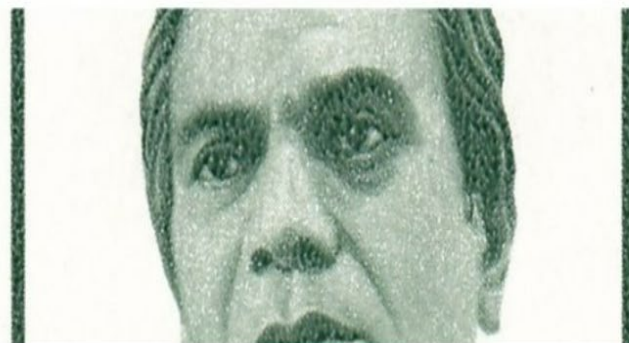
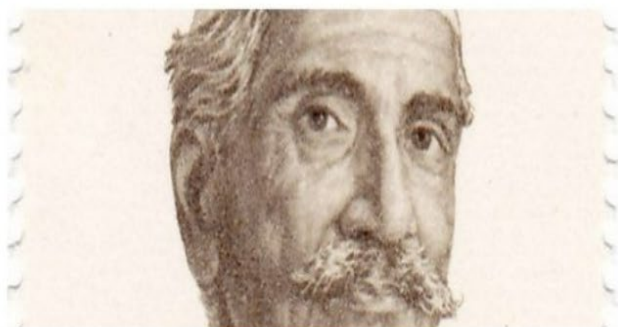
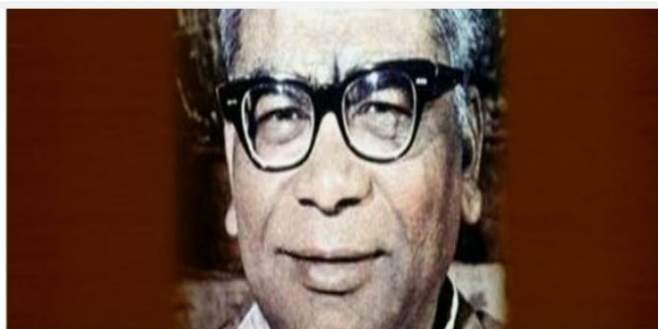


# Book Extract: Socialist Movement in India Is a Saga of Splits and Differences

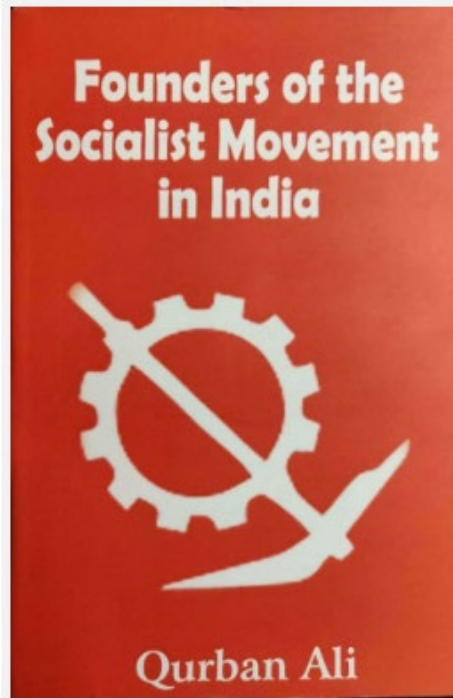
In its 89-year history in India, starting from 1934, the movement has been able to force successive governments, in whatever little measure, to implement socialist policies notwithstanding its failures



Qurban Ali



Clockwise: Jayaprakash Narayan, Rammanohar Lohia, Madhu Limaye, and Acharya Narendra Deva are the first generation of Socialist leaders in India. Photos: Jayaprakash Narayan and Rammanohar Lohia (The Wire Hindi); Madhu Limaye and Acharya Narendra Deva (Government of India, GODL License).



The first war for independence started against the British in India in 1857 under the leadership of the last Mughal King Bahadur Shah Zafar. There was no defined ideology in this rebellion, except that it was against foreign rule and was limited to some parts of the country, fought on traditional warfare. The organised political battle through democratic means started only after the formation of the Indian National Congress (INC) in 1885.

