

## 20. MILITANT REVOLUTIONARY TERRORISM

The rise and growth of revolutionary terrorism in India from the beginning of the 20th century was due to several factors. The youth, particularly those of Bengal, Punjab and Maharashtra, were increasingly getting frustrated with the moderate methods and techniques of political struggle such as petitions, meetings, resolutions, speeches, etc. The youth were also gradually losing faith in the extremists' methods of passive resistance (i.e. to refuse to cooperate with the government and to boycott government service, court, government schools and colleges) to achieve nationalist aims. This feeling was further strengthened by the failure of the Swadeshi and Anti-partition Movement. Besides, there was growing hatred among the Indian youth for foreign rule due to the racial superiority and arrogant behaviour of the British. This hatred was also due to cruel measures adopted by the British to suppress the national movement.

### Secret Societies

Several secret societies were set up especially in Bengal and Maharashtra. In Bengal, the first revolutionary secret societies started around 1902 - the Anushilan Samiti of Calcutta founded by Barindra Kumar Ghosh and Jatindranath Banerji (Aurobindo's emissaries) and Promotha Mitter, and the Anushilan Samiti of Dacca founded by Pulin Das. In Maharashtra, the first secret society, viz., Mitra Mela, was founded by the Savarkar brothers in 1889. Later, when V.D. Savarkar went abroad, his elder brother Ganesh Savarkar started it in 1907 the 'Abhinava Bharat' which soon had many branches all over western India. Secret societies were also established in Bihar, Orissa, Punjab and other regions of India as well. A few of them succeeded in keeping mutual contact among them but most of them worked as isolated groups of leaders.

It was only in the 1920's that revolutionary militant groups came at forefront. The 'Hindustan Socialist Republican Association' even established centres of revolutionary activity abroad. In London, the lead was taken by Shyamji Krishnavarma and V.D. Savarkar, in Europe by Madam Cama and Ajit Singh, while in the U.S.A and Canada Sohan Singh Bhakna and Har Dayal were the prominent leaders. While the Indian revolutionaries in Britain and Europe were no

more than fairly isolated emigre groups, those in the U.S.A and Canada acquired mass base. These people, under the leadership of Sohan Singh Bhakna and Har Dayal, had established the 'Ghadar' (revolution) party in 1913. While most of its members were Sikh peasants, workers, petty traders, soldiers, etc., their leaders were mostly educated Hindus or Muslims. The party had active members in other countries such as Mexico, Japan, China, Philippines, Malaya, Singapore, Thailand, Indo-China and East and South Africa.

### How did they spread their ideas?

The revolutionary terrorists, both in India and abroad, published a number of newspapers, journals and pamphlets in order to propagate revolutionary ideas. Newspapers like 'Sandhya' and 'Yugantar' in Bengal and 'Kal' in Maharashtra began to advocate revolutionary terrorism. A good number of Journals were also brought out by Indian revolutionaries abroad. Some of these journals were - 'Indian Sociologist' by Shyamji Krishna Varma from London, 'Bande Mataram' by Madam Cama from Paris, 'Talvar' by Virendranath Chattopadhyay from San Francisco, etc. The most important pamphlets brought out by revolutionaries were the 'Bhawani Mandir' (by Aurobindo Ghose in 1905) and 'Oh! Martyrs' by the London group in 1907.

### Assassination of unpopular officials

A beginning in the direction of assassination of oppressive and unpopular officials had been made in 1897 when the Chapekar brothers, Damodar and Balakrishna, assassinated two unpopular British officials at Poona. Again in 1907, an unsuccessful attempt was made on the life of the unpopular Lt. Governor of East Bengal, Mr. Fuller, by some members of the Anushilan Samiti of Calcutta. In 1908 Khudiram Bose and Prafulla Chaki threw a bomb at a carriage which was believed to be occupied by Kingsford, the unpopular Judge of Muzzaffarpur. The revolutionary terrorists became so bold that two of them, Rash Behari Bose and Sachindranath Sanyal, threw a bomb at the Viceroy Lord Hardinge while he was riding on an elephant in a state procession in Delhi in 1912. The Viceroy was wounded but not killed. Another dramatic manifestation of revolutionary terrorist activity was the



assassination of the British police officer, Saunders, by Bhagat Singh, Azad and Rajguru in 1928. The police officer had earlier ordered lathi-charge on a demonstration (against the appointment of the Simon Commission) led by Lala Lajpat Rai, and this 'Sher-e-Punjab' incurred a fatal injury to which he succumbed later.

### **Conspiracies hatched**

The revolutionary terrorists also tried to organize military conspiracies with the help of Indian soldiers in the British army and also that of the foreign countries hostile to Britain. For revolutionaries striving for immediate complete independence, the First World War seemed a heaven-sent opportunity, draining India of troops (the number of white soldiers was reduced to just 15,000) and bringing the possibility of financial and military help from the enemies of Britain, mainly Germany and Turkey. Britain's war with Turkey brought about close cooperation between Hindu nationalists and militant

Muslim pan-Islamists. As a result of this cooperation, important Muslim revolutionary leaders emerged like - Barkatullah in the Ghadar Party and; Muhammad Husan and Obaidulla Sindhi in Deobandh.

