants by feudal lords and in urban areas exploitation of labourers by industrialists continued. Dissatisfaction of a large group of peasants and labourers wanted a new social order on independence of India. After the inclusion of Indians in governance of India in British India, leaders of all political parties started looking for a solution to the problems of the peasants and labourers in the doctrine of socialism.

Socialism also found favouritism in all other countries of the world, who have adopted democracy or were in a transient process of adopting democracy like England. Dicey in his 'Law and Public Opinion in England' mentions that in the first 13 years of 20th century the British legislation was overshadowed by the idea of socialism. To substantiate his statement, he has given an example of the Old Age Pensions Act 1908, which made a provision for a poor man having no source of income to get pension of five shillings a week on attaining the age of 70. The National Insurance Act, 1911 which provided for compulsory insurance against ill health for all citizens from the age of 16 to 70 and the premium be paid by the government. The resources to pay the premium to insurance companies were to come from the taxpayers. In short, the facility of insurance is provided to the poor from recovering the finances from the rich. The Trade Union Act, 1930 for fixing the wages of workmen in certain trades. The Finance Act, 1910 provided for imposition of income tax to promote social and political objects. Dicey analyses that socialistic government is an expensive government and it believes in ceasing some part of money going in the hands of the rich and providing it to the poor. India has adopted all the legislations enacted by the British. India also adopted the parliamentary system of the British. Thus, the idea of socialism inculcated in the British system was automatically inherited by India.

The question of right to private property came before constituent assembly on suggestion of Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar and the members of constituent assembly started to deliberate as to how the right be reorganised in relation to creation, distribution and protection of wealth. The socialist propagated that it will not be possible to bridge the gap between rich and poor if absolute right to property is recognized. One group favoured indemnification of some pieces of property from judicial interference, another group insisted that the legislature should have the last word with regard to taking away the property and also to fix the compensation. The draft regarding right to property moved by Jawaharlal Nehru received 97 proposals for amendment, which discloses concern of the members about the question of right to private property. Dr. Aladi Krishnamurthy wanted that the courts should not be allowed to question legislative measures on this subject once it is embedded in the Constitution, whereas K S Munshi expressed that the barbarism of feudal lords is required to be abolished by taking away the right to property. Finally, Article 31 in Part III was introduced declaring the right to property as a fundamental right. Surging ahead with its objective to distribute the lands in the hands of feudal lords the government of State of Bihar legislated the Bihar Land Reforms Act. Virus of the Act was challenged before the Patna High Court contending that the provisions of the legislation infringe the Right to Property under article 31 of the Constitution. Judgement of Patna High Court in Kameshwar Singh VS State of Bihar (AIR 1951 PATNA 91) declaring the Bihar Land Reforms Act proposing ceiling on land holdings constitutionally invalid made the Central Government aware that the purpose to implement the socialistic ideology for distribution of land belonging to feudal Lords to the peasants is defeated by Right to Property guaranteed under Article 31 and therefore, Article 31 was amended by first amendment of Constitution which created 9th Schedule in Constitution declaring immunity to the legislation placed in this schedule from the provisions of Part III of the Constitution. That means said legislation will not be challenged on the ground of infringements of fundamental rights by taking recourse to Article 32 of the Constitution. The Constitution of India thus adopted a socialistic approach.

The entire Part III, which deals with fundamental rights and Part IV which deals with directive principles of State policy are completely influenced by the idea of socialism. Let us consider following rights recognised by the constitution as fundamental rights inculcated socialistic principles,

equality before law,
equality of opportunity in matter of public appointments,
abolition of titles constitutional guarantee to freedom of speech and expression,
to assemble peacefully,
to form association or union,
to practice any profession, carry any trade or business,
prohibition of exploitation of children,
equal pay,
right to education

Part IV of the Constitution with directive principles creates a road map for the governance of India. It imposes a duty on the state to strive to promote welfare of people, by securing

social order for the people by securing social, economic and political justice. State has to minimise inequalities of income, eliminate inequalities of status, facilities and opportunities. The state should follow the policy creating equality amongst men and women, create a right to adequate means of livelihood, ownership and control of material resources be so distributed to subserve the common good, operation of the economic system does not result in concentration of wealth and means of production to the common detriment these and all the other directives of state policy in the constitution specify that India is a country which has adopted doctrine of Socialism since adoption of the Constitution in which doctrine of socialism percolated from the deep thinking of people of India throughout freedom struggle and from prolonged deliberations of stalwart members of Constituent Assembly and did not become a socialist country because of pressure of any other Country.

Conclusion

It is a liability that every government may be a capitalist government to satisfy basic social needs of every citizen. The government has to strive for creating subsistence for all, inculcate in them a habit to create abundance, provide every citizen security which will allow every citizen to shape his personality to the fullest extent of his capability and try to create equality of status and opportunity amongst citizens. These objectives can only be achieved by adopting the doctrine of socialism and this has been done by most of the countries in the world including India.

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