**RESEARCH PAPER**

**COMMUNISM AND THE PURSUIT OF POLITICAL EQUALITY**

**By:-**

**ALENA DOMINIC**

**2nd Yr., BBA.LLB (Hons.)**

**SYMBIOSIS LAW SCHOOL, PUNE**

**Email: alenadominic@gmail.com**

****

[**www.probono-india.in**](http://www.probono-india.in)

**December 14, 2020**

**COMMUNISM AND THE PURSUIT OF POLITICAL EQUALITY**

*“Communism is the riddle of history solved,*

*and it knows itself to be this solution”*

*-Karl Max (1818-1883)*

**ABSTARCT**

Karl Marx’s “*Communist Manifesto*” sets out a new kind of society: a workers’ paradise where property and wealth are owned in common. Political Equity incorporates rights such as universal Adult Franchise and other civil rights which are important in a democratic country. The following is a research paper on ‘Communism and the Pursuit of Political Equality’. This research paper contains the following headings: Introduction, Research, critical analysis, conclusion, and recommendations. This paper focuses on the idea of communism and political equity in India. The paper also focuses on the extent of influence of communist ideology incorporated into the rights under political equality. The paper also focuses in detail on the History of Communism in India, Universal Adult Franchise, Equality of Opportunity with regards to Political Equality, and the issues faced under these rights.

**KEYWORDS**

Communism, Political Equality, Political Egalitarianism, Karl Max, India

**INTRODUCTION**

Communism was a movement that was dedicated to overthrowing capitalist systems. It is an ideology that believes in holding the resources from production collectively. A detailed meaning of communism would be that it is a system of organization where all properties are owned by the community and not just by one person or by a private entity and each person would receive resources according to their needs and would contribute according to their ability. In a basic sense, communism is when all manufacturing or ‘means of production’ are equally owned by all the members of the state. The intended result was to eliminate the capitalist- inspired class system where one class does all the work while the other class gets all the money. But in general is agreed that while communism is great in theory, it is disastrous in practice. Attempts to achieve communism have led to government corruption, a lower standard of living and, total collapse and failure of the government, in the case of the USSR.

Political Equality is where people in a society have equal standing in terms of political power and influence. This principle is one of the pillars of democracy. Political equality suggests that all citizens of a country must be treated equally solely based on their citizenship, and not based on their race, caste, religion, gender, or wealth. The basic foundation of political equality is that person has the capacity to make political judgments irrespective of distinction between genders. Now political equality is associated with democratic rights such as freedom of speech, religion, assembly, and association, one person-one vote, and equality before law. Equality of opportunity too is part of political equality. Under this, regardless of the background a capable person comes from, they should be allowed to compete on a leveled playing field with all other people.

**RESEARCH**

The common form of communism (now known as “Marxism”) comes from the works of German philosopher Karl Max and Frederich Engles. Communism is derived from the French word communisme (translated to “of or for the community”) which is developed from the Latin words communis and isme.

In India, Communism stood for courageous resistance against oppression, mistreatment, tyranny, and exploitation. Millions of lives of revolutionaries were sacrificed who pledged themselves to the dream of an egalitarian and democratic country. The Indian communist movement was internationalist because they stood for the rights of oppressed people all around the world, though this stance was not popular in India. In India, during that time more than 80% of the population was agrarian. Mobilizing the peasantry on a large scale was the only possible way for national liberation in the country. As a result, the communist movement which started mainly in urban areas started gaining popularity in rural level as well. As exploitation of peasants by landlords was prevalent in rural India, communism had to tussle with ingraining Indian feudalism. The first of the issues taken up by them was ‘Untouchability’ which was connected to forced labour and low wages. The number of working class struggles increased in the country in response to the enlistment of five to seven million Indian workers in the Second World War. By the time of Independence, there was an increase in differences within the communist party, which led to the party splitting into two. As the country entered into the Neoliberal era, communists were against the privatization of public properties and dilution of labour rights. Since the Soviet Union, which was formally the pinnacle of communism movement collapsed, India had a shift towards an aggressive form of capitalism.

