CHAPTER II

CHANGING SOVIET PERCEPTIONS OF THE INDIAN NATIONAL CONGRESS (1947-1955)
EVOlUON OF NEGATIVE SOVIET VIEW OF
THE INDIAN NATIONAL CONGRESS (1947-1951)

Early Positive Soviet view of
the Indian National Congress:

Facts contradict the commonly held view that because of the U.S.S.R's alliance with Britain in the War and the growing differences between the Communists and the nationalists in India, the Soviets failed to take adequate interest in Indian independence. Jawaharlal Nehru noted the clear differences between the British and Soviet War aims in his Discovery of India contrasting the shameless declaration of Winston Churchill about the non-applicability of the Atlantic Charter to India with Stalin's declaration of the war aims of the Soviet Union. Just two weeks after the outbreak of the war, Soviet journal World Economy and World Politics described the Indian National Congress as the "mass anti-imperialist organisation of the Indian people". It also carried an article by Melman towards the end of 1942 which referred to the Quit India Movement with sympathy. The Soviet author expressed his disagreement with the British propaganda projecting the Quit India Movement as pro-Japanese and pleaded for an end to the political deadlock with a view to ensuring full mobilisation.

of India's resources for the war efforts. The Communist Party of India continued to support war efforts aimed at routing the main enemy, viz., Fascism, while demanding the release of Congress leaders and urging unity of all nationalist forces. The end of the War saw the Soviet Union preoccupied with the tasks of reconstructing its war-devastated economy and of ensuring its security in the cold war atmosphere which precluded it from taking active interest in developments taking place in Asia and Africa.

The 1945-47 period represented the period of transition of Indian independence. It is difficult to agree with Overstreet and Windmiller that the Soviets displayed an "indifferent attitude to Indian affairs during this period". Writing early in 1945, A.M. Dyakov described the Congress as "undoubtedly a progressive organisation". He portrayed Gandhi as "the most influential and popular leader" in spite of "strong imprint of backwardness" which his philosophy bore. In an article published in Bolshevik of December 1945 leading Soviet commentator, E. Zuhukov,


referred to the Anglo-Soviet-American coalition as one which headed the "forces of democracy", and urged that its programme should be applied to the colonies. In another article Dyakov pointed out the paradox of India, a member of the United Nations not being granted the right of self-determination. He wrote, "the fact that the colonies continue to be deprived of elementary political rights creates additional handicaps in the maintenance of internal peace and security". True, in his article referred to above, Zhukov warned that any move to grant formal sovereignty to the colonies without ensuring their economic independence would only be a mask for their continued subjugation as in the U.S.-Philippines relationship, but he refrained from placing India in the same category as other colonies.

Though he did not identify the Indian National Congress as the embodiment of the national liberation movement, Dyakov portrayed the latter as the struggle in which all classes in India with the exception of feudal princes and a section of the big landlords had a part to play. The Soviet Indologist did not identify the Congress

5. E. Zhukov, Porazheniye Iaponskogo Imperializma i Natsionalno - Osvoboditel'noi bor'by Narodov Vostochnoi Azii, Bolshevik, (Moscow), December 1945, p. 80.
leadership with any particular class and confined himself to the observation that the bourgeoisie played a large role in it. He even went to the extent of saying that the Congress aimed at the complete independence of India and that its social and economic programme was, under Indian conditions "progressive". He, however, hastened to add that it was not clear whether the Congress would be decisively and continuously fighting for achievement of the goals put forward by it. The Hindu political leaders' opposition to Pakistan was attributed by Dyakov to the strong urge of the bourgeoisie to control the whole of the Indian market. Noting that the Congress stood for a federative State, Dyakov was critical of it for its omission to concede the Constituents of the Indian federation the right to secede. The Muslim League came in for a sympathetic reference in Dyakov's article as the "most influential Muslim organisation" and the Congress was criticised for paying little heed to the needs of the Muslims.

In a subsequent article Dyakov described Nehru as a "progressive democrat" and praised him for his "in the main correct appraisal of the international situation". Patel and Rajendra Prasad were, on the other hand, characterised as narrow nationalists. Dyakov was neutral on the issue of Pakistan. While mentioning Rajagopalachari's

support for the demand of the Muslim areas for a separate State which was also endorsed by the All India Trade Union Congress and other peasants and workers organisations, he also referred to the views of many progressive Indian leaders "that partition of India was no solution of Hindu-Muslim problems and would weaken the country". The Soviet scholar while maintaining that India was multi-national, did not openly endorse the Communist Party of India line on partition.

To sum up the Soviet assessment of the Indian national movement led by the Indian National Congress as reflected in the writings of leading Soviet Indologists and oriental scholars was far from extremist and dogmatic. Nehru was described as a "progressive democrat" and the Congress programme was hailed as "progressive under Indian conditions". The national movement was still viewed as an "all class affair with the sole exception of the Indian princes". While not extending open support to the League's demand for Pakistan, Soviet writings did recognise the need for including the right to secession for the various nationalities of India to strengthen the unity of the country. Soviet scholars also took up a principled position in warning against the pitfalls ahead in the form of imperialist manoeuvres for keeping the peoples in the

colonies under their continued exploitation while granting them nominal sovereignty.

