

Capitalism in India, Universal Suffrage and Multi-Party Republic

Multi-Party government based on universal suffrage is the most advanced political form of full-fledged capitalism. To demand more from capitalism is erroneous. To go beyond it means entering into the region of socialism. The responsibility of ushering the world-society, hand in hand on to socialism, rests with the working class. The working class will have to accomplish this task by building up their own independent political organization and by using the universal suffrage as the instrument of emancipation.

1600, 31 December, **Queen Elizabeth I** (7 September 1533 – 24 March 1603) of England granted a formal charter to the London merchants trading to the **East Indies**. The **East India Company**, a private British company, began its world trade and rose to account for half of the world's trade, particularly in basic commodities including cotton, silk, indigo dye, salt, saltpetre, tea, luxury goods and opium. Starting as a monopolistic trading body, empowered by means of the “right of conquest” – to carry on war and make peace in non-Christian countries, history’s most ruthless company, unafraid to further its interests by nefarious means, became involved in politics. The Company bullied and coerced its way to global supremacy – and that’s not even the worst of it. By the beginning of the 18th century, having acquired unequalled trade privileges from India’s Mughal emperors, the company had established in India the three presidencies of Calcutta (now Kolkata), Madras (now Chennai) and Bombay (now Mumbai). In the face of declining central Mughal authority and the emergence of self-motivated individual successor states, these settlements became subject to increasing harassment by local princes, and the company began to protect itself by intervening more and more in Indian political affairs, and eventually, with its own powerful army, dominated India.

Expeditions for finding out new markets, cheap labour power, sources of raw materials and most profitable business locations gave rise to **colonialism**. Trading capital sailed across oceans and entered into foreign countries and regions and began getting hold of pre-capitalist socio-economic formations. Just as William Morris appraised in his essay *Early England*, “feudalism or the society of status waned into capitalism or the society of contract.”

Colonialism had signaled the advent of capitalism. It had worked as the precursor of **Industrial Revolution** brought about by the invention of the steam-engine, of various spinning machines, of the power-loom, of a great number of other mechanical devices, and of the factory system affecting eventual demise of feudalism; it had forged ahead as the forerunner of globalization of capitalist mode and relations of production. In so doing colonialism became the bearer of the seminal and progressively evolutionary transitional phase of capitalism. This was the phase when

the two great modern antagonist classes – the capitalist and the working classes were appearing in the world historical panorama and were passing through their upcoming transition from the disintegrating feudal classes and relations – the peasantry and the landlords. Capitalism was being born.

This very process indicated capitalism's global dimensions from the outset. The sea voyage of the British merchant capital navigated by **Job Charnock** arrived on 24 August 1690 arrived at the village of **Sutanuti** beside the river Ganges, which in conjunction with two other villages **Govindapur** and **Kalikata** in due course developed into the city of **Calcutta**. There is a long chain of events behind the arrival of the British East India Company in Bengal, specifically Job Charnock in Sutanuti. It is generally recognized that the city of Calcutta was founded on the day when Job Charnock arrived. In fact this city has been built by the British. Once Lord Curzon aptly remarked – just a single glance at the buildings, river and buzzing and smoke is sufficient to show that Calcutta is a European city founded on Asian land. The region eventually developed productive forces under the influence of the newly arrived capitalist relations of production. This progression initiated the burgeoning capitalist city of Calcutta, the first capital of British India.

Capitalism began sprouting out branches having grown under the influence of the British capital: ports, roads and buildings, irrigation projects, jute mills, tea gardens, ship building, mining, insurance and banking, metal industries, the TATA iron and steel industry, and under domination of the growing Indian capital in Bombay in textile industry. In these fields the identities of the capitalists and workers by caste, religion, race, language, birth place and home country/foreign country became progressively more and more antiquated. Simply because capital is not a personal, but a social force. In India too its growth has accorded the intrinsic law of capital – alienation, uneven development and competitive laws of motion. Incessant wars, revolts, agitation and protest marches, meetings and congregations, proclamations remain marked in the history of the progress of capital in India as much as the ones in all other countries of the world.

