Chapter I

PRE-INDEPENDENT INDIA IN RUSSIAN MIND
Tsarist Russia and India

Even though the history of diplomatic relations between India and the Soviet Union is of recent origin, the history of economic and cultural contacts between the peoples of these two countries goes beyond the October Revolution in Russia or the British conquest of India. To a Russian in the medieval period India was a land of plenty and splendour. The first Russian account of India, written in the XII-XIII century, is known as: "The Relation about India" or "The Story of India the Rich". It was a Slavonic translation of a Latin tale. The story is about a rich Indian merchant who introduced new standards of tastes to the Russians. When some Russian envoys reached his home after an exacting journey:

They gazed down upon India, India the Rich...
They thought India was burning.
But no! Behold! India is not on fire.
India lies there before them all shining in gold;
Here they have palaces made of white marble
There they have columns cast of metal.
And the routes are guilded with gold. (1)

The first eye-witness account of India written by a Russian relates to the end of the fifteenth century. This was by a Russian merchant, Afanasi Nikitin, who extensively travelled in the northern plains and the Deccan hills and mixed freely with the Hindus and Muslims. Although he found Indian merchandise were cheap, particularly spices and colours, he thought it was not a good commercial

(1) P.M. Kemp, Bharat - Rus (ISCUS, Delhi, 1948), P. 4.
proposition to ship them to Russia in view of the high taxes and the hazards on the sea. (2)

Besides the Russian merchants there were some travellers too who had left behind their accounts of India. One of such well-known travellers was Garasim Lebedev, who arrived in India in 1785, stayed here for twelve years, made his living as a musician and a dramatist, learnt Sanskrit and Bengali, wrote Bengali dramas and staged them in Calcutta. He was the first European translator of a Bengali classic and the first one to use European techniques for the Indian stage. (3) Lebedev is described as first Russian Indologist in the "Bol'shaya Sovetskaya Entsiklopediya." However, the first Russian Orientalist to visit India strictly for academic purposes was Ivan Pavlovich Minaev, who toured India, Ceylon, Nepal and Burma between 1874 and 1886 in order to study Buddhist antiquities and living forms of Buddhism. Minaev's work, *sketches of Ceylon and India* is one of the standard works on Indology produced by Russian scholars. When the first session of the Indian National Congress met in Bombay in 1885, Minaev was there and in his diary he described it as striving for "the development of feeling of nationalism in India, for the unification of India." (4) Minaev established fairly close contacts with such leading Indian Orientalists and nationalist leaders like R. G. Bhandarkar, Bankim Chandra Chatterji, Kashinath Trimbak Telang and Surendranath Banerjee. He visited many Indian educational institutions, including Lokmanya Tilak's New English School.

There were a large number of Indian traders who had settled in Astrakhan in the Volga basin by the seventeenth century. Most of the traders were supplying goods to their contacts in Moscow and Petersburg. When some of them asked permission to make trips to Moscow and Petersburg for business, the officials of the Peter I readily acceded to their request. (5) Among the early Russian Tsars who took personal interest in developing trade with India was Peter I; (6) on his instruction the Vice-Admiral Whilster visited India to sign a trade agreement with the Moghal ruler. (7) Not only were the Russians directly purchasing goods from the Indian traders but they showed some interest in purchasing Indian goods in European market too. Thus, the Russian Ambassador to the Hague, B.I. Kurakin, purchased Indian printed cloth in Holland on behalf of his government and despatched it to Petersburg. (8) When the Indian traders had made Astrakhan their home, the Tsarist government granted temporary citizenship of Russia to them. (9) By a separate order the chief magistrate of Astrakhan granted them the same rights and duties as were enjoyed by Russian merchants. (10)

In a sense, Russia's interests before the October Revolution

(5) Russko-Indiskie Otnosheniya, n. 3 pp. 52-55.
(6) Ibid., see documents Nos. 13, 16, 18, 23, 39.
(7) Ibid., pp. 60.
(8) Ibid., pp. 84-85.
(9) Ibid., pp. 198-200.
(10) Ibid., pp. 236-54.
rarely penetrated beyond Central Asia. Much is made of by British historians of Russian plans to invade India, and the consequent justification of British invasions of Afghanistan and Tibet. A Russian Tsar, Paul I, had somewhat quixotic idea of invading India in 1801. He had Napoleon's support for this project and in a joint communiqué issued by them it was stated:

The sufferings under which the populations of India groans have inspired France and Russia with the liveliest interest; and the governments have resolved to unite their forces in order to liberate India from the tyrannical and barbarious yoke of the English. (11)

Napoleon could not provide more than a moral support to Paul's project owing to his involvement in Europe. The Tsar had a mind to proceed alone and accordingly he instructed his general to be friendly with the "Great Moghul and the lesser princes," to destroy all the British factories and possessions in India and to "bring the country into the same dependency on Russia as it was on the English and turn its trade in its direction." (12) The general proceeded with some 22,500 horsemen and 24 guns. The Russian army met with numerous difficulties on the way, was depleted in numbers and before this exhausted army could reach the Indian borders, the Tsar was assassinated and the proposed invasion never took place. His successor, Alexander I, revived the old plan, with Napoleon again, and they agreed to issue a proclamation to be given to the rulers on the Indian borders, when they would meet them on their way to India, that:

the army of the two most powerful nations in the world is to pass through their domain in order to reach India; that the sole aim of this expedition consists in driving out of

(11) Samra, n. 2, p. 5.
(12) Kemp, n. 1, p. 192.
Hindustan the British who have enslaved these beautiful lands, once so renowned, mighty and rich in products and industries that they attracted the peoples of the whole universe to partake of the gifts which it had pleased heaven to lavish upon them; that the terrible state of oppression, misery and slavery under which the peoples of these countries now groan has inspired the most lively sympathy of France and Russia; that in consequence of this these two states have decided to unite their forces for the liberation of India from the tyrannous yoke of the British; that there is nothing to be feared on the part of the rulers and peoples of the countries through which the allied army has to pass. (13)

Alexander I wrote to Napoleon that he had instructed his generals to work out the details of the plan but before the proposed plan could take some concrete shape it was again abandoned due to some developments in Europe.