Cold War and Shift Towards a Negative Evaluation:

At this juncture the British sent a Cabinet Mission to India in March 1946. In view of the failure of the Congress and the League to reach agreement, the Cabinet Mission announced a plan of its own on 16 May 1946. The Soviet press described this plan as a new imperialist manoeuvre. The plan provided for a federal system with a weak central government. It also provided for an intermediate level of government based on regional groupings of provinces—Hindu majority areas and Muslim majority areas. About this time the international security environment which had already worsened on account of cold war started increasingly to condition the Soviet perception of negotiations over transfer of power in India. V. Balabushevich, noted Soviet commentator on colonial affairs, looked upon the visit of Field Marshall Mont Gomery to India in June 1946 as part of a British conspiracy to draw India's resources into the so called defence plans after the introduction of the new Constitution. He reported that the Bengal Governor, Casey, has held talks with some Indian political leaders to project the bogey of a Soviet menace to India. Balabushevich drew attention to a write-up in the National Herald, a paper considered to be close to the Indian National Congress, particularly to Jawaharlal
Nehru, which stated: "the atmosphere is full of fears that India in its zeal to adjust with Britain may find itself compelled to support the Anglo-American Bloc, but the Congress would not allow it to be misled so easily".10

He also aired Soviet fear about the right-wing of the Indian National Congress influenced by the Indian capitalists like Birla and Tata affecting the policy to conclude an agreement with Britain.

Balabushevich, however, also noted that the Indian National Congress was not satisfied with the Cabinet Mission Plan. According to him the plan of the Cabinet Mission made some concessions to the growing national freedom movement with a view to preserving the colonial position and keeping the countries subordinate to the interests of British imperialism. The Soviet commentator noted with satisfaction that a number of Congress leaders and newspapers were not inclined to view the Interim Government, as a prelude to total national freedom.

Soviet scepticism about the developments in India continued to increase. In October 1946 E. Zhukov wrote that Britain's essential tactics towards the nationalist movement throughout Asia was to isolate the more militant elements and then strike a bargain with the Right-wing forces. In this context he referred to the utilisation

by the imperialist powers of the "steadily strengthened reactionary tendencies of Kamalism in Turkey, the influence of Gandhism among the Indian national bourgeoisie, (and) the treachery of the counter-revolutionary Right-wing of the Kuomintang in China.\textsuperscript{11}

Yet despite some creeping doubts about political developments in India on account of their fear of the Indian bourgeoisie walking into the trap of a compromise with British imperialism, the Soviets did not go to the length of suggesting that the Indian bourgeoisie, or even the Right-Wing of the Indian National Congress, was prepared to accept a deal with the British colonialists. A certain warmth towards the Interim Government headed by Nehru could still be discerned. Dyakov characterised Nehru as a "Left-Wing progressive" and noted that the Indian delegation to the United Nations included some progressive leaders.\textsuperscript{12} The Soviet press welcomed establishment of diplomatic relations between India and the Soviet Union as "a sign that India is moving towards an independent policy".\textsuperscript{13} Nevertheless, the Interim Indian Government evoked mixed Soviet responses. If Krishna Menon's inclusion in the Indian delegation to the United Nations Conference at San Francisco was welcomed by Dyakov,

\textsuperscript{11} E. Zhukov, "Velikaia Oktiabraskaia Sotsialisticheskaia Revoliutsiia i Kolonialnii Vostok? Bolshevik, October, 1946, p.46.

\textsuperscript{12} Pravda, (Mbscow), 21 October 1946.

\textsuperscript{13} New Times, 18 April 1947, p.15.
the performance of the Indian delegation at the Paris peace conference was characterised by Dyakov as that of a "loyal vassal of British imperialism". Dyakov also expressed doubts about the Indian Government's ability to realise Nehru's professed desire of conducting an independent foreign policy.¹⁴

In May 1947 at a joint session of Moscow Economists the views contained in Varga's book published earlier in 1946 were criticised. Varga was forced to disown his views that colonies could attain freedom through economic evolution and not necessarily through political revolution against the Metropolis. In his book Varga had laid the theoretical basis for accepting India's independence as a major advance. Varga had argued that accumulation by India of a positive sterling balance in England would lead to the weakening of India's economic dependence on England which might soon give rise to a new political relationship; Varga's denigrators held that this did not signify any qualitative change and implied only a change in the form of exploitation. About the same time E. Zhukov who headed the Pacific Institute in Moscow returned from India after participation in the Asian Relations Conference. Zhukov's impressions of his Indian visit were highly critical. He accused Nehru of pro-British sympathies and


even went to the extent of suggesting that India harboured expansionist ambitions in Asia.\textsuperscript{16} Nehru's plea for retaining the Commonwealth links was viewed by Zhukov as emanating from the necessity for maintaining military cooperation with Britain. The circulation of a report, \textit{India and Inter-Asian Communications}, at the Asian-Relations Conference held in Delhi in April 1947 was seen as an anti-Soviet Act by Zhukov who highlighted from it the portion which stated "the growth of Soviet power and its closeness to India necessitates the urgency to build roads in certain strategic places."\textsuperscript{17} The discussions raised by several Indian officials about the problem of defence of India against the imaginary threat of "northern expansion" was viewed by Zhukov as submission to British political and military plans.