1757 – The **Battle of Plassey** (23 June 1757) was a crucial victory of the **British East India Company** over the Nawab of Bengal and his French allies and the beginning of the **Company rule**. The battle consolidated the Company's presence in Bengal, which later expanded to cover much of India over the next hundred years.

1764 – The **Battle of Buxar** was fought on 22 October 1764 between the forces under the command of the British East India Company and the combined armies of Mir Qasim, the Nawab of Bengal; the Nawab of Awadh; and the Mughal Emperor Shah Alam II. The battle fought at Buxar, was a decisive victory for the Company.

1857 - The **Calcutta University Act** came into force on 24 January 1857 and a 41-member Senate was formed as the policy-making body of the university. **English education** initiated.

The **Sepoy Mutiny**, also known as the Indian Revolt of **1857**. The rebellion began on 10 May 1857 in the form of a mutiny of sepoys of the Company's army in the garrison town of Meerut.

The dissolution of the East India Company. It was dissolved before the outbreak of the war.

1858, 2 August, Lord Stanley's India Bill was passed; under which the East India Company came to an end. India became a province of the empire of **Queen Victoria** (Alexandrina Victoria; 24 May 1819 – 22 January 1901).

1850 – By this time Britain was producing **rail engines**.

During this time **large scale industries** were being installed in India.

At that time, in subordination to the “imperial preference” and under the compulsion of competition in the world market Bombay was growing as India's centre of large scale industry. Here Indian businessmen, moneylenders and lackeys accumulated huge sums of money through business. With large-sale exchanges, and as the middlemen of trade in opium, they remained much acquainted not only with China, but also with the Far Eastern markets through trade. During the decades – forties, fifties and sixties of the nineteenth century, the big business families of Bombay used to keep their representatives in Britain and thus got the opportunity to observe the growth of large scale industries there.

During the last three decades of the nineteenth century workers in the Indian factories had to work 80 hours in a week (compared with 56 hours in Britain). The working day was long: 16 hours. Since there were no electric lights the working day opened 15 minutes before the sunrise and closed 15 minutes after the sunset. Starkly visible as above that, given the opportunity, the native capitalists can become more ruthless than their foreign competitors. So much for patriotism!

It was this process of extreme exploitation of the “native” working class that the “native” capitalist class began to compete with the “foreign” British capitalist class in the market. Abysmal poverty, famines and severe oppression gave rise to mass-unrest; to counter this state of affairs the “foreign” rulers needed a popular platform. India witnessed two famines between 1825 and 1850 which claimed some 800,000 lives. Thereafter in 1850-1875 six times and during 1875-1890 eighteen times famines broke out and the death toll rose to 26,000,000. The Indigo revolts of East Bengal during 1859-1862 were remarkable uprisings of village people.

1885 – The **Indian National Congress** was founded. British top-ranking officers – such as retired officer Alan Octavian Hume, William Wedderburn and others initiated this party; Robert

Night, the founder Editor of the *Statesman* supported it. Among others were some people from the Indian capitalists, moneylenders and landlords, their supporters and some intellectuals; they launched this yearly gathering of the national movement – this they designated Indian National Congress which conducted its first session in **Bombay** from December 28–31, **1885**. With the approval of the ruling elite and at the request of the Viceroy Lord Dufferin, Hume became the General Secretary. The crucial objective was: consolidation of the unity between England and India, and for that purpose alteration of the conditions which may harm any interests of England. In other words to work as the “safety valve”.

Thereafter 20 years passed by, via strife between “loyalist” vs. “extremist” factions. Then the “extremist” faction raised the question of “**national interest**”.

1906 – In the Congress session a group led by Tilak proposed **self-government** and obtained majority support.

On the other hand, by the end of that year on 30 December a group of wealthy Indians stood to defend the interests of the Muslims of this country and initiated the **Muslim League** for a separate state as per their “**Pakistan**” plan.

