



Name: Dr. Panchali Majumdar

Qualification: MA (Jadavpur University, 1993); M. Phil (Jadavpur University, 1997); Ph D (Jadavpur University, 2007)

Designation: Associate Professor, History.

Date of joining: 02.05.1997

Courses Taught:

Honours:

Selected portions of History of India from Earliest Times to c.650 A.D, selected portions of Transformation of Europe from 15th to 17th Centuries, World since 1919

General:

Selected portions of Ancient India, selected portions of Mughal Period and Early Modern India, selected portions of Aspects of Modern India and the World

Specialization:

Modern Russian History, Origins of the Comintern, Influence of the Comintern on Early Chinese and Early Indian Communism, Chinese Communist Movement of the 1920s, Early Indian Communist Movement, Communism, Nationalism and the Progressive Movement in Hindi Literature

Research:

Title of PhD Thesis: *Comintern and Early Indian Communism: 1921-1928* (Jadavpur University, 2007). (Abstract below)

UGC Sponsored Minor Research Project:

1. “*The Communist International and Early Indian Communism: 1921-1928*”, 2001-2003.
2. “*The Indian Communist Movement and the Meerut Conspiracy Case*”, 2008-2010
(Abstracts below)

ICHR Sponsored Research Project

1. “*Nationalism, Communism and the Emergence of Progressive Trends in Hindi Literature*”, Ongoing since 2014

Current Research:

Progressive Literary Movement in Hindi Literature

Papers presented:

1. *Comintern and Early Chinese Communism*, 61st Session of the Indian History Congress, Kolkata, 2001
2. *The Communism of S.A.Dange: the Early Years*, 65th Session of the Indian History Congress, Bareilly, 2004.
3. *A Letter from Lenin to Bhupendranath Datta: Contextualising the Theses on the Colonial Question*, 66th the Indian History Congress, Santiniketan, 2005-2006.
4. *Roots of Progressivism: a comparative study of Premchand's short stories and Angare*, Paper presented at the XII Biennial International Conference of Comparative Literature, Jaipur, March 1st -4th, 2015.

Publications:**Book Published:**

1. *Comintern and Early Indian Communism: 1921-1928, Towards Freedom*, Kolkata, 2012, ISBN Number: 81-8206-029-X.

Papers Published:

1. *The Communist International and the Colonial Revolutions: Bourgeois Democracy and Socialism*, Jadavpur University Journal of History, Volume XVI: 1997-1998
2. *The Communist International, M.N.Roy and the Afghan Plot*, Proceedings of the Second Biennial Conference of the Indian Association of Asian and Pacific Studies, Sambalpur, 2004
3. *Organising Asian Communism: The Role of the Baku Congress of the Toilers of the East*, Jadavpur University Journal of History, Volumes 22 and 23, 2004-05/2005-06.
4. *Abani Mukherjee: the Ignored Revolutionary*, Proceedings of the Second Biennial Conference of the Indian Association of Asian and Pacific Studies, Kolkata, 2012.

College posts:

Head of the Department: 2013-2014

College committees/sub-committees (last three years):

- 2015: Member- Sports Sub-committee, Infrastructure Sub-committee
2014: Member- Sports Sub-committee, Infrastructure Sub-committee
2013: Member-Examination Sub-committee, Leave Sub-committee

Other engagements:

PG Teaching

Guest Lecturer, 20th Century World, Globalisation and its Manifestations, PG , History, Jadavpur University (2009-2011).

Awards/Fellowships/Grants:

Minor Research Project from U.G.C (2001 and 2008).

ICHR (Publication Grant) for publication of Ph.D (2010)

Teachers' Fellowship for pursuing doctoral research under UGC's Faculty Improvement Programme (2005-2007).

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PhD Abstract:

SYNOPSIS FOR Ph.D THESIS, “*The Comintern and Early Indian Communism:1921-1928*”

When communism first started making inroads into India, it had been a purely European phenomenon, catering to the industrialised societies of Europe. Unlike India, these were societies where capitalism had matured and the working class had already become politicised. Socialist doctrines too had consequently surfaced, hence providing the much needed ideological basis for the rising working class movement. India was then merely a British colony, a consequence of its exploitation, its society and economy periled under severe British domination. Freedom fighters had emerged, making tremendous efforts to achieve freedom from foreign rule, and the nationalist movement was in its full swing. Nationalist thoughts provided the justification for the freedom movement and socialist thoughts were still a far cry.

The Russian revolution had occurred in Europe in 1917, a fact that bore tremendous significance. It was the first success of communism, and a nation had, for the first time, been established on communist lines. Within a couple of years the Comintern or the Communist International had been established, avowed to foster the communist cause in the world. Soviet Russia, being the only example of communist success, gave it leadership, and the Comintern became very active in pursuing its cause.

