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# Political Contribution and Ideology of Acharya Naredra Deva

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## **Abstract**

*The Congress Socialist Party in early 1930s played a significant role in Indian nation political movement. It contributed to the socio- economic radicalism and political militancy and succeeded in making socialism as political agenda of development and struggle for the Independence . The Indian Social Movement was led mainly by Acharya Naredra Deva, Ram Monohar Lohia and Jayaprakash Narayan , Acharya Naredra Deva was strong believer that the political leadership must give the “Congress and the national movement a socialist direction and in order to achieve the objective they must organise the workers and peasants in their class organisations and make them the social base of the anti imperialist struggle.” The contribution of Acharya Naredra Deva in Indian Socialism and shaping the political movement during 1930s and 1940s has been quite significant while his role as Educationalist in early 1950s paved the Gandhian path of development of higher education and social development. Archarya Naredra Deva is also known as Socialist Political Thinker and his ideas are still relevant . Against this backdrop, present paper highlights the role and contribution of Acharya Naredra Deva in contemporary Indian political movement and highlighting his socio- political ideas.*

## **1. INTRODUCTION:**

Acharya Naredra Deva (1889-1956) is known as father of Indian socialist movement . He was learned scholar of Buddhist philosophy and an educationist. He was born in 1889 at Sitapur in Uttar Pradesh . He did M. A. and LLB from Allahabad in 1915. He was one of the leading theorists of Congress Socialist Party in India . His democratic socialism with embraced principle was Satyagrah and revolutionary tactic. He was influenced by B G Tilak and Aurbindo Ghosh . He joined Non cooperation movement during 1920-21 by quitting from law practice. He joined Kashi Vidya Peeth , Varanasi as a teacher and latter he become Principal during 1926-36. He was founder of Congress Socialist Party and presided over Congress Socialist Conference at Patna in 1934. In 1936, he became Member of the Congress Working Committee and was elected for United Provincial Legislative Assembly for 1937-46 .He was Member of Uttar Pradesh Legislative Assembly in 1948 , however, he resigned from the membership after leaving Congress. After Independence, he served as Vice Chancellor of University of Lucknow, Lucknow (1947-51) and Banaras Hindu

University, Varanasi (1951-54) . He was Chairman of Socialist Party (1950-52), Praja Socialist Party (1954-56) , President Kisan Sabha ( 1952) and Member of Rajya Sabha (1952-1954 and 1954-1956). Acharya Narendra Deva advocated the abolition of poverty and exploitation of weaker sections. He always served for the interest of peasants and advocated the concept of social democracy. He died in 1956. His socio-political ideas may broadly be divided into two phases. In the first phase, he was an admirer of the then Soviet system and in the second phase , he developed many ideas extremely critical of the so-called Soviet Communism. The Second World War may be regarded as the dividing line between these two phases. The experience of the Second World War led M.N.Roy and Jayaprakash Narayan to change their ideological views completely regarding the Soviet system. Acharya Narendra Deva was a politician and political philosopher with his own political thinking. He recommended a number of schemes for the economic development and also strived to end the racial discrimination and the improving economic condition of the women and backward classes.

