

The Impact of Sino-Soviet Ideological Dispute and the Sino-Indian Boarder Dispute on the Communist Party of India

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Abstract: The Sino-Soviet ideological dispute and the Sino-Indian boarder conflict had their impact on the Communist movement in India in as much as they were instrumental for bringing about a split in the Communist Party of India. At the Amritsar Congress of the Communist Party of India early in 1958 the rift between the Right and the Left groups became acute. The result was an opportunistic compromise at the sixth Congress in Vijayawada in 1962, in pursuance of an effort to avoid an open clash. During 1957-61, the Right-Left factionalism in the CPI coincided with the acceleration of Sino-Soviet ideological dispute and the Sino-Indian boarder conflict. In 1956 the dispute was limited in scope in the sense that it was mostly confined to mutual discussions between the Soviet and Chinese party leaders and ideologues. But in 1957, the ideological dispute assumed a new dimension. Open verbal war between the communist leaders of China and Russia began. In 1959, when Nikita Khrushchev's plan for co-operation with the USA became popular and the Soviet Union refused to afford atomic aid to China, the ideological conflict reached at its zenith. Besides, there were two other events which accelerated the clash. They were: (1) the publication of an article in the *Red Flag* with the title *Long Live Leninism* wherein the Communist Party of China described the ideological aberrations of the CPSU; (2) A fierce verbal battle between the leaders of the two communist parties in Bucharest in June 1960.

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I. THE BEGINNINGS OF THE SINO-INDIAN DISPUTE

The beginnings of the Sino-Indian boarder dispute can be traced to 1954, when the Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru raised to the Chinese Prime Minister Chou-en-Lai the question of certain Chinese maps showing Indian territories as belonging to China. The Government of India was then informed by the Chinese authorities that such maps were mere reproductions of the maps of previous Regimes and that the Government of the Peoples Republic of China had no time to revise them. In 1956, when the Chinese Prime Minister visited India, it is reported that, he told Jawaharlal Nehru that China would agree to the proposed formalization of the Mc Mohan Line, demarcating the Indo-China boundary in the case of Burma. It was during this period that the Lama Revolt in Tibet was intensive. On July 20, 1958, China blamed India for permitting Kalimpong, a boarder town, to be used as the centre for directing the Tibetan insurrection.

In January 1959, Chou-en-Lai questioned the established boundary alignment, but advanced no specific claims. Sino-Indian relations, already got strained, became worse by April 1959, when the Lama Revolt in Tibet was crushed and the Dalai Lama fled Lasha to seek political asylum in India. This incident brought about a severe rift between India and China. In September 1959, Chou-en-Lai stated his country's claim for about 50,000 square miles of territory in India's possession followed by a border clash between the two countries.

The Soviet attitude towards the Sino-Indian border dispute was one of the factors that strained Sino-Soviet relations, a fact attested by the Chinese. "*One of the main differences of principle between the Soviet leaders and ours turns on the Sino-Indian boundary question*"(peoples daily 1963).

China-Russian Relations

China and Russia maintained policy of accommodation and friendship from time immemorial. Both were guided by their national interest and waged no war either with word or sword. On the contrary, the Western powers looked upon China as a means to the attainment of their interests, both in narcotic trade and slave labour. After the first opium war against China, which was then considered as a country of opium eaters, the Western countries including Britain and the USA engaged themselves in large-scale smuggling of narcotics. The large population of China also attracted the West. Since the policy of the Western countries was based on the exploitation of man by man, they looked upon China as a potential centre for cheap labour. Contrary to this, when the October Revolution succeeded in Russia, Lenin addressing the second All Russian Congress of Soviets on unequal treaties with China said, "We reject all clauses on plunder and violence, but we shall

welcome all clauses containing provisions for neighborly relations and all economic agreements, we cannot reject.” (M. D. David, T. R. Ghoble, 2000).

The USSR was the first country in the world to recognize China. A Chinese delegation Mao arrived in Moscow on 16 December 1949. Speaking at Moscow railway station, Mao said: “The great peoples of China and the Soviet Union entertain feelings of deep and strong friendship for each other. For almost 30 years, the Soviet people and the Soviet government have supported the cause of liberation of the Chinese people. The Chinese people will never forget that they have been honored with the traditional friendship from the Soviet people and the Soviet government.” (M. D. David, T. R. Ghoble, 2000). After creative talks between top-ranking leaders of the two countries, an agreement of Friendship, Alliance and Mutual Friendship was concluded. It was in the larger interest of China to seek economic cooperation with the Soviet Union and build its economy ravaged by long oppression. During the first decade, China received massive Soviet assistance on all fronts including aircraft building, car and tractor manufacturing, radio engineering and chemical industry; and above all nuclear technology. China had no industrial base and the USSR sent its technicians, engineers and experts to build industrial infrastructure in China.

