CHAPTER I

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF SOVIET POLICY TOWARDS ANTI-COLONIAL MOVEMENT IN ASIA
Anti-colonialism had been the most important component of Soviet foreign policy ever since the victory of October Revolution in 1917. Lenin paid serious attention on the colonial developments throughout the world in general and in Asia in particular. While formulating theoretical foundations to fight colonialism, Lenin considered Marx as his ideal and thus, Soviet policy against colonialism emanated from Marxism-Leninism. It can be traced from the early writings of Marx and Engels on different Asian colonies during that period. Marx also wrote a series of articles on India in an American newspaper, called New York Daily Tribune. Earlier in 'Manifesto of the Communist Party' Marx and Engels wrote: "The bourgeoisie has subjected the country to the rule of towns. It has created enormous cities, has greatly increased the urban population as compared with the rural and has thus rescued a considerable part of the population from the idiocy of rural life. Just as it has made the country dependent on the towns, so it has made barbarian and semi-barbarian countries dependent on the civilised ones, nations of peasants on nations of bourgeois, the East on the West...."\(^1\)

In an other writing Karl Marx said: "While the bourgeoisie of each nation still retained separate national interests, big industry created a class which in nations has the same interest and with which the nationality is already dead."\(^2\)

So far as, theoretical question related to the concept of anti-colonialism is concerned, it always haunted the minds of all

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the revolutionaries ever since the formation of the Communist League and the publication of the Manifesto of the Communist Party by Marx and Engels in 1848. During Marx's time feudalism was still a dominant force throughout the world, however, bourgeoisie was emerging stronger in Europe and North America. Thus, with the growth of industrial bourgeoisie, the newly born proletarian class had to face a typical dilemma in its fight against the two enemies, i.e., feudalism and bourgeoisie. This typical dilemma was minutely and very carefully observed by Marx and Engels, as they mentioned in the Communist Manifesto: "At this stage, therefore, the proletarians do not fight their enemies, but the enemies of their enemies, the remnants of absolute monarchy, the landowners, the non-industrial bourgeois, the petty bourgeoisie. Thus, the whole historical movement is concentrated in the hands of the bourgeoisie; every victory so obtained is the victory for the bourgeoisie."3 In this regard, it is remarkable point to note that most of the European colonial powers who enslaved Asia, Africa and Latin America, were not fully developed bourgeois states with an exception to Britain and France. On the other hand, almost all the colonies were reeling under the feudal system. This typical phenomenon presented an unique theoretical problem before the propounders of communism. It is well known Marxist proposition that the revolution would take place in developed bourgeois states where proletariat class is stronger. If we take this dictum as the touchstone of revolution, the revolution would have never taken place in the colonies.

However, revolutions did occur in many colonies like Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos, etc. It does not mean that Marx was wrong in his interpretation of colonial situation. More emphatically, in a thought provoking manner Marx advocated that usually a colony could be liberated through a revolution taking place in the oppressor country. Though this proposition could not become an universal phenomenon, in certain cases, it did appear to be a concrete reality, as one could see the revolutions taking place in Angola, Guinea-Bissau, and Mozambique in mid-1970s after the overthrow of colonial regime in Portugal.

So far as, Marx position on colonialism is concerned, many western scholars have presented divergent views which sometimes seem to have created a lot of confusions on this very important question. In this context, Demetrio Boersner points out: "....It becomes quite clear from an examination of their (Marx and Engels) theoretical writing and their correspondence, that in the domain of the national question their field of observation and action was limited to Europe and North America. They did not conceive of the Asian, African and South American underdeveloped areas as playing a potential revolutionary role in the same sense as the nations of Europe."\(^4\) He further says: "While for the Marxists of the twentieth century nationalism and colonialism have become fused into a single and indissoluble problem, for Marx and Engels they were two distinct phenomena, not directly inter-related. They regarded colonialism as a primarily economic issue. They were convinced that events in the

overseas colonies of the capitalist countries could have positive or negative effects on the overall structure and behaviour of capitalism, but they never thought of the colonies as nations which were being more and more closely drawn into world politics, and which could produce world-shaking revolutionary movements. The fusion between the national and the colonial question in Marxist theory was not carried out until the second decade of the twentieth century, when Lenin taught that the Asian and African colonies of his day were destined to play a political role analogous to that of Poland, Germany, Hungary, Ireland and the Balkans at the time of Marx."\(^5\)

