

Rise of Terrorism in Indian Freedom Movement

Dr.S.BELWIN JOEL, Associate Professor, PG and Research Centre in History, Sri S. Ramasamy Naidu Memorial College (Autonomous), Sattur – 626 203, Virudhunagar, Tamil Nadu, India.

&

Dr.RAMACHANDRA C G, Assistant Professor, PG and Research Centre in History, Sri S. Ramasamy Naidu Memorial College (Autonomous), Sattur – 626 203, Virudhunagar, Tamil Nadu, India.

Abstract

The objective of the Terrorists was to free India from the clutches of the British yoke. They considered the British Government in India as an alien imposition based on force, fraud and deception. Their aim, therefore, was to remove the thorn of the British rule from the flesh of India. By removing the foreign rule, the Terrorists hoped to remove the political, economic and social disparities from India. They wanted to infuse patriotic sentiments among the people. They aimed to reconstruct society based on freedom, equality and justice. Their goal was indeed noble.

Key Words: *Violent movement, Aggressive policy, Extremism, Swadeshi, Terrorism, Philosophy of the pistol, Path of bloodshed.*

Introduction

The roots of the terrorist movement may be traced to the South Indian Rebellion of 1800-1801¹ and the Great Revolt of 1857.² The former was a “*violent movement of major proportions*”,³ as the latter was “*a violent reaction against the aggressive policy pursued by the British against the ruling houses and the ruling classes of the country*”.⁴ The ruthless suppression of insurrections, mutinies, revolts and rebellions by British authorities inflamed the minds of the impatient youth of India. The bubonic plague in Maharashtra and the Partition of Bengal gave rise to Extremism. Similarly, the suppression of the Swadeshi Movement and Passive Resistance of the Extremists gave birth to the Terrorist Movement. Disenchanted with both the non-violent but adamantly militant constitutional methods of the Moderates and the Extremists, the Terrorists turned to military confrontation.

Objective of the Terrorists

The objective of the Terrorists was to free India from the clutches of the British yoke. They considered the British Government in India as an alien imposition based on force, fraud and deception. Their aim, therefore, was to remove the thorn of the British rule from the flesh of

India. By removing the foreign rule, the Terrorists hoped to remove the political, economic and social disparities from India. They wanted to infuse patriotic sentiments among the people. They aimed to reconstruct society based on freedom, equality and justice. Their goal was indeed noble.

Method of Terrorists

The Terrorists believed in the philosophy of the pistol. They adopted the method of violence and followed the path of bloodshed. They were for organized rebellion tampering with the army and for carrying on guerilla war. They took recourse to underground activities. They never hesitated to smuggle arms and ammunition from neighboring countries. They risked their lives to liberate India from British rule to drive the British from India. The Terrorists assassinated the unscrupulous and inhuman British officers, destroyed government property and looted treasuries. At the same time, they raised patriotism to the pitch of religion as they elevated decoity to the level of patriotism. In short, instigation, insurrection, assassination, guerrilla warfare, destruction of public property and subversion were the methods adopted by the Terrorists to achieve their objective.

Political Murders by the Terrorists

The terrorists resorted to political murders to frighten the British rulers. On 6 December 1907, an attempt was made to blow up the train in which **Sir Andrew Henderson Leith Fraser** (1848-1919), the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal (from 1903 to 1908), was traveling. It is said that the idea of partitioning Bengal into two provinces to improve administrative efficiency came actually from Andrew Fraser. Scholars also believe that the partition of Bengal (1905) was not Curzon's idea.⁵ On 23 December 1907 **P.C. Allen**, the District Magistrate of Dacca was seriously wounded by a revolver shot. On 30 April 1908, an attempt was made on the life of **Douglas H. Kingsford**, Presidency Magistrate, who inflicted corporal punishment on respectable young men and vindictiveness towards the freedom fighters.⁶ By mistake the bomb meant for him killed **Mrs and Miss Kennedy**, wife and daughter of **Pringle Kennedy**, a European advocate. In November a student named **Jitendra Nath Rai Chowdary** was arrested after his cold-blooded attempt to assassinate Sir Andrew Fraser.⁷

On 1 July 1909 Lieutenant Colonel **Sir W. Curzon Wylie** (1848-1909) was murdered at the Imperial Institute, London by an Indian named Madan Lal Dhingra, who was a member of India House in London. He was sentenced to death in July 1909 and hanged at Pentonville