China, in the past, before Sino-Soviet differences, issued statements with the Soviet Union regarding the concept of Asian collective security. She accepted the dire necessity of removing the hotbeds of tension in Asia. Later, under the influence of Mao, China reversed its earlier stand. China developed the theory of maintaining or even creating tensions to realize their hegemonic aspirations. They began to follow Mao doctrine: “Tension is to our advantage.” China tried to provoke military conflict between the USSR and the USA and opposed the concept of peaceful co-existence. He tried to theorize it by saying that countries with different political systems cannot live in peace with each other, they must clash headlong. Actually, China wanted to become a great power at the cost of the USSR. Mao’s directive was “to watch two tigers fight till both vanquish.”

Article 15 of the new constitution of People’s Republic of China adopted in 1975 calls upon the armed forces of China to fight against “Social imperialism”, a euphemism for the Soviet Union. Anti-Soviet approach of China was thus made officially a state policy. Mao’s theory of contradiction was practically applied in the country’s relation with Soviet Union. Mao laid down the foreign policy basis of China as “anti-Sovietism”, “inevitability of war” and support to “counter revolutionary struggles”.

Indo-Soviet Relations

Communist Russia had always been sympathetic towards India’s struggle for freedom. Lenin had denounced the British rule in India which had plunged its multitudes into an abyss of degradation and humiliating backwardness. After the October Revolution, the Soviet Union proclaimed the struggle against imperialism and solidarity with the subject people the East including India as the bedrock of its foreign policy. Communist Russia was the first country in the world which was fully wedded to the policy of consistent anti-imperialism and anti-colonialism. It extended its relentless help to the people all over the world who were struggling against an economic and social order based on imperialist exploitation and ruthless oppression. Lenin predicted the possibility of all the Eastern people’s joint struggle in “Deciding the destiny of the whole world, so as not to be simply the objects of the enrichment of others”(V I Lenin,pp).

Even before the formal declaration of India’s independence, the Soviet Union decided to establish diplomatic relations with India. This amounted to the recognition by the USSR of the *de facto* independence of India even in advance of her formal constitutional independence. No less has been the help of the USSR in the key sectors of Indian economy to wipe out the country’s industrial and technical backwardness.

During 1970’s hostility between China and the Soviet Union continued. The United States of America began to develop relation with China. This added to worries of the Soviet Union and she made India the cornerstone of her foreign policy in the region. As before, India’s major problems in the sphere of foreign policy were those concerning relations with Pakistan and China. With the development of Bangladesh crisis, the prospect that China might come to aid Pakistan in the event of armed conflict between India and Pakistan was sufficiently alarming. The Soviet Union was the only source of solid support against this threat. In this situation India and the Soviet Union signed the Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation in August 1971(Francine R. Frankel, 1978).

There was considerable increase in the role of joint investigation to solve scientific and technical problems, along with the expansion of scientific and technical exchange. Above all, a joint draft programme of long-term cooperation for 1975-1980 was drawn up, envisaging new areas of cooperation. Another long-term trade agreement was signed between the two countries in April 1976 for 1976-1980, providing for an increase in the total trade turnover (Sucha Singh Gill, 1983). The saga of successful bilateral relations between India and the Soviet Union continued even after change in India’s political leadership. “On the eve of parliamentary election of 1977 and immediately after their results, the Western press carried a series of articles and communiqués predicting serious changes in India’s foreign policy in the event of Janata Party coming to power.

Forecasts were made on future relations between India and the Soviet Union, and the viability of the Treaty of 1971 was questioned”(Sucha Singh Gill,1983)

