

An analysis of the indian socialist movement politics essay



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The modern socialist movement largely originated in the late-19th century working class movement. In this period, the term 'socialism' was first used in connection with European social critics who criticized capitalism and private property. Socialism refers to a broad array of ideologies and political movements with the goal of a socio-economic system in which property and the distribution of wealth are subject to control by the community. This control may be either direct-exercised through popular collectives such as workers' councils-or indirect-exercised on behalf of the people by the state. As an economic system, socialism is often characterized by state, worker, or community ownership of the means of production, goals which have been attributed to, and claimed by, a number of political parties and governments throughout history. For Karl Marx, who helped establish and define the modern socialist movement, socialism would be the socioeconomic system that arises after the proletarian revolution, in which the means of production are owned collectively. This society would then progress into communism.

At the 1931 Karachi session of the Indian National Congress, socialist pattern of development was set as the goal for India. Through the 1955 Avadi Resolution of the Indian National Congress, a socialistic pattern of development was presented as the goal of the party. A year later, the Indian parliament adopted 'socialistic pattern of development' as official policy, a policy that came to include land reforms and regulations of industries. The word socialist was added to the Preamble of the Indian Constitution by the 42nd amendment act of 1976, during the Emergency. It implies social and economic equality. Social equality in this context means the absence of discrimination on the grounds only of caste, colour, creed, sex, religion, or

language. Under social equality, everyone has equal status and opportunities. Economic equality in this context means that the government will endeavor to make the distribution of wealth more equal and provide a decent standard of living for all.

Following independence, the Indian government officially adopted a policy of non-alignment, although it had an affinity with the USSR. The party's commitment to socialism has waned in recent years, particularly following the assassination of Indira Gandhi and her son Rajiv Gandhi. Elected in 1991, the government of Narasimha Rao introduced economic liberalisation with the support of finance minister Manmohan Singh, the current prime minister of India.

HISTORY OF THE CONSTITUTION: THE SOCIALIST COMMITMENT

Jawahar Lal Nehru came back from Cambridge, England and was influenced by the Fabian socialists in London and Dr. Annie Besant during the inter war period. His views were welcomed by most of the Constitution makers. Added to Nehru's voice were those of Rajendra Prasad, Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan and K. Santhanam. Prasad said that it was the aim " to end poverty.. to abolish distinction and exploitation. Radhakrishnan called " for the removal of all social disabilities...of man-made inequalities and injustice and (to) provide for all equality of opportunity." According to Austin, anybody who was talking about equitable distribution of resources, whether an industrialist or an intellectual (rag tag band of socialists), was categorized as socialist. The national movement flag bearers to India committed themselves to socialist ideologies.

Socialism was married with the principles of democracy and civil liberties. They committed towards the strengthening of the electoral process and the introduction of adult franchise in India. Also the Constitution makers made commitments to freedom of speech and a free press.

The nationalists who were responsible for writing the Constitution were committed to critique the colonial economy. Centralised Planning meant to address the issue of under-development and to devise a self reliant and independent economy demonstrated India's commitment to socialism. Another feature was the development of the tools of modern industry and agriculture as well as science and technology. Full industrialization became the objective.

The third arena where socialism was evident is where a socialist commitment was made by the nationals to steadfastly oppose the entry of foreign capital in India as it was integral to the development of a self reliant economy and the growth of indigenous capital.

There was a commitment to restructure the basic agrarian relations in India and to abolish landlordism and also to encourage peasant proprietorship of land. Clearly the socialists were alluring to communist principles of dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry.

Introduction of planning and state intervention in India's economy was another aspect of socialism as envisaged by the framers of the Constitution. Massive development of the public sector began in 1930s and this was to be experimented particularly in four sectors: power, irrigation, roads and water supply.

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PREAMBLE BEFORE 1975

India's Constitution as originally ratified in 1950 didn't include any mention of socialism, although the idea was proposed. The man who would become the country's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, was as socialist as they come in his economic policies. Nehru said " that it would not be right to impose one's political views on other citizens of India. Ambedkar said it cannot be laid in constitution otherwise it will destroy democracy altogether. Eminent lawyer, former Advocate-General of Madras, and one of the main architects of free India's Constitution, Dr. Alladi Krishnaswami Aiyar, commenting on the absence of a socio-economic outlook in the Indian Constitution, said, " The Constitution, while it does not commit the country to any particular form of economic structure or adjustment, gives ampler scope for future legislatures and the future parliament to evolve any economic order and to undertake any economic legislation they choose in public interest."

