



# Role of Russia (Former Soviet Union) in India's freedom struggle

Jahangeer Ahmad Bhat

Ph.D Political Science, Former Research Scholar of Vikram University, Ujjain, (M.P-India).

### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article history:

Received: 21 November 2018;

Received in revised form:

17 December 2018;

Accepted: 27 December 2018;

#### Keywords

Socialism,  
Imperialism,  
Democrat,  
Russian Revolution,  
Non Alignment Movement,  
Colonialism.

### ABSTRACT

As Indian masses entered the freedom movement, British changes tack. Shortly after the Russian revolution, the cunning British declared their aim in India, was "gradual development of self-governing institutions with a view to the progressive realisation of responsible government in India as an integral part of the British empire". Russia first became interested in India's freedom struggle after the cataclysmic war of 1857. It was sparked by Indian soldiers revolting against the British east India Company. However, it was Trotsky who did many efforts to grant substantial help to India. In fact his writings reveal that he was abreast with India's democratization and always criticized British imperialist reign over India. Moreover, from Soviet Union the whole leadership made cumulative efforts to unreel India from an oppressive rule of British. Most of the existing published material pertaining to the topic has been studied in order to extract pieces of information that were found relevant for the Research work. Along with that, historical method has been used to have in-depth insight for the background and nature of the India's Independence Struggle and USSR. An Objectives are to Study how India got inspiration from USSR during and before their freedom struggle and to Study Gandhiji's approach towards Soviet leaders.

© 2019 Elixir All rights reserved.

### Introduction

India has got a dynamic momentum and inspiration from Soviet Union during her freedom struggle. It was Tolstoy who flashed a new wave both moderates and radicals midst the Indian Nationalists unambiguously with his letter to a Hindu. Gandhi in his 'preface' to the English version of Tolstoy's 'Letter to a Hindu', Gandhi describes himself as a great admirer of Tolstoy and was divulging Tolstoy among his best inspiring guides.<sup>1</sup> The Russian Social Democrat, Kirill Troianovsky, noticeably a comintern official, was in close contact with Indian revolutionary workers. However, it was Mikhail Pavlovich who did the greatest amount of work with the Indian revolutionaries in Paris in 1909- 1914. In 1947, Soviet Union was headed by Stalin became one of the uppermost countries to spot Indian Independence in what was a logical extension of the anti-imperialist Soviet rhetoric.

#### India's Approach towards USSR and their positive response

As early as 1900 Lenin had carped British imperialism in India and had perceived that British had made the Indians desperate for freedom. Lenin implored for the unity of the working classes of India and Russia.<sup>2</sup> In 1908 Lenin wrote: "In India the native slaves of the civilized British capitalists have, in precisely this present period been causing much unpleasant concern to their 'masters'. There is no end to the violence and plunder which goes under the name of the British system of Government in India.<sup>3</sup>The revolutionary movement of India intrigued Lenin. The Soviet Government on gaining power, sent notes to the Governments of France, Italy, and Great Britain enquiring whether they would agree to grant the right of self-determination to the people of Ireland, Egypt, India, Madagascar, Indo- China, etc.<sup>4</sup>

The Indian and Soviet revolutionaries exchanged views and formed their own strategies outside India and the Soviet Union too. Some fruitful contacts between the Indian revolutionaries and the Bolsheviks had taken place at an informal level in distant Sweden. However, the Indian committee had, in the meantime, on the advice of troianovbky, put itself in contact with the Soviet Embassy in Berlin.<sup>5</sup> In 1921 the third congress of the communist international was held in Moscow were all leading Indian revolutionaries were summoned to select a leader for directing a revolution to overthrow Britain regime in India.<sup>6</sup>

If we talk of Leon Trotsky he may not have been able to achieve anything substantial in favour of India, there does appear in his writings and speeches an element of concern pertaining to India, which reveals that he was not totally oblivious to the India question. He was for democratization of India and blatantly criticized the British Government for its undemocratic policies. In an Article entitled 'Fight Imperialism to fight Fascism', dated September 21, 1938, he says "... Had the British Government loved democracy so it would have given freedom to India... the colonial and semi-colonial countries must fight first of all against that imperialist country which directly oppress them, irrespective of whether it bears, the mask of fascism or democracy".<sup>7</sup>

Trotsky stated in an Article, On the eve of World War 11, dated 23, 1939, in an interview to the committee of US scholars, "The real interest for British is India, for Germany the colonies, for Italy, to seize new colonies. The colonies do not have democracy. If Great Britain, for example, fights for democracy, it will do well to start by giving India democracy. The very democratic English people do not give them democracy because they can exploit India only by dictatorial means".<sup>8</sup>