The cold war thus brought a new dimension to the Soviet perception of Indian developments. Right from the beginning Soviet approach to the process of national liberation and the socio-political changes in colonial societies had been plagued by a perpetual dilemma of striking a proper balance between the social and the national as also the national and the international. The task became further tangled by the new complexities added by Soviet involvement.


in the Second World War. Moscow had not had sufficient time to correct the distortions inducted into its perception by the war when it was again faced with new challenges arising this time from the cold war. The fact that the shift in Soviet perceptions of Indian developments took place roughly between March and June 1947, i.e., in the period which witnessed an escalation of cold war in the wake of Truman Doctrin and the Marshall Plan cannot be lightly dismissed as of no consequence. The atmosphere of suspicion to the growth of which the cold war made no small contribution resulted in unfavourable and antagonistic perceptions of the Indian reality by the Soviets. Following a peaceful transfer of power which was viewed by Moscow as a compromise and betrayal by the national bourgeoisie, all its actions were seen in an unfavourable light.

**Crystallisation of the Negative Soviet View:**

With the Moscow Conference of Soviet Orientalists held in June 1947, the Soviet stance towards the Indian National Congress may be said to have crystallised in the negative direction. The reports presented at the Conference by E.M. Zhukov, A.M. Dyakov, V.V. Balabushевич and S.M. Melman contained negative assessments of the Indian bourgeoisie and Indian National Congress. There was general agreement among Soviet scholars that the Indian National Congress had betrayed the liberation movement by
its acceptance of the Mountbatten Plan and that the Indian working class with the Communist Party of India as its vanguard must now lead the struggle. The new strategy laid stress on building a united front from below led by the Communists. There was, however, disagreement among the Soviet scholars on the strata of the bourgeoisie which could be included in the united front. Whereas Zhukov and Melman\textsuperscript{18} accused the big bourgeoisie of joining the imperialist camp, Dyakov and Balabushevich\textsuperscript{19} came out against the bourgeoisie as a whole.

These agreements over the constituents of the united front from below led by the Communists following the capitulation of the national bourgeoisie before imperialism were immaterial insofar as the new Soviet approach remained one of unmitigated hostility. Cooperation with the Indian National Congress was ruled out by both groups of Soviet Indologists (Zhukov, Melman supporting a four class Communist led united front and Dyakov, Balabushevich favouring a three class united front).

It is interesting to note that Balabushevich later backtracked from his three class (workers, peasants and


petty bourgeoisie) united front line and beer round to Zhukov's viewpoint of four class united front (workers, peasants, petty bourgeoisie and certain revolutionary sections of the middle bourgeoisie). In one of his subsequent articles Balabushevich wrote: "the complete des- sertion of the upper Indian bourgeoisie to the camp of reaction and imperialism does not preclude the possibility of certain groupings of the native bourgeoisie still be- coming for some time and at the same period, fellow- travellers with the democratic forces in their struggle imperialism and against its allies in India. It is first of all those elements of the bourgeoisie whose interests are particularly affected by foreign capital which flows into the country in a steady stream and the growing bourgeoisie of the most backward national districts of India who are dissatisfied with the prevalence of the old monopo- poly groups on the Indian market." Yet Balabushevich proceeded to strike a note of caution. He added "... these opposition sections of the Indian bourgeoisie should not be regarded as reliable or permanent members of the anti-imperialist camp."  

21. Ibid.
Western scholars on Indian Communism like Overstreet and Windmiller have interpreted Soviet support for the four class strategy for the Indian revolution as an endorsement of the Chinese model for India. This is, however, an oversimplified view. Soviet endorsement of the four class strategy in India, the publicity given by the Soviet press to Mao's views endorsing this strategy as also to the statement by Liu Shao qi exhorting the Communists of India to follow "the Chinese path ... Mao Zedong's path" did not imply Soviet recognition of the Chinese origin of the strategy. It was only natural to expect the four class united front strategy to become popular in the wake of success of the People's Democracies in East Europe and China. However, in all fairness one must admit that the advocacy of the path of People's Democracy by the Soviets was always marked by caution and restrain. In his report at the joint academic conference of the Institute of Economics and the Pacific Institute held in Moscow in June 1949, Zhukov distinguished between a People's Democratic revolution in East Europe and in the colonial countries. He suggested that it would take considerably longer in Asia than in East Europe for such revolutions to pass on to the solution of the social tasks. For the present stage Zhukov called for inclusion of all the forces which could be brought into the anti-imperialist struggle. He urged the Indian Communists to desist from pushing revolutionary
slogans to the forefront. This was in marked contrast to the line adopted by the C.P.I. at its Second Congress at Calcutta in 1948. It is noteworthy that no Soviet delegate attended this Congress. In all probability the extremist line of armed struggle was adopted by the C.P.I. under the influence of the Yugoslav delegates. The political thesis adopted at the Congress declared that a "revolutionary upsurge" was in progress in India and that the final phase of revolution, the phase of "armed clashes" had arrived. The People's Democratic revolution, it said, involved the consummation of the task of democratic revolution together with socialist construction. It is interesting to trace the zig-zag course of evolution of antagonistic Soviet perceptions of the Indian National Congress following the acceptance of the Mountbatten Plan. The early Soviet reaction that it was a "new imperialist manoeuvre" did not imply any criticism of the Congress leaders. Soviet scholars and publicists put the blame on the British rulers. Thus in a lecture delivered early in July 1947 V. Avarin remarked that the acceptance of the Mountbatten Plan by the Congress leaders was motivated by their desire "to find a way out of the political impasse".