Although none of these half-hearted Russian attempts to invade India materialized, nevertheless they caused great consternation to the British in India. This was to result in the two Afghan wars, the first of which resulted in a big human tragedy. Alarmed by the dispatches from St. Petersburg, Lord Palmerston, British Secretary for Foreign Affairs, instructed the Indian Governor-General, Lord Auckland, "to take Afghanistan in hand, and make it a British dependency." (14) An army of 10,000 Indian soldiers marched into Kabul to replace the unfriendly Afghan ruler, Dost Muhammad, by Shah Shuja. In the war Dost Muhammad was defeated but before the British could settle down, the people of Afghanistan rose in revolt. They murdered Shah Shuja and massacred the bulk of the Indian soldiers. "No failure so fatal and overwhelming as this is recorded in the pages of history," concluded a leading authority on the First Afghan war. (15)

(13) Ibid., pp. 193-4.
(14) Samra, n. 2, p. 7.
(15) Ibid., p. 8.
Again, nearly seventy years after the last-known Russian plan to invade India had fizzled out, the Second Afghan war was begun in 1878. The British imposed the war on Afghanistan on the flimsy charge of Sher Ali's reluctance to receive a British mission in Kabul. Sher Ali pleaded for Russian help, but got only refuge. The British succeeded in placing his son, Yakub Khan, on the Afghan throne. Quick victory led Disraeli to boast to his Viceroy that "... it will always be to me a source of satisfaction that I had the opportunity of placing you on the throne of the Great Moghal." (16) In Asia, however, the victories against small rulers in distant, turbulent lands were easier to achieve but the fruits of victory were difficult to digest. Duke of Wellington once spoke about the First Afghan war: "In Asia, where victories cease, difficulties begin." The Duke proved wiser than Disraeli. The Afghan soldiers soon revolted again and murdered the British residents. The British had to rush their troops to Afghanistan again.

Curzon's obsession with Russia was so deep that not deterred by the Afghan disasters, he advanced into quiet, harmless Tibet too to free it from the Tsarist influence. A certain Agwan Dorjie, Russian-born Buddhist monk and resident of Tibet since 1881, was suspected to be spreading Russian influence in Lhasa. Curzon sent repeated dispatches to Lord Hamilton, Secretary of State for India, to send military dispatches to India to avert Russian influence in Tibet. At last, an expedition under Colonel Younghusband reached India, which was soon sent to Lhasa. Lhasa was captured in 1904; an indemnity of

(16) Ibid., p. 13.
Rs. 2,500,000 was imposed on Tibet and thus the British returned with an account of "one of the least justifiable of England's 'little wars', forced upon an essentially pacific and practically unarmed race." (17)

Thus, to look at the whole question again, was there really a serious threat from Tsarist Russia to the British Indian possession? A noted Russian authority on India, Professor A.E. Sueserev, told Louis Fischer that the Tsarist government never looked upon an invasion of India as a serious matter and only permitted the military governors of Turkestan to toy with the idea. (18) British historians, Edward Thomson and G.I. Garatt, consider it "more than doubtful whether any responsible Russian statesman ever intended an invasion of British India or of Afghanistan." (19)

**Lenin on India**

Viewed against the background of Russian contacts with India during the Tsarist period, the Soviet Russian concern for India is bound to look somewhat different. Soviet Russia's desire to protect its interests from British India in the period immediately following the October Revolution was obvious. With British forces participating in the Russian Civil War, British imperialism in India was more than an ideological opponent. To a question put to him by a correspondent of 'The Observer' and 'The Manchester Guardian,' Lenin said that Russia's interests in "Eastern problem" was not a matter of prestige for her; the Near East "concerns the most real and direct vital

(17) Ibid., p. 15.


(19) Samra, n. 2, p. 16.
On another occasion, speaking before a joint meeting of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee and some other organizations, he said on 29 July 1918:

Yesterday the news arrived that a number of Central Asian powers are in the throes of a counter-revolutionary uprising which is obviously supported by the British. Entrenched in India and having completely subjugated Afghanistan, they have long ago created a vantage ground for themselves from which to extend their colonial possessions to strangle nations, and to attack Russia. (21)

Lenin was concerned with the colonial problem not merely to safeguard Russian national interests. His writings, like that of Trotsky's, were quite prolific on the colonial problem and he vigorously advocated the liberation of all colonial peoples. Lenin's attitude to the colonial question had hardly undergone a change even after his assumption of power in the Kremlin. As the later course suggests, when the Kremlin was in danger, all that went out of it, including its colonial policies, had an object of serving Russian national interests. That tendency to use international communist movement to subserve Russian national interests was, however, not shown by the Kremlin under Lenin. This does not, of course, mean that Russia under Lenin opted for the spread of communism in preference to safeguarding her national interests, when there was a clash between such courses of action. Indeed, the Anglo-Russian Trade Agreement of March 1921, which says in the preamble that the Soviet Union would refrain from supporting disruptive activities in the British colonies, did point out the difficulties of handling


(21) V.I. Lenin, On Britain (Foreign Languages Publishing House, Moscow, no date), p.370.
communist ideology and a communist state even by its founders. (22) However, in spite of the obvious difficulties involved in such a job, Lenin showed his concern for the liberation of the colonies both before and after the October Revolution.

In his basic theoretical work on imperialism, which Stalin regarded as his significant contribution to Marxism, (Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism) Lenin argues that because of its monopolistic course, capitalism culminates in imperialism.

If it were necessary to give the briefest possible definition of imperialism we should have to say that imperialism is the monopoly state of capitalism...... Imperialism is capitalism in that state of development in which the dominance of monopoly and finance capital has acquired pronounced importance, in which the division of the world among the international trusts has begun; in which the division of all territories of the globe among the biggest capitalist powers has been completed. (23)

According to Lenin, British imperialism was blindly relying upon India which supplied her fighting forces and market for her commodities. With the growing discontent in India, and its resulting independence, British capitalism was bound to decay.