Equality is defined as a state of being equal in terms of status, rights, and opportunities. Equality implies similarity, not ‘identical’. Political equality is one of the most basic yet valuable forms of equality. It is one where democracy is held in high standards. Political Equality refers to the rights of citizens of a nation with regards to the political sphere. In short, it is the citizen’s right to have equal voice over the decisions of the government. All citizens are equal in terms of rights and consideration over interests in from of the government. This form of equality is difficult and complicated to define precisely. But it broadly falls under Universal Adult Franchise, One man- One vote, access to political offices for all citizens, and other democratic rights such as freedom of speech, freedom of speech, freedom of opportunities, freedom of assembly, and freedom of association. Citizen participation is the heart of political equality. Activities such as political campaigns, campaign contributions, and local community activities are part of political equality apart from one man- one vote. These activities are crucial as this is the means by which the citizens of the nation inform the governing party about their needs and wants. They force the government to be responsive to their demands. It is through political parties by which citizens in a democratic nation choose leaders in public offices and influence the government. Political Equality builds a sense of community in the nation as the society has a collective goal to achieve and are bound to do them together.

Universal Adult Franchise is an important factor identified with political equality. It gives the adult citizens of a state the right to vote irrespective of their gender, social status, race, wealth, or any other restrictions. It is based on equality which is one of the pillars of a democratic country. This right was slow in development. In the early democratic countries, the right to vote was only given to males with wealth and of higher class. This only represented a minority of the citizens in a country. Women were not given the right to vote at that time. Most western countries adopted universal adult franchise only in the wake of World War 1 (1914-1918). India adopted Universal Adult Franchise when the constitution was enacted in 1949 and implemented on January 26th, 1950. In India, the minimum age for exercising the right to vote is 18 years. Before the 61st Amendment Act, the minimum age to exercise the right to vote was 21 years. There are certain qualifications which have to be met to exercise the right to vote: One must be a citizen of India; must have attained 18 years of age; must not be of unsound minds; and must not be declared bankrupt by a court of competence.

 Article 326 of the Indian Constitution[[1]](#footnote-2) states that:

“Elections to the House of the People and to the Legislative Assemblies of States to be on the basis of adult suffrage The elections to the House of the People and to the Legislative Assembly of every State shall be on the basis of adult suffrage; but is to say, every person who is a citizen of India and who is not less than twenty one years of age on such date as may be fixed in that behalf by or under any law made by the appropriate legislature and is not otherwise disqualified under this constitution or any law made by the appropriate Legislature on the ground of non residence, unsoundness of mind, crime or corrupt or illegal practice, shall be entitled to be registered as a voter at any such election”

The article summarizes that elections in the country should be held on the basis of Universal Adult Franchise. India has incorporated ideals such as liberty, equality from other countries. But many of them did not have a holistic development until very late. During the introduction of the Article, Universal Adult Franchise was granted, which included women. Dr. B R Ambedkar considered voting as a tool for the oppressed section of the society to rise from their poverty. He played a crucial role in the drafting of the constitution and ensured that India followed Universal Adult Franchise post independence. Voting rights give people political equality. Jawarharlal Nehru was also of the same views. Earlier in western countries, right to vote was denied to many on the grounds that they could not be expected to exercise them wisely. Post Independence India suffered from poverty and was riddled with caste, gender, and class discrimination. Granting Universal Adult Franchise was a radical movement made by the framers of the Constitution. Dr. BR Ambedkar’s idea was based on two principles. One of the arguments was that voting was essential to citizenship and for equal moral membership. The other argument was that voting was a tool to ‘remove evil conditions’ which existed in the nation. Voting would serve as a means of political education for those who were denied space is any part of politics and society. There are arguments against Universal Adult Franchise in India. One of them was that since India was a country that had a high number of illiterate people, it was dangerous to have Universal Adult Franchise and they had to be restricted accordingly. Though there were other people from the assembly who supported it, the assembly adopted the universal adult franchise because it will result in the ultimate success of the democracy. They stated that the introduction of adult suffrage will promote the well-being and decent living of a common man. The direct result is prosperity at lower levels and development of the infrastructure of the country.

Another important part of political equality is the equality of opportunities.

Article 16 of the Indian Constitution[[2]](#footnote-3) states that:

 Equality of opportunity in matters of public employment

(1) There shall be equality of opportunity for all citizens in matters relating to employment or appointment to any office under the State

(2) No citizen shall, on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, descent, place of birth, residence or any of them, be ineligible for, or discriminated against in respect or, any employment or office under the State

(3) Nothing in this article shall prevent Parliament from making any law prescribing, in regard to a class or classes of employment or appointment to an office under the Government of, or any local or other authority within, a State or Union territory, any requirement as to residence within that State or Union territory prior to such employment or appointment

(4) Nothing in this article shall prevent the State from making any provision for the reservation of appointments or posts in favour of any backward class of citizens which, in the opinion of the State, is not adequately represented in the services under the State

(5) Nothing in this article shall affect the operation of any law which provides that the incumbent of an office in connection with the affairs of any religious or denominational institution or any member of the governing body thereof shall be a person professing a particular religion or belonging to a particular denomination

 Article 16(1) and (2) explain that no Indian citizen shall face discrimination of any kind with respect to public employment. Provisions under Article 16 falls under the same category as the provisions under Articles 14, 15, and 17 i.e. the government’s commitment in protecting the interests of Scheduled castes and Scheduled tribes. The provision under Article 16(1) is only applicable for employment/ offices which are held by the state. Clause 2 of the article states that citizens of India should not be discriminated against under religion, race, caste, gender, residence and any other for the purpose of employment.

