

CHAPTER –V

THE IMPACT OF THE REVOLT OF 1857: AN ASSESSMENT

Socialism remains on the agenda of human struggle for a just and humane society. Only socialism can effectively challenge the capitalist rationality of poverty amid opulence, growth via natural destruction and the accompanying socially, morally and culturally retrograde denouements in society. Doing away with capitalisms market rationality, that governs its 'industries' of both work and leisure, socialism can put economic rationality at the service of individual and social autonomy, engaging the masses in socio-economic planning for sustainable economic development and meaningful life for all. Socialism alone has the possibility of achieving that integration of political with economic democracy, of centralized with decentralized socio-economic planning, of representative with participatory democratic structures. Socialism involves the processes which give us the mastery of social change and conservation that we need to acquire in the decades immediately ahead if we are to secure rather than lose forever the human future. Socialism alone can enable us, humans, to have the final say on the future of not only civilization proper but of the human species and indeed the planet which has become a matter of such vital concern today. Against capitalism which today cannot offer anything more for the future of humanity than a diminished life in a rapidly diminishing ecosphere, socialism holds the promise of life of rationally planned abundance with people at last gaining mastery over their lives and their world, of a more transparent and non-alienated life, which of necessity involves a reconciliation of human-kind with nature, something impossible for capitalism. Such has been the emancipatory socialist project since 1848. It remains on the agenda of human struggle today.¹ Socialists of course have no illusions

that the struggle for socialism is going to be easy or expeditiously successful. After the first failure it will be far more difficult in many ways than before, it is going to be a long detour to socialism next time. But they have no reason to feel gloomy about its prospects either. The material conditions are more favourable and objective compulsions far stronger than appeared possible a few years ago and the constituency for the socialist cause can only grow as capitalism shows itself increasingly incapable of coping with the crises it produces. Old bases of struggle among the classes and popular masses have not entirely disappeared.² There is a new ferment among the people, new protests and struggle everywhere in the North as well as the South. With grievances expressed, demands made, and rights affirmed against capitalism, there is a growing refusal to accept the future that capitalism offers. The importance of this refusal is not to be underestimated. It provides the basis for constructing a different future, for forgoing the socialist alternative to capitalism. Protest is progressive and speaks a language which is well in tune with socialist aspirations. This is particularly true in case of the more disadvantaged groups – women, dalits, tribals, repressed and discriminated against ethnic and other identities, etc. – now waking up to their oppressions, and of movements on such issues as women rights, racism, peace, human rights and environment. These protests and movements can hope for fulfillment only in a socialist social order. They are crying out to be articulated with the struggle for socialism. The truly global character of capitalism and its worldwide depredations and the world people's common interest in its overthrow do constitute a material foundation as it were for a new internationalism of struggle for socialism which could draw in a huge array of progressive political forces and social interest. It has in a way expressed itself and its socialist gains. The people's

experiment with different paths of struggle and alternate models of socialism can be found during the revolt, resulting in setbacks as well as victories. In this perspective, the notion that socialism is dead says more about those who voice that notion than about future prospects of socialism. For socialists who are serious in intent, not content to live in or cry over the past or be a sermonizing minority, the conditions exist. The build mass support and forge new alliances, to hopefully carry on or resume the struggle for socialism.³ This struggle, learning from the past, has to resolve any number of old and new problems. Even as it seeks the much-needed ideological clarity, it must reaffirm the ethical commitment of socialism. It has to challenge the established political traditions of elite conciliation and negotiations as well as cooperation of popular leaders. In a situation of deep dissatisfaction with the status-quo, with people drifting or being led into all kinds of anti people channels, it has to seek and provide positive alternatives. The alternatives involve a new and vigorous role for the organizations of the people, especially those of the most oppressed the worst victims of the local and global capitalism and colonial exploitation. There has to be recognition of their autonomy, of their specific concerns and demands, independent of or in complementarities with the party or parties. It has to be a struggle from below which pushes forward the diverse emancipator agendas of the people. Given the structural nature of the transformation that socialism represents, building class and mass organizations of the working people, but shunning their economist deformation, remains central to the politics of this ongoing or resumed struggle for socialism as they requisite class alliances.⁴ The revolutions of the nineteenth and twentieth century have increased our collective knowledge about how to build movements for revolutionary transformation of society as also about how not to

build socialism. They have certainly indicated the potential for more successful future revolutions and building of socialism. Statism over emphasized the role of centralized political power, state ownership of the means of production, and abolition of the market by decree as a lever of socialist transformation, instead of laying the stress on self-government and intellectual-moral reform in the construction of a new hegemony. The western model could be extended worldwide, defining the social subjects and reducing them to the rank of mere allies. This whole complex of mentalities helped to produce degeneration in societies where a revolution was accomplished, but it has also hindered the western Left from uniting the Third World movements and from mobilizing the new social subjects that are emerging under advanced capitalism.⁵

This is necessary to face reality and rebuild the required politics and culture on the left. But it is equally necessary to be properly balanced about it. In other words, it also needs to be recognized that this past is not entirely a bitter heritage. Historical communism as it has been called, the outcome of October Revolution including the Soviet experiment, has extraordinary achievements to its credit. We have taken note of them in the foregoing pages. As with lessons, there is no need to recapitulate them either. Behind these achievements lie heroic sacrifices of generations of communists and the people led by them, and a wealth of revolutionary theory and practice, implicit in a long record of people mobilized, movements built, struggle waged, battles fought and won, revolutions made and entire societies transformed. The idea of socialism has caught on, especially with the poor and oppressed of the world that no failures can now efface. Beneath the socialist idea are a core of egalitarian values, the human right to creative, productive work; the right to accessible and dependable health care, the right to decent

housing; the right to public education; freedom from oppression based on race, gender or ethnicity; the elimination of great concentrations of wealth, power and privilege in the hands of a tiny minority; the democratic empowerment of those who historically have experienced the burden of exploitation and oppression. These values have now come to stay, not as something to be only cherished but as a distinct possibility in our times. The record of even advanced capitalism on all this only reinforces the belief that the socialist alternative continues to be both relevant and politically necessary.⁶ The enhanced possibility of moving towards socialism as Marx visualised it, to which democracy, it needs to be re-emphasised, is a central concern. Among other things they effectively challenged the sacredness of private property, common ownership of the means of production, despite bureaucratic usurpation in the Soviet Union, has come to be associated with values of solidarity. Revolutions have certainly left capitalism more vulnerable to be next wave of revolutions in India as well as the World. A genuinely public or common ownership of the means of production is an absolutely indispensable foundation for a social order radically different from capitalism. For this alone makes society-wide planning and conscious decisions about the overall use of resources possible. It may be added, public ownership is not synonymous with state ownership. It can and must assume many different forms, from socialist state's ownership of the commanding heights of the economy to municipal and co-operative ownership. Nor need public or social ownership. Even in its different forms, be all-encompassing. For socialism to have any future, the movement for it needs to make a critical assessment of its past, indeed not only after the October Revolution but also seventy years before it to know where it has come from, what it aims at, know not only the resources it lacks but