Lenin's occasional interest in India, however, was more than of theoretical nature. He censured "civilized" British capitalists for their exploitation of India and stated that: "In India the native slaves of the 'civilized' British capitalists have in precisely this recent period been causing much unpleasant concern to their masters. There is no end to violence and plunder which goes under.


the name of the British system of government in India." (24)

Commenting on the conviction of Lokmanya Tilak, Lenin stated:

But the popular India is beginning to stand up in defence of her writers and political leaders. The infamous sentence pronounced by the British jackals on the Indian democrat Tilak - he was sentenced to a long term of exile; a question in the British House of Commons the other day revealed that the Indian jurors had declared for acquittal and that the verdict had been passed by the vote of the British jurors! - this reprisal against the democrat by the lackeys of the money bags evoked street demonstrations and a strike in Bombay. (25)

A little later, writing in the article "Cultured Europeans and savage Asians," Lenin condemned an English official's behaviour in India and the British administration of justice. (26) He also ridiculed English socialists for their efforts at reconciling colonial policies with socialism. Commenting upon the deliberations of the British Social Democratic Party he argued that the British socialists' support to the fat naval budget for "national defence" was ridiculous, as what its navy defended and protected was the "Empire." (27) For him the Indian problem was, more or less, similar to the Russian problem. In a reply to questions put by an American correspondent, he said: "The activity of our Soviet Republic in Afghanistan, India and other Muslim countries outside Russia is the same as our activity among the numerous Muslim and other non-Russian nationalities within Russia itself." (28) Russia encouraged peoples of different

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(24) Lenin, n. 21, pp.-100-1.
(25) Ibid., p.100-1. Emphasis original.
(26) Ibid., pp.-159-60.
(27) Ibid., p.120.
(28) Lenin, n. 20, p.220.
nationalities to establish their own republics within the Soviet Union; so also she encouraged Afghanistan and India to found their national republics. When some Indian revolutionaries sent a congratulatory message to Lenin on the occasion of the establishment of socialist state, Lenin reciprocated their feelings by saying that the "toiling masses of Russia follow the awakening of the Indian worker and peasant with unabating attention." (29)

Lenin probably did not have much understanding of the Indian situation. Looking through his writings one feels that his reactions were more upon British imperialism than on the Indian situation itself. Indeed, when a delegation of Indian revolutionaries met him he showed more interest in a Punjabi servant who accompanied his bourgeois revolutionary master than in the intellectuals themselves! "The visitors were non-plussed about the behaviour of the great man; they wondered what interest could he have in talking with a servant of one of them! But they did not realize that in order to understand the background of the Indian problem, a peasant was more important to him than exalted personages." (30) Even though Lenin showed less interest in India, his concern, probably, was genuine. In one of the halls of the Central Lenin Museum in Moscow lies a wooden stick whose handle and tip are made of ivory. It is said that it was presented to him on 23 November 1918 by guests from India who had reached Russia after many months of trying journey. What is important is not the stick but that Lenin preserved it. (31)

(29) Ibid., p. 248.
(31) Ibid., p. 47.
However genuine Lenin's concern was for India, it did not, in fact, amount to much. A survey of his writings makes this quite clear. Even during his long exile, where he did hardly anything except writing, he wrote rarely on India. And when he came to power the problems facing him were so sudden and immense that even if he had desired to carry his polemics with imperialists, he could not have done so. In the very first year of the Soviet regime, Lenin spoke eight times, between May and November 1918, on "international situation", but on none of these occasions did he concern himself with either the Indian question or with the much larger colonial question. (32) Much of his writings on India can be found in a Soviet government publication V.I. Lenin on Britain. In the name index running over eight pages of the same work, names of only two Indians, M.N. Roy and Lokmanya Tilak, can be found. Roy figures twice in connection with his work in the Communist International, whereas Tilak is referred to only once and that too very briefly. Indeed, much is written about Lenin's differences with M.N. Roy at the Second

(32) V.I. Lenin, Collected Works (Lawrence & Wishart, London, 1945 (?) ), vol. XXIII. See his report submitted to the All Russian Central Executive Committee on "Soviet Foreign Policy", pp. 15-30. While speaking on "International situation" before the communist deputies of the Fifth Soviet Congress, he did not refer to the colonial or Indian problem. His preoccupation was with the war, Germany and England; pp. 126-7. His report on the "National and International situation" presented to the Fifth Soviet Congress in early July 1918 does not deal with the colonial or Indian problem; pp. 128-49. Also his speech delivered at a Moscow meeting on "International situation" does not refer to India or the colonial problem in his report to Moscow Provisional Conference of Factory Committee (pp.159-62), or in his speech on international situation on 29 July 1918 (pp. 164-80); or in his report to the Joint Session of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee, etc. (pp. 242-56); or in his speech on international situation delivered on 8 November 1918 (pp. 275-87).
Congress of the Communist International. Much of Comintern's later colonial policies were based on the thesis submitted by Lenin and Roy at this Congress. But the intended concern in even such a basic work of Lenin to India is, indeed, unbelievably less. The preliminary draft of the thesis on "The National and Colonial Questions" prepared for this Congress by Lenin himself did not include India for discussion. (33)

**STALIN AND BRITISH INDIA**

If Lenin's references to India were rare and far apart Stalin's were even more so. The survey of Stalin's writings (34) showed that throughout his long career at the helm of the CPSU and the Soviet State, lasting for more than thirty years, Stalin referred to Colonial India only six times! Of the six occasions when he did say something on India twice he repeated the kind of strategy which probably owed its inspiration to M. N. Roy's analysis of the colonial problem, and on four other occasions what he said on India was so casual and inconsequential that it is hardly necessary to deal with

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(33) The problems covered were: Austrian experience; Polish-Jewish and Ukrainian experience; Alasce-Lorraine and Belgium; Ireland; Danish-German; Italo-French and Italo-Sar relations; Balkan experience; Eastern peoples; struggle against Pan-Islamism, relations in the Caucasus; The Bashkir and Tatar Republics; Kirghizia; Thrkestan; its experience; Negroes in America; Colonies; China-Korea-Japan. See Lenin, no. 20, p. 249.