After the division of Bengal by Lord Curzon in 1905, the INC started reacting in a passive mode. It was only in 1919, after the unfortunate massacre of Jallianwala Bagh, when the Congress Party started the Non-Cooperation movement against Britishers under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. It was the first time a movement against foreign rule was started nationwide. There were many streams in this freedom struggle which included Nationalist Congressmen, Swarajist, Muslim Leaguers, Hindu Mahasabhis, Akalis, Revolutionaries, Gandhians, and many more.

The Socialist movement began to develop in India with the Russian Revolution. The Communist Party of India (CPI) was founded in Tashkent on October 17, 1920, soon after the Second Congress of the Communist International. The founding members of the party were M.N. Roy, Abani Mukherji, Mohammad Ali (Ahmed Hasan), Mohammad Shafiq Siddiqui and M.P.B.T. Acharya. The CPI began its efforts to build a party organisation inside India. Roy made contacts with Anushilan and Jugantar groups in Bengal.

Small communist groups were formed in Bengal (led by Muzaffar Ahmed), Bombay (led by S.A. Dange), Madras (led by Singaravelu Chettiar), United Provinces (led by Shaukat Usmani), and Punjab (led by Ghulam Hussain). On May 1, 1923 Singaravelu Chettiar founded the Labour Kisan Party of Hindustan in Madras (LKPH). The LKPH organised the first May Day celebration in India, and this was the first time the red flag was used. On December 25, 1925, a Communist conference was convened by a man called Satyabhakta at Kanpur. The conference adopted the name 'Communist Party of India'. Groups such as LKPH dissolved into the unified CPI.

In the year 1927, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru visited the then-Soviet Union along with his father Motilal Nehru. He was greatly impressed with the Soviet model. After his return from the Soviet Union, he advocated that Congress should also include planning and economic programmes along with its main objective of gaining political independence in its agenda. At the same time, Acharya Narendra Deva and Sampurnanand prepared a Socialist agrarian programme under the aegis of the UP Congress Committee (UPCC) and sent it for the perusal of the All India Congress Committee (AICC) meeting to be held in Bombay.



Prime Minister of India Jawaharlal Nehru addresses parliament after Indian Independence and partition 1947.

Photo: World History Archive

Jawaharlal Nehru got the AICC to accept UPCC's Socialist Programme. In 1931, at the Karachi session of the Indian National Congress, the socialist pattern of development was set as the goal for India and a resolution on fundamental rights and the economic programme was passed by AICC. According to Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru, who drafted the Karachi resolution of AICC, the origin of this resolution was UPCC's resolution of 1929.

At that very time, Jayaprakash Narayan returned from America, impressed by Marxist thought, and joined AICC. On his initiative in July 1931, the Bihar Socialist Party was formed. Prof. Abdul Bari was its president and Ganga Sharan Singh, Phulan Prasad Verma and Baba Ranodar Das, later known as Rahul Sankritayan, were its secretaries. There was also the Punjab Socialist Party, whose leaders were Prof. Brij Narain, Jeevan Lal Kapur, later a judge of the Supreme Court, and Lala Feroz Chand.

Similar to the Bihar Provincial Socialist Party, the leftist-minded Congressmen of other provinces also started organising themselves and soon Socialist parties were formed in UP, Punjab, Delhi and Bombay. In Orissa, Utkal Congress Socialist Karmi Sangh was formed in February 1933 with Nabakrushna Choudhury as secretary. In May 1934, the UP Socialist party was formed under the leadership of Sampurnanand. He had already outlined a comprehensive list of his Socialist programme in March 1930 when he published a booklet *When We Are in Power*.

During the Salt Satyagraha in 1930, and the Civil disobedience movement in 1931-32, many individuals who believed in the Socialist ideology and were part of the Congress Party at that time started thinking of establishing a Socialist forum within the Congress Party. In the year 1932, Rammanohar Lohia returned from Germany after completing his PhD with a Socialist mind and lots of ideas. It was a coincidence that people like Jayaprakash Narayan, Asoka Mehta, Achyut Patwardhan, Minoo Masani, Charles Mescrenhas, C.K. Narayan Swami, M.L. Dantwala, N.G. Gorey and S.M. Joshi were lodged in Nasik Jail in 1932-33, in connection with the Civil disobedience Movement.

