

The *Manifesto* in India

A Publishing History

The story of

how *The Communist Manifesto* came to be available in Indian languages is not well-known. The Communist Party of India was founded on 17 October 1920 at Tashkent, and Communist groups were working in different centres in India from the early 1920s. The access to the *Manifesto* for Indian revolutionaries was mainly through the copies of the English editions which were smuggled into the country.

In 1922, Ranchhoddas Bhuvan Lotwala brought out a series of pamphlets on scientific socialism under the imprint of Liberty Publications. Among them was the *Manifesto*. This was the first ever printing of the document in India. It was priced 6 annas. According to S.A. Dange, founder of the Communist group in Bombay, a dozen

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pamphlets were brought out by Lotwala. Other booklets published in this series were *Wage, Labour and Capital* by Engels, *Religion of Capital* by Lafargue, and *Communism* by R. Palme Dutt. The March 1923 issue of the *The Socialist*, a monthly edited by Dange, advertised these pamphlets.¹ According to G. Adhikari, 'These pamphlets were among the meagre sources of knowledge of scientific socialism available to the English-educated intellectuals of those days'.²

The publisher of the first edition of the *Manifesto*, R.B. Lotwala, was a patriotic businessman who was attracted to Dange after reading his *Gandhi vs Lenin* published in 1921. In December 1922, he started the Lotwala Trust for advancing socialism in India.³ He went to England in 1923 where he met left-wing Labour leaders and must have acquired some of the Marxist literature that he subsequently published. He owned the Hindustan Press which was used for printing these pamphlets and books.⁴

Bengali

The first version of the *Manifesto* published in an Indian language was in Bengali. It was translated by Soumyendranath Tagore, and published in *Ganavani* ('Voice of the People'), the weekly paper of the Workers' and Peasants' Party of Bengal edited by Muzaffar Ahmad, the founder of the first Communist group in Bengal. The *Manifesto* appeared in six issues of *Ganavani* between 12 August 1926 and 21 July 1927.⁵

Soumyendranath left for Europe in May 1927 and reached Germany in June. The last two instalments of the translation were sent by

¹ *Documents of the History of the Communist Party*, volume 2, 1923–25; edited by G. Adhikari, New Delhi 1974, p. 191

² *Ibid.*, p. 193

³ Mahadev Saha, Explanatory Notes, *Communism in India: Unpublished Documents from the National Archives of India (1919–1924)*, compiled and edited by Subodh Roy, Calcutta 1971, p. 373

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 322

⁵ The six issues of *Ganawani* which carried the *Manifesto* are: volume 1, nos. 1 (12 August 1926), 2 (19 August), 3 (26 August), 4 (2 September), 22 (14 July 1927), 23 (21 July).

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him from Germany. There is a letter intercepted by British Intelligence, sent by Soumyendranath from Berlin to Muzaffar Ahmad in Calcutta, which is available in the state archives in Calcutta. The letter, dated 14 June 1927, refers among other things to the ongoing work of the publication of the *Manifesto*. Soumyendranath wrote:

I am sending the translation of the remaining portion of the *Communist Manifesto* beginning from the second chapter. I think that the translation of the first chapter is already out in *Ganavani*. Please have it compared once. Please have the entire thing published in two issues. Then arrange to publish it in book form. I am making arrangement for money. . . . As soon as my translation has been published in *Ganavani* please advertise that the *Communist Manifesto* will be out shortly in book form. This will be the first publication of the *Ganavani* series.

Soumyendranath's translation was published in book form in 1930, but a copy of this publication is not available.