(34) This includes the following works: J. Stalin, *Marxism and the National Colonial Question* (Lawrence and Wishart, London 1947), his "Works" published by the Foreign Languages Publishing House, Moscow, in 13 volumes; and *Stalin on China* (People's publishing House, Bombay, February 1951). In addition to this, this reference also covers the works of many other writers on Stalin.
A careful analysis of Stalin's references to India shows that practically he had nothing to say on this country, or even on the colonial problem in general, before 1925. As far as it could be discerned from the available Comintern documents, it is clear that right from 1920 to 1925 among the leaders of the Communist International only Roy was developing an analysis of the different stages of development of the various colonies and the necessity of adopting suitable tactics for them. At the Second Congress of the Comintern he advocated it. (36) He consistently stated similar views at the succeeding congresses of the Comintern (37) and no other delegate...
supported him. (38)

When we examine Stalin's views on India we find the same type of analysis of both the colonial and the Indian situations like the one made by Roy. In fact when Stalin referred to India in 1927 in his speech pertaining to China he almost acknowledged the basis of his views on India to M.N.Roy and the Second Comintern Congress. (39)

With this much background let us now pass on to what Stalin had actually to say on India.

The first time that Stalin ever showed some interest about India was at the XIV Congress of the Russian Communist Party. While reporting on "The immediate tasks of the communist elements in the colonial and dependent countries, in May 1925, he set forth his strategy for India which he reiterated again in great detail a week later when he spoke to the students of the Communist University of the Toilers of the East; since the content of both of his speeches is, more or less, the same, we may pay greater attention to his second speech. On this occasion Stalin made analysis of the colonial world and suggested different policies for different countries. According to him, there were three categories of colonial and dependent countries.

Firstly, countries like Morocco, which have little or no proletariat, and are industrially quite underdeveloped. Secondly, countries like China and Egypt, which are

(38) At the Fifth Congress Roy led the discussion on the National and Colonial Question. In all 21 speakers participated in the discussion; of them none but Roy alone analysed the colonial situation as one existing differently in various countries and emphasised the need to adopt different policies by the Comintern for such different colonies. See, Fifth Congress of the Communist International: Abridged Report of Meetings held in Moscow, June 17th to July 18th, 1924. (Communist Party of Great Britain, no date), pp. 185-211.

(39) His relevant references are quoted in foot note no. 35.
underdeveloped relatively and have a relatively small proletariat. Thirdly, countries like India, which are capitalistically more or less developed and have a more or less numerous national proletariat. (40)

In view of this it was wrong to group the whole Asian world under one head and advocate the same tactics for all. Tactics to be followed by the communists in various Asian countries would be different, depending upon the conditions obtaining in those countries. In a country like Morocco, where the national bourgeoisie had not yet split up into revolutionary and compromising sections, and where industrial workers were hardly in existence, "the task of the communist elements is to take all measures to create a united national front against imperialism." (41)

In countries like Egypt and China, where the national bourgeoisie had split up into revolutionary and compromising factions, but where the compromising section had not yet joined hands with imperialists, the task of the communists was different.

In such countries the communists must pass from the policy of a united national front to the policy of a revolutionary bloc of the workers and the petty bourgeoisie.... The tasks of the bloc are to expose the half-heartedness and the inconsistency of the national bourgeoisie and to wage a determined struggle against imperialism.... (42)

When we come to a country like India the picture was somewhat different. Here not only the national bourgeoisie had split up into compromising and revolutionary factions, but the compromising faction of the bourgeoisie had already started to go hand in hand with imperialism.

(41) Ibid., p. 149.
(42) Ibid., P. 149.
Fearing revolution more than it fears imperialism, and concerned more about its money bags than about the interests of its own country, this section of the bourgeoisie ... is forming a bloc with imperialism against the workers and peasants of its own country. The victory of the revolution cannot be achieved unless this bloc is smashed. ... In other words, in colonies like India it is a matter of preparing the proletariat for the role of leader of the liberation movement, step by step dislodging the bourgeoisie and its mouthpieces from the honourable post. The task is to create a revolutionary anti-imperialist bloc and to ensure the hegemony of the proletariat in this bloc.... In such countries, the independence of the communist party must be the chief slogan of the advanced communist elements, for the hegemony of the proletariat can be prepared and brought about only by the communist party. (43)

Communist International on India

If Lenin's references to India were occasional, and Stalin's very meagre, the interest shown by the Communist International in India was certainly profound. With the establishment of the Third Communist International in 1919, Lenin founded an institution for the spread of communism in other countries. It is important to note in this connection that neither the invitation that was sent to various workers' organizations abroad to associate themselves with the communist international nor its first congress held in 1919 dealt with the colonial problem. (44) Keeping in view the Asian participation in the debates on the colonial question at the Second Congress, one doubts whether in the absence of such an Asian element in the Communist International, Russia would have shown any great interest in the trouble-gathering colonial issue at an early stage when the regime was still in the woods. Shortly before the Second

(43) Ibid., pp. 150-1.
(44) J. Degras, n. 37, p. 6.
Comintern Congress, an enthusiastic Indian youth, M.N. Roy, arrived in Moscow from Mexico; there he availed himself of the opportunities to discuss colonial issues with Lenin. Following this he presented a thesis, opposing the one presented by Lenin himself to the Second Comintern Congress. Lenin maintained that the colonial countries need not pass through the capitalist stage to reach socialism; as opposed to this, M.N. Roy maintained that there were different stages of development in the colonial countries and in a country like India, where the proletariat was increasing in strength due to rapid industrialization, the organization of the proletariat by the Communist Party alone would lead to the establishment of socialism. (45) In a sense, therefore, it could be said that the Second Congress of the Communist International inaugurated its colonial activities, with an Indian playing an important role in it. Even though the Second Congress adopted both the theses, one presented by Lenin and the other by Roy, it is important to bear in mind that its recommendations were based exclusively on Lenin's thesis and the Comintern never adopted Roy's views so long as he was in the organization. It was only after his exit that the Comintern cast its policies at the Sixth Congress in 1928 on lines advocated by him.