also the ones it has. Its self-accounting has to be a proper one which does not throw any baby out with the bathwater, but remaining careful of its basic principles critically appropriates its past or heritage for the tasks of the present. Making a mess of this past or heritage in any manner, apart from being poor politics, is an evasion of the responsibility, of the elementary care and sense of proportion which each generation of revolutionaries owes to the efforts of generations of revolutionaries before it. The specific character of capitalism or capitalist domination in a country and notwithstanding capitalism's remarkable resilience in surviving, which resilience we have noticed on more than one occasion earlier and which any serious struggle against capitalism must take note of. It was Marx's radical critique of the prevailing social order, of capitalism as a system structured by contradictions which are insoluble in its own terms, which led him to affirm that an entirely different social order, based on radically different foundations is not only desirable but possible. The socialist project depended not on the appeal of a theory but on the reality and power of contradictions, tendencies and possibilities that the theory correctly identified within capitalism, on Marx's analysis and prognosis of the inner logic of capital, which analysis and prognosis stands fully vindicated by the development of capitalism over four centuries. The critique of capitalism was indeed the starting point of Marxism and Socialism and is the point to which, quite properly, the socialist movement can and must now turn. The capitalist private property is specifically antisocial because of its exclusive pursuit of profit making and accumulation regardless of the consequences. If the main structural weakness of capitalism lies in its inability to ensure this as a smooth, uninterrupted process whose inability finds expression in periodic crises of profitability, if investment and of economic activity in general, its social or moral

weakness lies in the fact that its pursuit of profit and accumulation inevitably has disastrously damaging consequences for the vast majority of humankind. These consequences, the widely acknowledged economic, social, political, moral and ecological failing of the system must not be viewed as unfortunate deviations from its normal working, they are on the contrary an intrinsic outcome of the structural logic of capitalism. It is the attenuation of these damaging consequences by way of public intervention or regulation which must be taken as deviations from the essential dynamic of capitalism, as contrary to its spirit and purpose, which intervention or regulation capitalism has always opposed, evaded or sought to shake off at the first opportunity. It is important to note that the liberal or social democratic critiques of capitalism have typically tended to be piecemeal and specifically related to immediate problems, shortcomings and failings of the system. It is of course important to know how preciously the logic of late capitalism is at work in the advanced capitalist countries of the World, where mass unemployment, great inequalities in all spheres of life, material constraints of all kinds, moral and cultural disorientation, widespread sense of spiritual want, anomie and alienation are a reality for vast masses of people during colonial period to till today. But it is equally and in some ways perhaps more important to focus on Revolt of 1857. Set of interactions between the so-called first and third worlds where with the ongoing globalization and imposed structural adjustment, the basic relationship of exploitation backed where necessary with military power has assumed a still grosser form of the transfer of resources from the poorest people on earth to the richest. The situation within the third world countries are such that the collaborating native exploiting classes are content with their share of the loot, and the people-their countries increasingly locked

into the global capitalist system and helpless in the face of its logic-face the prospect of further impoverishment, mass deprivation and hunger. And all this when resources produced by social labour under capitalism itself are available that make possible decent livelihood and a life of dignity for all on this earth. The structural logic of capitalism is visible as never before and people's experience of capitalist exploitation and domination is only being accentuated by the current crisis of capitalism. With the crisis and the decline of revolutionary opposition, the prerogatives of capitalism are being reasserted with increasing cynicism, at the centre through restructuring of the economy union busting and dismantling of the welfare state, and in the periphery through globalization which, in collaboration with the local ruling classes, makes reinforced exploitation of the poor and oppressed of third world. This capitalist offensive is helping the common people as well as common masses everywhere to see more clearly the real face of capitalism. The loss of the old enemy is proving painful to the capitalist power-brokers and profiteers, the new enemies being discovered. Islamic fundamentalism, terrorism, the so-called rough state, etc. – are rather poor substitutes for it. With capitalism's new offensive against the working people undermining its legitimacy, and some of the ideological props gone, the abuses of the capitalist system are more difficult to make and those criticizing its irrationalities harder to silence. The discrepancy between the high rhetoric of capitalist apologetics – about freedom and democracy, fairness and equal opportunity, justice and common interest, development with a human face, prosperity for all, etc. – and the reality as it is daily experienced by the vast majority of people under capitalism stands more clearly revealed, threatening the fragile structures of bourgeois hegemony over society. And the way things are going it may not be long before people

come to recognize the ugly face of capitalism in the looming environmental crisis. All this surely provides a terrain increasingly favourable to renewal of argument and struggle for socialism. Capitalist societies everywhere are in deep economic and social crisis, crisis and contradictions of capitalism, its globalized depredations, are at the centre of popular concern and there is a renewed search for an alternative. Anti capitalist struggles have surfaced and any number of new movements have come up whose aspirations can be realized only in socialism. But evidence indicates that without an organized theory, and practice based on it, they will have surfaced and come up only to be frustrated and defeated, lending legitimacy to the claim that there is no alternative to the present order. To be successful, even for their limited aims and purposes, they need a theory which enables them to see the interconnections of their particular concerns with the social reality as a whole and provides them with a visible strategic alternative.⁷

Socialist society is far more difficult than it was ever visualized. Answers have to be found to any number of important questions involved in this construction, indeed in any transition to socialism, such as how to ensure genuine social ownership and popular participation in and control over the economy, how to secure democracy in society, combining its representatives and direct forms, how to articulate democratic planning with the inevitable, if necessary, relics of the market, how to reconcile economic growth with ecological imperatives, and so on. The overall perspective of struggle for socialism in the more or less backward, peripheral capitalist countries of the third world in a situation of global domination of capitalism. In India during revolt of 1857 period rebels were perceived them (common masses) theoretically and then forge them into practices or actions which made sense to the working people and linked their ongoing struggles to

the coming of a socialist future. Providing revolutionary leadership to partial, reformist struggles is only a part of the more basic task that faces the socialist today. The struggle for socialist, of course is governed by the historical specificities of the situation in different countries of the world. But everywhere it involves the question of hegemony in society, a renewed ideological – political struggle to so build up a movement for socialism that it wins a cultural – intellectual hegemony, becomes increasingly the enlightened common – sense of our age.⁸ This common sense indicate to the idea of Nationalism. Like all social phenomena, nationalism is a historical category. It emerged in the social world at a certain stage of evolution of the life of the community when certain socio-historical conditions both objective and subjective, matured. Before national communities, national societies, national states, there were feudal phases of social existence. At a certain stage of social, economic and cultural development, nations came into being. They were generally distinguished from non-national communities of previous periods of social existence by certain specific characteristics such as an organic welding of the members of the nation, living in a distinct territory within a single economy, so that they felt conscious of common economic existence; generally one common language used by them; and further, a similar psychological structure among its members and a common culture evolved by it. The integration of communities into nations was a prolonged historical process. The nation had to struggle against various obstacles and also British exploitation as well; which kept the people economically disunited and thwarted the free growth of trade and manufacture, the prime levers of the economic consolidation of the people.

