

Blunders of the Communists and the Socialists

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From the early twenties, various socialist groups in the national movement assumed prominence and worked towards making independent India a socialist nation based on equality and freedom. If one has to go through the journey of almost hundred years of Indian Socialist movement, one will find it a mixed bag of failure and success. Failure in terms of ideology, lack of consistency of running mass-based parties and providing a Socialist alternative to the centrist parties, left of the center parties and regional parties. In free India, they have lost their identity and have become a part and parcel of corrupt and communal parties like the Congress and the BJP and their allies like DMK, AIADMK, Shiv Sena and Akali Dal. They have also at times, lost their commitment to the cause of socialism and secularism.

However, on the other hand, Communists and Socialists can claim to have launched revolutionary programs like land reforms, decentralization of power, given power to the masses and compelled successive Congress governments to adopt a socialistic pattern of society, to fight for a just society and to compel non-Congress governments to undertake extraordinary measures like implementing the Mandal Commission report and paving way for social justice in the country. They also strove for civil liberty, human rights, equality among all sections of the society, against discrimination in the name of caste, color, creed, religion and sex and the betterment of common people. Communists and Socialists have a rich heritage. They participated in the national movement with full vigor and devotion and liberated this great country from foreign powers, not only from the British but from the Portuguese, and later on played a constructive role as a responsible opposition party in free India.

But at the same time, both the Communists and the Socialists committed monumental blunders and inadvertently caused immense damage to the dreams of the national movement, the basic idea of India and creating a homogenous pluralistic society under a democratic, socialist and secular constitution of free India and thus a great loss to the cause of Socialism. During the Second World War, the Communists supported allies in the war and didn't participate in the 'Quit India

movement of 1942' under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. Later on they supported the two-nation theory of a communal Muslim League that led to the creation of Pakistan.

Secondly, both the Communists and the Socialists didn't participate in the formation of the Constitution of free India and its constitution making body i.e. Constituent assembly. They then promoted communal and obscurantist forces covertly and overtly to capture power at the Centre and now the country is facing huge repercussions of this kind of politics.

As far as the constitution making of free India is concerned, the attitude of the Communists and the Socialists was almost the same. The father of the Indian Constitution, Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar, while speaking on making of the Indian Constitution said in the Constituent Assembly, on Friday, the 25th November, 1949, "*The condemnation of the Constitution largely comes from two quarters - the Communist Party and the Socialist Party. Why do they condemn the Constitution? Is it because it is really a bad Constitution? I venture to say, 'no'. The Communist Party wants a Constitution based upon the principle of Dictatorship of the Proletariat. They condemn the Constitution because it is based upon Parliamentary democracy. The Socialists want two things. The first thing they want is that if they come to power, the Constitution must give them the freedom to nationalize or socialize all private property without payment of compensation. The second thing that the Socialists want is that the Fundamental Rights mentioned in the Constitution must be absolute and without any limitations so that if their Party fails to come to power, they would have the unfettered freedom not merely to criticize, but also to overthrow the State*".

Soon after independence, the Communists recognized the need for all progressive forces to rally around Jawaharlal Nehru against the reactionary communal and pro-imperialist forces, but later in December 1947, they backtracked under unknown pressures and termed India's independence 'fake' by saying "*Ye Azadi Jhuti hai*" (This independence is a farce). They also said that 15th August is a day of national betrayal, that Congress

had crossed over to imperialism-feudalism and that Nehru had become a stooge of imperialism.

The CPI didn't participate in the process of Constitution making and called it a 'Charter of slavery'. The Party reacted to the new Indian constitution in 1949 brazenly. The manifesto of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of India described it as a 'slave constitution, representing a conspiracy on the part of the Indian capitalist class and British imperialism'. The party called it "a constitution of fascist tyranny, a monstrous constitution and a fraud".

On the other hand, some of the top Socialist leaders like Acharya Narendar Deva, Jayaprakash Narayan, Rammanohar Lohia, Faridul Haq Ansari, Kamladevi Chattopadhyaya, Yusuf Meherally, Aruna Asaf Ali and Asoka Mehta did not join the Constituent Assembly. In fact, they boycotted the constituent assembly. They even went to the extent of suggesting dissolution of the Constituent Assembly and its re-election by adult suffrage. Jayaprakash Narayan, who refused to join the Constituent Assembly, felt that the Constitution would prove to be a dead letter. According to Acharya Narendra Deva, it did not reflect or represent the aspirations and the will of the people.