Some other scholars think that the ideas of Karl Marx were not very clear in understanding the colonial question. For example, E. H. Carr has written that Marx gave little thought to colonial questions,... The First International ignored them. The Second International remained for a long time equally apathetic.\(^6\) Even a famous Soviet scholar R. A. Ulyanovsky has pointed out that Karl Marx had not know imperialism. The historic merit of exposing its economic, social and political essence, and conditions and capabilities engendered by imperialism for revolutionary activity belonged to Lenin.\(^7\) The focal point of Marx's revolutionary strategy were the highly industrialised

\(^5\) Ibid.


nations of Europe where, according to his formulation the sharpness of class division and class struggle would lead eventually to proletarian revolution. Clearly, for a socialist revolution Marx depended largely on industrially developed nations. The colonial world did not occupy a position of great significance in his scheme of things. This was reflected even in the activities of the First International led by Marx. The national and colonial issue was not discussed separately at the Congress of the First International, it was recognised as an important aspect of the struggle of the international working class against the capitalist countries only at the next stage of this movement.\(^8\) The main reason for such an approach was that the world system of capitalist economy was still in the process of formation.

One may differ from the opinion expressed by Karl Marx on the colonial question, however, there is no contradiction between Marx and Lenin on this basic issue. The facts remain that the Lenin's interpretation of colonialism is the extension of Marx's propositions. The only contradiction which remains to be seen is that the two political thinkers lived in two different era. It is obvious that Lenin's era witnessed imperialism as the highest stage of capitalism while the same situation did not exist during Marx's time. A Soviet scholar has rightly pointed out that in analysing the situation in colonial and dependent countries and the development of the liberation movement there, Lenin was guided by the scientific theory of dialectical and historical

materialism, evolved by Marx and Engels. Lenin continued their work in new historical conditions. His works, including those dealing with the national-liberation movement, reflected the course and prospects of world developments at the turn of the 19th century.9

In relation to India in an article, "The Future Results of the British Rule in India", Karl Marx said in 1853: "England has to fulfil a double mission in India: One destructive, the other regenerating the annihilation of old Asiatic society, and the laying of the material foundations of Western society in Asia. Arabs, Turks, Tartars, Moghuls who had successively overrun India, soon became Hinduized, the barbarian conquerors being, by an eternal law of history, conquered themselves by the superior civilization of their subjects. The British were the first conquerors superior, and, therefore, inaccessible to Hindu civilization. They destroyed it by breaking up the native communities, by uprooting the native industry, and by levelling all that was great and elevated in the native society. The historical pages of their rule in India report hardly anything beyond that destruction. The work of regeneration hardly transpires through a heap of ruins. Nevertheless it has begun."10

He further added: "The political unity of India, more consolidated, and extending farther than it ever did under the Great Moghuls, was the first condition of its regeneration. That

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10 K. Marx and F. Engels, n.1, P. 82.
unity, imposed by the British sword, will now be strengthened and perpetuated by the electric telegraph. The native army organised and trained by the British drill-sergeant, was the *sine qua non* of Indian self-emancipation, and of India ceasing to be the prey of the first foreign intruder.... Steam has brought India into regular and rapid communication with Europe, has connected its chief ports with those of the whole South-Eastern ocean, and has revindicated it from the isolated position which was the prime law of its stagnation. The day is not far distant when, by a combination of railways and steam vessels, the distance between England and India, measured by time, will be shortened to eight days, and when that once fabulous country will thus be actually annexed to the western world.\(^{11}\)

Nevertheless, Marx's formulations, however imprecise they were, provided a seed-bed of ideas for the successive generations of revolutionaries for chalking out their own respective strategies. Some of the basic ideas constituting the determining principles of national and colonial question to be taken up by the successive generation of revolutionaries, were related to the following: the specific feature of the Eastern society; the link between colonial expansion and the primary accumulation of capital; the contradictory and dual socio-historical role of foreign capitalist domination in the colonial world; the forms and methods of colonial exploitation; the inter-connection between the national liberation movement in the colonies and the proletarian class struggle; the attitude of the working-class movement towards the national movements when it comes to

