

# Marxist Ideology and Indian Political Thought: Contributions of M.N Roy and Ram Manohar Lohia

Touqeer Nazir Sheikh\*

Senior Research Fellow at the Department of Political Science, University of Kashmir, Srinagar, India-190006.

Javid Ahmad Dar

Professor at the Department of Political Science, University of Kashmir, Srinagar, India-190006.

\*Corresponding Author Email: touqeerpls@gmail.com

**Abstract:** *The present paper explores the influence of Marxist ideology on Indian political thought with a specific focus on the perspectives articulated by M.N Roy and Ram Manohar Lohia. The study aims to delve into how the foundational principles of Marxism have permeated and shaped the landscape of political thought in India by scrutinizing the written works and ideologies of these two eminent figures. The main objective of this paper is to illuminate the profound impact of Marxism on Indian Nationalism and its consequential role in shaping the political discourse in India. Furthermore, it attempts to engender a deeper comprehension of the intricate interplay between Marxist ideology and Indian political thought.*

**Keywords:** Marxism; Political Thought; M.N. Roy; Ram Manohar Lohia; Socialism; Nationalism

## INTRODUCTION

The intellectual milieu surrounding Indian political thought has sparked prolonged and heated discussions among esteemed scholars, weaving a complex tapestry of diverse perspectives and deeply entrenched ideological frameworks. Amidst this intricate discourse, an ongoing dialectic has emerged, highlighting fervent calls for embracing a liberal democratic system rooted in Western principles, contrasted by strong rejections and alternative viewpoints. The enduring influence of Western ideas on Indian political thought continues to challenge scholarly minds, leading to an ongoing quest for clarity and understanding (Brown 2023, 14-26).

The genealogy of Indian political thought dates back to a period characterized by its anti-political or Natural Law political system. Ancient texts, a plethora of political constructs and ideas burgeoning in past, gave rise to profound contemplations on the nature of the State, power dynamics, and sovereign authority. These deliberations were coupled with elucidating obligations, social contracts, constitutionalism, and the sanctity of the rule of law (Singh 2023, 177-186). When viewed through the lens of Indian political thought, these ancient texts impart a profound cornerstone that paved the way for the evolution of enduring political ideologies and systems, which continue to exert a lasting impact on the governance and societal structure of India. The advent of British colonization brought about a significant diversification of political ideologies, including those that opposed Western governance, political freedoms, rights, rationality, and the political philosophies advocated by prominent figures such as Locke, Rousseau, and Kant.

Among these ideologies, Marxism emerged as a notable and influential political theory in the mid-19th century, originating from the intellects of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. Marxism aimed to introduce a comprehensive and well-informed governance system that would bring about radical transformations in societies worldwide. The principles of Marxism resonated with Indian political thought in terms of their origins and epistemology, enhancing their potential for societal transformation and progress (Singh 2008, 184-197). The amalgamation of Marxism and Indian political thought challenged traditional conceptions of power, governance, and societal structures, offering a fresh perspective and stimulating ongoing discussions on political philosophies, liberties, and the shaping of societies.

The interplay between Marxism and Indian political thought encouraged a critical assessment of power dynamics, exploitation, and class struggle, shedding light on the impact of existing systems on marginalized communities. Moreover, the synthesis of Marxism and Indian political thought

generated a multitude of fresh perspectives on the pursuit of social justice and the quest for an egalitarian society. The intersectionality of these two created a fertile ground for exploring intersectional struggles and recognizing intersecting identities within the framework of social change. This inclusive approach expanded the scope of political thought, considering the multidimensionality of human experiences and the interconnectedness of various social issues (Parekh 1992, 535-560). This collaboration has provided unique insights into issues such as capitalism critique and caste-based discrimination, offering alternative solutions to longstanding problems.