With such an eventful start the Communist International was launched on the rough sea of colonial question. At times it took unexpected turns, causing embarrassment even to those who were to execute its decisions. Even though its course was not straight, its objective was clear and it was never lost sight of the view that the purpose of the organization was to establish communist regimes

(45) Ibid., pp.-138-44.
abroad. But when on occasions the activities of the Communist
International conflicted with the interests of the supporting regime
(The Soviet Union) the latter, at first, exhibited less overt interest
in pursuing colonial question; but when the regime itself was in
serious danger, it did control the Comintern's course at all the
stages to subserve its own interests, irrespective of the fact whether
such an action coincided with the objective of the Communist
International.

The constant hostility of the capitalist world, especially of
Britain, brought in many occasions when the policies of the Communist
International touched upon India in interesting ways. Indeed, very
soon the Third Congress of the Comintern threw up many issues concern­
ing the colonial question in such a way as to test the real character
of the Soviet regime. Lenin, who had to put up with the unabated
hostility on the part of Britain to the Soviet regime, was keen to
secure British recognition to it. Bearing this in mind and also the
prospect of attracting British loans and investments to bolster the
Soviet economy, Lenin entered into a trade agreement with Britain on
16 March 1921. In the preamble of this agreement the Soviet govern­
ment agreed to restrain
from conducting outside its own borders any official propa­
ganda direct or indirect against the institutions of the
British Empire ... and more particularly ... refrain from
any attempt by military or diplomatic or any other form of
action or propaganda to encourage any of the peoples of Asia
in any form of hostile action against British Empire, espe­
cially in India and in the independent state of Afghanistan.(46)

Such an agreement was profoundly in conflict with the objectives
and activities of the Communist International. When the Comintern

met two months after the conclusion of this agreement for the Third Congress, not only that no resolution was passed on the colonial question, but the discussion on it was so casual that M. N. Roy made an energetic protest (within the five minutes allotted to him) against the "sheer opportunism" of the founders. He had obviously in mind the Anglo-Russian Trade Agreement and its impact on the Soviet behaviour. (47)

The British public opinion was hardly reconciled to the Anglo-Russian Trade Agreement of 1921. While the agreement was still under negotiation, the liberal Manchester Guardian commented: "A Bolshevist, a real live representative of Lenin, has spoken to the British Prime Minister face to face ... Lloyd George has seen him and still lives ... The British Empire still stands." The Times flashed such headlines: "Recognition of red Russia. An empty agreement. Surrender to the Soviets. What can Russia export: nothing but communist principles."(48) Against this background, in the general elections which followed, the Conservative Party came to power under Bonar Law with Lord Curzon as Foreign Secretary. Within six months of his assuming office, on 8 May 1923, Curzon delivered a virtual ultimatum to Russia threatening to terminate trade relations unless the Soviet government withdrew in ten days its alleged agents in India, Afghanistan and Persia conducting anti-British propaganda. (49) With the Curzon ultimatum the course of Anglo-Russian relations again became rough and the Comintern

(48) Samra, n. 2, p. 56.
(49) Ibid., pp. 75-6.
started taking more and more interest in the colonial issues. It is important to note that the initial hesitation shown by the Soviet rulers, as seen at the Third Congress, to adjust Comintern policies with the requirements of the Soviet government was absent now onwards and in the normal course Russia allowed the Comintern to conduct its activities for its own purposes, irrespective of the state of Russian relations with other governments. (50) This became evident from the Fourth Congress onwards and the Comintern began to pass resolutions on colonial question practically at every Congress.

The Fourth Congress passed a thesis on the "Eastern Questions" which maintained that the communists should organize trade unions of their own in the colonial countries and should co-operate with bourgeois agencies struggling for national liberation. (51) Since it was decided to support trade union activities of the communists, the Congress also sent a telegram of greetings to the All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) which was meeting in Lahore in the same days. The telegram reminded the Indian communists of their two-fold task; to fight for improving the conditions of workers and for "national political freedom." (52) The Fourth Congress also sent a message to the Annual Conference of the Indian National Congress at Gaya. In this message, the Comintern maintained that only through violent means could India dislodge the British rule over India. The Fifth Congress which met in June-July 1924 issued a manifesto supporting the revolutionary movements of the peoples of the East. India, however, (50) This Comintern's policy of attacking colonial powers, however, was checked when Hitler attacked Russia in June 1941. (51) J. Degras, n. 37, Vol. I, pp. 383-93. (52) Ibid., pp. 393-4.
was not given any special attention, as could be seen by the lack of any reference to her in the manifesto. (53)

A survey of the Communist International activities from 1919 to 1927 shows that during this period, beginning from its first to fifth Congress, M. N. Roy was its principal leader who was shaping its policies in India, and on its behalf, who actively assisted communist elements in India. Even though the Indian Communist Party was founded in late 1920 or early 1921 in Tashkent, it was still to be organized in India and the Indian communists were functioning through trade unions and some other political parties like the workers and Peasants Party or the Indian National Congress.

Roy was in touch with Muzafar Ahmed and Dange, his functionaries in Calcutta and Bombay respectively. Report of the Fourth Comintern Congress indicates that four prominent Indians, one of them a son of a prominent Congress leader, C.R. Das, who presided in the same month over the annual conference of the Congress at Gaya in December 1922, were invited to participate in the Congress. Windmiller and Overstreet maintain that Subhash Chandra Bose was also invited. (54) Roy was constantly writing to C.R. Das during this period. Indeed, Dange and Singaravellu Chettiar attended the Gaya Congress of 1922. (55)

During this period when the Indian Communist Party was still officially not functioning in India and no serious efforts were made to organize it, the leaders of the Communist International in charge of India, principally M.N. Roy, were supporting Indian communists by monetary help and guidance and the Indian communists were principally


(55) Ibid., p. 54.
engaged in trade union activities as well as in organizing a broad-based party like the Workers' and Peasants' Party. The strength which the Indian communists achieved during this period was evident by a Bombay textile workers' strike in late 1928 which lasted for nearly six months with 60,000 workers participating in it. The Communist International Press lent its support to the strike by harshly criticizing the British policies of suppression and by providing financial help to the striking workers through its agencies. (56)

COMMUNIST INTERNATIONAL ON INDIA AFTER THE SEVENTH CONGRESS

The Sixth Congress of the Communist International was held in Moscow from 17 July to 1 September 1928. The very length of its session indicated the depth of its involvement in various issues it debated. By this time Stalin had established his hold over the Soviet Communist Party, Trotsky having been expelled from it in October 1927. However, there is hardly anything to show that the change in the Comintern policy towards India, effected by this Congress, was due to the changes in the Soviet leadership. Indeed, the interest shown by Stalin or any other Russian leaders of the Comintern in India was so little that a change of leadership in such circumstances hardly mattered from the point of view of its Indian direction.

