# Impact of Bolshevik Revolution on British Indian Politics (1917-1947)

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# Abstract

This paper analyses the impact of the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 on British India from 1917 to 1947. A qualitative method was used to understand the complex interaction between global revolutionary movements and Indian political thought. The Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, which led to the establishment of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republic (USSR) in Czarist Russia, served as a significant model for propagating Marxist ideologies in colonial India. The revolution's success inspired Indian revolutionaries, intellectuals, and political leaders to grapple with the challenges of anti-colonial struggle and socioeconomic inequalities. The research addresses two primary questions: the effects of the Bolshevik Revolution on the Indian political situation and how the Bolshevik Revolution affected the propagation of communism and socialism in India. The Communist Party of India (CPI) was established in 1925, formally reflecting communism's influence on Indian politics. Indian leftist scholars and politicians following the Bolshevik example demanded in the later part of the 1920s land reforms, workers' liberation, and the formation of a socialist state. Although the leftist scholars and political figures did not get mass popularity, it left, they left a valuable impact on Indian politics later on.

**Keywords:** Bolshevik Revolution, Communism, Socialism, Indian National Congress, Marxism, Anti-Colonial Struggle, Communist Party of India.

# Introduction

The Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 in Czarist Russia was a watershed moment in global history, marking the overthrow of the Czarist autocracy and the establishment of the first Socialist State. This revolution profoundly impacted various anti-colonial and left-wing movements worldwide, including in India. Indian political leaders, intellectuals, and revolutionaries drew inspiration from the Soviet model, leading to the emergence of socialist thought and communist movements in the country. This study investigates how the Bolshevik Revolution influenced Indian politics, focusing on labor movements, peasant struggles, political parties, and economic policies. The Bolshevik Revolution, spearheaded by the Bolshevik Party under Lenin's leadership, responded to the financial hardships, war fatigue, and social injustices prevailing in Czarist Russia (Banerjee, 2016). The October Revolution resulted in the establishment of the Soviet state, based on the principles of Marxism-Leninism. This event resonated globally, particularly among colonized nations, where it was perceived as a successful struggle against imperialism and capitalism.

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This research study explores the impact of the Soviet Union on the political landscape of British India from the time of the Russian Revolution in 1917 to India's independence and partition in August 1947. During this period, significant changes occurred in the political dynamics of British India, and the Soviet Union's influence on Indian political thought and movements was notably profound. The origins of Left-wing political ideologies in British India can be linked to the aftermath of the Russian Revolution of 1917 when several Indian revolutionaries traveled to Soviet Russia seeking international support for India's liberation from British imperialism. As a result, Leftist politics in British India was deeply influenced by the Soviet Union. The Communist Party in Russia, known as the Bolsheviks, achieved a successful takeover of power under the guidance of V. I. Lenin following the Great Russian Revolution in November 1917. The newly established government in Russia was founded on the principles of scientific communism, commonly called Marxism. This ideology was initially developed by the German thinkers Karl Marx (1818–1883) and Friedrich Engels (1820–1895). Marxism is a global ideology that promotes the idea that communist parties in every nation should work toward overthrowing bourgeois governments through socialist revolutions, with the ultimate goal of establishing worldwide socialism. The leaders of Soviet Russia viewed the Russian Revolution as the first step toward a global socialist revolution. The Communist Party of Russia (Bolshevik) was committed to disseminating revolutionary ideas to other nations across the globe (Kolarz, 1955). Around 2 million people fled Russia between 1917 and 1922, seeking refuge in Europe, China, and the United States (Figes, 1996). The Kanpur Conspiracy Case of 1924 saw several Indian communists arrested for their involvement in anti-colonial activities. The Mopla Rebellion of 1921, influenced by socialist and anti-imperialist ideas, resulted in the deaths of approximately 10,000 people, including both rebels and British forces. Additionally, the All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC), founded in 1920, saw participation from over 100,000 workers in its early years, reflecting the growing influence of socialist ideas (Chandra, 2008).