### **M.N. Roy: The Pioneer of Marxist Thought in India**

M.N. Roy, a profoundly influential and significant luminary in the domain of Indian political philosophy, undoubtedly wielded a critical and pivotal influence in not only popularizing but also interpreting the fundamental precepts and tenets of Marxist ideology within the specific milieu of India's socio-political fabric. His exceptional intellect and autonomous cogitation even prompted him to challenge and diverge from certain aspects of the original Marxian doctrine. This distinct approach sets him apart from both Indian and foreign adherents of Marxism, rendering him an exceptional figure in the realm of Marxist ideology. He combined the scientific socialism of Marxism, on the one hand, and the humanism of the French Revolution, on the other. Apart from nationalization, Roy visualized the new socialist world order, in which socialist commonwealths would replace nation-states. He stressed the liberation of backward nations from imperialism and adopting the democratic path of development.

M.N. Roy's multidimensional expertise enabled him to delve deeply into the intricacies of politics, unravelling intricate structures and providing insightful perspectives. Roy's ideas and teachings have resounded significantly within the Indian political sphere. Amid the turbulent milieu of imperialistic conflicts that engulfed Europe, Roy staunchly advocated that socialism, as delineated by Marx, held the key to achieving global peace. Roy's unwavering belief in the transformative potential of socialism, particularly during those critical junctures, remains a testament to his steadfast commitment to forging a more equitable and just world. As time progresses and his ideas continue to resonate, M.N. Roy's legacy as a maverick Indian Marxist and profound political thinker endures (Chouhan & Singh 2005, 633-648).

Roy's profound exploration of internal dynamics elucidated the far-reaching impacts of British imperialism on India's socio-economic landscape. Guided by the sagacious insights found within Leninist narratives, Roy skillfully delineated the motivated intentions of British imperialism, underscoring their palpable desire to export capital to India to facilitate infrastructure development (Manjapra 2020, 63-97). Through his unwavering commitment to promoting a comprehensive understanding of Marxist ideology and its application within the unique contours of Indian society. He espoused the belief that in India, political freedom should take precedence over socio-economic reconstruction (Singh & Roy 174-184). He considered freedom to be a fundamental prerequisite for a nation's optimal development. Given the existing presence of capitalism in India, Roy expressed confidence in it and condemned the boycott of capitalists. He opposed the concept of Indian Socialism as envisioned by the Indian National Congress under Jawaharlal Nehru. Additionally, he

rejected Mahatma Gandhi's proposition to establish a stateless, classless society, citing the impracticality of ensuring peace and balanced national growth under such circumstances. At the time of India's independence and subsequent partition, Roy advocated in favour of the division, reasoning that it was necessary to prevent fratricidal disunity and to establish peace within the region.

### **Impact of Marxism on Indian Nationalism**

The influence of Marxism on Indian nationalism is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that has significantly shaped the trajectory of Indian political thought. M.N. Roy and other Indian nationalist leaders were profoundly impacted by the compelling and visionary ideas put forth by Marxist thinkers, leading to a paradigm shift in their critique and analysis of Indian nationalism. Roy's political thought demonstrates a profound reinterpretation of historical events and socio-political circumstances. By exploring the historical context spanning the transition from the late Mughal Empire to the ascendance of British East India Company rule and, ultimately, the British Raj, Roy's scholarly pursuits unveil a meticulous examination of the multifarious facets intricately intertwined within the fabric of Indian society.

The optic of Marxism, when superimposed upon the Indian nationalist discourse, unveils a potent framework that elucidates the intricate interplay between imperialistic aspirations, economic exploitation, and the inherent class dynamics that both instigated and perpetuated the subjugation of the Indian subcontinent. Significantly, the Marxist perspective not only undergirds the intellectual edifice of Indian nationalism but also furnishes a lens through which socio-economic disparities and the struggle for emancipation can be comprehended holistically. The extensive application of Marxist principles in scrutinizing Indian nationalism illuminates the interconnected nature of economic exploitation, social inequality, and political repression, thereby offering a potent instrument for unravelling the intricate tapestry of India's colonial legacy (Vanaik 1997, 29-64). Consequently, the imprint of Marxism on Indian nationalism is indisputable; it serves as a precipitant for introspective contemplation, fostering a nuanced understanding of the myriad forces that have moulded the Indian national identity and its ongoing battle for liberation. By embracing the insights and theoretical underpinnings of Marxism, Indian nationalist leaders have been able to carve out a distinctive trajectory toward both social equity and the realignment of political structures, thereby setting the stage for a genuinely all-encompassing and egalitarian India.