The second blunder made by them was that they decided to leave the Congress party when they were needed in that organization most in 1948. It is worth mentioning that Socialists weren't just a part and parcel of the Congress party under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru but they had very special relationship with both the leaders and used to be called 'blue eyed boys' of Gandhi and Nehru. They nurtured the Congress party, to the best of their abilities during the National movement and gave the organization a socialist makeover.

According to Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru, who drafted the Karachi resolution of the AICC in 1931, "it was the first time that the Indian National Congress, set socialist pattern of development as the goal for India and resolution on fundamental rights and economic program was passed". He says "the origin of this resolution was the U.P. Congress Committee's resolutions of 1929" prepared by Narendra Deva and Dr. Sampooranand as Socialist agrarian program which they wanted AICC to accept. (Pt. Nehru's Autobiography P.266).

After India achieved independence, JP felt that Socialists should leave the Congress and play a role of

a constructive opposition party. Acharya Narendra Deva, Rammanohar Lohia and many other socialists were not in his favor and Mahatma Gandhi also agreed that Socialists should remain in the Congress. Even their critics like Vallabhbhai Patel and Maulana Azad asked them not to leave the party and be a part of the new government. Here, it is worth mentioning that Jayaprakash Narayan, Rammanohar Lohia, Achyut Patwardhan, Aruna Asif Ali and Yusuf Meherally were the heroes of the Quit India Movement and were respected greatly in the Congress. JP and Lohia were members of the Congress Working Committee also, but they decided to leave the Congress in 1948.

It was a setback for progressive socialist forces within the Congress party and more particularly to Pt. Nehru because all of them were his dear comrades during the national movement.

According to noted historian, Bipin Chandra, "the departure of the Socialists had weakened the radical forces in the Congress and the space vacated by them was being increasingly filled by vested interests-landlords, rich peasants, and even princes. Nehru realized that the Congress had been weakened ideologically by the absence of Socialists and that he was gradually being hemmed-in by conservative modes of thinking. Nehru, therefore, tried several times to bring the Socialists back into the Congress or at least get their cooperation in the implementation of a development oriented egalitarian agenda."

It is also interesting to note that while Communists and the Socialists boycotted the Constituent Assembly and making of the constitution of the free India, both of them participated in the first general elections under the same constitution and took oath under it. While the Communist Party of India got only 3.29% of the total votes polled and 16 seats, the Socialist Party got 10.59% of the total votes polled and got only 12 seats. This was the turning point in Jayaprakash Narayan's political life. He got disillusioned with the party's performance and tried to forge an alliance with a right wing party, called Kisan Mazdoor Praja Party or KMPP of JB Kripalani and merged his party, SP with KMPP. After the merger the party was called the Praja Socialist Party or PSP.

After some time the leaders in the PSP realized their mistake of leaving the Congress party and started parleys with Congress for a patch-up. Jayaprakash (JP) started corresponding with the prime minister Nehru and

visiting him while the party General Secretary Asoka Mehta published an article in party organ 'Janata' with the heading "Compulsions of a backward economy and areas of cooperation". This raised an alarm bell in the party. Due to severe differences among the rank and file over the issue of cooperation with Congress Party, Asoka Mehta resigned from the post of General Secretary of the PSP. To discuss all the issues, a special conference of PSP was convened at Betul (MP) on 15-16 June, 1953. JP has confessed that, he got a letter from Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru asking him to meet him in Delhi. He met Jawaharlal Nehru in Delhi for three days and discussed with him about the areas of cooperation between Congress and PSP. After this meeting, JP wrote to PM about the much-talked letter containing 14 points that can be the basis of the cooperation between the two parties.

According to JP, party president JB Kripalani had agreed to this move but Acharya Narendra Deva felt that it would be impossible to work with the Congress party. The news of these parleys between Nehru and JP spread as wild rumors and it was said from many quarters of the party, that JP was under Nehru's influence and was joining his Government as Deputy Prime Minister.

After the Betul Conference, JP gradually distanced himself from party politics and moved to the 'Sarvodaya' while the Praja Socialist Party split over the issue of police firing by the PSP Government in Travancore-Cochin (now Kerala) and Rammanohar Lohia formed his own Socialist party in 1955. It was in the same year that the Indian National Congress adopted its famous Avadi Resolution in which socialistic pattern of development was presented as the goal of the party. A year later, the Indian parliament adopted 'socialistic pattern of development' as official policy, a policy that came to include land reforms and regulations of industries. But surprisingly both the Communists and the Socialists opposed the Congress and the socialist policies of the Nehru government tooth and nail.