\(^{11}\) Ibid., PP. 82-83.
regard the national problem as a national colonial one, etc.\textsuperscript{12}

However, before going into the details of Lenin's ideas on colonialism and anti-colonial movement it would be quite relevant here to scrutinise carefully the validity of such claims made by a group of western scholars that Lenin's theoretical interest in the colonial question, which became manifest at the time of Second Comintern Congress in 1920, was the result of the disillusionment of Russian revolutionaries with the receding prospects of revolution in the West. It is claimed, for instance, that the defeat of revolution in Germany, the collapse of the Hungarian Soviet Republic, the liquidation of Soviet regimes in several countries which were formerly members of the Tsarist empire, such as Finland and the Baltic states, had resulted in the decline of revolutionary fervour throughout Europe, and discovering that the revolutionary prospects in the West were at low ebb, Lenin turned his attention towards the East.\textsuperscript{13}

Such an interpretation, however, scholarly it might appear, fails to acknowledge that Lenin's interest in the colonial countries of the East in the 1920s was not precipitated by the sudden collapse of revolutionary opportunities in the West, but was in direct continuation of his preoccupation with colonial problems for quite a long time.

Analysing in detail about the colonial process, Lenin estimated that by 1876, the colonialists had occupied 51.5 per

\textsuperscript{12} F. B. Belelyubsky, n. 8, PP. 32-33.

cent of all the territories of Asia, 100 per cent of Australia and 27.5 per cent of Central and South America while Africa was in the tragic period of partition. When London Congress of the Second International in 1896 adopted resolution recognizing the right of nations to self-determination, the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party was the first socialist party at its Second Congress in 1903, to introduce this slogan into its programme.

In the meantime, the Russian Revolution of 1905 influenced all anti-colonial movements throughout Asia. Lenin had rightly called this revolution as "dress rehearsal" for the October Revolution of 1917. In his work, "The Right of Nations to self-determination", Lenin wrote: "In Eastern Europe and Asia the period of bourgeois democratic revolutions did not begin until 1905. The revolutions in Russia, Persia, Turkey and China, the Balkans war - such is the chain of world events of our period in our "Orient" (East). And only a blind man could fail to see in this chain of events the awakening of a whole series of bourgeois democratic national movements, which strive to create nationally independent and rationally uniform state." According to another

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15 F. B. Belelyubsky's article in, R. A. Ulyanovsky, ed., n. 8, P. 58.

Russian source, the first Russian revolution aroused the peoples of the colonial and dependent countries; it exercised considerable influence on the Chinese revolutionary democrats headed by Sun Yat-sen. Its influence was also felt by the leaders of young Turks in the revolution of 1908 and the revolutionary upsurge in India (1905-1908) and in Persia (1905-11) was also connected with the revolutionary movement of the masses of the people of Russia. Imperialism was experiencing a tangible shake up in its colonial system. At the Stuttgart Congress of Second International, commenting on the deliberations on the colonial question Lenin had severely castigated the unalloyed opportunism of Hendrik Van Kol of Holland. His draft resolution to the effect that the Stuttgart Congress did not in principle oppose colonial policy as such, for even under socialism colonial policy had a civilising role to play was defeated through the stubborn opposition of Lenin and his comrades. Lenin's contention was that the draft resolution was signifying blatant bourgeois chauvinism and it utterly disregarded the interest of colonial people. Later on, in an article, "The Awakening of Asia", published in Pravda on May 7, 1913 Lenin said: "Following the 1905 movement in Russia, the democratic revolution spread to the whole of Asia - to Turkey, Persia, China. Ferment is growing in British India." A significant development is the spread of


19 V. I. Lenin, Collected Works vol. 13, pp. 75-76.
revolutionary democratic movement to the Dutch East Indies, to Java and other Dutch colonies with a population of some forty million.... World capitalism and the 1905 movement in Russia have finally aroused Asia."²⁰ He further said: "The awakening of Asia and the beginning of the struggle for power by the advanced proletariat of Europe are a symbol of the new phase in world history that began early this century."²¹ Within two weeks after this publication Lenin again wrote in Pravda on May 18, 1913 that everywhere in Asia a mighty democratic movement was growing, spreading and gaining strength.... No force on earth can prevent its victory, which will liberate both the peoples of Europe and the people of Asia.²²