## **2. POLITICAL CONTRIBUTION:**

As a spectator, Narendra Deva attended the Lucknow Session of the Congress in 1916 with his father; He came in contact with the leading personalities like M. G. Ranade, B. G. Tilak and Ramesh Dutt through his father (Chandra, 1954:72). Narendra Deva's association with radical wings continued even after he left college and he actively involved in different political activities. In 1907, Narendra Deva attended the Calcutta Session of the Congress. With the influence of Gandhi Ji , the Congress leaders had already made a declaration about the use of indigenous products, and boycott of foreign goods, a programme of awakening public consciousness, strengthening public institutions and complete autonomy as the ultimate goal. Narendra Deva took an oath to always use Swadeshi (Jayaprakash, 1951:12) and he adhered to it throughout the rest of his life. Besides Tilak , he was also influenced by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's novels in Bengali (Dandvate, 1964:27) and with Marxism and the Russian revolution. Narendra Deva's public life formally began, when he got elected to the Faizabad Municipal Corporation. However, his political career took off only when he opened a branch of Annie Besant's Home Rule League at Faizabad. During that time, he came in contact with Jawaharlal Nehru (Dalal, 1971: 29) who was also the provincial Secretary of the Home Rule League. Nehru was the main mentor for Narendra Deva's joining the Kashi Vidyapeeth as his political work-field. Narendra Deva met Gandhi in Benaras at Convocation of the Kashi Vidyapeeth, Narendra Deva became a great favourite of Gandhi, and latter he considered Narendra Deva best suited for the Congress and the nation. He was proposed for Congress President .However, it could not happen as there were other powerful persons who did not like Narendra Deva (Jayaprakash, 1951: 123-124). Narendra Deva maintained a low profile while participating in the Congress sessions. However, he began to raise their voice while working as a member of the Provincial Congress Committee, at the Kashi Vidyapeeth. As a member of the Congress, Narendra Deva always advocated a broadening of its social base by enlisting the support of the small peasants, the working class, small artisans in the village, and going for land reforms, labour welfare, and abolition of casteism and

communalism, civil liberties, basic education etc. Simultaneously, he maintained his belief in the Marxian theory of class struggle.

The Congress Socialist Party was a left-wing group within the Congress. It was formed with Acharya Narendra Deva as President and Jayaprakash Narayan as General Secretary in 1934. The rise of the Party was due to the increased left influence in the Indian National Congress. In fact, the birth of the Socialist movement made Narendra Deva quite unpopular among various Congress followers. Meanwhile, in April, 1934, at Banaras, Sampurnananda published a pamphlet entitled „*The Outline of Socialism*’ in which he stressed the need for the formation of an All India Socialist Party as a wing of the Congress. The Congress Socialists belonged to the westernized middle class and they were influenced by the ideas of Marx, Gandhi and the Social Democracy of the West. In May 1934, the All-India Congress Committee met at Patna to review the situation arising out of the withdrawal of civil disobedience and they turned towards a parliamentary programme. Jayaprakash Narayan and Acharya Narendra Deva presided over the meeting. While speaking at the conference, Deva said, that, “the masses were the class of the future. The socialists had an important role to play in widening the social base of our national movement and such a widening of the social bases, could be achieved only by formulating economic policies for the welfare of the masses” ( Bhasin,1975: 157). He pleaded for a widening of the social base of the freedom movement. No constitution could by itself provide a sound foundation for democracy. Democracy would not take root unless the social base was broadened and unless there was “economic emancipation of the masses” (Bhasin, 1975: 161). On October 22-23, 1934, another conference was held in Bombay, where „Congress Socialist Party” was formed with Jayaprakash as General Secretary, Minoo Masani as Joint Secretary and Narendra Deva as President. Gandhi was totally against the Congress Socialist Party and he made it clear that if the Congress Socialist Party gained dominance in the Congress, he would not remain in the Congress. When the Congress decided to form Provincial governments after the general election in 1937, the socialists had refused to join with the electoral process. In spite of these views of Jayaprakash , Narendra Deva had been elected as the leader of the Congress Legislature Party on behalf of the Congress Socialist Party. The main function of the Congress Socialist Party during that time was to observe the political line of the Congress.