## **Materials and Methods**

A qualitative method was used to understand the complex interaction between global revolutionary movements and Indian political thought. The research explores the impact of the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 on Indian Politics and highlights the spread of communist and socialist ideas in British Indian Academia and Politicians. Tools of data collection were mainly secondary, with informal, focused group discussions with scholars and politicians having inclinations towards Communism and Socialism.

#### Dissemination of Socialist and Communist Ideologies in India

The spread of socialist and communist ideas in India during the early 20th century significantly developed the country's political and intellectual landscape. Indian intellectuals and revolutionaries played a pivotal role in introducing and popularizing these ideologies, which were deeply influenced by the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. The Russian Revolution inspired anticolonial movements worldwide and provided a framework for addressing socio-economic inequalities through Marxist principles. Indian political thinkers and revolutionaries, such as M.N. Roy, Jawaharlal Nehru, and Subhash Chandra Bose, were among the key figures who embraced and propagated socialist and communist ideas in India. M.N. Roy, one of the earliest proponents of communism in India, was instrumental in establishing the Communist Party of India (CPI) in 1925. Roy's interactions with Bolshevik leaders, including Vladimir Lenin, and his extensive writings on Marxist theory contributed to disseminating socialist ideas in India. Roy believed

communism could serve as a tool for anti-colonial struggle and social transformation, addressing the exploitation of the working class and peasantry (Roy, 1930). His efforts laid the foundation for the communist movement in India, which later gained traction among trade unions and peasant organizations.

Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first Prime Minister, was another prominent figure influenced by socialist principles. His visit to the Soviet Union in 1927 left a lasting impression on him, as he admired the USSR's rapid industrialization and state-led economic planning. Nehru's subsequent policies reflected his socialist inclinations, emphasizing state control over key industries, land reforms, and planned economic development. His vision for India was rooted in creating a socialist pattern of society, which he believed would ensure equitable distribution of resources and reduce socio-economic disparities (Nehru, 1936). Subhash Chandra Bose, a revolutionary leader and freedom fighter, also drew inspiration from socialist and communist ideologies. Bose believed that India's independence struggle should be coupled with a socio-economic revolution to address the exploitation of the masses. His alliance with socialist groups and his advocacy for a classless society reflected his commitment to socialist principles. Bose's Forward Bloc, established in 1939, aimed to unite leftist forces to achieve political freedom and social justice.

The role of Indian intellectuals and revolutionaries in spreading socialist and communist ideas was crucial in shaping the country's political discourse. Their efforts influenced the anti-colonial movement and laid the groundwork for post-independence economic policies. The socialist framework adopted by India in its early years of independence, including the establishment of public sector enterprises and the implementation of Five-Year Plans, can be traced back to the influence of these thinkers and their engagement with Marxist and Bolshevik ideologies (Roy, 1930).

#### Influence on Anti-colonial Movements and Indian Nationalist Leaders

The Russian Revolution of 1917 profoundly impacted anti-colonial movements and Indian nationalist leaders, shaping their ideological outlooks and strategies in the struggle against British rule. The fall of the Tsarist autocracy and the rise of a socialist government under Lenin inspired Indian nationalists to consider socialism a viable alternative to colonial exploitation. The revolution's focus on self-determination and the struggles of the working class deeply resonated with leaders such as Jawaharlal Nehru, Subhas Chandra Bose, and M.N. Roy, who incorporated socialist ideas into the Indian independence movement (Chandra, 2008). The success of the Bolshevik Revolution demonstrated that a well-organized and determined movement could overthrow a robust regime, offering Indian nationalists a model for mass mobilization and revolutionary action. The Communist International (Comintern) provided ideological and material support to anti-colonial struggles globally, including in India. M.N. Roy, instrumental in founding the Communist Party of India in 1925, was heavily influenced by Marxist-Leninist ideology and sought Soviet assistance to counter British imperialism (Banerjee, 2016). The spread of communism in India coincided with the growth of labor and peasant movements, with organizations like the All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) advocating for workers' rights and fair wages, inspired by Bolshevik labor policies and state control over industries (Dutt, 1940). Jawaharlal Nehru's visit to the Soviet Union in 1927 deepened his appreciation for socialist planning and economic self-reliance, which later shaped India's post-independence economic policies (Gopal, 1976). Similarly, Subhas Chandra Bose, a radical nationalist leader, viewed the Soviet model as an effective tool to resist British imperialism, as evidenced by his efforts to seek Soviet support during World War II (Bose, 2022). The Russian Revolution also inspired peasant