(56) For criticism of the British Labour Government, please see *International Press Correspondence*, Vol. 9, nos. 16, 17, 18 and 20. The League Against Imperialism issued a statement directing all trade union organizations affiliated to it "to help the cause of the Indian workers and peasants by contributing financial help for the defence of the arrested and for relief of their families." See, *International Press Correspondence*, vol. 9, pp. 448-9. Hereafter the *International Press Correspondence* will be referred to as *Inprecorr*. 
In 1927 the Comintern sent M.N. Roy on a mission to China and even though he was in Berlin when the Sixth Congress met in 1928, he pleaded illness and did not attend it. For various reasons Roy went out of favour of the Comintern leadership. Roy himself maintains that the desire of the British Communist Party to "establish its protectorate over India," coupled with the opposition of some Indian communists, contributed to his exit from the Communist International. (5)

With the expulsion of Roy the task of handling Indian affairs in the Communist International had to be performed by some one else. The Russians themselves obviously had little interest in Indian affairs and they were only too willing to pass on the responsibility to the British Communist Party, which was both well-equipped and eager to shoulder it. During the discussion of the thesis on the "Revolutionary movement in colonial and semi-colonial countries" in the Sixth Congress, an Indian delegate, Razur, pleaded that the Indian affairs be conducted by the British Communist Party. Otto Kuusinen, the Comintern chief, stated that the British communists must train and advise the Indian party. The two should not be one, he hastened to add, as this would arouse Indian mistrust. (58) Roy, in fact, was sensing British Communist Party's interest in India; on one occasion he went to the extent of protesting against it. "This," he said, "smacks imperialism." (59) When the Sixth Congress was directing a new line, the British Communist Party sent Philip Sprat and Benjamin Bradley to India to direct Indian communists.

(57) M.N. Roy, Our Differences (Saraswati Library, Calcutta, 1938) 11.
(59) Overstreet and Windmiller, n. 54, p. 75.
And thus when the British Communists were steadily bringing the Indian affairs in their grip, Roy was expelled from the Comintern in 1929.

The Sixth Comintern Congress is important not only because it changed the leadership of Indian affairs, but it drastically changed its India policy too. The thesis on "The Revolutionary movement in colonial and semi-colonial countries" directed the Indian communists to change their line of action. It asked them to concentrate most on building a strong communist party in India. As it stated:

It is absolutely essential that the Communist parties in these countries should from the very outset demarcate themselves in the most clear-cut fashion, both politically and organizationally, from all petty bourgeoisie groups and parties. In so far as the needs of the revolutionary struggle demand it, temporary co-operation is permissible, and in certain circumstances even a temporary alliance between the communist party and the national revolutionary movement, provided the latter is a genuine revolutionary movement. (60)

In India, the thesis went on, "the Communists must unmask the national reformism of the Indian National Congress, and in opposition to all the talk of the Swarajists, Gandhists, etc., about passive resistance, advance the irreconcilable slogan of armed struggle for the emancipation of the country and the expulsion of the imperialists." (61)

The new line advocated by the Communist International was so different from what the Indian communists were doing in India that when this new policy line was communicated to them at a party Congress in Calcutta they refused to follow it. (62) But the Comintern kept

(60) J. Degras, n. 37, Vol. 11, p. 542.
(61) Ibid., p. 544.
on insisting that the "Workers and Peasants' Party cannot develop into a mass national revolutionary struggle" and the Indian Communists must substitute it by the Communist Party of India, "the organization of which is absolutely necessary." (63) It is interesting to note that the position taken by the British Communists did not entirely agree with the official line on this issue at the Congress and they advocated that the Workers' and Peasants' Party must be allowed to function in India legally and the Communist Party of India should be organized underground. (64)

Having seen the Indian situation in those days one wonders whether the new line introduced at the Sixth Congress was based on a correct understanding of the Indian situation. With its boycott of Simon Commission, the Indian National Congress was not only not proving counter-revolutionary or making a deal with imperialists but was emerging as a fighting mass party against the British. Roy himself was to criticize this Comintern policy at a later date. (65) What was more important than the doubtful wisdom of the policy was its probable Russian origin. Even though an Indian delegation was present at the Congress the very fact that all of them were new there and the Indian communists had refused to follow the new line, directed by the Comintern at this Congress, indicated the non-Indian origin of the policy. Roy being out of favour, there was no question of his participating in its framing. The opposition of the British delegates to the line that the Workers' and Peasants' Party in India

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(63) Ibid., p. 110.
(64) Ibid., pp. 119-21.
be disbanded also suggests non-British hand in shaping the new line. In all probability, therefore, this new line was laid down by the Russians in the Comintern. Because it had a Russian origin, the unwise element in the policy was indicative of Russians' lack of knowledge of the Indian scene. The strangeness of the policy can also be seen by the fact that in January of that year Roy welcomed the resolution of the Indian National Congress on "Purna Swaraj" (complete independence) (66) and in the following month an Indian communist welcomed the Congress boycott of the Simon Commission. (67) The policy line laid down by the Sixth Comintern Congress, however, was promptly implemented by the Indian communists who organised a big strike of Bombay textile workers which lasted for more than six months. The Inprecorr was now incessantly attacking the British Labour Government for suppressing the Bombay strike and for pursuing a repressive policy in India. As a result of the strike, prominent communist leaders in India were arrested and put on trial in what is popularly known as the "Meerut Conspiracy Case", which lasted for four years (1929-33) and proved a great hindrance to the growth of communist party organization in India. Due to the pursuit of the new policy and the eventual situation in India the Inprecorr's coverage of the latter was extensive. In 1929 alone it published thirty articles on India, a number unknown previously, most of which were severely critical of British Labour Government's handling of the Bombay strike and the Meerut case. The Communist International raised funds