The English people were among the first to be welded into a nation. As a result of a number of historical reasons, nationalism was born in England earlier than a number of other countries. For example, the early growth of trade and manufacture which enveloped the people more and more in a network of exchange of relations, paved the way for the growth of a national economy. It also led to the early emergence of democratic and nationalist ideas which attacked feudal conceptions of state, society, and the status and position of the individual.⁹ In course of time, historical conditions for the rise of nationalism matured in other countries also. This was the result of the development of internal forces as well as the impact, on those countries, of outside forces. The history of the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is primarily the history of the formation of nations in enlarging zones of the human world, of the struggles of nascent nations seeking to be full-fledged nations against internal and external obstacles, and of the struggles of already formed nations, among themselves, for self-preservation or self-aggrandizements. The nation is recognized as the dominant form of community prevailing in the present epoch. In fact the principle of nationalism has primarily governed various schemes of political and other reconstruction evolved by modern sociologists, statesmen, and politicians with a view to eliminating discord from the social world and creating a premise for the free and full expression of the creative power of human groups.¹⁰ The nation is thus the prime fact of the present epoch and the national sentiment, the dominant emotion of man. Contemporary movements in the spheres of economy, politics, or culture (barring the field of such, objective sciences as natural sciences and technology) are inspired by conscious national motives and urges, irrespective of whether they are organized to defend and develop the freedom and culture

of respective nations or to mitigate or suppress the freedom or culture of other nations. The nation remains, also, a unit in all contemporary programmes of world reconstruction which seek to integrate humanity, on a capitalist or socialist basis. This decisive significance of the role of nationalism in the life of humanity, some of the most acute and eminent thinkers of the world have made nationalism a special subject of study and investigation. They have attempted to study and solve problems concerning nationalism such as what constitutes a nation, under what socio-historical conditions the nation came into existence. What role nationalism plays in human progress and what its relation with internationalism or the urge of men to integrate on a world scale is? Further they have also tried to study the various expressions of nationalism in diverse fields such as social, economic, political and cultural. Finally some of them have also investigated the history of the rise and development of nationalism in separate countries and attempted to lay bare the genetic causes of this rise and growth in each individual country. Nationalism represents an attempt to unveil the complex and multifold process of the formation of nations, their traits, struggles and modes of self-expression and self-assertion. Since nationalism emerged in its own unique way in different countries, the study of nationalism in each country became a separate task.

Nationalism in Indian context is a modern phenomenon. It came into being during the British period as a result of the action and inter-action of numerous subjective and objective forces and factors which developed within the Indian Society under the conditions of the British rule and the impact of world forces. The process of the growth of Indian nationalism has been very complex and many sided. This is due to a number of reasons. Pre-British Indian Society had a social structure quite unique and perhaps

without a parallel in history. It sharply differed in its economic base from the pre-capitalist medieval societies of European countries. Further India was a vast country inhabited by a huge population, speaking many languages and professing different religions. Socially, the Hindus, comprising two-thirds of the population were almost atomized in various castes and sub-castes, a phenomenon peculiar to the Hindu-society. Again Hinduism itself was not a homogeneous religion but a conglomeration of religious cults which divided the Hindu people into a number of sects. This extreme social and religious division of the Hindus in particular and the Indians in general presented a peculiar background to the growth of nationalism in India. Nationalism in other countries did not rise amidst such peculiarly powerful tradition and institutions. India's peculiar social, economic, and political structure and religious history, together with its territorial vastness and a teeming population, make the study of the rise and growth of Indian nationalism more difficult, but more interesting and useful also. The self-preservative will of the past social, economic and cultural structure was stronger in Indian than in perhaps any country in the world. Further the significance of the Indian nationalist movement for the present and future history of humanity is also great since it is the movement, increasingly becoming dynamic, of an appreciable section of the human race.¹¹

Such startling changes in the religious outlook of the people in the village, however, did not bring about any fundamental change in the consciousness of the people, did not extend their consciousness, could not engender and build up any national consciousness. The same narrow village perspective continued to dominate the outlook of the villagers. Instead of considering himself a Hindu, he considered himself a Buddhist or

instead of feeling himself as a Vaishnavite, he now felt himself as a Shaivite. He never developed the consciousness of being an Indian, which the growth of the national sentiment signifies. Even when he felt the unity of India, it was only in a religious sense, i.e. India to him was the land of the Hindus who were united by the common religion of Hinduism and not that of the Indians who inhabited the Indian territory and who were economically and politically welded into a single unit. It was the consciousness of a religio-ideological unity and not that of a politico-economic unity.¹² Since unlike in the past, India was now ruled by a capitalist nation, this rule had a profound effect on her economic structure. It must however, be noted that capitalist society, a historically higher social formation than the feudal type, is still composed of classes with a divergent and even irreconcilably conflicting interests. However, in its early phase, the national bourgeoisie, as a rule, is able to gather all progressive social groups within the fold of national unity, instill the sentiment of nationalism among them and secure their support in the movement against feudalism and for a democratic reconstruction of society as also in their projects of capitalist consolidation and expansion. This becomes increasingly difficult with the decline of capitalism and growth of labour movements based on the principle of class struggle. It may here be remarked that the destruction of the economic disunity of India based on self-sufficient independent village economy and the transformation of India into a single economic unit. In fact the Indian nationalist movement was the product of the pressure exerted by British interests on the free evolution of the Indian people and the various social classes composing it. This was done by subordinating the interests of such free and normal development to British interests, by obstructing or restricting Indian industrialization, by distorting her agricultural

production to meet the raw-materials needs of British industries. In short, by keeping India as primarily an agrarian raw-material producing colony of Britain and as a market for British Industries. The very fact of the Indian nationalist movement being in opposition to Britain indicated the pressure of Britain on India. Capitalism penetrated the Indian village during the British period. It is necessary to follow this process the growth of capitalism since, thereby it destroyed the village self-sufficient economy and made village economy an integral part of a village unified Indian economy. It was this economic unification of India which became the objective material basis for the steady amalgamation of the disunited Indian people into a unified nation, for the growth of national sentiment and consciousness among them and for the rise and development of an all-India national movement for their political freedom, and social and cultural progress.¹³ The centralized state also took-over other functions of the village community such as defense. The village slowly but steadily became transformed from a self-governing community into an administrative unit of the centralized state and a dependent economic part of the national economy. The economic and administrative autarchy of the traditional village disappeared. Collective village life based on common economic interests and the resultant co-operative relations gave way to a new village existence based on competition and struggle. Competitive economic relations resulting out of private property and market replaced former co-operative socio-economic relations. The creation and penetration of capitalist economic relations into the village together with the political-administrative unification of India by assembling all hitherto independent centres into a single unified state system struck a mortal blow to the seemingly impregnable traditional village. Formally custom had most governed the relationship