On this basis and inspired by Jawaharlal Nehru, Socialists like Yusuf Meherally, Minoo Masani, Achyut Patwardhan and Smt. Kamala Devi Chattopadhyay formed the first Congress Socialist group in Bombay in December 1933. On February 25, 1934, at the initiative of M.R. Masani, a meeting was called where the Bombay Presidency Socialist Group elected a committee to draft a constitution and programme which subsequently became known as the 'Poona draft'. This group had no president or chairman, but two secretaries, viz, Purshottam Tricumdas and M. R. Masani, later Masani was replaced by Yusuf Meherally. The other members of this group were Ali Bahadur Khan, Dr K. B. Antrolikar, Krishna Menon (not V.K.Krishna Menon), Soli Batliwala, Achyut Patwardhan, N.G. Goray, Kamala Shanker Pandya, Majeed Hakeem, M. Shetty, Ishwarlal Desai, Shiru Limaye. The meeting was organised by Purshottam Tricumdas, Yusuf Meherally, Smt. Kamladevi Chattopadhyay and Acharya Narendra Deva.

According to Rajani Palme Dutt, the appearance of a "Congress Socialist Group" in Bombay with 'left wing' Congressmen disillusioned with the policy of Congress, met at Poona in July 1933 for the purpose of 'organising a Socialist opposition group. This gave rise to a widespread discussion in the ranks of the Indian national movement. The programme of this group was issued in February 1934, under the signature of Yusuf Meherally, Krishna Menon, M. Shetty, Minoo Masani and others.

According to Acharya Narendra Deva, "There were two basic objectives behind this move: (a) to draw a picture of Socialism in order to attract workers and peasants into the Congress fold; (b) to check the freedom struggle from drifting into the constitutional channel only (*Selected Works of Acharya Narendra Deva, Vol.1* page 29). Prior to this move, Minoo Masani wrote to Jawaharlal Nehru on December 19, 1933, about the formation of a Congress socialist group within the Congress party and seek his advice.

*"Some of us Congressmen in Bombay, who are socialists, are attempting to form a Congress Socialist Group or Party. We feel that the lead you have given to the Congress and to the country by emphasising the necessity of taking up a consciously socialist and anti-imperialist position should be followed by the organisation of socialists within the Congress.*

*The Group, it is proposed to form, would carry out the purpose you have in view by placing before the Congressmen and the public of our province (or, maybe presidency) a programme that would be socialist in action and objective.*

*The Group would be socialist propaganda among rank and file of Congressmen with a view to converting the Congress to an acceptance of socialism. We would also carry on propaganda among the workers (and peasants) at the same time participating in their day-to-day economic struggles. It would hearten us to know that in the formation of such a group, we shall have your approval and support."*

In reply to Minoo Masani's letter, Jawaharlal Nehru said:

*"I would welcome the formation of socialist groups in the Congress to influence the ideology of the Congress and the country. As you are aware, I have been laying stress on the socialist ideal very much in my recent speeches and writings. I feel that the time has come when the*

*country should face this issue and come to grips with the real economic problems which ultimately matter.*

*All over the world, today people are being forced to think in terms of economic and social change and we in India cannot afford to remain in the backwater of pure politics.*

*The time has undoubtedly come now when we must think more clearly and develop a scientific ideology. This is, so far as I am concerned, one of socialism and I would, therefore, gladly welcome the formation of groups to spread this ideology. But it is not enough to talk merely in terms of an academic ideology, especially at a moment when our country is in the midst of a struggle for freedom. This ideology must be tacked on to action and this action, if it is to bear fruit, must be related to the Congress struggle. Otherwise, the socialist group will become an ineffective, academic and sterile Centre. Even to spread the ideology the effective method is through action which is coordinated to the direct action of the Congress and labour and peasant organisations."*

After the meeting of the Bombay Presidency Socialist Group on February 25, 1934, this Group invited all those who believed in socialist ideology to attend the foundation conference of the Congress Socialist Party (CSP) at Patna on May 17, 1934.