(66) See Roy's article in the Inprecorr, vol. 8, no. 1.
both for the striking workers (68) and for the Meerut prisoners; the British Communist Party announced at one stage that it had already dispatched £ 100 to India for Meerut prisoners. (69)

Since the policy laid down by the Sixth Congress enjoined upon the Indian communists the dual task of fighting simultaneously both the British government and the Congress leadership in India, the Indian communists continued their fight against both. Writing in early 1930, Kuusiiin ridiculed Gandhi's salt satyagraha and maintained that, at bottom, it was a boycott of the Indian revolution. (70) When the First Round Table Conference was held in London it was described as the "Indian circus in London" with some "65 of the best trained Indian animals of various species" participating in it. (71) From 1931 onwards more and more British communists started writing on India in the Comintern journal. Since the Sixth Congress, Comintern's focus on India became so important that its journal opened a separate section on India. In late 1932, the British Communist Party issued a "Manifesto on India" criticising the proposed constitution for India which was to result out of the Round Table Conference. (72) In May 1932 the Communist Parties of China, Great Britain and Germany addressed an "Open Letter" to Indian communists asking them to devote completely to the task of organizing the communist party in India. A few months later the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China again sent an

(68) Inprecorr, Vol. 9, No. 22.
(69) Inprecorr, Vol. 9, No. 47, p. 997.
(72) Inprecorr, Vol. 12, No. 31.
open letter which advised the Indian communists to work in non-communist organizations too with a view to capturing them. (73) The Indian communists were also asked to abide by the decisions of the Sixth Congress of the Communist International. (74) In the middle of 1934 the *Inprecorr* carried the "Abridged Draft of Political Thesis of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of India." The draft stated the leftist programme of the Communist Party of India; it criticized Gandhism as "an anti-revolutionary ideology of the nationalist bourgeoisie." As for the Congress left, it said that by allowing the leftists like Jawaharlal Nehru to function in the Congress the rightists were retaining its mass following. (75) Even though the editorial note said that the draft was sent to the journal by the Provisional Central Committee of the Communist Party of India there is nothing else to show where this first important document of the Communist Party of India originated.

**Communist International after the Seventh Congress**

This line which had placed the Indian communists in an embattled position against the British government and the Indian National Congress continued till the end of 1935 when the Seventh Congress of the Communist International reviewed the situation afresh. The situation in India had changed radically from the one visualized at the last Congress eight years back. Since then the Indian

(74) Ibid., p. 1158.
communists had not only not increased their strength but had been rounded up and placed in prisons. Soon after when they were released in 1933 the government came down with a heavy hand on them by banning the communist party itself in July 1934. Under such circumstances the Seventh Congress radically changed its policies towards India. Roy says that the Comintern based its new policy on a report received from a British communist who had spent some years in Indian jails. (76)

The Comintern now advised the Indian communists to have a common front with the Indian National Congress, which, according to it, had ceased to be an organization of the big bourgeoisie and was now proving to be a mass party having a progressive character. The new policy was outlined by two British communist leaders, R.P. Dutt and Ben Bradley, in an Inprecorr issue under the title: "The Anti-Imperialist Peoples' Front." "The Indian National Congress," they affirmed, "has undoubtedly achieved a gigantic task in uniting wide forces of the Indian people for the national struggle, and remains to-day the principal existing mass organization of many diverse elements seeking national liberation. Nothing should be allowed to weaken the degree of unity that has been achieved through the National Congress." "The criticism levelled in the past against the Congress," the article went on to add, "was against some of its policies and some of its leaders only, and the mass character of the Congress, therefore, must be strengthened." (77) Once the new policy was formulated, it was vigorously pursued. (78) In 1936, the Inprecorr carried sixteen articles on India, as compared to only three

(77) Inprecorr, Vol. 16, No. 11, p.298.
(78) Inprecorr, Vol. 16, No. 12.
in the earlier year when the new policy was under shape. Almost all
the articles were written by the British communists, and invariably
all of them advocated that communists must work in non-communist
political and trade union organizations, and far from opposing the
Indian National Congress, they must strengthen it by lending their
support to it. It is important to note that the Indian communists did
make some gains by this new policy. Soon most of them joined the
Congress Socialist Party and remained there till the latter decided to
expel them, when they came out taking with them the Congress Socialist
Party's most of the South Indian provincial branches. (79)

This policy of supporting the Congress against the British
government continued so long as the European situation remained fluid
and uncertain. Russia was apprehending danger from Germany in the late
thirties and even though she had entered into a non-aggression pact
with Germany in August 1939, the swift diplomatic moves made by her
from 1939 to 1941 showed her anxiety about the whole uncertain
situation. When in September 1938 the Munich Pact was concluded, the
Commissariat of Foreign Affairs denied almost immediately that Russia
had any hand in it. On 10 March 1939 Stalin accused foreign
politicians and pressmen of inciting Germany to attack Russia. On
17 April the Soviet Union proposed the Anglo-Soviet-French alliance.
And thus even when in August 1939 Russia entered into a non-aggression
pact with Germany, the entire course of preceding and following events
showed uncertainty of the situation. Under such circumstances the
Comintern's policy of supporting the Congress against the British
government continued till the date of the German attack on Russia.

(79) Overstreet and Windmiller, n. 54, pp.179-82.
With this new phenomenal development its policy, of course, changed.

Writing soon after the German attack on Russia, R.P. Dutt pleaded for "British-Soviet unity", (80) but suggestion of a change in Comintern's policy towards India came three weeks after the Nazi attack on the Soviet Union. The article was allegedly written by "an Indian resident in London" and the editor hoped that it would provide a basis for discussion. The article, which was entitled as "A Policy for the Indian People," said:

The entry of the Soviet Union into the war, and the building up of the new alliance of the peoples on the basis of four pillars of the British, American, Soviet and Chinese peoples, has radically transformed the character of the war, and of the peace that will follow the war.