However, during the 1990’s, especially after the nuclear tests of 1998, there has been tremendous change in the foreign policy of India. India’s unprecedented ties with the US, its economic growth and the elevation of its status in the family of nations as a global economic player are most conspicuous. These changes in turn made India’s foreign policy unpredictable. “In particular, relations between India and Russia have had to be significantly refashioned since the end of the cold war.”(Sumit Ganguly, 2013). Collapse of the USSR in 1991 compelled India to seek viable alternatives to substitute the strategic importance of the former with a new powerful tie up. In the aftermath of the Russian transformation, India found itself severely disadvantaged. India took unconventional flights in its foreign policy. The changed international environment played a key role in Prime Minister Narasimha Rao’s ‘Look East’ policy. The foreign ministry of Russia under President Yeltsin, who showed clear tilt towards the Western world relegated India to a secondary position. However, failure of domestic market system in Russia, the first stage of expansion of the NATO and the large scale military action against Yugoslavia in the spring of 1999 were huge shocks against Yeltsin’s search for a European identity; and above all, for those Russians who had expected greater security concern despite its loss of international stature. This ultimately led to the sweeping victory of Vladimir Putin in 2000. Putin succeeded in reasserting Russia’s power and its status as an independent power axis and in challenging the unipolarity of the world politics. This reorientation included a more robust relationship with India. However, the fact that the new American administration under President Trump has celebrated its honeymoon with Russian President Putin in Helsinki is a matter for serious concern for all non European nations including India. Though no concrete result has not been come out, further meetings between officials may bring much ado to major Asian countries, especially India and China.

The Communist Party of India and the Communist Party of China

The Communist Party of India was drawn into a dilemma by the Lama Revolt in Tibet which had already strained the Sino-Indian relations. The Communist Party of India which had till then supported the foreign policy of Nehru “*in changing the world alignment of forces*”(communist party resolutions,Amritsar-1958), was embarrassed by Nehru’s attitude to the Lama Revolt in Tibet and the party could neither support the views of Nehru nor endorse the Chinese criticism of Nehru. The party tried to maintain a precarious stand by supporting the fraternal party, in China on the one hand and supporting Nehru’s foreign policy on the other. Ajoykumar Ghosh, the General Secretary of the Communist Party of India, observed that Nehru seemed to think that India’s conduct during the Lama Revolt in Tibet was “unimpeachable” and was in total conformity with *Panch Sheel* and the entire blame lay with the Chinese. He also observed that if the Chinese press and leaders were simply critical of India, it was because the Indian Government, “*Cannot but be considered as having been heavily biased in favour of the rebels. Nehru does not even seem to realize this*”(india china friendship-repair the damage-1959).

Ajoykumar Ghosh hastened to add that Nehru had rejected “imperialist” attempts to bring about a total change in India’s foreign policy. The Chinese charge of Indian expansionism was interpreted by Ajoykumar Ghosh as not intended against Nehru or his Government but against “*Certain reactionary circles in India.*”(ibid) Endorsing the Chinese charge that Kalimpong had become the command center of the rebels, the Secretariat of the C.P.I demanded that the Government of India should investigate “the affairs of Kalimpong”. However, the CPI Secretariat was happy that the Nehru Government had taken “a proper attitude” to the question and refused to oblige with reactionaries whose sole aim was, “*to sow discord between our two friendly people.*”(statement by the national council of the CPI-1959).

But, in march 1959, resolutions of Central Executive Committee of the CPI criticized Nehru, because he had allowed himself to take positions and make utterances which can’t be reconciled with his foreign policy. The resolutions tried to interpret the Chinese criticism of India as directed against the reactionary forces in the country. However, all the resolutions praised Nehru for not distorting India’s foreign policy in accordance with the imperialist wishes.

The Secretariat of the CPI stated that India had always recognized Tibet as a part of China. Lobbying the two countries to observe strict neutrality and non-intervention in each other’s affairs, the Central Executive Committee declared that some “Unfortunate and incorrect steps” of the Government of India, were being, “assiduously exploited” by the enemies of India’s foreign policy.

The Executive hoped Nehru and all those who supported his policy would overcome the “powerful pressure” from such quarters which are dreaming of Tibet as a “buffer state under their influence”.

The Anti-Nehru Propaganda of Peking

The propaganda agency of Peking charged the Government of India with unwilling collusion with imperialism, though it had no desire on Tibet. The private attitude of the CPI on the Tibetan episode can be

discerned from two later documents. In September 1960, a Central Executive Committee resolution admitted that “*The first breach of India-China friendship created in the attitude and acts of the Indian Government towards the counter revolutionary uprising in Tibet and the aid given to Dalai Lama to conduct the anti-China campaign in India.*”(resolution of the central executive committee of the CPI -1960). But, in these days, the CPI did not subscribe to the Chinese views that either Kalimpong was the command centre of the rebels or that Tezpur statement of Dalai Lama was under Indian instigation. The CPI did not approve of the usage of the term, *expansionism* in relation to India. Therefore, in the central executive committee’s statement of May 1959, no reference was made to Kalimpong at all, a departure from the resolution of March 1959, wherein the CPI Secretariat endorsed the Chinese charge of Kalimpong being allowed to be used as a counter revolutionary base.

