

SOCIALISM WHERE ART THOU ?

OPINION

HIMANSHU DHULIYA



Dear Socialism where are you ? Our founding fathers had given you a place of primacy in our constitution in words such as social , economic and political justice, in the Preamble itself . And lest we forget and go astray by an amendment the word ‘Socialist’ was explicitly added later, and yet you have vanished or crushed by the mighty boots of capitalism ! But what hope and fun it was to hear of your advent and the promise you held . You were the child of freedom struggle and the moment you were incorporated in the movement the entire country and its teeming masses aligned with the moment and it became a formidable force . There were members of all castes and classes , farmers , workers , students , lawyers , women , in the movement and there was an unwritten understanding that you shall be the core value of our constitution . And indeed you were the nucleus of the document and the very idea of India.

PROMISES TO KEEP
Policies and programmes were framed with you in picture – planning commission, green revolution ,white revolution, nationalization of banks, public sector undertakings , abolition of privy purses, end of zamindari , land ceiling and distribution etc . Despite the good intentions the success was limited but we were singing – ‘*Hum*

layein bein toofan se kashti nikal ke is desh ko rakbna mere bachhon sambhal ke’ (Mohammad Rafi , film -Jagriti 1954). The ‘spirit’ of socialism was alive, the emotions had not withered . And yet there was disenchantment and loss of heart and hope and it reflected in cinema and songs- ‘*Ye meblon ye takhton ye tazon ki duniya , ye insan ke jhute samajon ki duniya, ye duniya agar mil bhi jaye to kya hai , ye duniya agar mil bhi jaye to kya hai*’ (Mohammad Rafi , film Pyassa 1957).

Though you were in the news always in modern India , our country had known you since ancient times, our sages and wise people had believed in you and propagated your concepts : ‘*Sarve Bhavantu Sukhinah, Sarve Santu Niraamayaaah Sarve Bhadraanni Pashyantu, Maa Kshcid-Dubkha-Bhaag-Bhavet*’ (May All be Happy, May All be Free from Illness. May All See what is Auspicious, May no one Suffer.)- Brihadaranyaka Upnishad. The freedom struggle was being steered by Mahatma Gandhi who was influenced by not only Indian philosophy of Gita and Upanishads but also some of the great writers and thinkers of his time . He learnt to serve the last man by the works of John Ruskin’s ‘Unto the Last’ where he propounded the thought that the last man should be served too. Henry David Thoreau stated the concept of simplicity and to curb ones wants in his work ‘Walden’ in which he narrates his stay in the forest living alone and working alone. Leo Tolstoy taught Gandhi the concept of ‘The kingdom of God is within us’ and to seek goodness in oneself first. Gandhiji had dreamt of ‘Village Republic’ in India. Nehru was influenced by the French Revolution and the Russian revolutions and was a Fabian Socialist him-

self. Subhash Chandra Bose also talked about abolition of Zamindari and State control for general good. Socialism was linked to simplicity and curbing wants . Professor J K Mehta an economist of Allahabad university was influenced by the ideas of Gandhiji and was himself a reputed scholar who propounded the theory of ‘wantlessness’ . In this era when environment is under constant strain his theory is of relevance . He had stated ‘*true economic satisfaction is not maximising unlimited wants but achieving a state where wants cease , leading to contentment and bliss*’ . Mehta argued that individual should focus on basic needs – ‘*needonomics*’ in line with Gandhiji’s principle.