The Indian peasantry had been growing under the prolonged dominance and exploitation of the British Rule and the feudal system. The world war and the subsequent depression worsened the conditions of the peasantry (Shankar, 1987: 14) . Owing to the growing political consciousness and fervour created by the nationalist movement “the traditional outlook of the peasantry began to change and instead of looking to the landed aristocracy as their natural leaders , they slowly began to look into the leadership of the middle class as represented by the Congress , for relief and support “ ( Narendra Deva, 1946: 35) . The first All India Socialist Conference under the leadership of Acharya Narendra Deva, in May 1934 at Patna . Narendra Deva in his presidential address , spoke of the need for “endeavours to influence the nationalist movement in the direction of socialism “ ( Narendra Deva,1946: 4) . He further said that “ we should not forget that the present state of the Indian struggle is that of the bourgeois democratic revolution and, therefore, it would be a suicidal policy for us to

cut ourselves off from the national movement that the Congress undoubtedly represents ” ( Narendra Deva, 1946:4).

After independence, the Congress Socialist Party broke away from the Congress, under the influence of Jayaprakash to form the Socialist Party of India where Jayaprakash and Narendra Deva made making arduous efforts for the unity of the socialist forces all over India. However, the departure of the Congress Socialist Party leaders from the Congress was also based on several other important factors. Among them Narendra Deva firmly felt that in order to gain full benefits of freedom, it must come on a revolutionary basis. For him, revolution was the kingpin of social change. “The People”, he said; “must establish their own power of resistance to replace the government if it does not carry out its own policy and programme” (Sanghaarash, 1950:50). After resigning from the Congress, Narendra Deva decided to seek re-election as a candidate of his own Socialist Party. He contested a bye – election from Faizabad, The socialists performed badly in the 1952 elections and won only a quarter of the number of seats they had hoped for and it was the Communists and their allies who emerged as second to the Congress, both in the Centre and in the State Assemblies (Dandvate, 1989: 54). From 26-30 December, 1955, the Praja Socialist Party met for the second National Conference at Gaya. Narendra Deva was supposed to have presided but he was ill. However, he prepared a 60 page draft to outline the basic ideology and programme of the Praja Socialist party. The new policy statement discussed the growth of the socialist movement in India and buttresses the need for a classless society. It also emphasized class struggle as inherent in our system of production and confirmed socialist support for the oppressed classes. After the Gaya Conference, the Praja Socialist Party began to function under Narendra Deva’s able guidance and again he was re-elected as the Chairman of the Praja Socialist Party. In spite of a very poor health, he continued to provide guidance to his old party.

The political conviction of Gandhi overwhelmed and moulded Narendra Deva to a great extent and he in his own style strove for dignity, selflessness and integrity. The practical aspect of these virtues in Narendra Deva was Gandhi’s contribution which marked the former’s life forever (Mehta, 1934: 76). When Gandhi first met Narendra Deva in 1929, he saw in him a jewel of a son of India and that impression of Gandhi in 1947, led him to consider Narendra Deva as the President of the re-organized post-independence Congress to serve the masses at the grassroots level. During his interaction with Gandhi, the latter asked Narendra Deva about his views on Truth and Non-violence and in reply Narendra Deva said: “I replied that I had been a worshipper of Truth right from the beginning but I had my doubts whether we could snatch power from the British without violence...I had no moral objection to the use of violence even for a socialist revolution in free India”( Singh, 1953:101). Even in the early fifties, he did not rule out the use of force under certain specific instances, although he had never accepted the dictum that force was the inevitable midwife of all changes. But his sensitive mind and his constant worship of Truth, did lead him, before he died, to advocate complete renunciation of force in social affairs ( Lohia, 1937: 158). In the course of his Chairman’s address at the Gaya Conference of the Praja Socialist Party towards the end of 1955, he said: “Today, we believe that in this atomic age violence has to be ruled out both in the national sphere and in the international field” (Hovde, 1978:103). Narendra Deva

never denied that he was profoundly influenced by Gandhi's political thinking and as a matter of fact, he paid the highest tribute to Gandhi in the course of his Chairman's address at the Gaya Conference of the Praja Socialist Party, where he said: "In India it was Gandhiji, who was the first to realise the importance of the masses for any national struggle. Narendra Deva had neither the radical bent of mind like Lohia nor the persuasive lucidity like Jayaprakash Narayan, but his thoughtful original writings and speeches had a sustaining quality. Other radical left wing leaders wrote exquisite patterns and sky-sweeping utopian ideas for the reconstruction of the country where as Narendra Deva put emphasis on his ideas more on building to sustain a democratic ideological base to keep the flow of democratic social order in India.