1909 – Morley-Minto Reform – Vote started in India. The conditions of becoming a voter were – for a Muslim having a yearly income 3,000 rupees and that for a non-Muslim 300,000 rupees.

1914-1918 – First World War

1917 – First Constitutional Reform – During the war Viceroy promised: the natural goal of India was to be attainment of Dominion status.

1918 – Montagu-Chelmsford Report by India Secretary Montague and Viceroy Chelmsford

1919 – Indian Constitution: reconsideration – the Government of India Act

1919 – The Jallianwala Bagh massacre at Amritsar

1922 – Bardaloi – Non-Cooperation Movement – civil disobedience – non-payment of rent and taxes; Chauri Chaura incident - attack on police barrack and killing of 5 police personnel; withdrawal of the movement by the Congress.

Disputes inside the Congress and the launching of the **Swaraj Party** (established in late 1922–early 1923)

In a public meeting to protest against the Jalianwala Bagh massacre the National Congress urged on the workers to form **trade unions** and conveyed its decision of boycotting the scheduled elections to the legislatures in accordance with the new India Act. As a result elections to the Central and provincial legislatures were abandoned.

1922 – In August while speaking on state policies Lloyd George declared the unwillingness of Britain to approve self-government to India.

1927 – Simon Commission

In part-5 of the 1919 Government of India Act it was stated that a Special Commission was to be appointed within 10 years to consider the results of the approved regulations about self-governance and accordingly to adopt new laws.

1928 – In February that Constitution Amendment Commission under the leadership of the English Liberal Sir John Simon reached Bombay. At that time owing to the world crisis (Great Depression) the Indian market was also thrown into confusion; the employers were arbitrarily putting their paws on the wages of workers. Under such circumstances the Simon Commission actually fuelled strikes, processions and rallies raising voices – “**Simon go back**”.

1927 – Already, in December the Madras Congress Conference adopted the first “**complete freedom**” resolution. (Before which Congress had no demand for “complete freedom”).

1928 – In July the Report of the committee led by Motilal Nehru was published. This draft constitution known as “**Nehru Constitution**” of India was on the one hand a control by the elected body on the budget after accepting the Dominion status, and on the other hand to keep foreign policy and defence under the British power. In it the interests and rights of the native kings and the aristocracy were protected, whereas it disregarded the minimum interests of the workers.

1928 – 31st August – “**All Party Conference**”

1929 – December – Calcutta Congress – demand: Dominion status for a year

1928-1932 – Great Depression and its reaction in India

1930 – June – The Simon Commission report was published having proposed that the future Constitution will have a Federation of India under a Federal Government subject to the absolute power of the Viceroy. It was preceded by the Viceroy’s statement as stated above. In it voters of the voting constituencies were further divided providing for separate elections of the

untouchables, raising the power of the native kings, and retaining discrimination among the electorate on the basis of religion, race and caste.

In the meantime, beside the increase in the number of voters, the government declared Sindh a separate province as demanded by the Muslim League. Burma was also separated from India. During the beginning of 1929 the British Government invited the political parties of India to a round table conference to consider the Simon Commission report. But due to adverse attitude towards Simon Commission the National Congress ignored the invitation.

1930 – Indian campaign for independence (**Salt Satyagraha**)

1930 – 26 January – “**First Independence Day**” was observed throughout the country. (However, the Dominion status was still in force).

Round Table Conference, (1930–32), in Indian history, comprised a series of meetings in three sessions called by the British government to consider the future **Constitution of India**. The conference resulted from a review of the **Government of India Act** of 1919, undertaken in 1927 by the **Simon Commission**, whose report was published in 1930. The conference was held in **London**.

1930 – The first session (Nov. 12, 1930 –Jan. 19, 1931) had 73 representatives, from all Indian states and all parties except the **Indian National Congress**, which was waging a **civil disobedience** campaign against the government. It was attended by various native kings, Muslim League, Hindu Mahasabha, Liberal Federation and the “Scheduled Caste Federation” launched by **Bhim Rao Ambedkar**. The conference came to a deadlock due to the British Government’s ploy to inculcate incitement between the various religious representatives.