All these considerations make it imperative that the Indian people should not conceal from themselves the hard realities of the present world situation; that their hope of freedom, their very life is bound up with an anti-fascist victory; that they have everything to gain by helping to strengthen the Peoples' Front; and equally, that they stand to lose everything if they neglect to render that front impregnable. (81)

The British Communist Party also passed a resolution on "India's role in the war" in which it asked the Indian people to help war preparations or else to face a "worse slavery" than "anything that they have ever known before". (82) Not only were the Indians asked to participate in the war on the allied side, but the British government too was continuously asked to release Indian prisoners and thus help to change the mood in India. (83) V.K.Krishna Menon, then resident in London, was pleading that the defence responsibilities

(80) World News and Views, Vol. 21, No. 27. World News and Views was successor to Inprecorr.
should be passed over to Indians during the war period (84) and the British communists lent their support to that proposal. (85) The Conference of the British Communist Party passed a resolution towards the end of May 1942 asking the British Government to open talks with the nationalist leaders and to allow the formation of a responsible representative government in India. (86) The ban on the Communist Party of India was lifted in July 1942, as the party had adopted the Comintern directive of helping war preparations. Welcoming this action Ben Bradley laid down a policy for the Indian communists saying that they should move a resolution in the forthcoming conference of the AICC to the effect that the Congress should unconditionally support war efforts. (87) Accordingly, the communist members of the AICC moved a resolution, which was defeated. (88) Following Indian communists' opposition to the "Quit India" resolution of the AICC, they became suspect in the eyes of leading Congressmen. Soon afterwards Gandhiji made some correspondence with P.C. Joshi, the General Secretary of the Indian Communist Party. The Congress Working Committee then appointed a committee composed of Jawajarlal Nehru, Vallabhai Patel and G.B. Pant to study the truth in anti-national charges against the communists. The committee confirmed the charges against them, and as a result, the communist members of the AICC and other important Congress bodies were expelled from the Congress organization in late

(88) Overstreet and Windmiller, n. 54, p. 213.
1945, in which they had worked from 1936. (89) When the war was
still on, the Communist International itself was disbanded by Stalin
in 1943, and thus an end was brought to the career of an organization
which was established for the spread of communism in other countries.

During the entire war period India never figured in the Soviet
government's official policies. Documents published as "Soviet
Foreign Policy during the Patriotic War" in two volumes, as well as
the Soviet Government's official publication of the correspondence
of Stalin with Churchill and Roosevelt do not show any reference to
India. (90) When the war ended there was no Communist International
to look after the colonial questions. During the post-war period when
significant developments were taking place with respect to transfer
of power in India, Russian writings on Indian scene were neither
extensive nor were of a type which could provide guidelines for policy
makers. A. Dyakov and E. Zukov were emerging as Indologists, but
what they wrote during this period was merely of a descriptive kind.
In a lengthy article Dyakov surveyed the developments in India and
observed that as a result of growing freedom movement in India and
South East Asia British imperialism was counting its last days.
"Progressive people of the whole world are observing this with keen
attention. As Com. Molotov stated in Paris conference: soon better

(89) David N. Druhe, Soviet Russia and Indian Communism

(90) Publications mentioned are: Soviet Foreign Policy During the
Patriotic War, Vol. I and II (Hutchinson & Co.); "Correspondence
between the Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the USSR
and the President of the U.S.A. and the Prime Minister of
Great Britain during the Great Patriotic War of 1941-1945,"
Vol. I (Foreign Languages Publishing House, Moscow, 1957);
also see "Documents and Materials relating to the eve of the
Second World War," Vol. 1. (Foreign Languages Publishing House,
Moscow, 1948).
days will come for India. (91) He again wrote on "The English plan for partition of India" in Izvestia, describing the territories which were being assigned to India and Pakistan and stated that the plan was not whole heartedly accepted in India. (92) At the suggestion of Jawaharlal Nehru the Indian Science Congress had invited the Soviet scientists to attend its annual conference, held in December 1946, and the USSR Academy of Science had sent a full delegation. On return Academician V. Volgin wrote an account of India which was replete with sympathetic and appreciative observations. (93)

In the period immediately following the war, the Soviet government was too much preoccupied with the post-war European problems. Under such circumstances, even on occasions when the Soviet leaders referred to India in some connection their references were either casual or indicative of their overall policy towards the West. One such instance was Molotov's reference to India at the San Francisco conference, held in April 1945 to establish the United Nations Organization. Molotov did not refer to India in his delegation's main speech at the conference. (94) However, at a subsequent meeting, when the question of including Argentina in the proposed UN Organization came up, he made some comments on India. By this time the Soviet government was pressing for the recognition of the pro-communist provisional government in Poland by the British

(91) Pravda, 21 October 1946, 4.
(92) Izvestia, 5 July 1947.
and the US governments. In this context Molotov argued that it would be unjust to include Argentina, which helped Fascist Germany in the war, in the proposed UN Organization and exclude Poland, which suffered heavily at the hands of fascist aggressors. Pressing his point further, he said that even India and Philippines, who had not reached the status of independent nationhood till then, had joined the proposed organization and the Soviet government had agreed to such a proposal made by the British and the US governments, respectively. Coming to India, he observed:

> We have at this conference an Indian delegation. But India is not an independent state. We all know that the time will come when the voice of an independent India will be heard, too. Nevertheless, we share the view held by the British Government which suggested that representatives of India should be granted a seat at this conference, imperfect though her status is. (95)

Thus, in conclusion it can be stated that while some Russian travellers, Indologists and rulers showed some interest in India during the Tsarist period, this interest became more meaningful only after the establishment of the communist regime in the Soviet Union. Although Lenin and Stalin did not concern themselves much with the Indian question, the Communist International developed a profound interest in Indian affairs. The policies and tactics of the Comintern towards the Indian National Congress and the British Government changed often; but the interest shown by the Communist International continued on the whole to remain considerable. The direction of India policy of the Comintern was first in the hands of M.N. Roy, but after his exit from it in 1928, it passed on to the British Communist Party. However, it is to be noted that even though the Comintern

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(95) Ibid., p.347.
took a great interest in Indian affairs, the absence of Russian participation in shaping its India policies, as we shall see in the following chapter, contributed to some extent to the lack of Russian interest in India when it became independent.