uprisings like the Telangana Rebellion and the Tebhaga Movement, which demanded land redistribution and economic justice, reflecting Soviet-style land reforms (Guha, 2007). The formation of the Congress Socialist Party (CSP) within the Indian National Congress in 1934 further highlighted the influence of Bolshevik ideas. Despite differing ideologies, the leftist leanings within Indian nationalist politics significantly influenced anti-colonial discourse. The Russian Revolution's emphasis on organized resistance against oppressive regimes gave Indian nationalists ideological inspiration and strategic guidance in their fight against the British.

#### **Communist Literature and Influence on Indian Political Movements**

The translation of "The Communist Manifesto" and other Marxist works introduced Indian nationalists and intellectuals to socialist ideas, influencing the direction of anti-colonial struggles. Early translations of Karl Marx's works into Indian languages were undertaken by revolutionaries such as M.N. Roy and S.A. Dange, who were instrumental in spreading Marxist ideology (Banerjee, 2016). These translations provided ideological clarity to political activists, shaping their understanding of class struggle and economic justice. The Communist International (Comintern) encouraged disseminating Marxist literature, which found its way into Indian universities, political organizations, and trade unions. By the 1920s, the influence of "The Communist Manifesto" and Lenin's writings had led to the formation of the Communist Party of India (CPI), which played a significant role in mobilizing workers and peasants against British rule (Dutt, 1940). The publication of Marxist books and pamphlets further contributed to the growth of socialist consciousness among Indian nationalists. Newspapers and underground revolutionary groups were instrumental in spreading communist ideology and mobilizing mass movements against colonial rule. Leftist newspapers such as "The Socialist," "Workers' Herald," and "Kirti" published articles on class struggle, workers' rights, and the need for an armed revolution (Chandra, 2008). These publications challenged the narrative of the British government and provided an alternative vision of governance based on socialist principles. Revolutionary groups such as the Hindustan Socialist Republican Association (HSRA) used underground literature to spread radical ideas, advocating for armed struggle against the British. A prominent revolutionary, Bhagat Singh was deeply influenced by Marxist writings and frequently referenced Lenin and Marx in his articles and speeches (Sharma, 2013). The distribution of communist literature through secret networks helped create a broad-based movement among workers, students, and peasants. The All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC), formed in 1920, relied heavily on Marxist literature to educate workers about their rights, leading to widespread labor strikes and industrial unrest (Guha, 2007).

# Influence on Indian National Congress leaders and Economic Policies

The Bolshevik revolution's emphasis on state-led development, workers' rights, and socialist planning resonated with prominent leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru, Subhash Chandra Bose, and M.N. Roy, who sought to incorporate socialist principles into India's economic policies (Chandra, 2008). Nehru's visit to the Soviet Union in 1927 exposed him to the success of Soviet central planning and rapid industrialization, reinforcing his belief in state-controlled economic policies. He admired the Soviet self-reliance and economic justice model, which later influenced India's adoption of Five-Year Plans and large-scale public sector enterprises (Gopal, 1976). The INC's growing socialist orientation in the 1930s and 1940s led to the establishment of the Congress Socialist Party (CSP) in 1934, advocating for land reforms, industrialization, and worker-friendly policies. Subhash Chandra Bose, another key INC leader, supported Soviet-style economic planning and state intervention. His vision for India included industrialization under state control,

modeled on the Soviet economic system (Bose, 2022). M.N. Roy, an early communist leader, played a crucial role in propagating Marxist thought in India and influenced many INC leaders to consider socialist policies to achieve economic self-sufficiency and reduce class inequalities (Banerjee, 2016).