1931 – In March, the All India Congress Committee held its annual session in Karachi; a decisive meeting for Indian politics. That session is notable for a very incisive resolution drafted at the end of the conference, one which is counted as the precursor to the Indian constitution. The Conference adopted the document – “**Fundamental Rights and Duties and Economic Programme**” along with the proposal **to introduce bourgeois-democratic rights** having the principal aim: to achieve ***Swaraj*** for the masses. This put in: equal rights for all irrespective of religion or race, reorganization of provinces in accordance with language, along with the conditions of a minimum wage, restriction and reduction of taxes.

1931 – September – the Second Round Table Conference was held in London. Gandhi attended. But this time too, like the first one, the British side held on to their policy of fuelling the Hindu-Muslim dispute and the Conference was rendered futile.

1932 - Third Round Table Conference (November – December 1932). This last session assembled on November 17, 1932. Only forty-six delegates attended since most of the main political figures of India were not present. The Labour Party from Britain and the Indian National Congress refused to attend. However, this session conferred on the final form to the Constitution of India which was reflected in the **Government of India Act 1935**.

1932 – Congress declared unlawful assembly

1933 – “Joint Select Committee” proposed Federal structure.

In the meantime the **Communist Party of India** came into existence and has officially stated that it was formed on 25 December 1925 at the first Party Conference in **Kanpur**. But as per the version of CPI(M), the Communist Party of India was founded in **Tashkent, Soviet Union** on 17 October 1920, soon after the Second Congress of the **Communist International**. This party got going remaining subservient to Bolshevism or Leninism and preacher of the arranged upshots of the so-called October Revolution as a “strictly disciplined”-“vanguardist”-“secret”-“conspiratorial organisation”. This party has always kept the working class of India in the dark about the awful Bolshevik massacre at the naval station Kronstadt beside the Baltic Seashore near Petrograd in 1921 that claimed some 18,000 lives. What happened there? (See *Marxism and Asia*, p-27, Note-34). Following Lenin’s instruction and Trotsky’s direct order – “shoot them down like partridges” – the Red Army attacked the Kronstadt Soviet workers who were peacefully struggling for democracy. Just compare this terrible massacre with the one that happened at Jalianwala Bagh Square in Amritsar, Punjab on 13 April 1919 which saw some 1000 killed and 2000 wounded. This party is very vocal about the Jalianwala Bagh, but remains pretty silent about the Kronstadt. Why? It is an indispensable duty of the workers of India to look meticulously into Lenin’s duplicity – his condemnation against the mass killing in India (Amritsar) and his calumny about the Kronstadt annihilation in Russia.

1924 – Kanpur Bolshevik Conspiracy Case against the communists.

1929 – Meerut Conspiracy Case

1934 – The Communist Party of India declared unlawful

1935 - The **Government of India Act 1935: Approved by the King: August 1935** (passed by the British Government, also called the **New Constitution**) was the last constitution of British India. It lasted until 1947, when British India was split into Pakistan and India.

Objective: Suffrage was further broadened, even though it was still restricted under conditions of property, income and educational qualifications; so not yet universal. At that time the population of India stood at 353,000,000. Some 35,000,000 Indians obtained the right to vote, 29,000,000

were male and 6,000,000 female. Nevertheless, as always the Government retained its tactic of fuelling the “communal problem” – kept running special representation and weighted votes. The Government said this was done to protect the minorities; whereas at that time the Hindus comprised the minority in Bengal, but the balance of seats was in favour of the Muslims (Muslim population 257,000,000 – seats 117, Hindu population 215,000,000 – seats 78). Apart from that, the landlords were allotted special seats, and the “untouchables” were separated from others in the electorate.

Despite opposing the New Constitution, the Congress decided to take part in the provincial governments in order to strengthen the movement for self-government.