Narendra Deva represented a perfect assimilation of Indian tradition and Marxist thought and Indian cultural tradition shaped his political conviction. While referring to Marxism as a creed, he once said: "we can perform the task before us only if we try to comprehend the principles and purposes of socialism and to understand the dialectical method propounded by Marx for the correct understanding of the situation and make that understanding the basis of our true action. We must take our stand on scientific socialism and steer clear of utopian socialism" (Madhu Limaye, 1952:101). Narendra Deva's thorough studies in Marxist literature had already convinced him that the Congress would never be able to give a correct ideological direction and failed to direct the Indian national movement. Hence, he advocated the formation of the Congress Socialist Party, which could pressurise the party leadership to translate socialist ideology into random action in the soil of India. While, presiding over the first All India Conference of Congress Socialists in Patna in 1934, he had stressed that the conference was convinced to „prevent an outright drift to constitutionalism and to put more dynamic programmes before the country" ( Narendra Deva, 1948:236-237) and called the Congress path of constitutionalism and reformism as „barren" and firmly warned that these paths of the Congress could never lead the party towards an effective direction (Narendra Deva, 1949:131-132). He also pleaded that the peasantry and the working classes should form the backbone of any political movement and in this case his unequivocal faith in the Gandhian method was respected by all his Marxist colleagues. Narendra Deva believed that the socialist movement should adhere to the principles and programmes of constructive developments. According to Narendra Deva, the socialist movement has never been purely an economic movement, but also an ethical and cultural movement. He, therefore, constantly laid emphasis on the ethical and cultural values of socialism and strove for their creative realisation in the Indian society. In the post-war period, Narendra Deva laid considerable stress on democracy and democratic values and held that "the democratic sentiment is deeply rooted in human nature" (Lal, 1971: 22). About the prospect of democracy, he felt that, "it is essential for the future of democracy that economic and social inequalities should be removed. Democracy to be real must be social, must pervade all aspects of social life" ( Lal, 1971: 22) . During the later course in his eventful political career, he firmly believed that, "socialism alone is full democracy and it is a philosophy which insists on the free development of the human personality as much as on economic freedom" ( Lal, 1971: 22). Deva was also aware that progress of a nation was impossible without popular cooperation and that the power of the people should be used in the great task of national reconstruction.

Narendra Deva wanted the Socialist Party to become the centre of change and also the symbol of the people's resultant social struggles. In order to augment this, the Socialist Party should express the needs, desires and aspirations of the ranks and files. Narendra Deva's contribution to the spread of Democratic Socialist thought on India soil was further and clearly reflected when in February 1929, in a letter to Nehru, he wrote: "That no progress could be expected without a clear conception of the social and economic theories, on the basis of which the Indian society is to be remodelled under the umbrella of socialism" (Narendra Deva, 1979:92). Narendra Deva now accepted the Gandhian concept of Satyagraha as an appropriate means of the struggle for establishing socialism. Before independence, he considered Gandhi as an obstruction to the growth of socialism in India but after independence, he imbibed many Gandhian values. He accepted Gandhi's Satyagraha as a principle. During exchange of ideas on *Satyagraha* between Deva and Gandhi, the latter told Narendra Deva that, "the weapon of *Satyagraha* is to be used not only against foreign domination, but it could be legitimately used against one's own indigenous and national government if there is a clear case for its use" (Narendra Deva, 1979:99). Even though Narendra Deva stressed the necessity of parliamentary work, he gave equal importance to non-parliamentary works such as education, organization, construction and struggle. Only by educating the people in socialist theory and socialist solutions of Indian problems, the working classes would be able to distinguish the socialist society from the welfare state and thereby strive for the former even at the cost of certain immediate comforts.