Prison on 17 August 1909.⁸ On 13 November 1909, two coconut bombs were thrown on the carriage in which **Lord and Lady Minto** were driving through the city of Ahmadabad. The bombs, however, did not explode and the life of the Viceroy and Lady Minto was saved.⁹ On 21 December 1909, **Jackson**, the Collector of Nasik, was shot dead by **Anant Laxman Kanhere** at Vijayanand theatre. He was sentenced to death by the British government.¹⁰ In the same month, a bomb was sent in a parcel addressed to the Deputy Commissioner at Ambala. Khan Bhagadur Shams-ul-Alam, the Deputy Superintendent of Police in the Bengal Criminal Investigation Department, was shot dead in the Calcutta High Court in January 1910. **VanchinathaIyer** (1886-1911), popularly known as Vanchinathan or Vanchi, was an Indian independence activist¹¹ shot **Robert Ashe**, the Collector of Tirunelveli dead in broad daylight on 17 June 1911.¹² On 23 December 1912, when the new Viceroy **Lord Hardings** was triumphantly entering the new capital Delhi on an elephant, a bomb was thrown on him. The Viceroy escaped with injury though his ADC was killed by the explosion.¹³ The British Administration was panicked by the Terrorists.

Underground Organizations

Secret Societies

As the Swadeshi Movement declined the underground secret societies prang up in Bengal and Maharashtra. They were semi-legal revolutionary organizations. They concentrated mainly on the student population, urban workers and intelligentsia. Their aims were to 1) foster in Indian youth a sense of national identity; 2) wage a struggle against the British rule with whatever means available to achieve India's independence and 3) mount armed attacks and carry out acts of terrorism. The underground organizations followed terror tactics. The tasks of the societies were outlined in pamphlets, "War is inevitable if oppression can not be ended by any other means if the leprosy of slavery poisons the blood in the body of our nation and robs it of its life force". Acts of terror were perpetrated against those British or Indians who posed an immediate threat to the underground movement. The intention was not to liberate the country by killing a few foreigners, but rather to demonstrate to the people how they should face danger and death.¹⁴

Abhinav Bharat Society

The Abhinav Bharat Mandir (Young India Society) was founded by Vinayak Damodar Savarkar and his brother Ganesh Damodar Savarkar in the year 1904, as a secret organization during the Indian War of Independence. When Vinayak Savarkar was a student of Fergusson College in Pune, it was initially established in Nashik under the name 'Mitra Mela'. This led to some assassinations of British officials, after which the Savarkar brothers were convicted and imprisoned. It was one of the many (revolutionary organizations) involved in Maharashtra that believed in overthrowing the armed British rule. In 1904, at a meeting attended by 200 members from various cities in Maharashtra, freedom fighter Vinayak Savarkar named Giuseppe Mazzini's Young Italy and named it Abhinav Bharat.¹⁵

In 1906, Vinayak Savarkar left for London to study law. In the same year, he compiled a volume entitled Magnini Character, a translation of the writings of the Italian revolutionary Magnini, with a 25-page preface. The book was published in Maharashtra in June 1907 and the first edition with 2,000 copies is said to have sold out within a month. Savarkar had fully mastered Mazzini's secret society and guerrilla warfare techniques. He wrote regular letters to his compatriots in India as well as propagated revolutionaries in London.¹⁶

Inspired by Savarkar's revolutionary views, Madanlal Dhingra assassinated Lieutenant Colonel William Curzon-Wyllie, a political assistant to the Indian Foreign Secretary, at a meeting of Indian students on the evening of 1 July 1909 at the Imperial Institute in London. Dhingra was arrested and later tried. A.M.T. Jackson was appointed as the District Magistrate of Nashik. At the same time in 1909, Anant Laxman Kanhere was 17 years old. He shot and killed Jackson during the airing of Sangeet Sharda at Vijayanand Theater. Anant Kanhere, Krishnaji Karve, and Vinayak Deshpande were present at that time.¹⁷

The investigation into Jackson's murder revealed the existence of the Abhinav Bharat Society and the role of the Savarkar brothers. Vinayak Savarkar was found to have sent twenty Browning pistols to India, one of which was used in Jackson's murder. He was charged with Jackson's murder and sentenced to life in prison. Savarkar was imprisoned in the Andaman Islands Cellular Jail.¹⁸ The society was formally dissolved in 1952.