Similarly Dyakov's article in Izvestia merely attacked British policy and avoided making any criticism of the nationalist leadership. 24

The restraint reflected in Avarin's and Dyakov's comments was in sharp contrast with the strident tone of criticism contained in Zhukov's article of the same period. Zhukov described the acceptance of the Mountbatten Plan as amounting to an alliance with British imperialism with the "big capitalists and feudal elements of India". He attributed this deal to the fear of a mass national liberation movement on the part of the Congress leadership as well as to the U.S. attempt to elbow out Britain from its colonial markets by extending support to India's independence. He also alleged that the Indian big bourgeoisie was employing Gandhism for "poisoning the masses with disbelief in their strength". Zhukov called Gandhi the "apostle of backwardness", and Nehru "a rich millionaire" who had recently evolved towards the right and was currently supporting the general aim of the big bourgeoisie in preserving ties with Britain. Zhukov's first hand impressions of his Indian visit had only confirmed his suspicions about the pro-West leanings of the Congress leadership including Nehru.

Thus as already mentioned the international environment vitiated by the Cold War went a long way in conditioning the hostile Soviet perception of the Indian National Congress and its leadership.

of the Congress Government's role in international affairs continued to mount during the period 1947-50. In his report to the June 1949 Conference of Soviet scholars referred to above Zhukov criticised the "national reformists" who insisted on neutrality in the Soviet-American conflict. He called these "national reformists" henchmen of the reactionary bourgeoisie and servitors of the interests of imperialism. Not only a hawkish Zhukov but a dovish Dyakov who had earlier paid compliments to Jawaharlal Nehru as a "progressive democrat" was obliged to criticise him for trying to become together with Patel the "natural leaders of non-Communist Asia". Dyakov alleged that after the crushing defeat of the Kuomintang in China the U.S. imperialist circles had been paying more and more attention to India. In his article published in Pravda of 25 November 1949 Dyakov wrote: "the imperialist camp would like to saddle India with the heavy and disgraceful burden of being the instrument of aggressive plans in Asia. The choice of India is not only determined by the fact that next to China it is the largest country. The main reason consists the fact that the political regime established in India is similar in many respects to the anti-popular, reactionary regime which existed in Kuomintang China.

Dyakov also referred to Nehru's assurance in the Parliament that foreign investors would be guaranteed "normal profits" and would be given the right to take these profits out of India in the form of dollars. He also quoted from Nehru's speech in New York during his recent visit to the United States signifying India's willingness to grant the most favourable conditions and complete freedom of action to American capitalists. The Soviet commentator highlighted Nehru's statement in New York that India will support United States in any war of "self defence". Dyakov also mentioned the participation of Indian troops in the suppression of people's movement in Malaya and India's agreement with England to extend aid to the Burmese Government in suppressing the people's movement there. He deplored Nehru Government's policy of "converting India into an Anglo-American gendarme in the East".

An interesting analysis of the national composition of the big bourgeoisie which as the leading Soviet publicist alleged, had struck a deal with British imperialism, due to its fear of the growing anti-imperialist popular movement was offered in the works of Soviet Indologist A.M. Dyakov. Dyakov argued that the national movement in India was dominated not by the big bourgeoisie of the country as a whole, but by a few nationalities represented
by big Gujarati-Marwari business group, which wanted to monopolise the Indian market by gaining political power through a compromise with the British imperialists. According to him the Gujarati-Marwari big bourgeoisie oppressed not only the workers, peasants and petty bourgeoisie but also the weaker bourgeoisie of a number of other Indian nationalities such as the Marathi, Bengali, Telugu etc. The leadership of the Indian National Congress was seen as backed by the Gujarati-Marwari big bourgeoisie in its capitulationist move before the British imperialism. Zhukov in his review of Dyakov's work, the national Question and English Imperialism in India (Moscow 1948) concurred with Dyakov's conclusion that the agreement between English imperialism and the top Indian bourgeoisie was, in essence a deal with the Gujarati-Marwari national group, economically the strongest faction in this bourgeoisie. 26

Zhukov noted with approbation Dyakov's observation that "the Constituent Assembly of India, expressing the great-power ambition of the Gujarati-Marwari bourgeoisie declared the Hindi and English languages to be official languages of the Union". While commending the author's plea for considering the weaker nationalities as allies of the progressive movement Zhukov criticised him for underemphasising the agrarian aspect of the struggle in India. He also

disagreed with him that the Congress Government of India represented the interests of the top industrial bourgeoisie and industrial magnats only and pointed to the omission of representation of the landowners interests. Zhukov added that the democratic forces of India were waging a struggle not only against the British imperialists and the top Indian bourgeoisie but also against the landowners - the bitterest enemies of the multi-million peasant masses. Dyakov later somewhat modified his views on the value of the struggle of the less developed nationalities under their respective bourgeoisie. He observed that their "progressive role ... is highly relative ... and on no account must it be overestimated".27

The debate over the national bourgeoisie in India continued to pre-occupy Soviet Indologists during the Stalinist Era and even afterwards. Again it was Varga who struck a novel note while recanting his earlier views to fall in line with other Soviet scholars in viewing India as a semi-colony dominated by English capital.28 Varga made an interesting remark that India was able "to maneuver between English and the United States, utilising the discord between English and American imperialism."29

27. A.M. Dyakov, "Krizis Angliiskogo Gosposstva V Indii i Novyi Etap Osvoboditel'noi Bor'by ee Narodov", in Krizis Kolonial'noi Sistemy. (Moscow, 1949) pp.87-123.