### **3. SOCIO- POLITICAL IDEAS:**

After the achievement of independence, Narendra Deva became concerned with the various social and national problems of India and was deeply concerned with the problems of casteism and communalism and the problem of the minorities and also of those who were culturally, socially vis-à-vis economically backward. He was mainly worried with the problem of casteism and found that in the villages, the working class was not very much organized, they were divided amongst many parties and there remained zilch cooperation between them. To him, "the Socialist Party, being the defender of the rights of the exploited, stands the best chance of winning their confidence. They can be initiated into the principles and policies of the party and can be weaned away from casteism and sectionalism in politics. Betterment of their social and economic conditions is possible only in a socialist society which is based on equality and justice" (Narendra Deva, 1940: 226). He also held that, "we must extend our hand of cooperation to the Congress in wiping out communal hatred and passions, and thus help it to eradicate the poison of communalism" (Narendra Deva, 1940:227). Though the Acharya Narendra Deva was opposed to casteism which „militates against democracy and nationalism“, he used to respect the legitimate demands of the backward communities for equality and was convinced that while its fulfilment was necessary for national integration, it was possible only in a socialist order (Gupta, 1989:59). He regarded these „evils“ as largely socio-economic in origin and believed that it was impossible to eradicate them without reconstructing the entire social system (Gupta, 1989: 59).

Acharya Narendra Deva emphasised on the importance of masses in national movement. He said that “the masses are the class of the future. The Russian experiment is slowly though surely helping the masses to take the centre of the world stage. The needs of the Indian democratic movement also require an alliance between the lower middle class and the masses. We are being irresistibly driven to widening the social basis of our national movement by formulating economic policies for the welfare of the masses” (Narendra Deva, 1946: 7). He also highlighted the role of labour in Indian political movement. He said “the labour movement in India has out grown its purely trade union character. The working classes are slowly developing political consciousness and working class parties have already come into existence in some provinces while steps have been taken for the formation of an All India Working Class Party” (Narendra Deva, 1946:8). Acharya Narendra Deva was strong follower of Socialism. He said “if fascism is rejected, socialism alone holds the field. It is no longer a mere principle and dogma, but is being translated into action, at least in one country” (Narendra Deva, 1946:18). Narendra Deva opined that socialism has come to stay in India and it is gaining strengths. He indicated the new school of thought within the Congress as “democratic intelligentsia”

Acharya Narendra Deva’s political philosophy was a fusion of individualism, idealism and socialism and the key words of his economic and political programme were self-sufficiency, non-competition, equitable distribution and above all decentralised production exclusively relevant for the Indian scenario. His political philosophy was mainly influenced by the revolutionaries and the extremist tactics, and also with the ideals of the liberals and the moderates and was spontaneously influenced by the Hindu scriptures vis-à-vis nationalism and of course by the Gandhian idealism of national reconstruction and constructive mechanism. Narendra Deva’s loyalty to the concept of Democratic Socialism came from his firm belief in human values and humanity and, at the same time, he wanted to propagate the concept and significance of “labour value” under Marxian diction in the so-called Indian society.

Narendra Deva’s aim was to establish a society in which there was the fullest economic and political democracy. In the society of his conception the individual was to be free and the state had no right to deprive him of his rights and privileges except through due process of law. In such a society, trade unions were to be free and they had the right to strike (Gupta, 1987: 79). Narendra Deva maintained that “democratic means which include parliamentary struggle have not in any way advanced the cause of socialism and that violent means alone are effective to bring about social transformation” (Narendra Deva, 1955). Narendra Deva was fully convinced that an armed revolution was not always possible. Hence, working towards socialism, within the parliamentary framework, becomes the foremost mission. He always recommended peaceful methods for accomplishing the objective of socialist society of India. The most outstanding contribution of Acharya Narendra Deva in the field of political theory has been his efforts to synthesize Marxism and western political thought with Gandhian and the Indian traditions. He denounced Marxism as a dogma. For him, it was only a guide to action. He believed that different roads to communism were not only permissible but also inevitable in a world different parts of which were passing through different stages of development. Narendra Deva was not agreed to accept the policy

statement of Praja Socialist Party adopted at Gaya as an “an amalgam of Marxism , Gandhism and Bhoodan”. Rather, he considered it as “a consistent whole”. He claimed his theory of democratic socialism predominantly Marxist in character with certain Gandhian features rather than on amalgam of Marxism and Gandhism .