Nav Bharat Society

Nav Bharat Society was active in Gwalior. It was working towards the future armed uprising in India. 22 Brahmins who were members of the Society were put on trial and many of them were convicted. The Nav Bharat Society had links with the Abhinav Bharat Society.¹⁹

Anusilan Samiti

The main underground organizations in Bengal were the Anusilan Samiti in Dacca and the Yugantar Party in Calcutta. They had many branches in other towns and villages. The Anusilan Samiti was founded by **P.Mitra**. Its objective was to promote culture and impart training to the youth. It was modeled on the same lines as the secret societies of Italy and Russia. On 6 December 1907, the Samiti attempted to blow up the train on which the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal, Sir Andrew Fraser, was traveling.²⁰

Yugantar Party

Barindra Kumar Ghosh, the younger brother of Aurobindo Ghosh started the paper Yugantar and through its columns carried on the work of educating the masses. The party preached rebellion against the Government.²¹ In 1907 one of the leaders Yugantar Party, **Hem Chandra Das**, was sent to Western Europe where he made contact with Russian revolutionaries in exile and received instructions on making explosives. After his return to India at the beginning of 1908 bomb cult spread through the underground organizations. Other secret societies linked with the central organizations in Bengal and Maharashtra were active in the Punjab, the United Provinces, the Central provinces and South India.

Cruelly Crushed

When the national movement had been gathering momentum in 1905-1906 the underground organizations incited the Anglo-Indian army. In 1909 an unsuccessful attempt was made to arouse the soldiers of the Punjab Regiment stationed in Calcutta to rebellion. More careful preparations were made for a revolt in February 1915 simultaneously in five different garrisons in North India. Betrayed by an agent provocateur, the plot was detected and the organizers led by **Rash Behari Bose** were routed. Alarmed by the terrorist activities the colonial authorities cruelly crushed the underground organizations. They were practically wiped out in 1908-1909. The leaders of the secret societies including B.Ghosh, U.Datt, Hem Chandra Das,

U.N.Banerjee, J.Banerjee, P.B.Das, B.Ch.Nag and the Savarkar brothers were thrown into prison. And yet new underground organizations sprang up in the place of those that had been wiped out. Terrorist acts against the British and the unpatriotic Indians continued unabated. However, lack of popular support, absence of well- conceived programme, inadequate resources, and lack of coordination coupled with Government repression were responsible for the failure of the terrorist movement as such.

Indian Freedom Struggle in Abroad

Contact with Foreign Countries

At the beginning of the 20th century the Extremists, the Revolutionaries and the Terrorists carried on their struggle against the British Government abroad. They were interested in establishing contacts with foreign countries to espouse the cause of the Indian struggle for freedom and to seek their support for that noble cause. They visited England, France, Germany, America, Japan and Russia and started secret societies, delivered speeches, published articles and mobilized public opinion. The revolutionary organizations abroad were led by Indian Émigrés. The secret societies were first set up in Europe and later in the United States and in Eastern Countries. Thus, the Indian Émigrés kept the torch of the Indian struggle for freedom in foreign countries alive.²²

Society of Indian Home Rule, England

The first centre of Indian émigrés was established in London in 1905 by **Shamji Krishna Varma**,²³ who was implicated with the murder of W.C.Rand the Plague Commissioner of Poona, managed to escape to London and there he founded the Society of Indian Home Rule. Former Dewan of Udaipur and a sound Sanskrit scholar, Varma was able to easily impress the intellectuals at Oxford with his erudition. He published The Indian Sociologist, a nationalist journal. It spread the message of the Indian freedom struggle in England and rallied its readers to the cause of freedom fighters. Indian students were encouraged to go to England for higher studies. The Indian émigrés and students in London used to meet at Varma's India House. Though the India House served as a hostel for Indian students at British Universities, it functioned as the centre of revolutionary activities.

V.D.Savarkar joined the India House as a student from India and soon he became a close confidant of Varma. By 1906 he completed his two outstanding books Joseph Mazzini and his magnum opus Indian war of Independence. Special lectures had been arranged at India House to inspire the audience with revolutionary fervor. On 10 May 1908 the Revolution of 1857 was commemorated.²⁴ The leaders of the Society of Indian Home Rule included apart from Krishna Varma, V.D.Savarkar, Virendranath Chattopadhyaya, S.Ramabhai Rana, V.V.S.Iyer, MadanlalDingra and others. Harassed and founded by the British police, the majority of the members of the society left London and emigrated to Paris by 1909-1910.²⁵

The Paris Group, France

The most outstanding personalities who migrated to Paris were S.Krishna Varma, S.R.Rana, V.Chattopadhyaya, Madam R.Gama, Har Dayal and V.V.S.Iyer. They formed what was known as the Paris Group founded in 1905 at Paris under the patronage of Madam Bhikaji Rustom Cama, Munchers Shah Burjorji Godrej.²⁶ They established contacts with French sociologists. They came into contact with revolutionaries from other European countries. In particular, they had strengthened their ties with Russian Social Democrats who were the émigrés from Russia and also with Socialist International. The Paris Group had contact with the Secret Societies in India. A number of journals, newspapers, leaflets, circulars and books were sent to India. Indian Sociologist edited by Krishna Varma and '*Bande Mataram*' edited by R.Gama and S.R.Rana were surreptitiously despatched to India. Such revolutionary and seditious literature had been smuggled through the French colonies of Pondicherry and Chandranagur, which served as independent postal links with Europe.²⁷ However, the Paris Group of Indian revolutionaries was disbanded after the outbreak of the First World War.