It is interesting to note that in the fifties, Socialists started opposing Pt. Nehru and his Congress party along with rightist forces and started parleys with right wing party's like Hindu Mahasabha and Jana Sangh (Rammanohar Lohia supported Hindu Mahasabha candidate Prabhudutt Brahmchari against Jawaharlal Nehru during 1952 general elections in Phulpur parliamentary constituency) and internationally, Socialists started supporting Israel, which was contrary

to the stand taken by Mahatma Gandhi and the Congress party during the freedom movement about the Palestinian question and Zionist Israel. The socialists were in the forefront of seeking closer ties with Israel and started touring Israel. In this context, special significance can be attached to Jayaprakash Narayan when he visited Israel in September 1958.

Other prominent Indian Socialists who visited Israel were JB Kripalani, Asoka Mehta, N G Goray, Hari Vishnu Kamath, Prem Bhasin, Nath Pai, Madhu Dandavate, Surendra Mohan, George Fernandes, Rajwant Singh, Pradip Bose, Anusuya Limaye, Kamala Sinha, etc. Praja Socialist Party leaders have also been very active in supporting the Indo-Israeli collaboration. The Mapi Party (Israel's Labour Party) had close ties with PSP. The PSP and Mapi Party were members of the Socialist International.

On the domestic front, the results of the two General elections in 1957 and 1962 marginalized the two Socialist parties, the SP and the PSP, and two right wing parties, Swatantra and Bhartiya Jansangh, emerged as the main opposition parties in the 1967 general elections. After the debacle in 1962 elections, Lohia crafted his strategy of non-Congressism. Next year in 1963 there were four Lok Sabha by-elections held at Rajkot, Amroha, Farrukhabad and Jaunpur. Minoo Masani, JB Kiraplani, Dr Lohia and Deendayal Upadhyay contested these elections from the different parties. Minoo as Swatantra party candidate from Rajkot, Lohia as Socialist Party candidate from Farrukhabad, Kripalani, as an independent from Amroha and DeenDayalUpadhyay as Jansangh candidate from Jaunpur. All these leaders contested the by-elections on the anti-Congress plank as united candidates of opposition parties and won except Deen DayalUpadhyay. This gave a new momentum to the non-congress opposition parties.

Nehru started to become weak after the Chinese aggression and at the defeat of 1962 war. At this time Dr.Lohia called for the opposition unity and to defeat the Congress, he suggested a common candidate of opposition parties so that there would be no division among the non-congress votes. In the seventh National Conference of his party at Calcutta in December 1963, he elaborated his strategy of Non-Congressism. This was the beginning of Non-Congressism. At the same time he started unity moves with the PSP. In June 1964, the PSP and the SP decided to merge and a new party was formed with the name of Samyukta Socialist Party (SSP).But this merger could not last long and there was a split in

the new party at Varanasi in January 1965 and the PSP was revived at the same time in a parallel conference at Varanasi itself. On the other hand in June 1964, there was a split in the PSP itself and a group led by Asoka Mehta, MS Gurupadaswamy, Genda Singh, Narayan Dutt Tiwari, Vasant Sathe, ChandraShekhar and others joined the Congress.

During fourth general elections in 1967, Lohia called for a joint front of opposition parties against the Congress and it was a great success in many states including Uttar Pradesh and Bihar and led to the formation of Samyukta Vidhayak Dal governments (SVD) in nine states across the country which threw the Congress party out of power. This was perhaps for the first time that a unique amalgam of many streams formed the governments jointly which included the rightist parties like Swatantra and Jansangh on the one side, and leftist and socialist parties like SSP, SP, CPI, CPM and Republican Party on the other side.

By the end of 1969 there was a split in the Congress party. Old and veteran Congressmen formed Congress (O) while the other faction of the party led by Indira Gandhi was in power. A group of erstwhile Socialists and Communists in the Congress party supported Indira Gandhi and she portrayed herself as a socialist and the champion of the poor and the downtrodden. As she was not in a comfortable majority, she dissolved the Lok Sabha and announced mid-term elections in 1970. In the mid-term General elections, Indira Gandhi returned to power with a landslide victory. Barring the Communist parties, all the major opposition parties including the Socialist Parties (SSP & PSP) were defeated miserably in these elections. The results compelled both the Socialist parties to merge and form a single party once again.