PATH ABANDONED
It seems that our planning programmes and policies were partially successful and the best of programmes did not cover much ground and did not uplift the Nation and bring in prosperity and happiness and so in the early nineties we changed course and loosened the Government control of license and permits and opened our markets to international firms, markets, agencies . Many structural changes prompted by an acute state of economy compelled us to mortgaged our gold and seek financial relief. Matters stabilized and we never looked back thereafter. Justice V R Krishna Iyer in the chapter titled ‘The Noble Preamble : We have promises to keep ‘ of his book ‘Off the Bench’ states “ *The Indian humanscape , when freedom dawned in 1947 was vibrant with socialist hope of egalite, liberty and pursuit of happiness .As the twentieth century was about to set and the new Millenium was being midwived by passage of time , the onward Nehruvian locomotion of people’s progress took a reverse Manmobanics direction.*” The state has come to such as pass that there were pleas in the highest court to remove the word ‘Socialist ‘ from the preamble. Over the years many symbols and motifs and essentials of ‘socialism’ have dismantled as our journey toward free market and capitalism com-



Raj Kapoor in ‘Shri 420’ walking alone on the road.

menced . The physical and the emotional structure of socialism was dissolved in the flood and storm of market economy. And our preamble stood silence . Let me elaborate by a few examples below.

ROADS
The most common symbol of socialism are the ‘Roads’ made for the people . The ‘first right’ on roads is of the person and people who walk on the road on foot. This right has been snatched away from them , no one can now sing the song – ‘ *nikal paden bein khulli sadak par apna sina taane , manzil kaban kaban rukna hai upar wala jane , badhte jaayen bum sainani jaise ik Dariya toofani , sar pe lad topi rusi phir bhi dil hai Hindustani*’ (Mukesh in film -Shri 420). Now six lanes highways adorn our land with vehicles speeding at 100 km per hour tread on these , leaving the bystanders gasping for breath. There is no room for the commoners, no sideways or pathways for walkers. Even in cities the sidewalks have reduced and only vehicles are encouraged.

HEALTH
What great progress has been made in the medical field by private hospitals with astronomical fees , the attention is on money and not on patient ! I often wonder how countries like Cuba , China , Russia, England have provided medical care to their citizens . The Government and various state Governments have increased medical insurance substantially but still the moot question remains that this enhancement is to benefit the citizen or the hospital. Many pointers exist of our failures and the most glaring is the fee of private medical colleges . We failed to build Government medical

colleges and hospitals in accordance with the size of our population and have become dependent on privatization . The gap between a Government seat and private seat is unimaginably wide and the student/parent is trapped in bank loan cycle for the most productive period of his life . And yet the hygiene and care between private and Government hospitals is not comparable. The socialism spirit is lacking in this area substantially . In such times I search for the old family Doctor with his leather brief case and spectacles, stetoscope hung around the neck , smiling , genial person whose very presence gave us relief and satisfaction and was affordable to the common man.

EDUCATION
The universal free education was a mirage . The basic primary education was not a success story and the ‘right to education’ bill was introduced much later. The Government colleges which were giving excellent results and hope prior and post independence soon sank into deepslumber and the private schools and universities took charge. However, I remember that the education system was still holding some idealism and principles and was yet not called an ‘education industry’ . But, today it is indeed an industry where among others people who were dealing with the sale of ‘liquor’ and owners of ‘sweet shops’ are running prominent private universities . Their attitude toward education is the way they treat any commodity for sale and profits and their aim is attained through admissions and high fees . Institutions advertise themselves promoting jobs , a few students do achieve high standards



Balraj Sahni as Shambhu Maheto in ‘Do bigha Zameen’

and obtain high salary positions in prestigious firms mainly digital . Based on the success of these students other prospective students are lured and fall into the educational loan trap. Quality of education is secondary and image projection is the sole purpose. I think of my days in the school , college and the university where fair standards prevailed. I was in a missionary school St Joseph College in Allahabad and later in the university . My school had students mostly middle class like me from all over the city belonging to all religions and there was never any issue of fee being high . At the university it was nominal, and my university was known for producing maximum IAS officers at one time. There was a social purpose in the field of education, the famous DAV (Dayanand Anglo Vedic) colleges were established in Lahore in 1886 under the patronage of Lala Lajpat Rai to give balanced quality education to boys and girls in North India under the aegis of Arya Samaj . There are about 1000 schools and colleges and universities running at present and at one time this was the only institution in towns where higher education was imparted such as in Dehradun . Sadly many lack funds and have been taken over by the Government as a rescue measure but that commitment and glory is gone. Perhaps the biggest success story in the primary and secondary education field of the Government are the ‘Central schools’ spread over the country and Navodaya schools both have CBSE programmes . The quality of teachers and students in ‘Central schools’ should be our National bench mark . It is a success story but has covered limited area , the central