The first Indian translator of the *Manifesto* had an interesting career. Soumyendranath was the grand nephew of Rabindranath Tagore. Having acquired a degree in Economics from the Presidency College in 1921, Soumyendranath associated himself with the Congress-led nationalist movement. Disillusioned by the experience, he came in contact with radical Swarajists who, in Bengal, had organized a separate political party of their own, the Labour Swaraj Party, in November 1925. The revolutionary poet, Nazrul Islam, was one of the founders of this party. Muzaffar Ahmad joined this party in January 1926 and it was mainly due to his political influence that the Labour Swaraj Party was reconstituted, with a more radical programme, into a new Peasants' and Workers' Party of Bengal in the same month. Soumyendranath joined this party. In the second conference at the party held in February 1927, he became its General Secretary. Subsequently, he became a member of the CPI. He left for Europe in May 1927. Soumyendranath took part in the Sixth Congress of the Communist International in Moscow in 1928, though he was not an official delegate of the CPI. He left the Communist Party in 1934, after his return to India. He formed the Communist League which later

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became the Revolutionary Communist Party of India in 1937. This Trotskyite group had very limited influence.

The second Bengali translation was done by Dr Charu Sanyal, a doctor and Congress leader of Jalpaiguri and it was published in 1933. Another translation was done by a group of scholars under the guidance of Professor Sushobhan Sarkar, noted Marxist historian. This was published by the National Book Agency (NBA) in 1944. A group of Bengali writers in Moscow approved the translation made in the NBA publication and this was published by Progress Publishers, Moscow, in 1968.

Urdu

The next Indian language in which the *Manifesto* appeared was Urdu. Close on the heels of the Bengali version which appeared in *Ganavani*, the *Al-Hilal* weekly, also published from Calcutta, published the first Urdu version. However, unlike *Ganavani* which was a left-wing paper, *Al-Hilal* was founded and edited by Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, Islamic scholar and one of the foremost leaders of the Congress-led nationalist movement.

Al-Hilal carried the first two sections of the *Manifesto* entitled 'Bourgeois and Proletarians' and 'Communists and Proletarians'. These two sections contain the main content of the *Manifesto*, while the last two sections deal with the critique of pseudo-socialisms and the tactics to be adopted by Communists in various European countries. Obviously the latter two parts were considered to be of less interest or relevance to the Urdu readership.

The two parts appeared in the 4, 11 and 18 November 1927 issues successively. The introductory note by the editor mentions that a publishing house in Germany had begun a series of publications of which two volumes have already appeared. The first volume contains the selected writings of Karl Marx along with a detailed sketch of his life. The editor says that after the Russian Revolution, Communism has become a reality and it is necessary for every country to study this doctrine not only politically but also intellectually and arrive at a correct and enlightened opinion about it. The editor states that since there is no book in Urdu that gives a correct account of this

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revolutionary, political, and collectivist faith, it was felt that some brief writing by Marx himself would be suitable for this purpose. For this work by Marx has been selected for publication in *Al-Hilal*. However, neither the introductory note nor the title of the article mentions that the work concerned is *The Communist Manifesto*. The title given in *Al-Hilal* is 'Communism and its Aims' ('*Communism aur uske maksid*').

The editor is careful to point out that the work is being published only to provide the Urdu readership with the material required; this should not be taken to imply that the editor or the journal accepts the doctrine:

In our view Communism is the natural reaction to the bourgeois inequities of modern civilization, and just as the capitalism of modern civilization has reached an extreme, Communism too is a manifestation of the other extreme. The way to virtue and truth cannot be through these extremes, it will always be a middle path.

Apparently, the translator of this version was Abdurrazak Malihabadi, though this is not specifically stated in the weekly. Malihabadi, a close confidante of Azad, lived in Calcutta and was a prominent Congressman.

Another Urdu version was rendered by Abdul Bari who wrote under the name of 'Ishtarki Adeeb' ('communist writer'). This was published in the early thirties from Lahore.

A definitive translation was done by Ali Ashraf, a senior leader of the Communist Party from Bihar, at the instance of P.C. Joshi, the then General Secretary of the Party. It was published in 1946 by Qaumi Darul Ishaat (the branch of People's Publishing House) from Lahore.