The CPI Attempts to Pacify Peking

The CPI was a little bit frustrated on the Sino-Indian relations. It made many private efforts to patch up a compromise between Delhi and Peking, in order to pacify the Chinese leadership. On May 3rd and 5th, 1960, the CPI dispatched to the Communist Party of China two letters. In those letters, the CPI while extending full support to the general stand taken by the Chinese comrades, deplored some of their statements regarding Kalimpong, *Indian expansionism* and the like.

In May 1960, at the Moscow conference of Communist Parties, Ajoy Ghosh spoke about the attempts of CPI to patch up the difference between India and China on the Tibet. He pointed out that the members of Indian Communist Party avoided any reference in public that would betray the relation with the Communist Party of China. He added that, even if Nehru had made certain anti-China statements, a marked distinction should have been made by the Chinese leaders between the statements of those of Indian reactionaries.

Though the uproar over Tibet died down, the CPI had to confront a more embarrassing situation during the period. On July 31, 1959, the Nehru Government dismissed the 28 months old Communist Government in Kerala. This event was responsible for placing the CPI in a more embarrassing situation than the one over Tibet. It was strange coincidence that soon after the dismissal of the first Communist Government in Kerala, the Nehru Government secured two Soviet credits worth 350 million Rubles.

“*The Leftist group resented Soviet support to India’s domestic and foreign policies because such supporting effect blunted the edge of the CPI’s struggle against the reactionary forces.*”(Mohan Ram-1969).The truth of this comment on the attitude of the Leftist group in the CPI has been evidenced by subsequent turn of events, causing a vertical split in the CPI and the emergence of the CPI (M) and its ideological war with the Communist Party of Soviet Union.

The dismissal of the Communist Government in Kerala served the purpose of unnerving the CPI leadership. Reports of ill treatment of the Indian Nationals in Tibet, of incidents on the Sino-Indian border and of the growing dispute between India and China over the border issue, all of these increased the worries of the CPI leadership.

The CPI leadership legitimately expected a massive *reactionary offensive* following the overthrow of the communist government in Kerala and feared that further deterioration in Sino-Indian relations would spell a lot of harm to the democratic movement in India. In fact, one of the main weapons the reactionary forces wanted to use in its offensive against the CPI was the strained Sino-Indian relations.

On August 20, 1959, the CPI General Secretary wrote another letter to the CPC in which the latter was appraised of the CPI’s apprehensions and requested the Chinese to observe a wait and see policy. “The campaign against China which is steadily gathering strength is a campaign against India’s foreign policy, against India-China friendship, and also against the Communist Party of India. Continuation and accentuation of the present differences would gravely endanger India’s foreign policy, help the right wing to take India towards America and would also help the drive against the CPI. I would, therefore, like to know what can and what should be done to resolve these differences. This has become an urgent matter both in the interest of our foreign policy and differences of democracy inside our country”.

However, the CPC leadership was not at all prepared to save the CPI from its difficulties. The tension on the border which continued for some time was climaxed by the Longju incident of August 1959. At that time Ajoy Ghosh, who was in Moscow, dispatched another letter to the CPC pleading for Sino-Indian Government level negotiations and exchange of views on the border issue. He expressed his fear that any delay in the matter would only help the very forces that seek to create hostility between India and China and thereby pull India towards the Anglo-American camp. This letter was also ignored by the CPC in the similar manner it had ignored the two CPI letters of May 3rd and 5th. Between June 23rd and August 28th, 1959, Peking and New Delhi exchanged eight notes, but the CPC hardly took the CPI in confidence.

Ajoy Ghosh Running After Soviet Help

On September 8, 1959, the *Pravda* Announced that Ajoy Ghosh was in Moscow and the *Tass* flashed the statement of the Soviet Government condemning the Longju incident. "Soviet leading circles are hoping that the Chinese and Indian Governments would not allow the incident to further the aims of those circles who want the international situation to worsen and that both Governments will settle the misunderstanding". Further, the statement also noted that, "This incident has been caught by those circles, in the United States, especially those who are seeking to prevent relaxation of international tension and aggravate the situation."

However, the Chinese Government had popularized that there were certain developments behind the *Tass* statement deploring the Longju incident. As per the Chinese version, the Indians were responsible for it, and there was no ground for the Soviet statement condemning the Longju incident.

But, brushing aside the Chinese plea, the Soviet Government released its statement. It was the Soviet Government's statement deploring the Longju incident released on September 8, 1959, and Chinese denouncement of it in 1963 as "A diplomatic rocket" against China, which proved to be the first disclosure of Sino-Soviet differences over India in public.