1937 – Provincial elections were held in **British India** in the winter of 1936-37 as mandated by the **Government of India Act 1935**. Elections were held in eleven provinces - Madras, Central Provinces, Bihar, Orissa, United Provinces, Bombay Presidency, Assam, NWFP, Bengal, Punjab and Sindh . Amid of the 11 provinces the Congress won a majority and formed ministries in Bihar, Bombay, Central Provinces, Madras, Orissa and United Provinces. In North-West Frontier Province the Congress formed ministry as the one single largest party. And there were coalition ministries in Sindh and Assam under Congress influence. The other two – Bengal and Punjab were not in the Congress fold.

Second World War and India

1947 – 15 August Independence

1948 – Universal suffrage in India, Universal suffrage (also **general suffrage** or **common suffrage**) consists of the extension of the right to vote to all citizens (or subjects).

1950 – All adult citizens as recognized by the Constitution of India, irrespective of race or gender or religion on the founding of the Republic of India came under the Universal Suffrage umbrella.

Republic Day commemorates the date on which the **Constitution of India** came into effect on 26 January 1950 replacing the **Government of India Act** (1935) as the governing document of India.

The Constitution was adopted by the **Indian Constituent Assembly** on 26 November 1949, and came into effect on 26 January 1950 with a democratic government system, completing the country's transition towards becoming an independent **multi-party republic**. 26 January was chosen as the Republic day because it was on this day in 1930 when Declaration of Indian Independence (*Purna Swaraj*) was proclaimed by the Indian National Congress as opposed to the Dominion status offered by British Regime.

Conclusion

It is manifest enough that our ruling class did not gift universal suffrage to us at one momentary go through the constitution in 1948-49. That is their propaganda. Most workers in India still accept the view that via “independence” and constitution the Indian leaders have given them the right to vote in 1948. But once they grasp the world history of the long-drawn movement for the vote, and knows the action-and-reaction – cause-and-effect chronology and lineage of all previous seminal documents relating to time-to-time preceding reforms towards the Constitution, then they will themselves discover that they have got the right to vote as a sequel of over a century-long class struggle originally organized by their political forerunners - the **English Chartists (1838)**, who were all workers, “**incalculably nearer to the Communists**” (Engels, *Principles of Communism*). Thus our right to elect the Government i.e., the political-administrative Executive Committee, has been achieved historically in England and thereafter in India and elsewhere via many struggles and reforms.

What and why the states are here?

In accordance with the historical materialist analysis a state is the highest embodiment of aggregate national capital, the power of national oppression no matter what its form, and its governing body is the managing committee or executive committee of national capital’s common affairs – the executive committee of the total national capital. Therefore the job of employing or electing their managing committee or executive committee is their business – their right. Then, why should they allow the working class to interfere in what is not their business anyway? Nevertheless, initially they extended the suffrage to the upper echelon and kept others outside, using their own system of division of labour. The fact remains that the capitalist class brutally suppressed the Universal Suffrage movement of the working class – the Chartists. Even then with the passage of time and circumstances they found it very practical to extend the suffrage to the working class by gradually taking them again as pawns in their fray.

The reasons are as follows:

- 1) The working class encompasses the immense majority of society; it is also the productive and driving force of society; which is why in all bourgeois revolutions against pre-capitalist landed aristocracy and feudalism the nascent capitalist class had to use the working class itself.
- 2) In **1871** it was the **Paris Commune** that, first in history, discovered and applied the revolutionary method of election of recallable delegates on the basis of **Universal Suffrage**. A more and more self-confident capitalist class, after overthrowing the Commune, on the one hand, having to thwart the working class struggles, and on the other, having been more and more experienced through crises, slumps and wars between themselves, considered suffrage to be in their interest, and gradually extended it to the working class in order to deceive and rule them by ballots instead of by bullets. And in that cunning treachery they lopped off the participatory democratic principle – the heart of the Paris Commune -- to turn universal suffrage into an instrument of trickery.
- 3) By subordinating knowledge and science, technology, education, information, social media – in a word the entire superstructure of society – and by deceitfully marginalizing the Materialist