Gradually ideas of communism began to infiltrate into the colonies of the east, bringing with them images of freedom, images that had never been sought for before. Radical Indian nationalists, dissatisfied with the strategies their leaders proposed, were groping for answers to the existing situation. Soviet Russia, as an ideal to be cherished, loomed large before them as communist ideas slowly began to superimpose upon their nationalist visions and goals. This image of freedom that Soviet Russia presented to the world was

very new to the Indians who had for the first time been influenced by socialist doctrines. This freedom was not confined merely to freedom from foreign domination as the nationalist were aiming at. It sanctioned much more. Communism came with incredible hopes about a life free from the abuse of exploitation of all kinds, a life of dignity and freedom, one where the toilers would rule, where the masses would be the leaders, and above all, a life that had never been dreamt of before. They realised, despite their conventional nationalist backgrounds and their limited knowledge of communist principles, that the attainment of socialism was the alternative that they were searching for.

India, unlike Europe, was not just a tool of capitalist exploitation. It was steeped in several layers of exploitation that were both native and foreign. The early communists dreamt of ushering communism into India. Influenced deeply by whatever little communist literature they could procure from Europe, and whatever little help they could obtain from the Comintern, they had sought for an alternative to the nationalist movement, their goals overstepping the visions that the nationalists were seeking. The image of Soviet Russia lurked in their minds as they began their crusade for the emancipation of the toiling masses. At the same time, their non-communist and more often than not, their nationalist backgrounds kept surfacing time and again in their thoughts and ideas. It was in this background that communism established itself in India, and even after the fall of the greatest communist state, that of the Soviet Union in 1991, and consequently, the end of the cold war, communism has existed in India, unhampered and undeterred. Its nature has undergone a metamorphosis over the years, but its existence still remains unchallenged.

This thesis is about how communism emerged in India. It has explored the ways in which communism originally defined the national and colonial questions. After detailing the evolution of communist theories regarding the national and colonial questions till the end of the second decade of the twentieth century, the thesis has analysed the background that led to the emergence of communism in India. Lastly the thesis has examined the relationship between the Communist International its theories on the one hand, and the early Indian communists, their ideas and the development of Indian communism on the other. And after juxtaposing one alongside the other, the thesis has shown that early Indian communism was not merely an appendage of the Comintern, but that it had an autonomy—an independent ideological basis that guided its advance. Help and support undoubtedly came from the Comintern, but that was not all where its progress was concerned. The Indian communists actively and independently did much more. It was never totally dependent upon the Comintern and its guidelines, its concepts and strategies being uniquely Indian despite all external influences. This idea about the autonomous nature of Indian communism is not quite what earlier historiographyⁱ would have us believe. It emphasises the fact that early Indian communism was totally the creation of Moscow or rather the Moscow led Comintern. A re-evaluation of earlier historiography has been done in the thesis in the light of several new documents that are now available today after the fall of the Soviet Union and the opening up of its archivesⁱⁱ.

ⁱ David. N.Druhe, *Soviet Russia and Indian Communism, 1917-1947*, Bookman Associates, New York, 1959, John Patrick Haithcox, *Communism and Nationalism in India*, Cecil Kaye, *Communism in India*, Calcutta, 1971, David Petrie, *Communism in India*, Editions Indian, Calcutta, 1972.

ⁱⁱ John Riddell ed. *Lenin's Struggle for a Revolutionary International, Documents: 1907- 1916, The Preparatory Years*, New York, London, Sydney, 1986, *Lenin's Struggle for a Revolutionary International, The Communist International in Lenin's Time*, New York, 1986, *The Workers of the World and Oppressed Peoples Unite! The Communist International in Lenin's Time: proceedings and documents of the Second Congress, 1920, Vol. I*, New York, 1991, *German Revolution and the Debate on Soviet Power, The Communist International in Lenin's Time*, New York, 1986, *To See the Dawn, Baku 1920, First Congress of the Peoples of the East*, New York, 1998. Also see Purabi Roy, Sobhanlal Dattagupta and Hari Vasudevan ed. *Indo-Russian Relations 1917-1947, Select Documents from the Archives of the Russian Federation, Part1 and 2*, The Asiatic Society, Calcutta Kolkata, 1999.

MRP 1

Abstract:

Abstract for “The Communist International and Early Indian Communism: 1921-1928” Minor Research Project (2001-2003)

The impact of the Russian Revolution was felt worldwide and the colonies of Asia and Africa were no exception. These colonies, where modern thoughts and ideas had already begun to infiltrate from the West, now came into contact with another new idea—that of Communism. As a consequence, radical nationalism had to succumb to a new influence, one that was laden with new ideas of liberty and emancipation. Freedom from foreign rule no longer remained the ultimate goal, for the concept of freedom now stretched to the emancipation of the poor masses of workers and peasants to a level, where they would gain control over the socio-political and economic realms as representatives of the masses of producers.

Meanwhile, the Communist International or the Comintern was set up, and Lenin started to become all the more conscious of the revolutionary potential of the colonies and semi-colonies, an idea that was first brought under discussion in the Second Congress of the Comintern (July—August, 1920). Several Indians attended the Congress. M.N.Roy, an Indian revolutionary turned communist too attended the Congress, although as a Mexican delegate. He had a lengthy debate with Lenin regarding the future strategies of the Comintern in the East. The Eastern Question thus assumed much significance, and was hence probed and discussed in almost all the future Comintern Congresses especially in those of the Fourth, Fifth and Sixth. The Sixth Congress however, marked a sharp change in earlier theories and had a deep impact on the Communist movements in the colonies of the East.