In 1947, Soviet Union as headed by Stalin became one of the top most countries to recognize Indian Independence in what was a logical extension of the anti-imperialist Soviet rhetoric. According to Arun Mohanty, Indian Embassy in Moscow became “truly the first ever diplomatic mission of independent India,”<sup>9</sup> Many observers accuse that although India was a founding member of NAM and bespoke of ideals like staying away from superpower struggle, ultimately India informally aligned itself with erstwhile Soviet Union. However it has to be recognized that it was a historical necessity and more of inevitability. Firstly, during the freedom struggle of India, Soviet Union was one of the few countries which had supported its freedom movement. Secondly, just after India got its independence, it was badly in need of industrialization, modernization, infrastructure and endless number of other things. India got this valuable technical assistance and aids, both technical and financial from Soviet Union. Thirdly, India suffered long from ruthless imperialism and extreme poverty. Going by social indicators India was extremely underdeveloped. Poor Indians and Indian leaders saw imperialists, big landowners, zamindars etc. enjoying the wealth extracted by exploiting Indian masses. Therefore socialism as an ideology of uplifting poor had an understandable appeal in India. Indian leaders saw miraculous transformation that happened in Soviet Union. They were attracted by the level of social development that had happened in Soviet society.<sup>10</sup> Although, India’s adoption of Non-Alignment and its independent stand on certain issues at that time did not please Soviet Union. As, such, in 1947, the Soviet Union was quite skeptical about India’s Independence and its future identity. The situation, however, started changing, from 1953 onwards. With the end of the Stalin era, new Socialist leadership began to look towards the newly independent Afro- Asian countries as its natural allies. It, therefore appreciated India’s non- Alignment.<sup>11</sup> The policy that laced India in a position of securing bilateral international commitments only in situations that were clearly neutral in nature or in cases of last resort. The basic principles of nonalignment<sup>12</sup> also governed the military relationships of the Indian defense establishment, resulting in limited military-to-military contact, and those usually under the auspices of United Nations (UN) peacekeeping missions or training at foreign military schools.

### **Conclusion**

Going both by popular belief and history, contacts and relations between India and Russia go for back into antiquity. The Bolshevik revolution of 1917 and birth of USSR were developments which went for from unnoticed in India. These

momentous events arouse not just curiosity and interest but even admiration. This period was to witness impressive progress in virtually all aspects of Indo-Soviet relations; a truly multifaceted relationship which became the corner stone of India’s foreign policy. Economy cooperation boosts of its times at height.

Above all, the Soviet Union realized India’s importance as a strategic partner when in 1954 Pakistan joined SEATO and CENTO alliance, and provided a basis to America on Russian borders. As a consequence, the Soviet Union considered Pakistan as an American client state, advancing and nurturing the US military and strategic interests in the region. From this period onwards relations between India and Soviet Union started developing very cordially and friendly.

### **References:**

1. Nirula, India and the Soviet Union(1917-1947)A.P.B. Publishing corporation 5,Ansari Road, Darya Ganj New Delhi-110002, 2005,pp.115-116
2. Ibid, pp.24.
3. Lenin, V.I.: ‘Inflammable Material in the World Politics, published in the Bolshevik Journal ‘ Proletary’ Aug.5, 1908, reported in Lenin, V.I: The National Liberation Movement In the East’, Foreign Language Publishing House, Moscow, pp. 12-19
4. Soviet Review, No. 44, 1977, 26<sup>th</sup> September. Lenin V.I., Collected Works, XXII: 338)
5. Nirula, India and the Soviet Union 1917-1947, Op.Cit., pp.41
6. Ibid, pp.42-43
7. writings of Leon Trotsky (1938-1939) New York, 1969, pp.27
8. Nirula, Op.Cit., pp.16.
9. Arun Mohanty, “Saga of India- Russia Diplomatic Relations,” Russia- India report, the times of India, April 27, 2011, p.3.
10. Rahul Mohanty, Indian Foreign Policy: Emerging Challenges and the Road Ahead, Odisha Review, January – 2013,pp.68
11. Anilkumar B.Halu, Indo-Russian relations in the post cold war period(1991-2003) ,Authorspree-E-35/103,Jawahar park Laxmi Nagar, Delhi, 2010, pp.4
12. Brian K. Hedrick, India’s Strategic Defense Transformation: Expanding Global Relationships, Director, Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 122 Forbes Ave, Carlisle, PA 17013-5244,November,2011,pp.1.)