The Foundation Conference of CSP was presided over by Acharya Narendra Deva on May 17, 1934 at Patna's Anjuman Islamia Hall. About a hundred delegates from all over India attended this conference. Prof. Abdul Bari was the president of the reception committee.

Delivering the presidential address, Acharya Narendra Deva said, "Socialism has come to stay in this country and is daily gaining strength and prestige inside the Congress as well as in the country. The social foundation of this new school of thought which has appeared within the Congress is the democratic intelligentsia. Outside the Congress among its adherents are representatives of workers and to much smaller extent peasants who constitute the real revolutionary elements of an anti-imperialist struggle. As a matter of fact, the working class is the vanguard while the peasants and the intelligentsia are only its auxiliaries."

He also fondly remembered his leader Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and paid him a tribute. He said, "Friends, we are founding today the first cells of the Socialist movement within the Congress. In the absence of our great leader, Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru, our task has become extremely difficult. We do not know how long we shall remain deprived of his valuable advice, guidance and leadership. I am sure he will hail with delight the birth of this new party within the Congress and that he will be watching our progress with keen interest from behind the prison bars. Let his great example stimulate and inspire us during the period of his incarceration and let us march forward with the assurance that the cause we represent will triumph in the end."

At the conference, the draft proposals for a Socialist programme were circulated and a Socialist programme was approved. Outlining this programme, the founding Secretary of CSP, Jayaprakash Narayan explained why the Congress Socialist Party stands for Socialism.

He said that the objectives of the CSP, as laid down in its Constitution, are “the achievement of complete independence, in the sense of separation from the British Empire, and the establishment of a socialist society. This is direct and simple enough. The Party has two objectives: the first is the same as that of the Indian National Congress, except that the Party wishes to make it clear that the complete independence of India must include separation from the British Empire; the second object of the Party is that independent India must reorganise its economic life on a socialist basis. The question is one of the values and ultimate objectives, which once determined, the rest becomes a matter of logical sequence.

If the ultimate objective is to make the masses politically and economically free, to make them prosperous and happy, to free them from all manner of exploitation, to give them an unfettered opportunity for development, then, Socialism becomes a goal to which one must irresistibly be drawn. If again, the objective is to take hold of the chaotic and conflicting forces of society and to fashion the latter according to the ideal of utmost social good and to harness all conscious directives of human intelligence in the service of the commonwealth, then, again, Socialism becomes an inescapable destination.

“If these be our objectives, it should take a little argument to show that Socialism is as definitely ‘indicated’ in India as elsewhere. In India too there is poverty, nay, starvation on the one hand and wealth and luxury on the other; in India too there is exploitation; the means of production here also are in private hands. That is, the root evil of modern society, namely, economic and social inequality, exists in India too as does its cause; the exploitation of the great many by the very few.

“And this is not the result of British rule. It is independent of it and will continue even after it. The ending of foreign domination would not automatically solve India’s problem of poverty; would not put a stop to the exploitation of the vast many; would not, in fact, mean the accomplishment of any of the objectives which we have started with. Economic freedom is also indispensable. As far as we socialists are concerned, economic freedom means only one thing to us – Socialism. Without Socialism, economic freedom would be a sham.”

To draft the party’s Constitution, policy and programme, a draft committee was constituted under the chairmanship of Acharya Narendra Deva and Jayaprakash Narayan as secretary. Following were the members of the committee: Prof. Abdul Bari, Purshottam Tricumdas, Minoo Masani, Sampurnanand, C.C. Banerji, Faridul Haq Ansari, Rammanohar Lohia, Prof. Abdul Aleem, N.G. Ranga. The measures that are necessary, in the opinion of the party to achieve this, were clearly set forth in the objectives of the programme of the All-India Congress Socialist Party. They are:

- 1) Transfer of all power to the producing masses.
- 2) Development of the economic life of the country to be planned and controlled by the state.
- 3) The Socialisation of key and principal industries (e.g., Steel, Cotton, Jute, Railways, Shipping, Plantations, Mines, Banks, Insurance and Public Utilities, with a view to the progressive socialisation of the instruments of production, distribution and exchange).
- 4) State monopoly of foreign trade.
- 5) Organisation of co-operatives for production, distribution and credit in the un-socialised sector of economic life.
- 6) Elimination of princes and landlords and all other classes of exploiters without compensation.
- 7) Redistribution of land to peasants.