Communism focuses more on equality of outcome rather than equality of opportunity. Equality of opportunity is capitalist in nature. But they are more of partners rather than opposites. There can be no real equality of opportunity without any equality of outcome. Equality of opportunity is of the sense that everyone starts the race at the same time while equality of outcome attempts to ensure that everyone finishes the race at the same time. Though Karl Marx was in favour of equality of outcome, it was never the ultimate goal. His notion of equality was the abolishment of class.

**CRITICAL ANALYSIS**

There are many advantages to communism. One of the main advantages is that it overrides the self-interest of individuals. In theory, under communism, there would be abolishing of the right of inheritance, centralization of credit in the hands of the state, abolition of child labour, and free education to all children irrespective of wealth and income. Communism would also ensure that there the major sectors in a country such as transportation, communication, etc would be controlled by the government. The communist countries all around the world have free health care, education, and other essential services. The government owns the business on behalf of the works which effectively means that the government controls the monopoly. But there are certain problems associated with it. The main problem is that communism eliminates free market. It is the government that controls the prices, the supply, and the demand for products. This results in a lack of information on customer feedbacks and often results in a surplus or shortage of goods. China, which is governed by the communist party, is in complete control from government to military in the country. The country, albeit being a communist nation, does not elect its leaders based on universal adult franchise. Though it is an economic powerhouse, the country tolerates no opposition or dissent against the ruling government. The government moreover has a stronghold on the media and internet which silences dissent. There is no true opposition against the government and any person who criticize the government rick facing persecution. This goes against political equality which provides us the freedom of speech and expression. This almost total control of the media helps the government to sway public opinion. This has created a bad reputation for communism around the world because people equate communism to authoritarianism.

In the French revolution, Equality was one of the main ideals in a political body. Political equality is enshrined in the Constitution of India where all citizens of India irrespective of caste, religion, gender have the right to vote. Initially, though the political parties were able to gather the support of rural areas, it was soon clear that voters were appealed more to their caste, religion, and language rather than the appeal of a nationwide public policy. It was soon seen that the lower caste, which had the majority population rose to higher positions and occupied seats in municipal bodies, legislative assemblies, and parliament and party organizations. Differences and rivalries which were set aside and squashed during independence reignited. As a result, linguistic, caste, and tribe based political organization rose throughout the nation. Elections rarely involved issues that were of public policies. The majority of the citizens prefer political leaders from their own class, caste, or religion. This was more prevalent in among citizens who were illiterate across castes and religions. Many a time the political candidates were less than qualified for their positions. Surveys have shown that illiterate candidates who constitute about 63% of the candidates were less likely to make changes in the community than a college-level educated candidate (who only constitute 47% of the total candidates).

Another problem that arose from Universal Adult suffrage was that social classes that were politically dormant now played an important role in local politics. In Urban areas, high class and well-educated political leaders who had previously guided the parties have now been replaced by less educated and status- hungry people. This caused a bitter struggle for power in local party organizations. Regardless of who won, urban municipal governments increasingly fell under the control of lower social caste men. However, in rural areas, this was not the scenario. Rich and prosperous rural businessmen, rich landlords still reigned power at rural level. The organizations of local governments in rural areas are still controlled by comparatively high class and educated landlords. As of now, it is seen that lower castes have become increasingly active in political activities in rural areas. But still, the ultimate result is that more often than not, the government is reigned by people who have no experience in managing government bodies which leads to inefficiency. A rise in the number of lower caste people entering into panchayats saw favouritism towards a specific community. This shows the inefficiency of local government bodies and corruption. This crass struggle of power in the local level government bodies is one of the main side effects of Universal Adult Franchise in India. A part of Equality of Opportunity, falls under Political Equality in Education and Job opportunities. To improve the social and economic position of backward classes in the country, legislation was passed to reserve a proportion of seats in the educational sectors. A certain percentage of jobs (usually large amount- in government bodies) were reserved as such. This is not given to people of higher class as they have a jumpstart in education and admissions in colleges and universities. This has led to the inevitable decrease in the standard of quality. Many critics and cut off marks are decreased for those of backward classes in education and government sectors. These policies and legislations increase caste loyalties for political parties. These policies do not necessarily equalize the positions of the backward class in society. Many families of the high class are economically backward while many backward class individuals come from wealthy families. Test to check economic conditions must be applied to individuals rather than an entire community. With a rise in the number of people going for higher education, State ministers have to choose between mass education and high quality education.