The Indian nationalist movement was in full swing during this time. But disaffection with Gandhian nationalism led several nationalists to seek out an alternative. It was here that communism made its inroads into Indian circles. Rivalries among these new communists were rampant as they were searching for answers to the problems that they faced. Besides, British domination, their suppression tactics and resistance from moderate nationalists made their task to consolidate, a very difficult process. All the same, a communist movement in India was born—one that posed a serious challenge to the imperialist masters of India.

MRP 2

Abstract:

Abstract for Minor Research Project, “The Indian Communist Movement and the Meerut Conspiracy Case”

When ideas of communism began to infiltrate into the colonies of the east, they brought with them images of freedom, images that had never been sought for before. Radical Indian nationalists, dissatisfied with the strategies their leaders proposed, were groping for answers to the existing situation. Soviet Russia, as an

ideal to be cherished, loomed large before them as communist ideas slowly began to superimpose upon their nationalist visions and goals. This image of freedom that Soviet Russia presented to the world was very new to the Indians who had for the first time been influenced by socialist doctrines. This freedom was not confined merely to freedom from foreign domination as the nationalists were aiming at. It sanctioned much more. Communism came with incredible hopes about a life free from the abuse of exploitation of all kinds, a life of dignity and freedom, one where the toilers would rule, where the masses would be the leaders, and above all, a life that had never been dreamt of before. They realised, despite their conventional nationalist backgrounds and their limited knowledge of communist principles, that the attainment of socialism was the alternative that they were searching for.

The Russian revolution had occurred in Europe in 1917, a fact that bore tremendous significance. It was the first success of communism, and a nation had, for the first time, been established on communist lines. Within a couple of years the Comintern or the Communist International had been established, avowed to foster the communist cause in the world. Soviet Russia, being the only example of communist success, gave it leadership, and the Comintern became very active in pursuing its cause.

There were several stages in the development of communism in India. The Comintern had been helping the nascent communist movement in many ways ever since the Communist Party of India was set up. But slowly the attitude of the Comintern towards the Indian Communist Party changed. This was not an isolated phenomenon. After the death of Lenin and the rise of Stalin, the Soviet led Comintern had begun to dictate its members. Dissenting voices were being suffocated as well, and the theory of developing communism in a single country proliferated in the place of internationalism, that was Marx and Lenin's main contention.

Despite all these problems, Indian communism was slowly gaining grounds. The Comintern, it can be noted, was still following the policy of bringing the Indian communist movement increasingly under the control of the CPGB. The Indian communists, however, often expressed their disregard for it. But that was not enough to deter the Comintern from future formulations on the same line. In its Resolution on Organisational Work in regard to India, it said clearly, "The Communist Party of Great Britain must support the revolutionary movement in India and particularly the organisation of the Communist Party in every possible way." This was perhaps because the Stalinist led Comintern, through the Communist Party of Great Britain, wanted to bring the Indian communist movement under its absolute control, one that was not possible if the movement developed and gained grounds without the interference of the Comintern. It would also not be possible if the communists like Roy kept on opposing the strategies of the Comintern in India, a

reason that can be clearly attributed to his expulsion from its folds. This attitude of the Comintern however, alarmed the British. The events of 1928 clearly showed them that the communist movement had gained a momentum that needed to be curbed immediately or it would prove to be very fatal to their interests as the colonial masters of India. They therefore set out to destroy Indian communism once and for all. The Meerut arrests began in 1928 and the Meerut Conspiracy Case began in 1931. If the Meerut records are studied, it will be seen that the British were fully abreast of the communist activities in India and abroad. Most of the letters were intercepted by them before their delivery, and they were serious topics of discussion in bureaucratic correspondence. Even the speeches of the communists and the trade unionists were kept as records by the British during the trial of the communists in the Meerut Conspiracy Case.

Another point that needs to be highlighted is that even after the communists were arrested, they continued to be a source of continuous concern for the British. They severely criticised British behaviour in jail often expressing their antagonism through hunger strikes and other measures. The British jail authorities did resort to certain rough measures to contain their spirit to revolt, but they were held back when the government interfered. The government feared that if a communist prisoner died in jail, he would transcend to the ranks of a martyr—a fact, that might trigger popular resentment.

The Meerut Conspiracy Case dragged on for a long time. But ultimately many of the communists had to be freed mostly on grounds of health. However, the Meerut Case nearly wiped out the communist movement in India. And when the movement reared its head again, a new dimension was added to it. The idea of an independent Indian communist party began to lose ground. And there emerged another variant of the earlier communism, one that did not develop any more on indigenous lines. It was controlled from the top by the Communist Party of Great Britain. New leaders emerged and new theories unfolded as Indian communism began trotting further once again.