29. Ibid., p.8.
Later in another article Varga was to argue ingeniously: "the Indian bourgeoisie, having betrayed the interests of the people in striving at the same time to strengthen its role by capitalising upon the contradictions between the British and the U.S.A. This was opposed to Zhukov's view expressed in 1949 that the Indian "reactionary bourgeois leadership is distinguished by particular servility not only towards the British but also toward the American imperialist". 30

Towards the end of Stalin's rule the prevailing Soviet assessment of the Indian National Congress showed some signs of change at an important conference held at the Institute of Oriental Studies in November 1951. Zhukov in his report presented at this Conference warned against the danger of following the Chinese model with its emphasis on peasant based guerilla warfare as a stereotype. 31 Zhukov's observation coincided with the thinking inside the Indian Communist Party in favour of discarding its line of armed struggle in favour of peaceful application of the United front tactics through participation in elections. Other participants in the Conference, I.P. Nasenko and V.V. Balabushevich also argued against the applicability of the path of the Chinese revolution to other Asian countries particularly India. Conditions were ripening for a


new positive appraisal of the Indian National Congress. Even though some Soviet analysts continued to attribute India's recent initiative for peace in Korea and for securing China's rightful place in the United Nations to the growing popular pressure over the bourgeois Congress Government in India. 32

TOWARDS A POSITIVE ASSESSMENT OF THE INDIAN NATIONAL CONGRESS (1951-1955)

The emergence of Communist China in October 1949 at the doorsteps of India compelled the West-oriented Indian regime to have second thoughts about its international policy having a tilt towards the West. The Nehru government came out with proposals for peace in Korea and started actively supporting Communist China's claim for a U.N. seat. This forced the Soviets to revise their attitude. An article published in Izvestia lauded the Indian initiative but attributed it to the pressure of public opinion. 33 The article also noted the existence of differences among leaders of the Indian National Congress on communal problems and Indo-Pakistani relations. Giving a hint for a more discriminating approach, India's refusal to sign a Japanese peace treaty in San Francisco. This was followed by an exchange of cultural delegations with India. Decision

32. A typical expression of this position may be found in I.M. Lemin, Obstrenie Krizisa Britanskoi Imperii Posle Vtoroi Mirovoi Voiny, (Moscow), 1951), pp.221-223.
33. Izvestia, 23 September, 1950.
to send wheat and food supplies to India in 1951-52 to help overcome the food crisis indicated an impending thaw in the frozen Indo-Soviet relations. Rejection by India of western feelers for a regional military alliance put forward at the Conferences at Colombo and Baguio created a favourable impression on the Soviet Union about the independent course of Nehru's foreign policy. Moscow was increasingly realising the need to strengthen the peace movement against the global western strategy of forging military blocs and acquisition of military bases which called for a review of the policy of unmitigated hostility towards the new bourgeois nationalist regimes in Asia.

The Soviet policy towards India was under review during the last days of Stalin. The Soviet offer of 50,000 tonnes of wheat to India in 1951 was the earliest indication of Moscow's interest in wooing India. The same year at a trade conference at Singapore the Soviet delegates suggested exchange of Indian products like jute, tea, rice, rubber and spices with Soviet industrial equipments. USSR displayed its products at an industrial exhibition held in Bombay in January 1952. Stalin's work *Economic Problems of Socialism* suggested economic cooperation with the newly independent countries. A policy of peaceful coexistence began to take concrete shape during the last days of Stalin who in reply to a question put by a group of American
journalists declared that "the peaceful coexistence of communism and Capitalism is fully possible". 34

Malenkov's report to the XIX Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union also stated that the Soviet Union stood for "and now advocates the development of trade and cooperation with other countries irrespective of differences in social systems". 35 Indian businessmen participated in the international economic conference in Moscow in April 1952. At this Conference Soviet proposal for sale of Soviet machinery was accepted. This deal, however, remained unrealised until conclusion of a trade agreement in 1953 after Stalin's death. Stalin gave an interview to the then Indian Ambassador Dr. S. Radhakrishnan and also received his successor K.P.S. Menon who was the last foreigner to meet him only a fortnight before his death. Stalin made a charitable remark about the secular policy followed by India. 36

The dimension of the change already underway during the last two years of Stalin's rule became clear after his death. 14 Indian delegations visited the Soviet Union in the 18 months following Stalin's death. Mrs. Indira Gandhi spent about two months travelling throughout the


USSR in July 1953. Stalin's successor Malenkov in his August 8, 1953 speech to the Supreme Soviet declared: "Of great importance for the promotion of peace in the East is the attitude of so big a country as India. India has made substantial contribution to the efforts of the peace loving countries to stop the Korean War. Our relations with India are growing firmly, and cultural and economic intercourse with her is becoming wider. We hope that relations between India and the Soviet Union will become stronger and develop in a spirit of friendly cooperation." 37