Similarly, it is in the same spirit that in 1916 in his critique of the thesis of Roza Luxemburg, Lenin severely criticised her for her failure to understand that in the age of unbridled imperialism national wars waged by the colonies and semi-colonies were not only probable but inevitable and that such battles for national liberation would ultimately take the form of national wars against imperialism.²³

Thus, much before the October Revolution Lenin's writings on the colonial problem pointed in quite clear terms some very significant methodological questions which emanated from his


²¹ Ibid., P. 86.

²² Ibid., PP. 99-100.

study of the nature and role of imperialism. To put it differently, imperialism was the main focus of Lenin's theoretical formulations on colonialism and national liberation movements.

Lenin's theory of imperialism was an attempt to explain the formidable fact the revolution had not yet occurred in the most highly developed countries. Explained in simple terms the essence of his theory was as follows: Instead of having developed internal contradictions to a point where Communist revolution must inevitably occurs, capitalism had found a way out by expanding into the world in search for cheap raw materials, a market for commodities and excess capital, and cheap labour which would be exploited. Such an expansion was possible primarily because of intense competition between monopolies eager to bring all the processes of manufacture under direct control and stop the falling rates of profits at home. Such a process of imperialistic expansion produced super profits from the world dependencies which enabled the capitalists to bribe a part of the proletariat, thereby creating as bond between it and capitalism.24

In short, imperialism was taken as an instrument of robbing the proletariat of its revolutionary character - it was through super profits that the bourgeoisie in the metropolitan countries had succeeded in averting the increase in the misery of the

masses which was an essential situation for the out-break of revolution. However, as Lenin argued, this did not remove the irreconcilable contradiction in a capitalist society. Besides some of these contradictions obstinately existing in a capitalist society many of them were transformed on the international level expressing themselves in two forms - (a) Contradictions between the imperialist powers and (b) Contradictions between the imperialist powers and the colonial_world. These questions were specially debated in the Comintern Congress and attempts were made to put them in to practice. So far as, the concrete Soviet policy towards Asia is concerned, it began to take proper shape just the next day after the October Revolution, when Lenin announced the famous "Decree of Peace" on November 8, 1917 in which he said: "The workers and peasants' government created by the revolution of November 6-7 and backed by the Soviet of Workers, soldiers and peasants' deputies calls upon all the belligerent peoples and their governments to start immediate negotiations for a just and democratic peace."²⁵

He further stated: "The government considers that it would be the greatest of crime against humanity to continue this war for the purpose of dividing up among the strong and rich nations, the feeble nationalities seized by them and solemnly declares its determination to sign immediately conditions indicated, which are equally just for all peoples without exception.... The government abolished secret diplomacy and for its part, expresses it firm determination to conduct all negotiations quite openly before the whole people. It will immediately proceed to

the full publication of the secret treaties ratified or concluded by
the government of landlords and capitalists during the period
March to November 7, 1917."\textsuperscript{26}

On the basis of the above declaration, Soviet government
abrogated all secret treaties concluded by Tsarist government
and paid special attention to Asian countries. Lenin's abrogation
of secret treaties between Tsar and the British partitioning Iran
and Afghanistan under their sphere of influence, created most
favourable atmosphere for the implementation of Soviet policy
against colonialism in Asia.

Lenin thus was able to establish both the theoretical and
strategical links between (a) the colonial and national questions
through the advocacy of a common policy for them; and (b) the
united proletarian struggle in the capitalist countries and
national liberation movements in the colonies. He, in no
circumstances, was prepared to consider the colonial question
and the prospect of proletarian revolution in the West and the
final victory of socialism over capitalism as entities separate
from one another. He saw a dialectical relationship between the
national democratic struggles and the socialist revolution. He
showed that the popular masses, the proletariat, peasantry and
petty-bourgeoisie, of the oppressed nation were the allies of the
conscious proletariat of metropolitan countries. Lenin wrote that
the world social revolution would occur only "in the form of an
epoch of proletarian civil war against the bourgeoisie in advanced
countries combined with a whole series of democratic and
revolutionary movements including movements for national

\textsuperscript{26} Ibid., P. 402.
liberation in the undeveloped backward and oppressed nations."\(^{27}\)

Thus, for a final victory of socialism over capitalism, Lenin laid equal emphasis on the success of socialist revolution in the West, and on the imperative need of national liberation in the colonies.