Marathi

The next in chronological order was the Marathi version of the *Manifesto*. Gangadhar Moreshwar Adhikari, who became a prominent leader of the CPI, returned from Germany in December 1928. In March 1929, he was implicated in the Meerut Communist Conspiracy case. He translated the *Manifesto* in Meerut jail in 1930–31. It was

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then edited by Jagannath Adhikari and R.M. Jambhekar. This translation was published by the Kamgar Vangmaya Prasarak Mandal, Parel (Mumbai) in October 1931. The first edition had 160 pages and was priced at eight annas. It was the first of a series of Marxist books for the working class published by the Mandal, which was an organization set up by the Communist Party.

The second version of the *Manifesto* in Marathi was published in 1948 by the People's Publishing House belonging to the Communist Party of India.

Tamil

In the same month that the *Manifesto* was published in Marathi, it began to appear in serialized form in Tamil translation. Although this translation and publication appears to have been incomplete, it has an interesting history. E.V. Ramaswami (EVR), the great social reformer and leader of the non-Brahmin and Self-Respect movements in the Tamil-speaking areas of the old Madras Province, popularly known as Periyar, began to publish this serialized translation in the Self-Respect movement's weekly, *Kudi Arasu* (Republic), under the title '*Samadharma Arikkaï*' ('Communist Manifesto'). The weekly published from Erode, EVR's native town, serialized the translation of Chapter I ('Bourgeois and Proletarians') in five consecutive issues beginning 4 October 1931. Although there is no mention of the name of the translator or translators, the first instalment in the series carries an introduction by EVR.

In his Introduction, EVR makes a brief reference to the history of the *Manifesto* and presents his perception of why Russia (the Soviet Union) became the first country to attempt to put Communist ideas into practice. 'However', he says,

such Communist consciousness should have taken shape in India before it did in Russia. If it has not happened here, it is because various conspiracies have taken place and because the schemers have taken great care to see that the Indian people are denied access to education, knowledge, awareness of the world and a sense of self-respect, and are kept in a barbaric state. More-

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over, in the name of god and religion, a consciousness has been instilled in them that being in a condition of subjugation is the will of god and a means of salvation.

But EVR does not subscribe simply to a conspiracy theory. He discerns a larger reason behind the lack of growth of Communist consciousness:

In other countries, one factor is considered important, the capitalist–labour (rich–poor) divide. However, in India, since the divide between the upper and lower castes is rampant and primary, this serves as a fortress for the rich–poor (capitalist) ideology. Because Communism faces double opposition here, Communist consciousness has not grown.

At the end of the fifth instalment in the translated version of Chapter I of the *Manifesto*, which appeared in the 1 November 1931 issue of *Kudi Arasu*, there is an announcement that the first Chapter is over and that the second will follow. However, the subsequent issues of the weekly do not carry the rest of the Tamil translation of the *Manifesto*. It is unlikely that the translation was completed. In fact, a month after the last instalment of Chapter I of the *Manifesto* was published, *Kudi Arasu* (issue of 13 December 1931) carried an editorial announcing that EVR was leaving that very day on a voyage to Europe. The Soviet Union was among the countries he visited. He spent six weeks there, from 14 February to 17 May 1932. It is noteworthy that this outstanding social reformer attempted to publish the *Manifesto* in Tamil and to think about its application to Indian conditions on the eve of a visit to the Soviet Union.

The first full Tamil translation of the *Manifesto* was published much later – in April 1948 – by the Janasakthi Prasuralayam, the CPI publishing house in Chennai. The translator was M. Ismat Basha who contributed a 16-page introduction to the 91-page book. ‘*Kammunist Katchiyin Arikka?*’ (literally, ‘Manifesto of the Communist Party’) was priced at 12 annas (75 paise).

It is fitting that the *Manifesto* got published first in Bengali, Urdu, Marathi, and Tamil, as it is in the centres where these languages pre-

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dominate that the Communist movement first struck roots. The early Communist groups were based in Calcutta, Bombay, Lahore and Madras.