Another problem that arises is industrialization. The main aim of any nation is to boost its economic growth and increase national income. Privatization helps increase economic growth and competition. As a result of globalization, the world economy has become one global sector. Privatization prevents state interference from interfering in the functioning of the company. It has helped lessen the financial burden upon the government. Privatization had helped revive the stagnant Indian economy in the early 1991. But the main ideology of communism is that all property is owned by the community. Their philosophy is for the collective ownership of properties and was against all forms of private ownership dealing with production.

**CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION**

Communism is an ideology that is defined very clearly in theory. But is something which harder to manifest in real life. Part of the reason could be that it has not been truly tried. It is a theory that has very complex reasoning towards a future social evolution. Under communism, oppression is the result of the way we organize our means of survival i.e. Capitalism. But capitalism is necessary for innovation, healthy competition, and the prosperity of a country. It is not something that can be completely ignored and set aside. Too much communism may lead to an authoritarian government while too much capitalism leads to social inequalities and failure to create equality of outcome (which in turn leads to failure of equality of opportunities). Even the communist nation China has incorporated a form of free market capitalism (though there are some Chinese features to it). It is essential to create a balance between the two in order to have a fair and economically strong nation. In recognizing the flaws under capitalism and communism we can find this balance and adopt them. Many of the advantages under communism are built around social and political equality rights such as Universal Adult Franchise and Equality of opportunities.