Conception of History, they have become decidedly successful in imposing their all-pervading idealist-reformist conceptions and ideas to safeguard their exploitation and rule over the working class. They are now ruling by deception. In this itinerary of obstructing and obscuring class consciousness they have become all the more successful in using universal suffrage. They have turned the **bottom-up** participatory democratic Paris Commune principle upside-down by means of their **top-down** bureaucratic rule. Now again the working class must reverse it by sending their class's delegates (MPs) to the Parliaments of the world with a mandate to pronounce: **Annulment of all property and territorial rights whereby all that is on and in Earth becomes the common heritage of the whole humanity.** However this ambition still remains unheeded by the immense majority of the workers of the world. Maybe the enormously class-conscious capitalists have become nearly successful in creating a race without aspiration.

Long ago in 1877 Engels had cautioned, "Up till now the aristocracy mollified the working masses with philanthropic concessions; now the bourgeoisie is trying its hand by lending support to the workers' political tendencies and taking possession of them in order to direct them. We are on the brink of the period of universal suffrage: and on this terrain the bourgeoisie is hastening to display all its skills and wiles, in other words to make political concessions in order to safeguard its own economic interests and leave the aristocracy behind," (*British Agricultural Labourers Want To Participate In The Political Life Of Their Country*, London. June 5, 1877, Collected Works, Progress, Moscow, 1989, Vol. 24, p-180).

He advised, "For the full representation of labour in Parliament, as well as for the preparation of the abolition of the wages system, organization will be necessary, not of separate Trades, but of the working class as a body. And the sooner this is done the better." (Engels, *Trade Unions*, written in about May 20, 1881, *op. cit.*)

- 4) And in 1878 Engels had monitored, "If the crises demonstrate the incapacity of the bourgeoisie for managing any longer modern productive forces, the transformation of the great establishments for production and distribution into joint-stock companies [trusts] and state property shows how unnecessary the bourgeoisie are for that purpose. All the social functions of the capitalist are now performed by salaried employees. The capitalist has no further social function than that of pocketing dividends, tearing off coupons, and gambling on the Stock Exchange, where the different capitalists despoil one another of their capital. At first the capitalist mode of production forces out the workers. Now it forces out the capitalists, and reduces them, just as it reduced the workers, to the ranks of the surplus population, although not immediately into those of the industrial reserve army." (*Anti-Dühring*, Progress, 1969, p-330)

However, now after some 139 years since 1878 the big capitalists are not at all required even to tear off coupons; they enjoy themselves by sky-trekking from country to country and checking in and out from luxurious star hotels and sea and hill resorts after leaving everything to be done by the working class. Now all their itineraries are looked after by their salaried or waged slaves.

Nevertheless, doesn't this excellent situation clearly point out that to do away with this reckless indolent and lavish production and administration the working class needs a **reverse tactic** – that they have to transform their universal suffrage into an instrument of capitalism's burial? And for that matter, that they have to totally reject all parties based on undemocratic leader/follower

forms, have to get rid of all deceptive ploys of the thousand and one self-styled labour, communist or socialist parties with their reformist manifestoes with their catalogues of topsy-turvy demands; and have to join in their own leaderless participatory democratic really revolutionary and the only global cornerstone – the **World Socialist Movement**. This movement was initiated by the pathfinder party – the **Socialist Party of Great Britain** in 1904 which afterward incorporated companion parties and groups in many countries around the world. The workers of the world including those in India will have to recognize, understand and adopt the **object** and **principles** of this movement alongside those of the **World Socialist Party (India)** and other companion parties to move forward; they will have to understand, want and join in the socialist parties only for socialism.

“Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living. And just as they seem engaged in revolutionizing themselves and things, in creating something that had never yet existed, precisely in such periods of revolutionary crisis they anxiously conjure up the spirits of the past to their service and borrow from them names, battle cries and costumes in order to present the new scene of world history in this time-honored disguise and this borrowed language.” Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, Marx Engels Selected Works, Vol. 1, Progress Publishers, Moscow 1969, p. 398

Remember Karl Marx’s guidance: *"The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point, however, is to change it."*

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