Malayalam

Closely following the Tamil publication came the Malayalam version. In Kerala, Idappalli Karunakara Menon, who translated classics like *War and Peace* and *Crime and Punishment*, translated and published the *Manifesto* in 1932. This version was titled ‘*Samasthi Vada Vijnapanam*’. The Malayalam version appeared four years before the Communist Party was founded in Kerala.

In the early forties, E.M.S. Namboodiripad, Unni Raja and M.S. Devadas translated some important Marxist works including the *Manifesto*. In 1948, a revised edition was published in which D.M. Pottekkatt was mentioned as the translator. More editions were later published by Prabath Books and others.

Telugu

P. Sundarayya, one of the founders of the Communist Party in Andhra Pradesh and South India, translated the *Manifesto* in Telugu in 1933. This was, however, not printed but circulated in cyclostyled form. In a report sent to the Central Committee, the Secretary of the Madras State Committee reported that this translation of the *Manifesto* was being distributed among the cadres. Interestingly, ‘Principles of Communism’ (by Engels) was also translated alongwith the *Manifesto*. Later, Kambhampati Satyanarayana, one of the senior Communist leaders in Andhra, translated the *Manifesto* and it was published by the Communist Party. P. Ramachandra Reddy, a well-known critic also got the *Manifesto* translated and published it. Progress Publishers, Moscow continued to reprint it.

Gujarati

The first Gujarati edition of the *Manifesto* was published in 1934 by the Navi Duniya (New World) Karyalaya Publications Centre in

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Ahmedabad. The Navi Duniya Centre was the first left group in Gujarat. The Centre had two convenors, Ranchod Narayandas Patel and Dinkar Mehta. Patel had become the secretary of the first Communist group in Gujarat in December 1933. Mehta, a Joint Secretary of the All-India Congress Socialist Party, was one of founders of the Communist movement in Gujarat. Navi Duniya brought out a *Granthmala* (series of pamphlets), and the *Manifesto* was the third in the series. It was priced at 6 annas and was printed at Geeta Printers, Ahmedabad. Some of the other titles in the *Granthmala* were *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* by Engels, *Whither Russia* by Jawaharlal Nehru, and *Changing Russia*.

The *Manifesto* was translated by Chandrabhai Bhatt, one of the pioneering Communist leaders of Gujarat. He was a prolific writer, with about 80 publications to his credit. He explained the principles of Communism in his works, engaged in political polemics, and wrote literary works. A notable feature of his translation is that he appended 39 notes to explain the various terms and events referred to in the text for the Gujarati readership.

Hindi

In Hindi, the distinction of being the first translator and publisher of the *Manifesto* goes to Ayodhya Prasad. As a Communist, he was implicated in the Meerut Conspiracy case. He translated the *Manifesto* from jail and after his release in 1933, he published it in 1934 under the imprint of the Matrubhoomi Printing Works, Jhansi. This edition was banned by the British authorities.

Oriya

In Oriya, the *Manifesto* was translated by Bhagabati Panigrahi and published under the title ‘*Vaigyanik samyabad*’ (‘Scientific Communism’) in 1936 by the Congress Socialist Party. Panigrahi was one of the founders of the Communist Party in Orissa and became the first secretary of the Orissa unit of the Party. Earlier, he was the secretary of the Congress Socialist Party in Orissa. Besides being the organizer and leader of various worker–peasant movements, Bhagabati was also

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a noted creative writer and initiated the progressive literary movement in Oriya. He died of dysentery at the young age of 34 while doing famine-related relief work in 1943.

Punjabi

The first Punjabi edition of the *Manifesto* was published in November 1944 by the Progressive Publishers, Lahore. A second edition was brought out in 1950 by Sada Yug Publishers, Delhi. The translator was Professor Randhir Singh, the well-known Marxist political scientist. This version appeared in an improved edition from the Punjabi Book Centre Publishers, Jalandhar, in 1959.

Here we have tried to trace the history of the *Manifesto* in Indian languages up to Independence. In the fifties and later, the *Manifesto* was published regularly in different Indian languages by Progress Publishers, Moscow.