- 8) The State to encourage and control cooperative and collective farming.
- 9) Liquidation of debts owing by peasants and workers.
- 10) Recognition of the right to work or maintenance by the State.
- 11) To everyone, according to his means is to be the basis ultimately of the distribution and production of economic goods.
- 12) Adult franchise, which shall be on a functional basis.
- 13) The State shall neither support nor discriminate between religions nor recognise any distinction based on caste or community.
- 14) The State shall not discriminate between the sexes.
- 15) Repudiation of the so-called Public Debt of India.

After the Foundation Conference at Patna, the first CSP Conference was held in Bombay on October 21-22, 1934. Sampurnanand presided over and more than a 150 delegates attended the conference. By that time, out of 20 states, CSP groups were formed in 14 states. It is interesting to note that before the formation of the CSP, Socialist Parties in Bihar and Punjab were already functioning which later merged into the CSP.

The second National Conference of the CSP took place in Meerut on January 20, 1936, and Smt. Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay presided over it. In the early 1930s, Communists were opposed to Mahatma Gandhi and the Congress. When Congress Socialist Party was formed, they derogatorily called it "Social Fascism". But when Nazism emerged as a victorious force in Germany and Stalin's policy got reversed, Indian Communists changed their mind and started joining the CSP.

In the Lahore session of CSP, many prominent Communist leaders like E.M.S. Namboodiripad, Sajjad Zaheer, Z.A. Ahmed, K.M. Ashraf, Dinkar Mehta and Soli Batliwala got elected to the National Executive of CSP. The third National Conference of the CSP was held at Faizpur along with AICC Session on December 24-25, 1937, and the fourth one at Lahore on 12-13 April 1938. The CSP's fifth National Conference was held at Kanpur in February 1947, under the Chairmanship of Dr. Rammanohar Lohia and the word "Congress" was removed as a prefix as the CSP became the Socialist Party. This National Conference was held after a gap of almost nine years.

The main reason for this gap was that most of the CSP leaders were either in prison due to their participation in the 'Quit India Movement', or had left the party by then. After India got Independence in 1947, JP was of the opinion that the Socialists should leave the Congress party and play the role of a constructive opposition.



A procession in Bangalore during the Quit India movement. Photo: Wikimedia Commons

Acharya Narendra Deva and Dr. Lohia were not in favour of this, and Mahatma Gandhi was also of the view that Socialists should continue to be part of the Congress as long as they were welcome in it. On January 30, 1948, Gandhiji was assassinated and the Congress also amended its constitution saying that no entity or organisation can exist within it with a separate constitution and membership. Jayaprakash Narayan, Rammanohar Lohia, Achyut Patwardhan, Aruna Asif Ali and Yusuf Meherally were the heroes of the 'Quit India Movement' and were greatly respected in the Congress.

Jayaprakash Narayan and Lohia were members of the Congress Working Committee as well, but with a heavy heart, decided to leave the Congress in 1948. The Socialist Party's Sixth National Conference held at Nasik in March 1948, under the Chairmanship of Purshottam Tricumdas, decided to sever its ties with INC and left the Congress to play the role of 'constructive opposition'.

In this volume, we have tried to publish short profiles of the founders of the Congress Socialist Party, their publications, and achievements as members of the Drafting Committee and National Executives (CSP) 1934-1948. Fifty-five profiles, starting from the senior-most of them, Acharya Narendra Deva in 1934, and the youngest of them was Madhu Limaye in 1948, who was just 26 years old.

Many of these CSP leaders were darlings and blue-eyed to Mahatma Gandhi and though most of the time they were his followers, at the same time they had a strong ideological difference of opinion and fought with Mahatma tooth and nail and had the courage to disagree or sometimes even to defy him. But the beauty of this relationship was that they never lost respect for each other. They were also emotionally and politically attached to Jawaharlal Nehru during the national movement, but after Independence became his worst critics.