The shift of the Indian National Congress towards socialist policies was also evident in its resolution at the 1931 Karachi Session, which emphasized labor rights, land redistribution, and economic planning as key pillars of an independent India's economy. The influence of the Bolshevik Revolution was powerful in shaping India's post-independence economic policies. As the first Prime Minister, Nehru implemented a mixed economy with a dominant role in the public sector, reflecting Soviet-style planning through the Planning Commission and Five-Year Plans (Nehru, 1955). The government prioritized heavy industries, infrastructure development, and land reforms to create a self-reliant economy and reduce economic disparities. The emphasis on socialist policies led to nationalizing key industries and banking sectors, reflecting the INC's long-standing admiration for Soviet economic models (Guha, 2007).

## **Establishment of Congress Socialist Party (CSP)**

The establishment of the Congress Socialist Party (CSP) in 1934 and the emergence of communist factions were direct consequences of the increasing appeal of socialist and Marxist ideologies among Indian leaders and intellectuals (Chandra, 2008). The economic disparities under colonial rule, coupled with the inspiration drawn from Soviet policies, encouraged leaders like Jayaprakash Narayan, Acharya Narendra Dev, and Ram Manohar Lohia to establish the CSP as a socialist wing within the Indian National Congress. The CSP aimed to integrate socialist principles into the broader nationalist struggle by advocating for land reforms, workers' rights, and an egalitarian economic structure (Gopal, 1976). Although the CSP remained within the Congress, it maintained an independent ideological stance, frequently clashing with conservative Congress leaders over economic policies and approaches to social justice. The party was instrumental in organizing labor movements, promoting agrarian reforms, and opposing capitalist exploitation, positioning itself as a bridge between nationalist politics and leftist ideology. Simultaneously, the communist movement in India gained momentum with the establishment of the Communist Party of India (CPI) in 1925, primarily influenced by M.N. Roy, one of the earliest Indian Marxists who had direct connections with the Communist International (Comintern) in Moscow (Banerjee, 2016). The CPI sought to mobilize workers and peasants against both British imperialism and native feudal oppression, leading to the formation of numerous labor unions and peasant movements. The Bolshevik-inspired ideology resonated particularly among industrial workers in Bombay, Calcutta, and Madras, where strikes and protests were organized to demand better wages and working conditions (Dutt, 1940). By the 1930s, communist factions began infiltrating mainstream nationalist politics, influencing trade unions such as the All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) and peasant organizations like the Kisan Sabha. These groups were critical in mobilizing mass support for socialist policies, further embedding leftist ideology within the freedom struggle (Guha, 2007). The influence of communist thought was also evident in the radicalization of peasant movements, including the Telangana Rebellion and the Tebhaga Movement, where landless peasants and sharecroppers demanded land redistribution and an end to feudal exploitation (Chandra, 2008). The British colonial government viewed both the CSP and communist factions as threats to its rule, leading to frequent crackdowns, arrests, and bans on their activities. However, despite facing repression, these left-wing groups significantly shaped India's political discourse by pushing for economic and social justice as integral components of the independence movement.

The ideological influence of these groups persisted even after independence, as socialist policies were incorporated into India's economic planning under Jawaharlal Nehru's leadership. The legacy of the CSP and communist factions continued to shape India's labor laws, land reforms, and financial policies for decades, reflecting the long-lasting impact of Bolshevik-inspired socialist thought on Indian politics.

#### **Impact on Indian Nationalist Movements**

The Soviet Union's strong opposition to imperialism profoundly influenced Indian nationalist leaders and movements. Vladimir Lenin's public condemnation of colonial rule and support for oppressed nations resonated with Indian leaders who sought independence from British rule (Chandra, 2008). The Soviet Union actively promoted anti-imperialist struggles worldwide and provided ideological support to nationalist movements, including those in India. Soviet literature and Marxist ideas, which highlighted the exploitative nature of colonial economies, found their way into Indian political discourse, inspiring revolutionaries and intellectuals. Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhas Chandra Bose, among others, were influenced by the Soviet model of state-led economic development and social welfare policies (Gupta, 2011). Nehru's visit to the Soviet Union in 1927 reinforced his belief in socialism as a viable alternative to capitalist exploitation, shaping his vision for post-independence economic planning.