The intricate nexus of nationalist and Marxist ideologies within the idiosyncratic Indian context, where the multifaceted narrative of British imperialism unravels. Driven by the ambition to exploit India's extensive infrastructure and educational systems, the imperial power strategically funneled its resources to reinforce its control over Indian markets and crucial raw materials. This calculated manoeuvre deepened the penetration of British influence and fortified their dominant position. The interplay between Marxist critique and Indian nationalism in this discourse underscores the profound intricacies that mould the trajectory of Indian political thought. Upon deeper exploration, Dutt's enlightening analysis foregrounds the pivotal role played by the British rulers in nurturing modernist inclinations within the burgeoning Indian middle class (Dutt 1906, 326-343). This, in turn, vividly exemplifies the undeniable influence

of Marxist ideologies on the very essence of Indian nationalism. By acknowledging this symbiotic relationship, one can grasp the extent to which Indian nationalism seamlessly integrated Marxist principles and frameworks. The imbued spirit of resistance against foreign domination seamlessly coalesced with the quest for socioeconomic equality and justice. In doing so, the Indian nationalist movement sought to liberate the nation from colonial rule and aimed to contest and reshape the existing socioeconomic disparities. Essentially, the confluence of nationalism and Marxism within the Indian context is a testament to the remarkable adaptability and flexibility of ideological frameworks in addressing a nation's specific needs and aspirations. This profound amalgamation of ideas not only shaped Indian political thought but also ignited a formidable wave of enlightenment that continues to shape the its trajectory.

### **Synthesis of Nationalism and Marxism in the Indian Context**

In the context of India, the amalgamation of nationalism and Marxism has undergone a convoluted and multidimensional evolution, characterized by the influence of eminent figures such as M.N. Roy and Ram Manohar Lohia, who played pivotal roles in shaping the ideological terrain of the nation. In his seminal works, Roy embarked on a compelling intellectual odyssey, delving into the fundamental principles of Marxism and Leninism and their applicability to the Indian milieu. He meticulously scrutinized India's historical trajectory, methodically tracing capitalism's impact on the late Mughal Empire and the subsequent transition to British East India Company rule and the British Raj. Roy adeptly brought to the forefront the devastating consequences of this transition, particularly the disintegration of the Indian communal village and the ensuing dislocation and impoverishment that marked the breakdown of the old social order. Furthermore, Roy astutely discerned the relentless advancement of British capital as it embarked on an epochal transformation, transitioning from a former colonial power to the age of finance capital (Sharma 2020, 13-32).

Through a Leninist lens, Roy meticulously dissected the complex motivations behind British imperialism's capital export to India. He argued that this capital export served a dual purpose: to develop India's infrastructure to benefit British imperialism and tighten its grip on Indian markets and raw materials. Roy's comprehensive narrative successfully intertwined nationalism and Marxism in the Indian context, shedding light on the multifaceted dynamics that shaped the socio-economic and political landscape of the nation (Varma 1961, 279-292). His intellectually rigorous analysis provided a transformative lens for subsequent generations of Indian thinkers to comprehend and negotiate the interplay of nationalism and Marxism. Roy's intellectual legacy and influential figures like Ram Manohar Lohia continue to inspire rich debates and critical engagement with the challenges and possibilities of creating a more equitable and just society. As India progresses, the synthesis of nationalism and Marxism remains a vibrant and evolving discourse, shaping the contours of a transformative future.

The amalgamation underscored a significant reconfiguration of class dynamics, laying the groundwork for a more nuanced comprehension of the societal structure in India. Roy shrewdly pinpointed the inception of the Indian middle class as deeply intertwined with Marx's discerning

assignment of a progressive role to the British in India (Kataria 2005, 619-632). It was through their actions that the British rulers, against the backdrop of industrial devastation, evinced an active engagement in bolstering the modernist proclivities of the embryonic Indian middle class. This burgeoning class comprised Western-educated Indians and local industrial entrepreneurs impelled by the winds of change. This seamless convergence of nationalism and Marxism within the Indian context showcases remarkable and distinctive manifestations and adaptations of Marxist ideals within the broad framework of Indian nationalism. Through this amalgamation, the seeds of progress and social change were sown, forever altering the historical landscape of India.