The political philosophy of Narendra Deva was not confined to democratic socialism rather it had been an ethical and cultural movement . He worked for economic and moral revolution. He was convinced that a socialist society could never be established , unless and until , the majority of its people , particularly its elite , accepted its ethical basis. Mere acceptance of the doctrine of public ownership of means of production and distribution did not guarantee the establishment of a socialist society , influenced by Marx (Gupta, 1987: 173) . Narendra Deva was no doubt, as explained by Marx’s criticism of religion . He rejected both God and religion. He believed that man made religion , and it was never the other way round. The concept of super human God was the product of man’s imagination or illusion. Therefore, , alongwith economic emancipation , Narendra Deva always emphasised on ethical , moral and cultural upsurge of man. He believed that it alone would create a climate conducive to the emergence of a socialist society. He regarded man as supreme and the central point of socialist Cultural Revolution.

Narendra Deva could not remain indifferent to the emerging pattern of India’s foreign policy more so because after the end of the Second World War; the world had become divided into two power blocs-the American and the Soviet bloc. As the then Indian state believed in the policy of neutrality, it had no desire to join any power bloc. While endorsing this policy, the Acharya Narendra Deva stated that, “India’s interest demands that it should keep out of the war and every possible effort should be made to see that peace of the world is not disturbed. It can effectively play such a role only if it does not identify itself with any of the blocs” ( Narendra Deva, 1955:2). He wanted India to evolve its own independent foreign policy as it had an important role to play in the defence of Southeast Asian countries and during that period he felt that, “it will have to work for peace not only because its traditions have been such but also because its national interest will demand the pursuit of a peaceful policy”( Narendra Deva, 1955: 3). He clearly mentioned that, “it will therefore be essential for her to live at peace not only with her neighbours but also with all the big powers. It will enter into non-aggression pacts with every country and will refuse to be involved in the wars of others” (Narendra Deva, 1955: 4).It can be said that Narendra Deva’s outlook towards India’s post independence foreign policy remained mainly confined towards the policy of neutrality and not to incline with any of the then Cold War power blocs. However, he had a soft corner towards the former Soviet Union, on account of its socialist ideological affiliation

Acharya Narendra Deva strongly believed in the Indian tradition of Vasudhev Kutumbhkam ( the whole world is my family). He held the view that a genuine , relevant and workable internationalism could co –exist along with the nation state. He attacked colonialism and racialism vigorously for their being based on exploitation. Narendra Deva was in favour of Nehru’s non alignment policy However, he was against the viewpoint of Commonwealth policy as an excessive collaboration with Great Britain or other countries of western block would have an adverse effect on India’s relations with several newly independent nations. He always insisted on India’s withdrawal from the Common wealth. He advocated world



peace as main objective of foreign policy. Hence he was in favour of Panchasheela principles based on the Sino- India agreement on Tibet signed in 1954.

#### **4. CONCLUSION:**

Acharya Narendra Deva played a critical role in political movement during 1930s and 1940s and shaped the political ideology of Congress Socialist Party and latter on Praja Socialist Party . He significantly contributed to Indian socialism and evolved the road map of democratic humanistic and ethical socialism in the context of Gandhian path of development. He was political thinker, socialist leader and educationalist. His contribution in Indian national movement for independence and shaping the future of India is massive. Narendra Deva stood for a broad political perspective and a deep favour for social justice.

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