school model should have been our National model and all the states and districts should have followed it . It has given innumerable IIT graduates and successful citizens of India. Balanced and standard instructions are imparted. Central schools is ‘Socialist’ model of which we should be proud of. Education is the foundation of a Nation and what spirit we had toward this cause ! Tagore established ‘Vishva Bharti University ‘ in Shanti Niketan from the prize money he received as Nobel prize , an education close to nature . He established a team of eminent scholars and was successful. Madan Mohan Malviya established ‘Banaras Hindu University’ with his herculean efforts went around the country to seek financial aid and was successful. It is a premier university today. Hari Singh Gaud created the Sagar university in remote corner of Bundelkhand to provide higher education to his people and today it is a central university. We having such models before us and yet we took a wrong turn and packed education in the capitalist bandwagon.

HOUSING
‘*Chota sa ghar hoga badalon ki chaav mein Aasba diwani mann mein bansuri bajaye*’ (Kishore Kumar film -Naukri -1954) Among the many core social sectors it is the ‘Housing’ which has suffered the most and has succumbed to near complete privatization. But was not so when it started . Our people had the necessary know how to build good houses and the many Government personnel quarters spread all over the country are testimony to the same – R K Puram in Delhi , Armed forces quarters built

by MES (military engineering services), MAHDA (Maharashtra housing building authority) and similar such organizations. My parents purchased their only house in Allahabad in 1975 , a two BHK flat on ‘hire purchase’ scheme of ADA (Allahabad development authority) . An initial amount of Rs 5000/- was paid and then for fifteen years an affordable amount of Rs 550/- per month was paid as rent . The Government was indeed benevolent. When we had everything with us – land , engineers, material resource , why then we opened the gates to such massive privatization which has economically burdened the masses for their life time.

THE SPIRIT AND HOPE
More than anything it is the spirit of socialism which is lost . Socialism meant good for all , it meant considering all the people as part of oneself . It meant that their fears and problems were common , and that they shall travel together and work for the people and the Nation in the making together . What we have adopted is crass consumerism , the collective human spirit is discarded. In this digital age we have become assembly line creations in turn we have lost ourselves . This loss has traversed from economy to culture , we have shunned grace and poise and adopted pomp and pelf. I have some hope and with that hope I conclude here with the song penned by Shailendra for Bimal Roy’s ‘Do Bigha Zameen ‘-1953 . The scene is that Shambhu Mahato’s ‘Do bigha Zameen’ has been mortgaged to the zamindar as he could not pay back the loan and so he is compelled to leave his village and go to Kolkata for work to earn money and get back his land. The song plays as he is leaving his village : ‘ *‘Dharti Kabe pukar ke beej bichale pyar ke Mausam bita jaye Apni kahani chod ja Kuch to nishani chod ja Kaun kabe is oar Tu phir aye na aye Mausam bita jaye Mausam bita jaye ‘*

Himanshu Dhuliya is an Indian Navy veteran, author and pod-caster.

India’s MSME moment is a test of systems leadership

OPINION

ANIL TRIGUNAYAT & SUMIT KAUSHIK



Across advanced and emerging economies alike, MSMEs are being asked to do more than survive. They are expected to absorb supply chain shocks, drive employment, anchor domestic manufacturing, and increasingly, meet the sustainability and compliance standards of global trade. In this context, MSME policy is no lon-



ger a domestic development concern. It is a competitiveness strategy. India has over 68 million MSMEs, contributing nearly 28 to 30 percent of the country’s GDP, making the sector central to economic growth, employment generation, and domestic value chains across regions. Its performance