The adoption by the Soviets of an active economic policy in India must have been the result of a positive re-evaluation of the Congress régime. Surely the need to harness the newly independent countries into a world-wide peace movement and struggle against military blocs played an important part in this re-evaluation of the old dogmatic Soviet approach. On the Indian side too a process of re-thinking over the foreign policy course was going on. As already stated the fear of a strong neighbouring Communist China forced the ruling classes in India to correct their pro-West tilt. The conclusion of American military aid agreement with Pakistan in February 1954 embittered Indo-U.S. relations. At a time when India and the Soviet Union

were giving final touches to their agreement on construction of the Bhilai Steel plant, Pakistan formally joined SEATO (September 1954) and the Baghdad Pact (February 1955). With the conclusion in 1954 of a Sino-Indian agreement on Tibet resulting in recognition of Chinese sovereignty over Tibet and withdrawal of Indian troops stationed there the way was further cleared for improvement of Indo-Soviet relations. The Soviet Press praised Nehru's foreign policy mentioning in particular his proposals ending the Indo-China war. 38

While a distinct improvement was taking place in the Indo-Soviet relations during 1951-54 period, Soviet writings on India took a long time to mirror it. Most of these writings continued to be critical of the policies of the Indian National Congress and its leadership. Thus an article highly critical of the character and policies of the Indian National Congress appeared in a prestigious Soviet academic journal in early 1952. According to its author I. Lemin, "The leadership of the Indian National Congress Party expresses the interests of the monopolist bourgeoisie, of the feudal hierarchy of Indian principalities, of the landlords, moneylenders, and speculators." 39 The Soviet economist wrote that the "old promises once made


by the Indian National Congress Party in its pragmatic declarations under pressure of the masses, to carry out democratic reforms and changes have now become a dead letter". He accused the Congress government of virtually going back upon its promises to nationalise the most important branches of industry, specially those controlled by foreign capital in deference to the wishes of foreign and local monopolists. He likewise took it to task for having deceived the peasantry by not implementing a democratic agrarian reform. Lemin pointed out that 75% of the Indian peasants had no land whereas 14% of the agrarian population have concentrated two-third of all the land in their own hands. The Indian Constitution which came into force on 26 January 1950 also came in for a scathing criticism by Lemin who wrote: "The reactionary policy of the dominating classes is embodied and laid down in the new Constitution ... (which) consolidates India's continued allegiance to the British Empire. The Constitution upholds the interests of the monopolists and the landlords in all possible ways."

The economic performance of the Indian ruling classes was also subjected to a blistering attack by Lemin. According to him the industrial production of India continued to decline steadily, the agriculture was in the state of stagnation and decline and constantly growing inflation was a

40. Ibid.
characteristic feature of Indian economy. Planning was described by him as a cloak to "conceal the ugly economic reality". The Soviet author rejected the possibility of any truly planned management of economy under the conditions of present-day semi-colonial India. The Indian peace initiative on the Korean question and India's refusal to participate in the signing of a separate peace treaty with Japan were attributed by him to the pressure of "the Indian people's clearly expressed will for peace". He alleged that these initiatives did not prevent the Indian ruling circles from giving diplomatic or any other support to the aggressive camp and accused the Indian government of following the instructions of Anglo-American imperialists in rejecting broad economic relations with the Union of Soviet Socialist Republic and the People's Democracies.

The Soviet press of the 1950-54 period when a slow improvement in state relations between India and the USSR were taking place, did not contain many write-ups on the Indian National Congress. The Izvestia carried a report on the Nasik session of the Indian National Congress. Referring to the foreign policy resolution which supported the aggressive American resolution on the Korean question in the United Nations, it took note of the stipulation in the Congress resolution that "all efforts should be undertaken for the peaceful solution of the conflict" and that "the goal of the U.N. of which India is a member is the support of peace and not measures leading to war". 41 The

41. Izvestia, 23 September 1950.
paper attributed these reservations of the Congress resolution in supporting American action in Korea to the "apprehension that the Indian public would be indignant over the open support of American aggression".\textsuperscript{42}

The *Izvestia* write-up on the Nasik session of the Indian National Congress also mentioned disagreement among the Congress leaders over the resolution on communal discord and Indo-Pakistani relations. It noted that four members voted against it. Quoting the Indian press it informed the Soviet readers about a fierce struggle between the different groups of party leadership specially after the election of Purushottam Das Tandon enjoying the favour of Deputy Prime Minister Patel to the post of President of the Indian National Congress. The Tandon group was reported to have laid all blame for communal discord on Pakistan and the Muslims and favoured a military solution of the Indo-Pakistan conflict. This line the paper wrote, was opposed by Prime Minister Nehru who favoured a tolerant approach towards the minorities and a peaceful solution of disputes with Pakistan. The debate over the economic policy resolution was also mentioned by the *Izvestia*. It was reported that the resolution which did not mention any thing about the task of building a classless society, a common feature of earlier resolutions of the Indian National Congress, came in for sharp criticism by some delegates who regretted\textsuperscript{42}  

\textsuperscript{42} Ibid.
that the interests of the workers, peasants and the middle classes were being ignored.