The Congress Socialist Party (CSP) was established in 1934 as a socialist wing within the INC to advocate for workers' rights and land reforms and to end feudal exploitation (Mukherjee, 2005). The CSP attracted leaders such as Jayaprakash Narayan and Acharya Narendra Deva, who sought to integrate socialist principles into the mainstream nationalist movement. The party was critical in mobilizing peasants and industrial workers against British policies and economic exploitation. The emergence of communist factions within the Indian freedom movement was another significant outcome of the Bolshevik Revolution. The Communist Party of India (CPI) was founded in 1925, drawing direct inspiration from the Soviet model of revolution and class struggle (Banerjee, 2016). The CPI organized strikes, protests, and peasant uprisings against British rule and landlords. Communist leaders worked closely with labor unions and peasant movements, emphasizing the need for economic and social justice as part of the struggle for independence. The CPI's efforts established unions and agrarian movements, laying the foundation for post-independence socialist policies.

## **Socialist Policies in the Indian National Congress**

The growing influence of socialist thought within the nationalist movement resulted in a shift in the policies of the INC. The Karachi Resolution of 1931 was a milestone, emphasizing fundamental rights, labor protections, and state control over key industries (Bose & Jalal, 2022). Nehru's election as INC president in 1936 further strengthened socialist tendencies within the party. He advocated for economic planning, equitable wealth distribution, and a mixed economy model that balanced state intervention with private enterprise. These principles later formed the basis of India's economic policies after independence. The adoption of socialist policies within the INC was also reflected in the post-independence development strategies. Inspired by the Soviet model, India established the Planning Commission and launched Five-Year Plans to promote industrialization and social welfare (Gopal, 1976). The emphasis on self-sufficiency, land reforms, and public sector enterprises was rooted in the socialist ideology that had gained momentum due to the Bolshevik Revolution.

## Formation and Growth of the Communist Party of India (CPI)

The Communist Party of India (CPI) was established in 1925 in Kanpur, marking the beginning of an organized leftist movement in India. The emergence of CPI was influenced by the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 and the spread of Marxist ideology among Indian nationalists and intellectuals. The early years of CPI were characterized by underground activities due to British colonial repression, with leaders like M.N. Roy, S.A. Dange, and Muzaffar Ahmad playing a crucial role in spreading communist thought (Banerjee, 2016). The party initially faced significant challenges, including bans, arrests, and ideological divisions, but it continued to operate clandestinely and sought to mobilize workers and peasants against colonial exploitation.

During British rule, the CPI faced intense persecution as colonial authorities viewed communism as a threat to imperial control. The Meerut Conspiracy Case of 1929 was pivotal, where several CPI leaders were arrested and charged with attempting to overthrow the British government (Chandra, 2008). Despite these setbacks, CPI activists continued to work in underground networks, distributing Marxist literature and organizing political discussions. The party sought to align itself with anti-colonial struggles while promoting class-based resistance against landlords and industrialists. However, internal divisions and differences with the Indian National Congress (INC) often limited CPI's political effectiveness in the early years (Mukherjee, 2005).

## Role in Trade Unions, Strikes, and Leftist Activism

The CPI played a significant role in organizing trade unions and leading strikes to improve the working conditions of laborers. It was instrumental in establishing the All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) in 1920, which became a platform for advocating workers' rights and resisting capitalist exploitation (Bose & Jalal, 2022). The CPI mobilized workers in major industrial centers, including Bombay, Calcutta, and Madras, leading strikes in textile mills, railways, and jute factories. The party also worked among peasants, organizing movements against feudal oppression and advocating for land redistribution (Gopal, 1976). CPI's involvement in the Tebhaga movement in Bengal and the Telangana Rebellion in Hyderabad were notable examples of its commitment to agrarian struggles (Gupta, 2011). The party's influence expanded during World War II, when it temporarily aligned with the British against fascism, leading to a shift in public perception. After independence, CPI continued to advocate for socialist policies, influencing labor laws and playing a crucial role in shaping leftist politics in India.