It is quite clear from the foregoing analysis that the elements of theory and strategy intermingled with each other quite admirably in Lenin's formulations on the colonial question. In any case, fundamental purpose was never lost sight of. That is to say, it was aimed, firstly, to resurrect the proletarian movement in capitalist countries from the reformist quagmire and galvanise it for a new series of militant action to sap the foundation of capitalism. Secondly, it also aimed at forging an inseparable link between the Western proletariat and colonised peoples of the East. For this reason the national oppression and colonial exploitation were not distinguished from one another. These two divergence courses were drawn into a common objective - the ultimate victory of socialism and proletarian internationalism.

If we keep aside for a moment the era of Gorbachev's Perestroika after 1985, it will appear that the Soviet policies be it domestic or foreign, had been derived from the Lenin's ideological formulations in the past. These policies received dogmatic treatment during the early decades after October Revolution. During that period most of the Asian countries were reeling under the colonial domination, that is why, Lenin took special interest in Asian affairs and tried to help ideologically

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these people to fight against colonialism. He formulated that the national liberation movement developed parallel to the growth of capitalism in these countries. This is the reason why the revolutionary people of these countries had to adopt dual policy while fighting against colonialism. On the one hand, they had to fight against international colonialism while on the other, against domestic capitalism. In such a complex situation, it was not so easy to adopt a ready-made policy during the struggle for national liberation. That is why, the urgent need was felt to form Communist International in 1919 to solve all these complex problems.

At the outset of formation of the Comintern Soviet Russia was dangerously surrounded by hostile powers and subsequently engaged in fierce civil war which posed a potential threat to the basic existence of newly born revolutionary state. At the same time, Soviet Russia had already lost the diplomatic relations with almost all major powers of the world. Under these circumstances, the Comintern was very wisely used by the Soviets to make urgent appeals to international proletariats in the East and West both to defend Soviet Russia and wage struggles for national liberation in the colonies throughout the world.

As a result of the above appeals, thousands of revolutionaries from all over the world, most of them had already been living in Russia, fought shoulder to shoulder with Red Army against domestic as well as foreign invaders. The struggle for Soviet Russia was coincided by promoting national liberation and communist movements, particularly in the East. In this process a
Soviet scholar says that an outstanding role was played by the Communist International. It effectively contributed to the unification of communist elements in the oppressed countries, played an indispensable part in arming the emerging communist parties in the East with Marxist-Leninist theory and helped them to chart their strategy and tactics and policy of forming alliances with the non-proletarian anti-imperialist forces.²⁸ He has further pointed out: "As the head of the Comintern's collectives leadership Lenin guided the organizations' activities in the post-October period when the proletariat launched an assault on imperialist citadels in the West and there was a powerful upsurge of the struggle of the oppressed people against imperialist domination throughout the colonial East."²⁹ In a different language, the Comintern provided instrumentalities through which Leninist foreign policy was sought to be projected.

It was natural, therefore, that there should have been a distinct commonness between the objective of the Comintern and those of the Soviet State. It would not be exaggeration to say that with the passage of time this commonness became all the more conspicuous when aims and objectives of the Comintern were largely subordinated to those of the Soviet State.

It is in this background the present chapter aims at analysing the historical and ideological background of Soviet policy towards anti-colonial movement. The genesis and development of this policy which was pursued in a highly effective manner by the Soviet state and Comintern can be traced

²⁸ R. A. Ulyanovsky, ed., n. 8, P. 5.

²⁹ Ibid., P. 6.
in an embryonic form in the writings of Marx and Engels. Later from the early years of the present century we find Lenin coming back to this question again and again, each time expounding his theory in much clearer and sharper form.