1976 AMENDMENT: BACKGROUND TO INTRODUCTION AND CONSEQUENCES

One of the causes of the Emergency era was that the Supreme Court of India ordered that, although the Constitution is subject to amendment (as used by Indira), changes that are ultra vires to its basic structure cannot be made by the Parliament of India. In Keshavananda Bharati case (1973) it was held that the objectives specified in the Preamble contain the basic structure of our Constitution which cannot be amended in exercise of the power under Article 368. The declaration of a State of Emergency in 1975 gave Nehru's daughter, Indira Gandhi, a convenient opportunity continue her agenda of

nationalization, repaying support from the socialist parties, while expanding her own power. Amid a raft of Constitutional amendments she pushed through parliament to enhance her authority, she included one adding “socialism” to the preamble. She did this despite the Supreme Court’s finding barely three years earlier that the preamble was part of the “basic structure” of the Constitution and thus not subject to amendment. The succession of socialist-leaning governments in subsequent years meant few people were interested in challenging this provision. The text currently opens with: “We, the people of India, having solemnly resolved to constitute India into a Sovereign Socialist Secular Democratic Republic...”

Instead, Indira Gandhi’s successors made it worse. Her son, former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, amended the Representation of the People Act in 1989 to require all political parties to include socialism in their party platforms to align with the values espoused in the Constitution’s preamble.

In January 2008 a PIL was filed before the Supreme Court of India by Good Governance India Foundation challenging the Representation of People’s Act, 1951 which was altered by Rajiv Gandhi by a 1988 Amendment. It required that political parties are to bear allegiance to constitutional principles of socialism, democracy, secularism, amity and integrity of India. The word ‘socialist’ in the Preamble of the Constitution has also been challenged. Six decades after Ambedkar’s caution, three decades after 42nd amendment and two decades after RPA amendment act this has been done.

The 42nd amendment brought about during the 1975-1977 emergency violates article 19 (1) (a) freedom of speech and expression and article 19

(1)(c) right to form associations and unions. Fali S. Nariman said it is contrary to constitution. It breaches the basic structure of constitution. Grave breach of liberty provisions. Balakrishnan, J. said why take a narrow view. In broader sense it means welfare measures for citizens. It is a facet of democracy. The word socialist has no definite meaning and gets different meaning in different times. Notice to centre and election commission regarding RPA but socialist in Preamble stays.

CONCLUSION

Whatever amendments are made in the constitution are basically improvements. However, the constitution is the paramount parchment and in Kelsonian terms, socialism can be regarded as one of its grund norm and no entity has a right to use the constitution as a plaything. It cannot be changed according to the whim of every alternate judge of the Supreme Court. There is an independent judiciary to exercise checks on them. The basic argument is that these are immutable norms that cannot be changed or deleted overnight not by the legislature, nor by the judiciary. We have a system of checks and balances working as per the scheme of the constitution.

It is to be kept in mind that irrespective of whether socialism was inserted into the preamble, it had always been part of the constitutional ethos. It is assumed that socialism was one of the basic objectives of the constitution which is not set out anywhere in the constitution originally except for the DPSPs where also it is not directly mentioned and those are not binding and non justiciable. Also, socialism is a reflection of a particular political ideology. You cannot shoot down anyone just because they're not subscribing to your

world view. But, we were and still are a growing economy and state regulation is required in the overall picture, especially considering the disparity in income levels right now. Reference can be made to the RC Cooper case that dealt with bank nationalization. But what it did in fact was to actually give a constitutional base to the actions of Jawaharlal Nehru as well in terms of the Land Reforms Acts. The inclusion of the word ' socialist' was actually far more legal than the creation of the 9th schedule by the constituent assembly by the first parliament. The standard of life has gone up and the number of net poor persons as a percentage of the population has also gone down but socialism hasn't worked in India. Statistics from the Venkatachaliah report say that 350 million people are still living below the poverty line. India has slowly moved from wannabe socialist to neo capitalism state control is slowly being done away with , example privatisation of parts of railways, increased FDI in almost every field. There is need of a more equitable distribution of resources, and the word in the preamble is a reminder of the fact that justice is yet to be meted out to the poor but our current economic structure is very capitalist so the socialist commitments of the framers of our Constitution makers have not been fulfilled yet.