During early seventies there was a student movement in Gujarat and Bihar, which was later known as JP movement. When this movement was on its peak, JP called for a 'Delhi March' by all major opposition parties on 5th March 1975. On 12th June 1975, the Allahabad High Court set aside the election of Indira Gandhi to the Lok Sabha on the ground of corrupt practices during the election. This was a major setback to Indira Gandhi and within 14 days of this judgment of the Allahabad High Court, she imposed Emergency on 25th June 1975.

According to a French scholar Christophe Jaffrelot, "till the 1970s, there were few attempts by opposition parties to relate to the Jana Sangh. Some were initiated by Rammanohar Lohia in the framework of his strategy of *non-Congressism* and the formation of SVD governments

in the Hindi heartland in the 1960s, but they were short-lived. For most political forces, the Jana Sangh was a communal party that did not fit in the constitutional, secular order that the Indian republic had established in 1950. The crucible of the first inclusion of the Sangh Parivar in a legitimate, united opposition front was when in early seventies one-third of the 24 members of the Chattra Sangharsh Samiti (CSS) governing body of the so-called 'JP or Bihar movement' came from the ABVP, the students' wing of the RSS, whereas only four were socialist, two were from the Gandhian Tarun Shanti Sena and two were from the Congress(O)".

He further wrote "in March 1973, the CSS turned to JP, who was already in touch with RSS leaders and in June 1973, JP had presided over a mourning ceremony in memory of M.S. Golwalkar (and 20 years before, Nanaji Deshmukh, a senior RSS pracharak, had taken part in the bhoodan programme). After JP agreed to lead the student movement against the Congress, Deshmukh became his *aide de camp* and a key organizer of the protests. Hence the Jana Sangh was not "untouchable" any more. It was even less so after JP agreed to take part in its annual function, where he said: "If you are a fascist and communal, then I too am a fascist and communal."

While the integration of the Jana Sangh into the mainstream politics had started before the Emergency, it was not a turning point, because the Janata Party broke over the dual membership controversy after the socialists and the BLD leaders realized that ex-Jana Sanghis continued to pay allegiance to the RSS. Then, the ex-Jana Sanghis created the BJP but could not join hands with any party except the Shiv Sena. They could do it only in 1989, when the leaders of the Janata Dal decided to form an anti-Congress coalition in the name of their struggle against corruption. That coalition didn't last either, but the BJP had become part of India's mainstream politics for good. By the end of the 1980s, the non-secular repertoire had been legitimized from almost all quarters.

It is worth mentioning that (there can be no justification for imposing the Emergency and arrest of more than one lakh political workers across the country and imposing press censorship) during the Emergency "the word socialist was added to the Preamble of the Indian Constitution by the 42nd amendment in 1976. It implies social and economic equality. Social equality in this context means the absence of discrimination on the grounds only of caste, color, creed, sex, religion, or language. Under social equality, everyone has equal status and opportunities. Economic equality in this

context means that the government will endeavor to make the distribution of wealth more equal and provide a decent standard of living for all.

During the eighties(1980-90) almost all the left and so-called Socialist parties were hand-in-glove with Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP), a political outfit of RSS or its extended family to oppose the Congress party led by Indira Gandhi. In some states they formed alliance with BJP covertly or overtly. In the second half of that decade when VP Singh was expelled from Congress party and formed 'Janmorcha' all the left-socialist parties joined his bandwagon along with the BJP. This was the second time after the 1977 Janata experiment that a non-Congress government was formed at the national level with the support of RSS-BJP.

After the fall of VP Singh's National Front government in 1990, the politics of Mandal (read Social justice) versus Kamandal (read communal politics) started and since then there is no looking back for BJP. In the eighth Lok Sabha, BJP had only two members but in the ninth Lok Sabha (1989-91) there were 89 members, in 1991 it rose to 121, in 1996 to 163, in 1998 to 183, in 1999 to 189 and in 2014 it got absolute majority with 282 members.

The need of the hour is that all those who believe in the true spirit of Socialism, its ideology, its policies and have been associated with the Socialist movement in any form, should sit together and do some soul searching. They should also identify their blunders, accept it with all humility and think about its redress.

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