International Socialist Congress, Germany

Indian revolutionaries were active in Germany. They worked in close collaboration with German sociologists. An International Socialist Congress was organized by them in 1907.²⁸ Madam Gama and Sardar Singh Rana attended the Conference. It was at this Conference Madam Gama unfurled the National Flag of India. In a resolution, they urged all freedom-loving nations of the world to support the freedom struggle in India. She devoted four decades of her life to the cause of Indian freedom. In 1914 she was arrested and deported. She returned to India in 1934 and died a couple of years later. With the outbreak of the First World War the Indian

revolutionaries in Germany pinned their hopes on German aid. All Indian Independence Committees had been formed in Berlin to coordinate their efforts with the German authorities for the subversion of British rule in India.²⁹

Komagata Maru Episode, Canada

Taraknath Das, who arrived in Canada in 1906, played an important role in the propagation of opposition to British rule in India. Soon he moved to the United States. The Indian immigrants in Canada, mostly Sikhs, were subjected to discrimination and indignities. They were campaigning for equal rights on par with their Canadian counterparts. With a view to restricting Indian immigration, the Canadian Government passed an Immigration law permitting only direct passengers from Calcutta to Canada. As there were no direct sea services from Calcutta, Baba Gurdit Singh floated *Guru Nanak Navigation Company*. He hired a Japanese ship called *Komagata Maru*. The Japanese ship reached Calcutta and was able to accommodate 500 Indian passengers. But it was not allowed to enter the Canadian harbor (22 May 1914).³⁰ The Canadian authorities in collusion with their British counterparts harassed and subjected the passengers of Komagata Maru to untold suffering. Bai Bhag Singh and Bhai Vatan Singh led an agitation against the Canadian authorities for the repeal of the new immigration law. Hopkinson, the Chief Immigration Officer of Canada, was killed by Mewa Singh, who was sentenced to death and hanged on 11 January 1915.³¹ The Komagata Maru episode and aftermath created a lot of bitterness among Indians in general and the Sikhs in particular against the British and Canadian Governments.³²

The Ghadar Party, the United States

Taraknath Das who came from Canada to the United States in 1906 started a journal *Free Hindustan* (April 1908) which became very popular among the Indian émigrés. His propaganda work prepared the ground for a bigger organization for Indian revolutionaries in exile.³³ Har Dayal, who arrived at San Francisco in 1911, was the main source of inspiration to them. His newspaper *Ghadar* (uprising) was started in memory of the Great Revolt of 1857. Har Dayal formed the *Ghadar Party* at San Francisco in November 1913.³⁴ *Yugantar Ashram* was its headquarters. The Ghadar Party decided to wage a war against the British in India. With this end in view, it established a network of branches in America and also in various countries of the Pacific, including Japan, the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaya and China. Indian soldiers in the Far

East, South East Asia and India were contacted and instigated to revolt.³⁵ Its attempt to provoke an all-India revolt on 21 February 1915 failed and the revolutionaries were either sentenced to death or transported for life. Though the Ghadar movement was suppressed, it continued to influence the Sikhs and gave the Akali movement its radical colour.³⁶

Conclusion

The origin of early terrorism in India may be traced to the formation of four militant groups in Bengal in 1902. The progress of these groups was modest till the beginning of the Swadeshi Movement in 1905. The movement witnessed an upsurge of Secret Societies. Decoy, robbery, bomb throwing, assassination of oppressive officials, became the prominent features of terrorist activities. Khudiram Bose's attempt on the life of the Bengal Presidency Magistrate Kingsford on 30 April 1908 at Muzaffarpur and the arrest of the terrorist group including Aurobindo Ghose dealt a death blow to terrorist activities. Aurobindo's ambition of an open armed rebellion was aborted. "In terms of direct gains, the terrorist activities achieved precious little".