between the members of the village community. The village committees had regulated the relations between and adjusted disputes among villagers. Now legal codes and law courts established by the new regime governed the complex social relations arising out of the new land system based on private property in land. Over the face of the agrarian world took place a change such as England had witnessed in the sixteenth century; the disruption of the medieval framework, the influx of foreign agent's considerations and of contractual relations, and the substitution of individual responsibility, enterprise and freedom for coordinated effort along paths prescribed by custom. Thus twilight fell over the ancient traditional Indian village, the seemingly invulnerable Rock of Ages. It could successfully resist all former political upheavals, wars and invasion. History moves dialectically, progress is achieved not through the quantitative extension of the good aspects of the old but its qualitative transformation. Higher forms of co-operation and social existence emerge not through the quantitative expansion of old forms but their dissolution. It is true that the capitalist transformation of the village co-operation but its historical progressive role lies in the fact that it broke the self-sufficiency of the village economic life and made the village economy a part of the unified national economy. It was a historically necessary step towards integrating the Indian people economically. It simultaneously broke the physical, social, and cultural isolation of the village people by creating the possibility of large-scale social exchange through the establishment of such means of mass transport as railways and automobiles. Capitalist unification of India based on the destruction of the village autarchy and co-operation on the narrow village scale paved the way for higher forms of economy and social collaboration. It paved the way for a national economy and nation scale collaboration among the Indian people. It

becomes the material premise for the emergence of the Indian nation out of the amorphous mass of the Indian people which, before this unification, were scattered in numerous villages between which there was very little exchange, social or economic, and hence which had hardly any positive common interests.¹⁴ However, tragic, the destruction of the autarchic village and the collective life of the people living in it, it was historically necessary for the economic, social and political unification of the Indian people. Social progress is achieved as history shows, through the moral action of historical forces.¹⁵

The type of agricultural organization we are visualizing is an organization based on the state regulation of production in the general interests of our people and the conversion of agricultural production into a public utility service.¹⁶ It is obvious that only a real national government of the Indian people could put such a plan into successful action. Thus the restoration and further development of Indian agriculture was not a mere techno-economic problem. Basically it was bound up with rapid and free all round development of Indian industries which not only could absorb surplus population in the countryside but could also provide agricultural machinery for the modernization and mechanization of Indian agriculture. It also was bound up with the problem of the overhauling in land. It further raised the problem of political power, of the establishment of an independent sovereign state of the Indian people where power lay in the hands of the producing and exploited strata of the people themselves and not in those of Indian vested interests. Thus bound up with the problem of freedom and a socio-economic reconstruction of Indian society of a historically higher level, the problem of agricultural reconstruction had a progressive national character.¹⁷

The vital historical fact that the destruction of the pre-capitalist urban handicrafts and the village artisan industry of India brought about by the forces of modern industries and trade, made way for the transformation of India into a single economic whole. It objectively unified the entire people – and not a section – within the web of a system of exchange relations. It thus contributed to the building of the material basis for the growth of a common and joint economic existence of the Indian people into a nation. The mass of ruined handicraftsmen, in part, took to modern Indian Industries, and became factory and transport workers, but in the absence of sufficient growth of these industries, in the main, took to agriculture and became tenants or land labourers. They had rarely sufficient capital to purchase land to become free peasant proprietors. Thus the class of Indian handicraftsmen, a class based on medieval handicrafts, steadily dissolved itself into and increased the class of the modern proletariat, of tenants and land labourers. They became integral parts of the new classes in India which arose on the basis of the new capitalist economic relations which developed in India during British rule. They became a part of the capitalist socio-economic structure of Indian society however insufficiently developed. They became parts of the new classes which were nationally unified and had to confront problems which transcended a mere town but were national in scope. The new class of land labourers or industrial workers or tenants or peasant proprietors had a community of interests and common problems which could not exist among Indian handicraftsmen in pre-British India. The ruined handicraftsmen now achieved the status of being members of classes which were component parts of the Indian nation and existed as national units with common interests and problems. This was a distinct historical advancement.¹⁸

The bourgeoisie and the proletariat are the basic classes of the modern capitalist society. As capitalist economy based on competition and commodity production develops, the intermediate classes of small producers such as artisans, and others, being unable to compete with powerful industrial rivals in the market, are ruined and increasingly fall into the ranks of the workers. In the countryside, too, the intermediate stratum of peasant proprietors, due to progressive impoverishment in the circumstances of capital economic environment, increasingly lose land to users and merchants and other capitalists and a good proportion of them become landless labourers or agricultural proletariat. Thus while the intermediate social groups are unstable and dissolving social categories, the proletariat remains a stable and increasing class. The conflict between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie is, therefore, the basic conflict in capitalist society, providing movement to it. In this class struggle, the working class set to itself the goal of socialism, a social system based not on wage labour and private property in means of production as in the capitalist system, but on social ownership of those means and free co-operative labour of all workers.¹⁹

Industrialization played almost a revolutionary role in the life of the Indian people. It led to the consolidation of the unified national economy which evolved in India as a result of the introduction of capitalist economic forms in agriculture by the British government, penetration of India by the commercial forces of the world and spread of modern transport during the British rule. Industrialization made the Indian economy more unified, cohesive and organic. It raised the tone of the economic life of India. It also brought into existence modern cities which became the centres of modern culture and increasing democratic social life and from which all progressive movements,

social, political and cultural, emanated. The progressive social and political groups in India realized the advantages, direct and indirect, of industrialization. Though they differed in their views regarding the social organization of industrial and other economic forces and resources whether on the laissez faire principle of private enterprise and unlimited individual completion or on a planned national basis, capitalist or socialist they all stood for rapid, all-sided expansion of industries while sharply divided on many vital issues, they put up a united demand for it. They jointly struggled for the removal of the various handicaps on industrial development. The demand for industrialization thus became a national demand. The establishment of modern industries, in addition, engendered two important classes of the contemporary society, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, whose great significance in the national movement will be subsequently discussed.²⁰

The top-sided and limited character of the development of modern means of transport and communications in India prevented the unfolding of the potential power of these means to accomplish a still closer social and economic integration and more rapid cultural advance of the Indian people. The problem of extensive and adequate expansion of those means was closely bound up with the problem of the political power in the hands of the Indian people, as also with that of a rapid development of the productive forces of the Indian society through a scientific plan of economic reconstruction which would have been fully possible if society, as a whole, owned all means of production. In spite of the growth of a modern intelligensia and an educated middle class, an overwhelming portion of the Indian people, however remained illiterate. The principal reason for this was their great poverty. The liquidation of mass illiteracy was, therefore, bound up with the

problem of the removal of the mass poverty of the Indian people. This great poverty of the Indian people, as we have seen, was the product of the colonial character of Indian economy, the resultant low development of the productive forces of the Indian society and, furthers the prevailing system of land and other economic relationships. Elimination of mass poverty, therefore, implied national freedom, power in the hands of the mass of the Indian people instead of in those of vested interests, and a comprehensive plan of national socio-economic reconstruction. Such a plan could be fully realized only if society owned the means of production. The state of a free and economically prosperous country alone could evolve a financial budget such could pay adequate attention to mass education and social service. The problem of complete solution of mass illiteracy and further the extensive spread of the rich scientific and artistic culture of the contemporary era among the Indian people was, thus, closely bound up with national freedom and an economic plan based on the social ownership of means of production.²¹

The British established a uniform reign of law in the country. In establishing the new system of law and tribunals, the British had to supersede the customary law which prevailed in pre-British India and expropriate village and caste committees of their power to enforce the customary law which further varied from place to place in the absence of a uniform system of law.²² The villagers had an organization designed to make them self-supporting and self-governing. Their autonomy was part of a loosely organized system of government, in which the sovereign power left communal and local institutions to function independently, each in its limited sphere. Each village coordinated the social activities of its inhabitants and was an independent unit.²³ The new legal system was based on the democratic conception of equality of all citizens before the laws of the state.