It is interesting to note that out of these 45 members of CSP National Executives, 10 belonged to the Muslim community, two were Parsis, two were Christians, one was Sikh, and three were women. Unfortunately among them, none were Dalit, Adivasi or even from backward castes. The representation from southern states, Jammu and Kashmir and northeastern states was minimal. The CSP was mostly represented by north and central India. Before the formation of the Socialist Party in



1948, at least nine members of the CSP National Executive having leanings toward the Communist party left or were expelled from the CSP and joined the Communist party.

They were E.M.S. Namboodripad, Dinkar Mehta Charles Mescrenhas, Soli S. Batliwala, Sajjad Zaheer, Z.A. Ahmad, K.M. Ashraf, and B.P.L. Bedi. Smt. Aruna Asaf Ali also left in 1950 to join the Communist party, but later joined the Congress party.

In March 1948, almost all the CSP leaders barring Sampurnanand and Mohanlal Gautam left the Congress party and formed an independent Socialist Party at Nasik. Later on, however, at least eight of these Socialist leaders re-joined the Congress party. They were N.G. Ranga, Ganga Sharan Sinha, Asoka Mehta, Surendra Nath Dweadi, R.K. Khadilkar, Hareshwar Goswami, Suresh Desai and Smt. Aruna Asaf Ali.

It is also interesting to note that out of these 55 members of CSP National Executives, two, namely Minoo Masani and N.G. Ranga, became rightists and formed the Swatantra Party in 1959, which advocated for a capitalist and free economy. Another two, Achyut Patwardhan and Rohit Mehta, became spiritual and joined the Theosophical movement. But no one can deny the fact that all of these leaders, who were founders of CSP and associated with it for a long time, played a significant role during the freedom movement. They sacrificed their youthful days in the prisons of British India for a long time.

If one has to go through the journey of the last 89 years of the Indian Socialist movement, it has a rich heritage. Socialists participated in the national movement with full vigour and devotion and played an important role to liberate this great country from foreign powers – not only the Britishers but also the Portuguese in Goa.

Furthermore, they played an important role as opposition leaders in Independent India. But at the same time, the history of the Socialist movement in India is a saga of differences and splits. In short, it's a mixed bag of failure and success. Failure in terms of ideology, lack of consistency in running a mass-based Socialist party and providing a Socialist alternative to the rightist parties, centrist parties, left-of-centre parties, left parties and regional parties.

Time and again their successors, or those who claim their legacy, lost their Socialist identity, their commitment to social justice, secularism, and socialist economy and became part of either corrupt or communal parties like the Congress and Bharatiya Janata Party and their regional allies like Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, Shiv Sena and Akali Dal.

On the other hand, Socialists can claim to compel various Congress and non-Congress governments to adopt a socialistic pattern of society, to fight for a just society, for social justice and to compel non-Congress governments to constitute the Mandal Commission and implement its report and paving the way for social justice in the country. Socialists can also claim their credit for fighting for civil liberties, and human rights, for equality among all sections of society, against discrimination on the name of caste, colour, creed, religion and sex and for the betterment of common people.

At the 1931 Karachi session of the Indian National Congress, a socialist pattern of development was set as the goal for India.

Through 1955, at the Avadi Resolution of the Indian National Congress, a socialistic pattern of development was presented as the goal of the party. A year later, the Indian parliament adopted a socialistic pattern of development as official policy, that came to include land reforms and regulations of industries, nationalisation of banks and the coal industry, the abolition of privy purses of erstwhile royals who decided to accede to India, and so on.

The word 'Socialist' was added to the Preamble of the Indian Constitution by the 42nd amendment act of 1976, during the Emergency. It implies social and economic equality. Social equality in this context means the absence of discrimination on the grounds only of caste, colour, creed, sex, religion, or language. Under social equality, everyone has equal status and opportunities.

Economic equality in this context means that the government will endeavour to make the distribution of wealth more equal and provide a decent standard of living for all and maintain national unity (Qaumi Ekta) and integrity as dreamt by the leaders of the freedom movement and enshrined in the Constitution of independent India by its framers.

It is a great challenge to all of those who believe in the Constitution and its ideology, and its policies. Those who have been associated with it, or believe in the ideology of Socialism in any form should sit together and think about the future of this great country as dreamt by the founders of the Socialist movement in India.

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*This article is the introduction to the book Founders of the Socialist Movement in India, authored by Qurban Ali. The book is yet to be published.*

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