The crisis in the Indian National Congress in the wake of Tandon's election as the party President was commented upon by Soviet Weekly *New Times* which carried Tandon's statement to the press that he had no choice but to resign himself after 16 members of the Congress Working Committee had resigned. It reported the acceptance of Tandon's resignation and election of Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru as the President of the Party at a special meeting of the All India Congress Committee held on 8 September 1951. The *New Times* also referred to reports in the Indian press about Tandon's dealings with American Ambassador Loy Henderson and speculated about American desire to have a docile puppet regime in India through which they could militarise the country in pursuance of American plans for a Third World War. The Soviet weekly dismissed the view that with the ouster of Tandon a "regenerated Congress" can relieve the hardships of the people and make up for the lost time as an attempt to foster "fresh illusions". "The crisis was precipitated by the policy of the National Congress ... and Tandon was the symbol of that policy", the weekly commented. The curbs imposed by Indian government on the freedom of speech and press, the ban on strikes and the Preventive Detention Law were mentioned as evidence of continuation of the crisis.

The Soviet press also wrote about preparations of the Indian National Congress for the first general elections. A detailed article analysing the results of the first general election held in 1952 was published in the Soviet Weekly *New Times.* Its author Y. Bochkaryov expressed satisfaction over the rout of the Right-wing forces represented by the Hindu Mahasabha and the Socialist Party led by Jaiprakash Narayan and Ashok Mehta. These parties were condemned by the Soviet commentator for their tie-up with foreign imperialist interest and feudal sections. The emergence of the Communist party-led United Left Front as the second largest force both in the Union Parliament and State Legislatures (with a total of 30 seats in the Parliament and 239 in the State Legislatures against 4 seats of the Hindu Mahasabha and 12 seats of the Socialist Party in the State Legislatures) was hailed by the Soviet observer as a definite blow to the imperialists who expected "that one or other of these parties would get enough seats in Parliament to operate, in conjunction with the Indian National Congress, a 'two-party system' patterned on that of Britain and the U.S."45

While not using strident epithets like "servant of the British and American imperialists" reserved for the


45. Ibid.
Socialist Party led by Mehta and Narayan and "author of legislation directed against Labour and Trade Unions" for Ambedkar whose organisation the Scheduled Castes Federation formed an electoral alliance with the "Right-wing Socialists"; the Indian National Congress also got its share of condemnation. In the article quoted above, its author Bochkaryov observed: "The obvious inference is that the British and American imperialists are now banking on retaining the Congress in power, for - this the elections have shown - they have no other political base in India".

The Congress Party's victory in the 1952 elections was attributed by the Soviet Press to its "many privileges and advantages", its strong party machine built up over the course of several decades" and "extensive political experience, notably in conduct of election campaigns which the other parties lacked". The Indian National Congress was also charged with the abuse of the Government machine through wholesale arrests of candidates and militants of the Communist and other democratic parties under the "reactionary" preventive detention law. The fact that in the state legislatures of Madras, Orissa, Tripura and Travancore-Cochin the Congress could not gain majority of seats and its thin majority in Hyderabad were referred to as an evidence of substantial numbers of people turning against it. Bochkaryov concluded that "the elections were a grave political reverse for the National Congress".

46. Ibid.
47. Ibid.
The Congress reverses in the 1952 elections were attributed by the Soviet press not only to the inefficiency and corruption of the ruling party (this was the analysis of the *New York Times* correspondent Trumbull). In the opinion of Bochkaryov, the failure of the Indian National Congress at the polls was largely the result of its inability to carry out radical land reforms and liberate the country's economy from "domination by the imperialist states which are plundering her natural wealth and retarding her industrial development".\(^\text{48}\) Alleging that the British imperialists continued to control India's armed forces and economy, Bochkaryov also took the Indian government to task for its agreement with the American Standard Vacuum Oil Company for construction of a refinery near Bombay and a similar agreement with the British Burma Shell Oil Company.

The 1951 agreement for American technical assistance under the 4 programme of President Truman and induction of 15 American experts as Advisors to the government departments dealing with food, agriculture, natural resources, scientific research, education, public health and labour also came in for criticism as leading to "still a greater dependence and the harnessing of India's economy to American plans of aggressive war.\(^{\text{49}}\) This was pointed out as another


reason for the Indian people turning away from the Congress party and their gradual rallying behind the United Left Front led by the Communist Party in defence of "their interests and India's right to independent development". 50

The year 1955 represents a high watermark in the development of relations between India and U.S.S.R. In January 1955 the Indian National Congress in its Avadi session proclaimed the establishment of a socialistic pattern of society as the goal of its economic planning. The Pravda editorial commemorating India's Republic Day gave a clearly new turn to Soviet Union's perspectives on India. The editorial described the signing of December 2, 1953 trade agreement between the two countries as an important event and declared the Soviet Union's willingness to cooperate with India in the technical field. Pravda expressed Soviet People's "profound accord with great Indian people who are defending their independence and peace in Asia and throughout the world". 51 The unique feature of the Pravda write-up was the praise it lavished not only on the peaceful foreign policy of the Indian government but also on its domestic achievements. It referred to Jawaharlal Nehru as the "outstanding statesman". Alleging a stepping up of subversive activities by America against the Indian people, the Soviet daily wrote that the United

50. Ibid.

States policy was "arousing Indian people's indignation". Noting that "the Indian government refuses to participate in aggressive blocs and supports peaceful co-existence between different social systems", Pravda mentioned India's proposals for a ceasefire which helped in ending hostilities in Korea and Indochina. India's chairmanship of International Commissions on Korea and Indochina was ascribed by the Soviet daily to the "peace loving people's great confidence in India". India's stand on cessation of atomic tests and ban on production of nuclear and mass destruction weapons as well as establishment of good neighbourly relations between India and China and the Indian government's advocacy for the restoration of China's legal rights as a U.N. member were also commended by Pravda.