In pre-British India, a Brahmin offender was meted out a lighter punishment than a non-Brahmin offender for the same offence. Under the new law, all citizens, no matter what their caste or creed, were considered equal before law the jurisdiction of which further covered the entire territory of the state. Thus, the British brought about a legal unification of the Indian people on a democratic basis for the first time in Indian history. The establishment of British rule in India brought about an extensive and basic political, administrative, and legal unification of the country for the first time in Indian history. Such a state structure became necessary to the new type of economy which came into existence in India under the British rule. The capitalist economic transformation of India broke up the multitude of separate village economies, welded the Indian people economically, through a system of exchange relations, and made contract the key basis of their economic relations. The British government created a new land system on a private property basis and introduced money economy. A uniform system of law had to be evolved to maintain and regulate the new land relations and contractual transactions such as purchase, sale, and mortgage of land resulting inevitably from the new system. It was primarily and basically designed to meet the requirements and sub-serve the political, economic, and strategic interests of British capitalism. Hence along with certain historically progressive features, it also inevitably exhibited and suffered from basic and vital limitations and defects. This contradiction, namely that of a foreign state governing a native population, was one of the main factors which gave rise to the Indian nationalist movement.²⁴ The presence of the British in India did not stimulate Indian national consciousness simply by bringing all Indians under an effective common government, and by making accessible western ideas. The incursion of an alien race, themselves

imbued with a strong consciousness of nationality and of colour, had its customary effect in stimulating a similar consciousness among their subjects. the British rule did not merely make the Indians aware that they possessed characteristics in common, it also provided them with common interests and common grievances.²⁵ The Indian people, as they became politically conscious, organized movements to secure demands like administrative reforms, Indianization of the services, representative institutions, elimination of racial discrimination, franchise, elected legislatures, civil liberties, a constitution on lines of self-governing colonies, and finally a constituent Assembly as they were the sole authority to shape the constitution for the Indian people. In fact these demands sought to democratize the state machinery and to transfer, in varying degrees administrative initiative and political power from the British to the Indian people. Thus the national movement became essentially a democratic movement. Indian national movement had a multiclass basis and was directed against the British foreign rule. Each social group or class put forth demands which reflected its interests and aspirations. These groups, however united for such demands as civil liberties, Swaraj and other which were of common interest, while the Indian Nationalist Movement had reached a stage when it had put forth the demand of Independence or a sovereign state existence for the Indian people, various political group representing different classes had their own conception of nature of the future state division of India into Hindu and Muslim League which stood for the division of India into Hindu and Muslim Sovereign States, other political groups and organization desired to preserve the single state existence of the Indian people accomplished by Britain (though granting the right of self-determination to nationalities). However, while some of them visualized a democratic Indian state based

on modern capitalist economy, others like the All-India-Trade Union Congress and socialist groups stood for a socialist state based on socialist economy. It is to be noted that the nationalist movement deserved to retain the political and administrative unification of India, accomplished by the British, which represented a historical advancement of Indian society. It did not aim at the resuscitation of the self-governing village at the general political and administrative disunity of pre-British feudal India. The Indian nationalists aimed at putting the state structure on a democratic basis. It's most progressive section finally set, as the objective, Independence in terms of a sovereign state existence for the Indian people.²⁶

The imperial power consolidated its hold and expanded its control over new areas of Indian rural life. During the course of the next half century, new areas of conflict emerged. These conflicts were, however, more easily contained by the state. The history of peasants and mass resistance during the period 1858-1914 is, necessarily, disjointed from a collection of histories of local agrarian relationships and struggles, each of which had its own timetable of revolt. Only with the development of new forms of leadership at the national level after 1918 – with Gandhi, and with the congress championing peasant demands more militantly did peasant resistance begin to link up once more across the sub-continent to pose a formidable challenge to the colonial state, becoming, once again, something more than a collection of isolated struggles. Although peasant resistance did not thus pose a direct threat to British rule between 1858 and 1914, it was a force which continually worried colonial officials. Always in the background lurked the spectre of 1857, a reminder of what could happen if the peasants once more came together in revolt. Such resistance also provided a continuing rebuttal to the claims made by colonial

officials that India had become a more prosperous and stable society under the British.²⁷ The eminent scholar Kathleen Gough, who wrote an influential article in 1974 on 'Indian Peasant Uprisings', argued that the peasant militancy seen in the Naxalite movement had a long history. This had been denied in many studies, which argued that rural resistance had in most cases been led by the upper classes of the countryside, such as landlords and rich peasants, who had used ties of patronage and caste to mobilize or influenced the poorer peasants, or common masses as well.²⁸ The Great Revolt of 1857 was often explained in such cases. In these circumstances when the poor had rebelled, their resistance was often described as mere outlaw or a form of communalism, rather than as a protest against harsh agrarian conditions. In this way, most peasant resistance had been written out of Indian history. Gough also argued that there was in fact a strong history of rural revolt against colonial rule and the indigenous beneficiaries of colonial rule. British rule had led to an extreme disruption of rural relationships throughout India. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries the peasantry had been impoverished through extremely high rates of land tax levied by the East India Company. After these taxes were lowered, new forms of expropriating the surplus of the peasants through intermediaries, such as landlords, merchant money lenders and British planter, were evolved. These intermediaries often acquired property rights in land of a capitalist kind, which allowed them to exploit the peasants more thoroughly. The British also destroyed much local handicraft industry, forcing the handicraft producers to turn to agriculture and compete for land with the existing peasants. The same was true for pastoralists and forest dwellers, who had their pasture lands and forests expropriated by the colonial state. There was, as a result, a massive impoverishment and marginalization of the rural population of

