

3. 100 Years of Communist Party of India- Polity

The Communist Party of India completed 100 years, marking a significant chapter in India's history

European Background of Communism

Emergence of the Right-Left Political Divide- The French Revolution (1789) fundamentally transformed European political thought by introducing mass politics and ideological contestation. Society became ideologically divided between

1. Right (Monarchists / Conservatives)- Supported monarchy, aristocracy, church authority, and social hierarchy.
2. Left (Republicans / Radicals)- Advocated popular sovereignty, republicanism, secularism, and equality.

This Right-Left binary, institutionalised after the French Revolution and Napoleonic Wars, became the ideological foundation for later socialist and communist movements.

Impact of Industrial Capitalism in Europe- The Industrial Revolution led to unprecedented economic growth, urbanisation, and technological advancement. However, it also produced

1. Concentration of wealth in the hands of industrial capitalists.
2. Exploitative labour conditions, long working hours, child labour, and urban poverty.
3. A sharp divide between the bourgeoisie (owners of capital) and the proletariat (industrial working class).

These contradictions created fertile ground for radical critiques of capitalism.

Karl Marx and the Foundations of Communist Ideology- Karl Marx, along with Friedrich Engels, provided the most systematic critique of capitalism. Core ideas of Marxist theory

1. Historical materialism- History progresses through class struggle.
2. Surplus value- Capitalist profit arises from exploitation of labour.
3. Alienation- Workers are alienated from the product, process, and purpose of labour.

Marx argued that capitalism contains internal contradictions that would inevitably lead to its collapse.

He predicted that

1. Socialist revolutions would first occur in advanced capitalist societies of Western Europe.
2. These societies had a large, organised proletariat capable of revolutionary action.

Russian Revolution and Its Global Impact

The Russian Revolution (1917)- Contrary to Marx's expectations, the first successful socialist revolution occurred in Russia, a largely agrarian and semi-feudal society.

The Russian Revolution

1. Overthrew the Tsarist autocracy.
2. Established the world's first socialist state under Bolshevik leadership.

The Bolsheviks opposed

1. Monarchy and feudal privileges.
2. Capitalism and private ownership of means of production.
3. Imperialism and colonial domination.

Lenin's Contribution and Global Influence- Vladimir Lenin modified Marxist theory by arguing that-

1. Revolution could succeed in a weak link of imperialism, not only in advanced capitalist societies.
2. A disciplined vanguard party could lead the masses.

The Russian Revolution inspired

1. Anti-imperialist movements across Asia, Africa, and Latin America.
2. Formation of Communist parties in colonised societies, including India.

The establishment of the Communist International (Comintern) aimed to coordinate global revolutionary movements.

Impact on the Growth of Communism in India

Ideological Influence- Indian revolutionaries and intellectuals were deeply influenced by-

1. The success of the Russian Revolution.
2. Lenin's writings on imperialism and colonialism.

Communism offered

1. A scientific critique of colonial exploitation.
2. An alternative vision of social justice, equality, and workers' power.

Three Political Strands Leading to CPI Formation

Diasporic Revolutionaries- Led by figures such as M. N. Roy. Active in United States, Mexico, Europe, Soviet Union, Kabul, and Berlin. Maintained close links with The Comintern. International socialist and communist networks. Played a key role in ideologically shaping Indian communism.

Indian Left Groups Within India- Emerged independently in cities such as Lahore, Bombay, Calcutta, and Madras. Comprised workers, intellectuals, and radical nationalists. Sought coordination and a unified national platform.

Growth of Labour Organisations- Rapid industrialisation under colonial rule expanded the working class. Formation of the All-India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) in 1920. Trade union activity became a mass base for communist mobilisation and political education.

Tashkent Meeting (1920)- Indian revolutionaries, with Comintern approval, formed a Communist Party in Tashkent.

Objectives

1. Overthrow British imperialism.
2. Establish socialism in India.

Limitations

1. Minimal contact with Indian-based revolutionary groups.
2. Absence of mass support within India.

Significance- Marked the internationalist origins of Indian communism.

Kanpur Conference (1925)- Indian communist groups convened a national conference in Kanpur. Officially established the Communist Party of India (CPI).

Declared objectives

1. End British colonial rule.
2. Establish a workers' and peasants' republic.

Symbolic importance

1. Kanpur was a major industrial centre.
2. It had witnessed earlier Bolshevik conspiracy cases, making it a politically charged site.

Debate on the Foundation of the CPI- CPI (Marxist) recognises Tashkent (1920) as the founding moment due to Comintern sanction. CPI considers Kanpur (1925) as the true foundation, emphasising indigenous initiative and mass politics. Analytical interpretation

1. Tashkent symbolises the "Communist" (internationalist) aspect.
2. Kanpur represents the "Indian" (national and mass-based) character of Indian communism.

Role in the Anti-Imperialist Struggle

Participation in Freedom Movement- Communists actively participated in

1. Workers' strikes.
2. Peasant mobilisations.
3. Anti-colonial protests.

Faced intense repression through

1. Conspiracy cases (Kanpur, Meerut).
2. Bans on organisations.
3. Long imprisonments.

Relations with the Indian National Congress- Persistent strategic debate

1. Whether to transform the Congress from within.
2. Or build an independent working-class political alternative.

This dilemma shaped communist tactics throughout the freedom struggle.

United Fronts and Mass Movements – Formation of Workers' and Peasants' Parties. Alliance with the **Congress Socialist Party** in the 1930s. The alliance collapsed by 1939 due to ideological and tactical differences.

Post-1945 Phase and Peasant Struggles- Communists led major peasant movements

1. Tebhaga Movement in Bengal.
2. Telangana Armed Struggle in Hyderabad State. Played a role Mass resistance against colonial and feudal exploitation.

Post-independence

1. Movement split between armed revolutionary strategies and parliamentary democracy.
2. Achieved sustained electoral success in Kerala, West Bengal, and Tripura.

Criticism and Continuing Relevance

Criticisms- Accused of

1. Authoritarian tendencies.
2. Centralised party control.
3. Declining relevance in an era of global capitalism.

Electoral decline in many regions.

Continuing Significance

Despite limitations, communism

1. Continues to articulate the concerns of workers, peasants, and marginalised groups.
2. Provides a critique of inequality, exploitation, and unchecked capitalism.

In a world marked

1. Rising global inequality.
2. Job insecurity.
3. Concentration of wealth,

Communist ideas retain ideological and ethical relevance, particularly in debates on social justice and redistribution.

Source- <https://www.newindianexpress.com/states/tamil-nadu/2025/Dec/27/cpi-and-nallakannu-turn-100-on-same-day-leaders-extend-wishes>