### **Ram Manohar Lohia: Advancing Marxist Ideas in Post-Independence India**

Ram Manohar Lohia adeptly applied the potent tenets of Marxism to the intricate and distinct Indian circumstances of his era. Lohia, as a contemporary luminary alongside the esteemed figures of Gandhi, Nehru, and the prestigious Indian National Congress, fearlessly and consistently criticized the Congress for its intrinsic classism and caste-centric approach. He indefatigably championed the cause of accessible and affordable sustenance, education, and employment for the masses, recognizing the pivotal significance of these fundamental rights. Unwavering in his pursuit of social justice, he pioneered the Socialist Party in 1948, infusing it with his unwavering convictions and undying passion. Furthermore, he led numerous compelling campaigns against assimilating princely states into the Indian framework, audaciously challenging prevailing power structures. Lohia's indelible contributions to both socialist and Marxist thought were invaluable, as he not only provided invaluable insights and interpretations but also offered visionary leadership to various political movements and eminent leaders. His robust intellectual critique of capitalism served as an intellectual compass, unequivocally advocating for a socialist order founded on the principles of equality, justice, and unwavering unity (Chakrabarty & Pandey 2009, 177-192).

Lohia fervently contended that in the Indian context, the constructive endeavours of development held greater significance than the tumultuous pursuits of revolution. He conducted a profound analysis of India and the global landscape through the lens of three planes of reality: land, economy, and spirit. Lohia ardently advocated for the primacy of rationality over sensibility among the Indian populace, acknowledging the immense potential in nurturing intellectual acumen and analytical thinking. Lohia's steadfast commitment to social justice and parity extended to his vehement opposition to the caste system, which he believed inherently plagued the very fabric of Indian society and politics. He produced extensive treatises on anti-caste movements, illuminating the profound intricacies of the caste system, its incidental origins, ethical ethos, and intricate hierarchical structure linked with varna. Lohia's teachings emphatically underscored the pressing necessity for a society in India free of caste distinctions and rooted in equality, where everyone is endowed with equal opportunities and rights, irrespective of lineage or birth.

Lohia's profound impact transcended his era, serving as a well spring of inspiration and influencing the trajectory of Indian politics. Lohia's influence precipitated the emergence of the Socialist Party, which evolved into a

significant oppositional force post-independence. This party played a pivotal role in challenging the hegemony of the Indian National Congress and its policies (Lohia 1990, 405-412). Jayaprakash Narayan, a staunch advocate for societal transformation, fearlessly confronted British colonial rule and subsequently directed his efforts toward ushering in a new epoch of progress during India's independence. As a prominent socialist leader, Narayan collaborated closely with kindred spirits such as Ram Manohar Lohia and Minoo Masani. Embracing Lohia's vision, they coalesced and collectively laid the foundation for the socialist-led government of Bombay. In their pursuit of fostering a more egalitarian society, these visionary leaders emerged as the architects and standard-bearers of the inaugural cabinet under the socialist-led administration, leaving an indelible imprint on history.

Lohia's endeavours laid a robust groundwork for socialist and Marxist thought in India. His somewhat Gandhian approach and limited exposure to contemporary Marxist literature, both domestic and international, necessitated his successors in the 1960s and 1970s to adopt a more comprehensive and holistic approach to further develop and expand upon Lohia's rich intellectual legacy (Almust 1998, 1-24). Lohia's concept of New Socialism, which acknowledged the historical imperative of transitioning from capitalism to socialism, stands out as a seminal idea in the modern age (Chakrabarty & Pandey 2009, 177-192).

#### Marxian Influence on Indian Political Theorists

A pivotal figure in the evolution of Indian communism, Roy vehemently disputed Lenin's claim that imperialism epitomized the continent's terminal refinement stage. Roy insisted that nations under imperialism would not and could not face an unavoidable catastrophe following Lenin's grand scheme. Lohia and Roy had been almost at opposite ends to each other, both underestimating Marx's concept of social formation for the sake of their Buddhism, egalitarianism, and rationality. Lohia, nevertheless, was aggrieved that Roy's brand of communism would take its toll on the political foundation and destiny of the nation. It was through disillusionment with the Indian National Congress and corrupt socialism that the ideas of Marx and Buddha electrified Lohia.