India during the nineteenth century.²⁹ Gough attempted to divide peasant resistance into five types – (a) restorative rebellions to drive out the British and restore earlier rulers and social relations; (b) religious movements for the liberation of region or an ethnic group so as to establish a new form of government; (c) social banditry, (d) terrorist vengeance, with ideas of meting out collective justice; (e) mass insurrections for the redress of particular grievances.³⁰ Certain features of a movement so as to slot it into one or the other category, even though only one movement is likely to have elements to it which cut across all kind of limitation and as well as categories. Colonial historiography, which deputed Indian history as a story of never ending conflict between primordial groups, such as castes and religious communities, which failed to develop and change with the times. Historians have rightly challenged this view, showing that changing socio-economic realities have provided much of the underlying dynamic to such conflict and solidarities. In the process, however they desired too much. Community became a residual category which explained why given the same socio-economic conditions – mobilization was successful in some instances but not in others. Thus it was said, ties of caste or religion could help the richer peasants mobilize the poorer in what were essentially the class interests of the former, poorer peasants might use ties of caste, tribe or religion to achieve greater unity in the struggle for socialism.³¹ Partha Chatterjee has argued that in India masses and also peasants have generally conceptualized relationships of power in terms of the idea of the community. They conceive of the community as a collective which exists in a close relationship to the land which it controls. By right, the individual is allowed access to the land only as a member of the community. Chatterjee states that, the place of the individual in the social ordering or rights is determined by his

membership in the community, the collective in prior to the individual parts and its authority larger than the mere sum of the parts. He argues that political power in such a community is organized as the authority of the entire collectivity.³² Chatterjee goes on to say that both feudal and bourgeois states have sought to destroy peasant communities and the bases of peasant community ideology, as they have provided an alternative focus of power and loyalty. The absolutist monarchs of medieval India waged a constant struggle with these communities – described as tribes or clans in the literature. They were never entirely successful, always having to reach some sort of compromise with the colonial state. The colonial state, representing the class interests of the bourgeoisie, like wise attacked the solidarity of these groups.³³ He also argues that, the language of organized politics often characterizes such forms of mobilization as an alliance of various classes or strata within the peasantry, but ideologically the notion of the alliance is hardly ever relevant in collective action of this kind; it is always the concept of the community as a collective whole, a form of authority incapable of being broken down into constituent parts, which shapes and directs peasant politics vis-à-vis state.³⁴ Community consciousness is very different from bourgeois consciousness. The latter operates from the premise of the individual and a nation of his or her interests, with solidarities being based on alliances of common interests. In present consciousness people are required to act together because of existing bonds of solidarity. Collective action does not flow from a contract among individuals; rather individual identities themselves are derived from membership in a community.³⁵ In any discussion of community – based political action, it is important to make a clear distinction between communities as actual social groups and the community as a form of consciousness.³⁶ This consciousness indicates to the idea

of socialism. The history of peasant or mass resistance after the great revolt 1857 must necessarily be the history of many disparate movements. Resistance never linked up with that cumulative explosive power which transformed local struggles into wide ranging rebellion. It had happened in 1857, it occurred less dramatically in 1920-22; it happened on a wide scale once more in 1942.³⁷ Like Bengal also in Bihar struggles against the planters continued into the twentieth century. By then, the industry was in any case in the decline – though it revived briefly during the First World War. Again resistance was led by the richer peasants. In 1907-08 there was a powerful movement in which the indigo factories were boycotted and factory employees intimidated. Meetings were held and planters threatened with violence. The government intervened and forced the planters to give substantial concession to the peasants. The system however, remained and the struggle continued. It attracted support from local lawyers, teachers and political activists, who managed to win increasing support for the cause at all-India level after 1912.³⁸ In other words, it is the function of *Neel-Darpan* to generate illusion about British rule in India as a good thing with only a few minor faults here and there than can be easily mended. Put so bluntly, it might hurt liberal sensibilities. These had fed for over a hundred years on its reputation as predominantly a play of protest Bankim Chandra called it the *Uncle Tom's Cabin* of Bengal. Priest, professors and politicians have been unanimous in their description of the work as exclusively an indictment of the planters' tyranny. One has to turn to the text to see for oneself how partial and misleading such a description is. For the author's aversion to the planters is equated by his reverence for the Raj. One is a measure of the other. The blacker the planters, the whiter the regime.³⁹ The developed of Indian socialism during the two crowded decades which span the First and

Second World War can best be studied in the political and social context of the time. This growth was not, however, in a straight line; it suffered from false starts and setbacks; it was affected by the hostility of the British authorities, recurrent economic crises, the changing international scene, and the rather violent shift in the attitude of the communist international towards the nationalist struggle in India. The periods favourable to socialist ideas were those which formed the troughs of the Gandhian Waves of Satyagraha Struggles. There is no doubt that socialist ideas and parties gave a certain social content and occasionally a sharper edge to Indian nationalism as represented by the Indian national congress. That they could not achieve more was due to the internal contradictions of the left parties, and the charismatic, but dynamic and skilful leadership of the Indian National Congress by Mahatma Gandhi throughout this period. There was also a built-in fear of drastic changes. Memories of the civil disorder and instability in the eighteenth century, doubtlessly exaggerated by the British writers, conditioned the first generation of Indian nationalists against root-and-branch reforms. The agrarian disturbances in the decan in the 1870's and the 1890 have struck the Indian intelligentsia not as the welcome stirrings of an oppressed peasantry, but danger signals of a possible relapse into anarchy. The Congress leaders wanted gradual changes towards a rational secular, progressive society and an administration at first responsive and ultimately responsible to public or mass opinion. The Indian educated class constituted a small minority, but it was not merely the mouthpiece of the upper and middle classes. That it did not neglect the interests of the masses is shown by its persistent and persuasive advocacy of increase in the minimum limit for income tax, the abolition of the salt tax, the extension of local self-government, the establishment of the village panchayats, the

reduction of land revenue and the institution of free and compulsory elementary education – reforms which would benefit the poorer sections of the community.⁴⁰ In the world context Russian Revolution was to make socialism a word to conjure with. It was only natural that Indian nationalism, engaged in a continual debate with the British government, should have seen in the fall of Tsarist autocracy the confirmation of its hope that British autocracy in India would also crumble one day. The annulment of the partition of Persia and Turkey by the revolutionary government in Russia was well received in India; it was a practical token of the renunciation of imperialism by a European power. But the other important aspect of the Russian Revolution – the fashioning of a new socio-economic system – seems curiously to have made relatively little immediate impact on the Indian imagination. This may have been due to the fact that Marxist literature had enjoyed little vogue in this country and the news from Russia, filtered through the British press, tended to produce a dark picture of disorder and bloodshed, wholesale executions of political opponents, expropriation of property, censorship and regimentation.⁴¹ The Russian Revolution seems to have stimulated the organization of labour and the formation of trade Unions in India. In April, 1918, wadia formed a trade union in Madras, and in the same year, Bombay saw the emergence of the Indian seamen's Union. The G.I.P. Railway Union came into existence in 1919, the Ahmedabad Textile Workers Union and All India Trade Union Congress in 1920. The success of the proletarian revolution in Russian powerfully affected a few individuals such as the poet Nazarul Islam who wrote his *Byathar Dan* in 1919, and young men like A.K. Fazlul Haq and Muzaffar Ahmed who brought out a *New Bengali Paper*, the *Navayug* in 1920 in Calcutta, and S.A. Dange who published *Gandhi and Lenin* in 1921.