The Soviet Daily's appreciation of Nehru government's domestic achievements was, however, still on a low-key in comparison with its fulsome praise for its foreign policy. It referred to the Indian Republic's "harsh legacy" and noted that "British capital had retained important positions in the Indian economy right upto the present day" and that "at the same time American monopolies are seeking to penetrate India". "The British and American monopolies", Pravda commented, "are hampering India's development everywhere. It mentioned Indian government's succession the past few years in increasing grain crop yields by increasing the area of land under cultivation. It also noted that the national government devoted great attention to eliminating illiteracy in the country and that public health
was also being developed and generation of power stepped up. The Pravda commentary on the Indian Republic Day Anniversary informed the Soviet readers about the announcement of Nehru government that it would "gradually eliminate the harsh legacy of Colonialism".

It is worthwhile to note that the Pravda remained silent about adoption by the Indian National Congress of socialistic pattern of society as its goal at the Avadi session in 1955. In April 1955 India played an important part at the Bandung Conference of Asian-African States. India's role at Bandung was lauded by E.M. Zhukov who expressed the conviction that close cooperation between the communists and the nationalists against the common imperialist enemy was both possible and necessary. The stage was thus set for an exchange of state visits by Nehru and the Soviet leaders in 1955.

The Soviets made careful preparations for Nehru's visit which took place in June 1955. The May issue of Kommunist carried a positive evaluation of the role of Gandhi in the independence movement. In another article in Pravda O. Orestov supported the Congress government's policy of continuation of English and its gradual displacement by Hindi as the official language, thus signifying


Soviet support for a unified Indian nation state. Orestov's article also called upon the Indian Communists "to strengthen even more the friendly ties now binding Soviet and Indian people". Orestov noted Communist Party of India's endorsement of several foreign policy initiatives of Nehru and indicated that the C.P.I. support for Nehru's domestic programme was not forthcoming. Nehru, it may be noted, had not changed his hostile attitude towards the Indian Communists to facilitate improvement of relations with the U.S.S.R. In fact, he had in December 1954 extended for a period of another three years the Preventive Detention Act.

Nehru's historic sixteen-day visit to USSR was a great success. He was welcomed enthusiastically and was given the honour of being the non-Communist leader to address a public meeting in Moscow. In according Nehru unprecedented welcome the Soviets had an eye on impressing the numerous nonaligned countries. They took care not to hurt the Indian sentiments and susceptibilities and even avoided making any reference to recent Soviet agreement to set up a steel plant. The visit made a tremendous impression upon Nehru who widely publicised both in the West and in Asia and Africa Soviet Union's sincere commitment to a policy of peaceful co-existence. That Moscow wanted to promote cooperation with India mainly for foreign policy reasons is clear from the coverage of Nehru's USSR visit by the Soviet press.

54. Pravda, 10 May 1955.
The Pravda editorial on the arrival of Nehru in Moscow on a state visit like the earlier editorial on the Republic Day anniversary on 26 January 1955, laid stress on the Soviet and Indian peoples' common desire for peace. It noted that the peoples of USSR and India do not have the same state systems and observed that their efforts "together with all other peace loving peoples in the fight for peace are having favourable results". Pravda again referred to the active participation by the two countries in putting off the flames of war in two Asian areas of Korea and Indochina and praised India's support for the Chinese people's legal rights in the United Nations. The only reference to the domestic policy confined itself to the observation that "the Soviet people sympathise with the Indian government's efforts to industrialise the country, for they know from experience the importance of industrialisation for independent existence".

Again, significantly, there was no mention of the Avadi resolution of the Indian National Congress on socialist pattern of society or to any of its radical economic programme. It was only later that Khrushchev during his visit to India at the end of the year 1955 took note of Nehru's declared intention of leading India along the socialist path. Said Khrushchev: "that is good. Of course, our conceptions of socialism differ. But we welcome this statement and the intention". Praising Gandhi as a

55. Pravda, 7 June 1955.
"Glorious patriot" Bulganin, however, added: "We, Lenin's pupils, do not share Gandhi's philosophical views, but we consider him an outstanding leader".

The visit of the Soviet leaders to India in December 1955 laid the foundation of a new Soviet approach towards the newly independent countries, which stressed the development of their relations on a basis of equality and mutual advantage in the interest of world peace. By strengthening its ties with India the Soviet Union ended the Western encirclement on its periphery. Its success in forging closer ties with India enabled it to achieve a breakthrough in its relations with the newly independent states. It had every reason to feel satisfied over the development of Indo-Soviet friendly relations which appeared to have fulfilled Lenin's dream of an alliance between socialism and bourgeois nationalism in Asia against imperialism. This new Soviet approach towards the Congress government in India was mainly the result of convergence of policies of the two countries in the struggle for peace. This policy was subsequently confirmed at the highest level in the party by the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union held in 1956.

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57. Ibid., p.16.