#### Repression and Bans on Communist Movements in India

The British colonial government perceived communism as a direct challenge to their control over India, which resulted in harsh measures to suppress communist movements and their leaders. A key obstacle was the introduction of strict laws designed to limit communist influence. For example, in 1934, the Communist Party of India (CPI) was outlawed, with the British claiming it was necessary to preserve public order and stop anti-colonial uprisings (Chandra, 1989). This forced communist leaders to work in secrecy, complicating their efforts to organize and rally workers and peasants. Another significant hurdle was the constant surveillance and targeting by British intelligence. Communist leaders were closely watched, and many were detained under laws like the Defence of India Rules and the Indian Penal Code. Well-known figures such as P.C. Joshi and S.A. Dange were repeatedly jailed, which weakened the party's structure and disrupted its operations (Overstreet & Windmiller, 2022).

The British also spread propaganda to tarnish the communist movement, portraying it as unpatriotic and tied to foreign powers, especially the Soviet Union. This sowed doubt among the

public and made it harder for communist leaders to win widespread backing. Internally, communist leaders also struggled with ideological splits and divisions within the party. The CPI's close ties to the Soviet Union sometimes contradicted the Indian nationalist movement, causing tensions with groups like the Indian National Congress (Gupta, 1972). Despite these difficulties, communist leaders were instrumental in forming labor unions and peasant organizations, playing a vital role in the fight for India's freedom. Their determination and dedication to social justice had a profound and lasting influence on the country's political development.

## **Conclusion**

The Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 deeply influenced Indian politics by spreading socialist and communist ideas that reshaped the struggle against British rule. It introduced concepts like class struggle, workers' rights, and anti-imperialism, which inspired Indian intellectuals and activists to envision a society free from colonial and capitalist exploitation. These ideas became a foundation for challenging British dominance, with nationalist leaders incorporating socialist principles into their fight for independence. The revolution also demonstrated the effectiveness of organized mass movements, motivating Indian leaders like M.N. Roy to adopt similar strategies. This led to the formation of the Communist Party of India (CPI) in 1925, strengthening the anti-colonial movement. Communist literature, including works by Marx and Lenin, further educated activists about revolutionary tactics and class consciousness. The revolution's impact extended to the Indian National Congress (INC), where leaders such as Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhash Chandra Bose embraced socialist ideals. Nehru, in particular, pushed for socialist economic policies, advocating for fair resource distribution and state control over industries. This shift within the INC culminated in creating the Congress Socialist Party (CSP) in 1934, which sought to promote radical economic and social reforms. The CSP provided a platform for younger leaders to advance socialist ideas within the broader nationalist movement. The Bolshevik Revolution left a lasting legacy on India's political landscape, influencing its leaders, movements, and policies.

## Findings of the Study

- The Bolshevik Revolution provided a successful model of resistance against imperialism, inspiring Indian revolutionaries to adopt Marxist ideas.
- Indian political leaders and intellectuals, including M.N. Roy, Jawaharlal Nehru, and Subhash Chandra Bose, embraced socialist ideologies and incorporated them into nationalist movements.
- Marxist thought influenced trade unions, Labour unions, and student organizations, leading to increased agitation against British rule.
- The Revolution highlighted the need for organized mass movements, influencing Indian nationalist leaders.
- Established in 1920, the All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) had over 100,000 workers participating in its early years, showing the growing impact of socialist movements.
- The Mopla Rebellion of 1921, inspired by anti-imperialist and socialist sentiments, resulted in approximately 10,000 deaths during clashes between rebels and British forces.
- The Congress Socialist Party was formed in 1934 as a socialist wing within the Indian National Congress. Its goals were to promote land reforms and labor rights.
- Revolutionary figures like Bhagat Singh were deeply influenced by Marxist and Leninist ideology, as seen in his writings and political activism.

- The Meerut Conspiracy Case of 1929 resulted in the arrest of communist leaders involved in labor movements and protests.
- The British government banned the Communist Party of India in 1934, forcing leftist leaders to operate clandestinely.
- The Indian National Congress incorporated socialist principles, advocating wealth redistribution, labor rights, and industrial development under state control.

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