The effect on established political parties and its leaders was however hardly perceptible. Raja Mahendra Pratap, Barkatullah and other romantic revolutionaries, who assured Lenin in Moscow that India was ripe for a revolution in 1919, had been so long in the terrorist underground or in exile that they had little knowledge of the real conditions in India. M.N. Roy operated from European capitals with an unending stream of journals, leaflets, and letters aimed at potential and actual sympathizers of the revolution in India.⁴² Roy's propaganda and emissaries did not make much headway in India so long as the non-cooperation movement was on the crest of a rising wave. His chance came in the wake of the Chauri Chaura tragedy and the demoralization following the revocation of civil disobedience. Deviating somewhat from his own thesis at the second congress, he made a bid to cultivate support within the Indian National Congress and even to wrest the leadership into communist hands. He tried to win over C.R. Das who was known to be in favour of simultaneously prompting the economic welfare of the masses as well as the struggle for political liberation.⁴³

During the next three years, even as Gandhi led non-cooperation movement, he was reluctant to launch mass civil disobedience without adequate preparation. In February 1922, he succumbed to pressure from within the congress for launching mass civil disobedience in selected areas, but immediately afterwards, when he heard of the riot at Chauri Chaura, he applied the reverse gear. There is little evidence to show that the reasons which Gandhi gave for cancelling the aggressive phase of his movement were not honest. He knew the outbreak in Chauri Chaura was no revolutionary rising of the peasantry, but another manifestation of the mob violence that had been creeping into his movement. The occasional communal riots culminating in the fanatical moplah outbreak

in Malabar, and the riots at Bombay on the occasion of the visit of the Prince of Wales had disconcerted him.⁴⁴ For Gandhi, the Chauri Chaura incident was, as he wrote to Jawaharlal Nehru, “the last straw I assure you that if the thing (civil disobedience) had not been suspended, we would have been leading not a non-violent struggle, but essentially a violent struggle... The movement had unconsciously drifted from the right path.”⁴⁵ Jawaharlal Nehru, the son of the veteran Motilal Nehru introduced socialist ideas into the Congress. His interest in economic and social questions developed in the enforced leisure of the prison in 1922-23 when he delved into the history of the Russian Revolution. In 1926-27 he visited Europe and came into closer contact with the anti-colonial as well as the anti-capitalist crusaders from Asia, Africa, Europe, and America, particularly at the Brussels Congress of oppressed Nationalities. Already a student of Marx and an admirer of Lenin, he was deeply impressed by his brief visit to Moscow in November, 1927 and returned to his homeland just in time to attend the Madras Congress where he piloted resolutions with a radical slant. In the following year he clashed with the congress establishment on the issue of dominion status versus independence. As a gesture of defiance, he joined hands with Subhas Bose to found the Independence League, vowed to the severance of all relations with Britain and to “a socialistic revision of the economic structure of society.”⁴⁶ Nehru’s presidential address at the Lahore Congress was at once an onslaught on British imperialism, Indian feudalism and capitalism. He frankly introduced himself as a socialist and a republican and no believer in kings and princes, or in the order which produces the modern kings of industry”⁴⁷ The philosophy of socialism, he asserted, had permeated – the entire structure of society the world over, and “the only point in dispute was the pace and

methods of advanced to its realization". He questioned the proposition that the Congress should hold the balance fairly between capital and labour, and landlord and tenant. The balance was, said Nehru, "terribly weighted on one side," to maintain the status-quo "was to maintain injustice and exploitation." He called for changes in land laws, a minimum wage for every worker in the field or factory, organization of industry on a cooperative basis and effective liaison between the congress and the labour or mass movement. That all this was not merely a verbal exercise became evident 15 months later when under his pressure, but with the backing of Gandhi, the Karachi Congress embodied some of his ideas in a catalogue of fundamental rights and economic principles, including a living wage, imposition of death duties, and state ownership or control of basic industries. These may seem "mildly socialist" today; in 1931 they sounded revolutionary.⁴⁸ A group of young congressmen who were admirers of Nehru, felt a similar disenchantment with Gandhi's leadership. The members of this group, Jayaprakash Narayan, Asoka Mehta, Achyut Patwardhan, Yusuf Meherally, N.G. Goray, and S.M. Joshi, were ardent nationalists as well as ardent socialists. They felt that a new orientation to the congress was necessary, and drew up the blueprint of a new political party which was to function within the congress. They were later joined by some of the senior congressmen in the U.P. – Acharya Narendra Deva, Sampurnanand and Sri Prakasa – all from the Benares Vidyapeeth. The foundations of the Congress Socialist Party were laid at Patna in May 1934 when a meeting of the A.I.C.C. was held there. A few months later, the party had its first conference at Bombay and adopted a 15-point programme which included the repudiation of the public debt of India, transfer of all power to producing masses, planned development of the economic life of the country by the state, socialization of key

industries, state monopoly of foreign trade, cooperative and collective forming, organization of cooperatives for production, distribution, and credit, and the elimination of princes and landlords without compensation. This was a thorough-going socialist programme, which the communist party could well have included in its manifesto. Indeed the leaders of the new party swore by the Marxian theory, and believed that planned economic development on the soviet model was the answer to the problem of Indian poverty and backwardness. They criticized the congress leadership, but avowed loyalty to the organization.⁴⁹ Their professed object was, “to resuscitate and reinvigorate the congress,”⁵⁰ to rid it of its defeatist mentality,” and to draw into it the mass of workers and peasants, both to ‘socialize’ the nationalist struggle and to forge a massive anti-imperialist front. They were critical of Gandhi, of his self-imposed limitations on the score of non-violence, of his ethical approach to politics and of his theory of “trusteeship.”⁵¹ The approach to the Act of 1935, the formation of ministries in 1937, the organization of Kisan Sabhas and agitation for agrarian reforms, the release of political detenués and agitation in Indian states. There was the curious spectacle during these years of congressmen leading agitations against congress ministries in the provinces. There were prolonged and bitter controversies in which the congress leadership was continually under fire. “Gandhism has played its part”, announced J.P. Narayan. It cannot carry us further and hence we must march and be guided by the ideology of socialism.⁵² The socialist leaders did not realize the predicament of the congress executive, harassed as it was by a ceaseless cold war with the Muslim League and never – ending battle of wits with the British government. Without a minimum discipline in the party and stability in the country, the Congress could hardly speak effectively on behalf