Though the terrorist attempts failed, the heroism of individual terrorists inspired the imagination of the people and immortalized in folklores. The Terrorist Movement went underground and refused to die down. Revolutionary terrorism was considered to be an alternative to the mendicant policies of the Moderates and the dissipated attempts of the Extremists. It was even claimed that the Minto-Morley Reforms were an outcome of the Terrorist Movement. Despite their eventual failure, the patriotic terrorists made "*a valuable contribution to the growth of nationalism in India*".

Notes and References

1. K. Rajayyan, *South Indian Rebellion the First War of Independence 1800-1801*, Rao and Raghavan, Mysore, 1971, p.1.
2. Shireen Moosvi, *Facets of the Great Revolt 1857*, Tulika Books, Chennai, 2010, p.2.
3. K. Rajayyan, *A History of Freedom Struggle in India*, Raj Publisher, Madurai, 1981, p.66.
4. Ibid., p.95.
5. Stuart Christie, *Worlding Forster: The Passage from Pastoral*, Routledge Publisher, New Delhi 2005.
6. Arun Chandra Guha, *First Spark of Revolution*, Orient Longman, Hyderabad, 1971.
7. G. Venkatesan, *History of Indian Freedom Struggle*, V.C. Publications, Rajapalayam, 2010, p.147.

8. VishavBandhu, *The Life and Times of Madan Lal Dhingra*, Prabhat Prakashan Publisher, New Delhi, 2015, p.76.
9. *From Confidential Compilation No. 2330*, J. D. Vol. No. 160 Of 1909.
10. *Assassination of the Collector of Nashik at Vijayanand Theatre 1909*, Published by Ministry of Culture, Government of India.
11. The Hindu, “*Madras miscellany: The Ashe murder*”, by S. Muthiah, 17 July 2011.
12. *Ibid.*,
13. Peter Heehs, *The Bomb in Bengal: The Rise of Revolutionary Terrorism in India, 1900-1910*, Oxford University Press, Chennai, 1993, pp. 246–247.
14. Proceedings of the Indian History Congress, *The First National Revolutionary Secret Society of Colonial Bengal: The Atmonnotti Samiti (1897-1902)*, Vol. 63, 2002.
15. Prabhu Bapu, *Hindu Mahasabha in Colonial North India, 1915-1930: Constructing Nation and History*, Routledge, 2013.
16. N. Jayapalan, *History of India from National Movement to Present Day*, Vol. IV, Atlantic Publishers & Distributors, New Delhi, 2001.
17. Christofer Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement and Indian Politics*, C. Hurst & Co. Publishers, London, 1996.
18. Jyotirmaya Sharma, *Hindutva: Exploring the Idea of Hindu Nationalism*, Penguin Books, New Delhi, 2006.
19. *Ibid.*,
20. G. Venkatesan, *Op.cit.*, p.148.
21. S. P. Sen, (ed.). *Dictionary of National Biography*. Vol. II., Institute of Historical Studies, Calcutta, 1973, pp. 63–64.
22. G. Venkatesan, *Op.cit.*, p.10.
23. Catherine Lynnette Innes, *A History of Black and Asian Writing in Britain, 1700-2000*, Cambridge University Press, 2002.
24. Ramesh C Majumdar, *History of the Freedom Movement in India, Vol I*, Firma K. L. Mukhopadhyay, 1971.
25. G. Venkatesan, *Op.cit.*, p.150.
26. Sanchari Pal, “*Remembering Madam Bhikaji Cama, the Brave Lady to First Hoist India’s Flag on Foreign Soil*”, 24 September 2016.
27. B.D. Yadav, M.P.T. Acharya, *Reminiscences of an Indian Revolutionary*, Anmol Publications Pvt. Ltd, Delhi, 1992.
28. Nicholas Klein, *International Socialist Congress*, Wilshire's Magazine. 11 (10), 1907.
29. G. Venkatesan., *Op.cit.*, p.151.
30. Hugh Johnston, “*Komagata Maru: The Canadian Encyclopaedia*”, Dated: 7 February 2006.

31. *The Voyage of the Komagata Maru: the Sikh challenge to Canada's Colour Bar*, University of British Columbia Press, Vancouver, 1989.
32. G. Venkatesan, *Op.cit.*, p.152.
33. *The Free Hindustan-An Organ of Freedom, and of Political, Social and Religious Reform*, British Columbia, 1908.
34. Hew Strachan, *The First World War, Volume I: To Arms*, Oxford University Press. USA, 2001.
35. Steve Law, "*Oregon marks ties with India revolutionaries*", Portland Tribune, Dated: 19 September 2013.
36. Emily C Brown, *Har Dayal: Hindu Revolutionary and Rationalist*, Arizona University Press, Arizona, 1975.