Lohia saw Marx's teachings as a source of inspiration for empowering the impoverished class through land and employment opportunities. While the 1857 bourgeois, capitalist society and colonisation failed to create the same industrial development cycle witnessed in Europe, they did lead to the lucrative by-product of political power within the bourgeoisie. Lohia believed that if the impoverished class gained political power, they could overturn oppression, landlordism, and capitalism through rights such as taxation. This would lead to flourishing mutual support, eradication of employment inequalities, and the creation of credit opportunities, similar to what occurred in Europe. The comparison of Marxist thought in India and the West reveals both similarities and differences in their application and interpretation. M.N Roy's interpretation of Marxist principles in the Indian context was influenced by Leninist thinking, particularly in his analysis of the impact of capitalism on India's economy and society. Roy revisited some of Marx's ideas and Lenin's beliefs, emphasizing the destruction of Indian communal villages and the transition to British East India Company rule as a capitalist reformation

of society and the economy. Additionally, Roy highlighted the movement of British capital into the age of finance capital, driven by the needs of nineteenth-century free-trade capitalism to develop India's infrastructure and bolster its grip on Indian markets and raw materials.

#### Conclusion

The enduring legacy of Marxism in shaping Indian political thought is undeniable, as evidenced by its profound impact on the Indian political landscape. The Marxist philosophy, focusing on resolving the contradictions leading to the exploitation of the masses, has provided a significant ideological orientation for Indian political thinkers. The Marxist emphasis on economic exploitation in capitalist systems and the call for revolution to ultimately replace capitalism with socialism and communism has resonated deeply in Indian political thought, influencing the strategies for attaining political, economic, and social development. M. N. Roy and Lohia undoubtedly reshaped the intellectual landscape of Indian political thought. The ingress of British capital into India, as expounded by Roy, was propelled by a potent amalgam of motives encompassing both economic and political imperatives. Lohia's ideals deeply resonated with eminent Indian leaders and galvanized various movements during and after independence leaving a profound impact on social and political landscape.

#### REFERENCES:

1. Almust, A.S. 1998. *Lohia, the Rebel Gandhian*. Mittal Publications.
2. Brown, D. M. (2023). *The White Umbrella: Indian Political Thought from Manu to Gandhi*. University of California Press.
3. Chakrabarty, B. and Pandey, R.K. 2023. *Modern Indian Political Thought: Text and Context*. Routledge India.
4. Chouhan, A. P. S. & Singh, D. K. 2005. "MN Roy and Marxism." *The Indian Journal of Political Science*, pp. 633-648.
5. Dutt, R. C. 1906. *The Economic History of India Under Early British Rule*. Routledge.
6. Kataria, K. 2005. "M. N. Roy's Conception of New Humanism." *The Indian Journal of Political Science* 66, no. 3 pp. 619-632.
7. Lohia, R., 1990. *Rammanohar Lohia* (No. 9). Deep and Deep Publications.
8. Manjapra, K. 2020. *MN Roy: Marxism and Colonial Cosmopolitanism*. Routledge India.
9. Parekh, B. 1992. "The Poverty of Indian Political Theory." *History of Political Thought*, 13(3), pp. 535-560.
10. Sharma, S. 2020. "Socialist Perspectives on Economic Change in Colonial India: MN Roy and Rajni Palme Dutt." *Social Scientist*, pp. 13-32
11. Singh, M.P. and Roy, H. eds. 2011. *Indian Political Thought: Themes and Thinkers*. Pearson Education India.
12. Singh, R. 2008. *Marxism, Socialism, Indian Politics: A view from the Left*. Aakar Books.
13. Singh, U. 2023. "Ideas of Empire in Ancient India in a Comparative Frame." *Bridging Two Worlds*, pp. 170-186.
14. Vanaik, A. 1997. *The Furies of Indian Communalism: Religion, Modernity, and Secularization*. Verso.
15. Varma, V. P. (1961). "Marxism and MN Roy." *The Indian Journal of Political Science*, 22(4), pp. 279-292.