of nationalist India.⁵³ In the historical perspective the progress of socialist ideas and organization seems to have been affected by a series of events on the national and world stage and a complex interplay of personalities and politics. It is difficult to say what the results would have been if the second communist international had endorsed only Lenin's thesis on colonialism; if M.N. Roy had not been the chief guide of the international in the twenties, and Indian communists had been allowed to function within the national movement during this period, if Nehru and other left leaders had joined hands in the pre-war years and revolted against the congress establishment; if Gandhi, the most charismatic as well as the most tolerant, receptive, and creative leader of nationalism in history had not been at the helm of the national congress; if Nehru's bonds with the Mahatma had not been as strong as they actually were, and he had chosen to lead the congress socialists; and finally, if the British had not skillfully alternated reform with repression and in 1947 confounded the theoreticians of revolutions by deciding to go while the going was good.⁵⁴ Lenin is also reported to have dismissed the delegation with the remark: Religion would not save the Indian people. Tolstoy and others like him tried the same thing in Russia but failed. Go back to India and preach class-struggle, and the road to freedom to India will be nearer.⁵⁵ M.N. Roy on the other hand, asserted in his supplementary thesis that the "bourgeois – democratic nationalist movements" were not worthy of commenter support because they were not "revolutionary" and also because the nationalist bourgeoisie was likely to 'compromise with Imperialism in return for some economic and political concessions to their class.'⁵⁶ As he surveyed the colonial world, he saw two distinct movements in the colonies: The bourgeois – democratic nationalist movement, with a programme of political independence under the bourgeois order and

the mass struggle of the poor and ignorant peasants and workers for their liberation from various forms of exploitation. He saw in the second movement the seeds of progress and urged that communist parties should be organized in order to revolutionize the social character of this movement and to “organize the peasants and worker as well as common masses and lead them to the revolution. While Lenin believed that there were no proletarian organizations of any consequence in the colonies, Roy insisted that in most of the colonies there already exist organized revolutionary parties which try to keep in close contact with the working masses and that the communists should work with them in preference to bourgeois organizations. Though he considered it profitable to make use of the cooperation of the bourgeois national revolutionary elements, he held that, the leadership of the revolution should be in the hands of a communist vanguard.⁵⁷ Again, Lenin held that Gandhi was a ‘revolutionary’ because he inspired and led a mass movement’ while Roy maintained that as a religious and cultural revivalist” Gandhi was bound to be a reactionary socially, however revolutionary he might appear politically.⁵⁸ In the year 1916 the provocative question raised by Lala Lajpat Rai in a socialist meeting in New York had been tormenting him: What difference would it make to the Indian masses if they were exploited by native capitalists instead of foreign imperialists?” This question made him uncomfortable and ultimately led him to the New York Public Library to read the works of Karl Marx and accept Marxism? ⁵⁹ How could he now think of political independence alone? His commitment to the new social order called for organizing the poor and ignorant peasants, common masses and workers, in the colonial stage, especially in India.⁶⁰ The Revolution in Russia and its beginning was regarded in India as a triumph over despotism notwithstanding the fact that it has involved that

unhappy country in anarchy and dismemberment. It has given an impetus to Indian political aspirations.⁶¹ The widespread nature of such propaganda, emanating from influential Anglo-Indian sources, compelled the nationalists to take a defensive position. They argued that Home Rule would not bring about revolutionary chaos, but that in fact a delay in reform could lead to a revolution. Characteristic of the contemporary opinions on this controversy was the following comment from a nationalist daily. It is not the Home Rule that brought about troubles in Russia. It is the Revolution which is the parent of this chaos. Had the erstwhile rulers of Russia had the wisdom to make a timely concession of Home Rule, there would have been no revolution and no outbreak of lawlessness and disorder Reforms indefinitely postponed are inadequate in their scope and comprehension, and prepare the ground for revolt.⁶² In the international sphere the Bolshevik Revolution and the rise of Soviet Russia introduced an explosive new factor in Indian politics to all intents and motives. It created a deep-rooted suspicion of the bonafides of the nationalist movement partly because of the apparent community of interest between the Indian nationalist were concerned. The British Government looked with alarm and suspicion at every demand the nationalists advanced and every agitation they undertook. In them, the British detected a mysterious Bolshevik connection and failed to evaluate the nature of the growing upsurge of nationalism objectively. In the ultimate analysis, the Bolshevik Revolution, later events in Soviet Russia, and Soviet interest in colonial affairs, did exercise a remarkable influence in the whole process of the beginning of liquidation of British Rule over India and in the growth of socialism in India. The Indian nationalists looked to the Soviet Union with sympathy, admiration and good will. This widened their perspective, which had always been traditionally confined

to Britain and encouraged them to take a radically new approach to the socio-economic problems then confronting the country; and thus to gain more and more support from the various strata of the Indian masses, particularly the workers, peasantry and lower middle classes. Britain's fear of Soviet propaganda and hostile activities and the wide publicity given to this by the British and Anglo-Indian Press did help in promoting the image of the Soviet Union as the only foreign power interested in bringing about the end of British Rule in India. All this helped in fostering world interest in the independence of India. A new realization began and grew among the Indian nationalists that their cause had acquired an international character of anti-imperialism shared and supported by Soviet Russia. Thus, by 1929, anti – imperialism became the main hallmark of the Indian Nationalist Movement which paved the way for the development and propagation of the socialist movement and socialist ideas later in the thirties.⁶³ The political form of socialism, again, there are certain general observations available from Nehru rather than an exposition of any political theory or doctrine. These observations, however, give a fairly clear idea of his view of the political structure associated with socialist transformation in India. He is categorical and firm in his view that India should have a democratic state structure with maximum regard for democratic freedoms – freedom of speech and organization and individual liberty. Indian socialist transformation, he suggests, should be based on a wide consent of different sections of Indian society and even on a large measure of cooperation of some at least of the groups who were normally opposed to socialist doctrine. He is hopeful that a free national government which is both strong and popular would be capable of introducing fundamental changes in the social and economic structure. He is therefore; keen to avoid the path of regimentation and

concentration of power for bringing about basic changes. At the same time, he clarifies that democracy should not provide a sanction for the status-quo and if social changes through the method of consent was not possible on account of the resistance of the vested interests, the use of coercion in the limited context should not be ruled out. Nehru thus seems committed to explore the possibility of socialist transformation through a democratic political structure; his view therefore stands in sharp contrast to the classical view which stresses the necessity of dictatorship of the proletariat as the political form inevitable for transition to socialism.⁶⁴ Nehru repeatedly emphasized that socialism is not just an economic doctrine but a philosophy of life which involved a profound change in habits, instincts, values and motivation. He also posed the problem of giving socialist ideology an Indian form so as to make it meaningful to the common people of India. He was aware of the fact that European socialism originated in an entirely different social context and it addressed itself to the Industrial proletariat. In India, on the other hand the national factor was of great significance and the bulk of the masses lived in villages and was illiterate. In this context, he stressed the need of “speaking of socialism in the language of India, through the idiom and categories which were current coin among Indian people.”⁶⁵ In the history of socialism in India, the period intervening between the two world wars will always be treated as crucial. It was then that the socialist idea gained a foothold in the Indian soil and the conception of a new India was gradually enlarged and transformed in the mind of the elite into the vision of a socialist India. It is also during this period that the intellectual framework of Indian socialism was evolved in a rudimentary form. In bringing about this turn in Indian nationalism, an outstanding role was played by Indian leaders.⁶⁶

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- 56) *M.N. Roy's Memoirs*, N-17, p.382.
- 57) Nanda, *op. cit.*, p.25.

- 58) Roy's Memoirs, *op. cit.*, p.379.
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- 64) *Ibid.*, p.136.
- 65) *Ibid.*
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