**REFERENCES**

1. A. Brown, ‘Communism’ (science direct, 2001) <www.sciencedirect.com/topics/social-sciences/communism> accessed on 8th December 2020.
2. ‘Communism Timeline’ (history, 9th July 2019) <https://www.history.com/topics/russia/communism-timeline> accessed on 8th December 2020.
3. ‘One hundred Years of the Communist Movement in India’ (tri continental, 1st September 2020)<https://www.thetricontinental.org/dossier-32-communist-movement-in-india/> accessed on 8th December 2020.
4. Samved Iyer, ‘An essay on political Equality in India’ (reader’s blog, 14th April 2020) <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/readersblog/the-disquisitions-of-a-common-indian/an-essay-on-political-equality-in-india-11973/> accessed on 9th December 2020.
5. Myron Weiner, ‘The Struggle for Equality in India’ (Jstor) <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20029587> accessed on 9th December 2020.
6. Gaghre, ‘Equality in India Social and Political Scenario’, (legal services India) <http://www.legalservicesindia.com/article/1901/Equality-in-India-Social-and-Political-Scenario.html> accessed on 9th December 2020.
7. ‘Equality: Social, political and economic; relationship between equality and freedom; Affirmative action’ (civil service India) <https://www.civilserviceindia.com/subject/Political-Science/notes/equality-social-political-and-economic.html> accessed on 9th December 2020.
8. S.A.H Haqqi, ‘Adult Franchise and Democracy in India’ (Jstor) <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41853946> accessed on 10th December 2020.
9. Sean Sayers, ‘Private Property and Communism’ (springerlink, 2011) <https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1057/9780230309142\_7> accessed on 10th December 2020.
10. David Purdy, ‘Communism and Democracy- a living legacy’ (open democracy, 27th April 2018) <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/communism-and-democracy-living-legacy/> accessed on 10th December 2020.
11. Gautam Bhatia, ‘Ambedkar and the right to vote’ (mint, 12th April 2019) <https://www.livemint.com/mint-lounge/features/ambedkar-and-the-right-to-vote-1555040490483.html> accessed on 10th December 2020.
12. G. A. Cohen and Keith Graham, ‘Self-Ownership, Communism and Equality’ (Jstor) <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4106878?seq=1> accessed on 10th December 2020.
13. A Left Wanderer, ‘Does Marxism call for “Equality of outcome”’ (medium, 5th June) <https://medium.com/@aleftwanderer/does-marxism-call-for-equality-of-outcome-47327d07b105> accessed on 10th December 2020.
14. ‘Universal Adult Suffrage’ (elections, 24th September 2014) <https://www.elections.in/political-corner/universal-adult-suffrage/> accessed on 10th December 2020.
15. Alison Saldanha, ‘How caste and religion influence selection of political leaders in India’ (Business Standard, 18th July 2018) <https://www.business-standard.com/article/politics/how-caste-and-religion-influence-selection-of-political-leaders-in-india-118071800122\_1.html> accessed on 10th December 2020.
16. J. K. Mittal, ‘Equality of opportunity in matters of public employment and the Indian Supreme Court’ (Jstor) <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24862306?seq=1> accessed on 10th December 2020.
17. Waleed A. Jami and Markus Kemmelmeier, ‘Remnants of Communism and Present-Day inequality’ (sage journals, 27th September 2020) <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1069397120957293> accessed on 11th December 2020.
18. Dipti Khatri, ‘Equality of opportunity in Public employment’ (Lawctopus, 12th January 2015) <https://www.lawctopus.com/academike/equality-opportunity-public-employment/> accessed on 11th December 2020.
19. Samasti, ‘Article 16 of the Indian Constitution’ (samistilegal, 3rd May 2018) <https://samistilegal.in/article-16-of-indian-constitution/> accessed on 11th December 2020.
20. Diva Rai, ‘Rights to Equality: Article 16, 17 & 18 under the Indian constitution’ (ipleaders, 15th January 2020) <https://blog.ipleaders.in/right-to-equality-article-16-17-18/#Right\_to\_equality\_of\_Opportunity\_in\_Public\_Employment\_Article\_16> accessed on 11th December 2020.
21. Ed Rooksby, ‘the complexity of equality’ (the guardian, 14th October 2010) <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2010/oct/14/complexity-of-equality> accessed on 11th December 2020.
22. Ben Werdmüller, ‘Equality of opportunity vs Equality of outcome’ (Ben Werdmüller, 6th June 2018) <https://werd.io/2018/equality-of-opportunity-vs-equality-of-outcome#:~:text=Equality%20of%20opportunity%20provides%20in,Everyone%20must%20be%20completely%20equal!> Accessed on 11th December 2020.
23. John M. Echolos III, ‘Does Socialism mean greater Equality? A Comparison of East and West along Several major Dimension’ (Jstor, February 1981) <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2110910?seq=1> accessed on 11th December 2020.
24. Kimberly Amadeo, ‘Communism: what it is, gow it works, and Comparing it to Capitalism and Socialism’ (the balance, 17th September 2020) <https://www.thebalance.com/communism-characteristics-pros-cons-examples-3305589#:~:text=Disadvantages,about%20what%20the%20people%20want> accessed on 11th December 2020.
25. ‘China anniversary: How the communist Party runs the country’ (BBC news, 30th September 2019) <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-49631120> accessed on 11th December 2020.
26. Zeechan Aleem, ‘Is china still communist?’ (Vox, 19th January 2017) <https://cpb-us-w2.wpmucdn.com/u.osu.edu/dist/a/43197/files/2017/02/Stafford\_2017\_China-2cr35vt.pdf> accessed on 11th December 2020.
27. ‘Equality of Opportunity’ (Stanford encyclopedia of philosophy, 8th October 2002) <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/equal-opportunity/> accessed on 11th December 2020.
28. John Mauldin, ‘Capitalism Isn’t Bad; It’s Just Broken’ (Forbes, 12th February 2019) <https://www.forbes.com/sites/johnmauldin/2019/02/12/capitalism-isnt-bad-its-just-broken/?sh=67641b5b524c> accessed on 11th December 2020.
29. Micheal Ray, ‘Why did the Soviet Union Collapse’ (Britannica) <https://www.britannica.com/story/why-did-the-soviet-union-collapse> accessed on 11th December 2020.
30. ‘The collapse of the Soviet Union’ (Office of the historian) <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1989-1992/collapse-soviet-union#:~:text=Gorbachev's%20decision%20to%20loosen%20the,Communist%20rule%20throughout%20Eastern%20Europe> Accessed on 11th December 2020.
31. Cass r. Sunstein, ‘Political Equality and Unintended consequences’ (University of Chicago law School, 1994) <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/234134062.pdf> accessed on 11th December 2020.

**BRIEF ABOUT AUTHOR**

Alena Dominic is a 2nd year BBA.LLB (Hons.) student at Symbiosis Law School, Pune. She has a keen interest in Criminal Law, Family Law and Corporate Law.

1. Indian Constitution, Art 326 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Indian Constitution, Art 16 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)