will decisively shape India’s growth momentum and manufacturing competitiveness. Improving productivity, simplifying compliance, and ensuring convergence across schemes and institutions are therefore not administrative choices but economic imperatives to unlock scale, efficiency, and sustained value creation across the MSME ecosystem. India has responded to this challenge with scale and intent. Few economies deploy as many targeted interventions as possible for small enterprises. Yet the defining constraint today is not policy attention but policy architecture. As global capital becomes more selective and trade regimes more exacting, fragmentation within MSME support systems has begun to carry macroeconomic consequences. The renewed emphasis on convergence must therefore be read as a strategic inflection point. Not a bureaucratic consolidation, but a systems reform with

implications for productivity, exports, and economic resilience. **FRAGMENTATION IS A HIDDEN DRAG ON GROWTH** In a world shaped by near-shoring, friend-shoring, and supply chain rebalancing, the speed and reliability of MSMEs matter as much as their scale. Fragmented policy delivery introduces delays, raises compliance costs, and weakens the ability of small firms to integrate into time-sensitive value chains. When credit schemes are decoupled from technology upgrades, when skilling operates independently of industry demand, and when market access initiatives do not align with quality and sustainability standards, MSMEs struggle to convert policy support into measurable output. At the macro level, this translates into lower productivity, weaker export competitiveness, and reduced investment efficiency. Convergence offers a way

to address this structural drag. But only if it is framed around enterprise outcomes rather than institutional convenience. **DESIGNING POLICY AROUND THE FIRM, NOT THE FILE** Leading economies increasingly design MSME support as platforms rather than programmes. The objective is coherence. Data integration across taxation, registration, finance, and skilling allows governments to anticipate stress, allocate capital more efficiently, and calibrate interventions in real time. For India, information convergence can enable a shift from reactive policymaking to predictive governance. But data integration must be complemented by process alignment. From the enterprise perspective, engagement with the state should feel continuous, intuitive, and proportionate to scale. Digital infrastructure is an enabler, not a solution. Platforms must reduce decision friction, lower compli-

ance burdens, and provide actionable insight. Otherwise, digitisation risks replicating fragmentation at a faster pace. **SUSTAINABILITY IS NOW A TRADE VARIABLE** Perhaps the most significant global shift facing MSMEs today is the convergence of trade and sustainability. Carbon intensity, resource efficiency, and traceability are rapidly becoming prerequisites for market access, not optional differentiators. For export-oriented MSMEs, especially those linked to European, North American, and East Asian markets, sustainability compliance will increasingly influence pricing, financing, and buyer relationships. This reality demands that sustainability be embedded within MSME policy design rather than addressed through standalone initiatives. Converged policy frameworks can align technology upgradation with energy efficiency, skilling with en-

vironmental management, and cluster development with shared sustainability infrastructure. When sustainability is treated as a productivity driver rather than a regulatory cost, MSMEs are better positioned to compete globally. **CONVERGENCE REQUIRES INSTITUTIONAL MATURITY** The risks of convergence are real. Large-scale restructuring without sequencing can disrupt delivery and weaken accountability. Execution will require shared metrics, inter-ministerial coordination, and capacity building at the administrative level. Equally, convergence must be selective. Targeted programmes serving specific regions, communities, and sectors should retain autonomy where scale and context demand it. Strategic systems are not uniform systems. They are adaptive by design. **A STRATEGIC OPPORTUNITY IN A FRAG-**

MENTED WORLD
As global trade becomes more fragmented and geopolitical risk reshapes supply chains, countries that can offer reliability, transparency, and scale will gain advantage. India’s MSMEs are central to that proposition. The question is no longer whether India has enough MSME schemes. It is whether the ecosystem allows enterprises to move quickly, comply effortlessly, and compete credibly on the global stage. Convergence, if executed as systems leadership rather than administrative reform, can reposition India’s MSMEs as anchors of growth, exports, and economic resilience. This is not incremental policy work. It is a strategic choice about how India competes in a more complex, more demanding global economy. *Former Ambassador Anil Trigunayat is a Retd. IFS Officer, and has served as the trade commissioner in New York, USA. Sumit Kaushik, a social impact and a public policy consultant.*