However, the *Tass* statement expressed the hope that both governments of India and China "will settle their misunderstanding taking into account their mutual interests in the spirit of traditional friendship between the peoples of China and India." The CPI Secretariat's statement read, "It fervently hopes that immediate steps will be taken by both the governments concerned to settle controversies with regard to the border issue by mutual consultation."

By the *Tass* statement, the Soviet Union was alleged to have equated a socialist country with a non-socialist one and made known to the world that it was not supporting China when pitted against India. Therefore, it became imperative on the part of the CPI to interpret the Soviet stand. Thus interpreting and defending the *Tass* statements, Ajoy Ghosh declared later that neither India nor China was planning aggression against the other.

".....in the interest of the socialist camp as a whole, including China, in the interest of the cause of peace and unity of the peace zone, it was necessary that measures were taken to minimize the conflict, to restore good relation to defeat the game of those who wanted to drive a wedge between the socialist world and the biggest of the neutral countries. That is what the Soviet Union tried to do, and for this the whole socialist camp should be grateful to the Soviet Union." While Mr. Ajoy Ghosh hailed the Soviet statement as "entirely correct, wise and timely", the Chinese saw in it an open condemnation of their position. The Chinese Government stated that the Soviet Union had issued the statement deploring the Longju incident to please Eisenhower. Further, they declared that the Soviet statement had only served the purpose of affecting adversely the interests of the peace camp and helping the imperialists and Indian reactionaries.

In this issue, the crucial Sino-Soviet difference was on the question whether the Soviet Union was right in equating India with a socialist country without verifying the facts. The Chinese seldom recognized India as a country of the peace zone.

II. THE DEEPENING OF SINO-SOVIET RIFT

As has been stated earlier, the real burst up in the relationship between the USSR and China over their respective attitude to India was the former's statement in September, 1959.

The statement of the Soviet Union served a dual purpose in India. It indicated to the Nehru Government that the Soviet positions was shifting in its favour, while, at the same time, it helped the Rightist group in the CPI in its plea for the support of Nehru regime. The CPI was in no mood to defend the Chinese position or actions anymore, because even the Soviet Union was not supporting them. Therefore, the CPI found it easier to identify itself with the Government's side on the border issue.

On September 30, 1959, Mr. Khrushchev made a public statement which proved to be a soothing balm to the CPI's drive for supporting the Nehru regime. In his statement, Mr. Khrushchev blamed China for its desire to test the stability of the capitalist system by force. On a later occasion, the Chinese disclosed that while Khrushchev was in Peking, they had explained to him on October 2nd the background of Sino-Indian hostilities; pointing out that China would not yield to *Indian reactionaries* all the time. However, Khrushchev did not care

to know the real situation and “identity of the party committing provocation” but insisted that it was wrong for people to die in clashes.

III. DISAGREEMENT IN THE CPI ON THE CHINESE STAND

The CPI leadership was divided over the Longju incident. This is very clearly proved by the ambiguity in the statement of the CPI Secretariat issued on August 30. Further, it failed to locate the responsibility of the clash either on India or China. The statement merely pointed out that the boarder clashes in the North occurred because “unfortunately a great part of the northern border of our country has not been clearly demarcated.”

The *Link*, a pro-Moscow journal commented on the Secretariat’s statement that it hardly convinced anybody in the party. When the CPI Secretariat met again the members were divided. S.A. Dange, Z.A. Ahmed and A.K. Gopalan would have preferred a nationalist line. While some leaders were un-inhibited, some others were cautious in their reaction. The Soviet statement of September 30, however, provided some of the leaders with confidence. P.Ramamurthi, A.K.Gopalan and E.M.S.Namboodiripad declared in public that any aggression on Indian borders would be fought by the party.

The Central Executive Committee of the CPI met towards the end of September and called for a negotiated settlement of the border dispute without either side declaring acceptance of its own claims the preconditions for talks. The Central Executive Committee was convinced that “Socialist China can never commit aggression against India just as our country has no intension of aggression against China”

This resolution of the CPI is believed to have made as a stop-gap arrangement because many of the second rank leaders of the CPI were demanding a firm declaration supporting the Indian Government’s stand on Mc Mohan Line. Ajoy Ghosh did not stand with the majority. Yet, to avoid a split in the party, he urged everybody to pursue a cautious line. The Calcutta resolution of the CPI, however, endorsed Prime Minister Nehru’s approach towards the problem. It did not accept the Chinese claim, and thus, for the first time, there was a difference of opinion between the CPI and the government of a communist country. This rupture between the CPI and the CPC was obviously the outcome of the shift in the Soviet attitude to the border dispute.

Key words: reactionary; imperialism; expansionism, dispute; conflict.

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