**On Indian Soil:** In Bengal, most of the revolutionary groups united under Jatin Mukherji popularly known as 'Bagha Jatin'. These groups planned the disruption of rail communications, seizure of Fort William in Calcutta (contacts had been made with the 16th Rajput Rifles stationed there) and landing of German arms (for arranging this, Naren Bhattacharji, later known as M.N. Roy, was sent to Java). The grandiose plans were, however, ruined by poor coordination and Jatin died a hero's death near Balasore on the Orissa coast where he had been tracked down by the police through the help of local villagers. The Bengal plans were part of a far-flung conspiracy organized by Rash Behari Bose and Sachindranth Sanyal in cooperation with the returned Ghadarites in Punjab. But many of the Punjabis who returned after 1914 were quickly rounded up by the British and the plan for a coordinated revolt on 21st February 1915, based on mutinies by Ferozpur, Lahore and Rawalpindi garrisons was foiled at the last moment by treachery. Rash Behari Bose had to flee to Japan and Sanyal was transported for having tried to subvert the garrisons of Banaras and Danapore. Though the plan for an all India revolt misfired badly, its organizers, and particularly

the Ghadarites, were still pioneers in taking revolutionary ideas to the army and the peasants. There were some scattered mutinies, most notable of them are - at Singapore, by the Indian sepoys of the British army on 15th February 1915, of the Punjab Muslim 5th Light Infantry and the 36th Sikh Battalion.

**On Foreign Land:** Efforts to send help to revolutionaries from abroad were centered during the war years in Berlin where the Indian Independence Committee was set up in 1915 under Virendranath Chattopadhyay, Bhupen Dutta, Hardayal and some others in collaboration with the German foreign office under the so-called Zimmerman Plan. An Indo-German-Turkish mission tried to stir up anti-British feelings among tribes near the Indo-Iranian border and in December 1915, Mahendra Pratap, Barkatullah and Abaidulla Sindhi set up a 'Provisional Government of Free India' at Kabul with some backing from crown prince Amanullah but not from the Amir, Habibulla. Funds were channeled through German embassies in the far East and from Japan. Rash Behari Bose and Abani Mukherji made several efforts to send arms after 1915.

### **Dacoities and Robberies**

Revolutionaries organized a number of raids on government armouries, banks and police stations to raise funds, arms and ammunition. According to official record, between 1907 and 1917, the number of dacoities that were conducted in different parts of India was 1121. The Chittagong groups of revolutionaries headed by Surya Sen brought off the most spectacular coup in the entire history of militant nationalism in April 1930 by seizing the local armoury and issuing an independence proclamation in the name of the 'Indian Republic Army'. The Chittagong raid proved to be the curtain raiser for an extremely intense wave of terrorism in Bengal with no less than 56 incidents reported in 1930 (as against just 47 for the entire decade 1919-29). Among them, the most spectacular raid was the one on the Government headquarters in Writer's Building in Calcutta in December 1930. In Punjab also, where the Hindustan Socialist Republic Association had become very active, 26 incidents of robberies were reported in 1930.

### **Simon Commission**

- The Indian Statutory Commission was a group of seven British Members of Parliament that had been dispatched to India in 1927 to study



constitutional reforms there. It was commonly referred to as the Simon Commission after its Chairman.

### Background

- The Government of India Act 1919 had introduced the system of dyarchy to govern the provinces of British India. However, the Indian public clamoured for revision of the difficult dyarchy form of government, and the Government of India Act 1919 itself stated that a commission would be appointed after 10 years to investigate the progress of the governance scheme and suggest new steps for reform.
- In the late 1920s, the Conservative government, then in power in Britain, feared imminent electoral defeat at the hands of the Labour Party, and also feared the effects of the consequent transference of control of India to such an “inexperienced” body.
- Hence, in November of 1927, Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin appointed seven MPs (including Chairman Simon) to constitute the commission that had been promised in 1919 that would look into the state of Indian constitutional affairs.
- The people of the Indian subcontinent were outraged and insulted, as the Simon Commission, which was to determine the future of India, did not include a single Indian member.
- The Indian National Congress, at its December 1927 meeting in Chennai, resolved to boycott the Commission and accepted the challenge of Lord Birkenhead, the Secretary of State for India, to draft a constitution that would be acceptable to the Indian populace. A faction of the Muslim League, led by Muhammad Ali Jinnah, also decided to boycott the Commission.
- In Burma (Myanmar), which was included in the terms of reference of the Simon Commission, there was strong suspicion either that Burma's unpopular union with India would continue, or that the constitution recommended for Burma by the Simon Commission would be less generous than that chosen for India; these suspicions resulted in tension and violence in Burma leading to the rebellion of Saya San.

### Death of Lajpat Rai

- Almost immediately with its arrival in Mumbai on February 3, 1928, the Simon Commission was

confronted by throngs of protestors. The entire country observed a hartal (strike), and many people turned out to greet the Commission with black flags. Similar protests occurred in every major Indian city that the seven British MPs visited. However, one protest against the Simon Commission would gain infamy above all the others.

- On October 30, 1928, the Simon Commission arrived in Lahore where, as with the rest of the country, its arrival was met with massive amounts of protestors. The Lahore protest was led by Indian nationalist Lala Lajpat Rai, who had moved a resolution against the Commission in the Central Legislative Assembly of Punjab in February 1928.
- In order to make way for the Commission, the local police force began beating protestors with their lathis (sticks). The police were particularly brutal towards Lala Lajpat Rai, who later that day declared, ‘The blows which fell on me today are the last nails in the coffin of British imperialism.’ On November 17, Lajpat Rai died of his injuries.

### Report of the Commission

- The Commission published its 17-volume report in 1930. It proposed the abolition of dyarchy and the establishment of representative government in the provinces. It also recommended that separate communal electorates be retained, but only until tensions between Hindus and Muslims had died down.
- Noting that educated Indians opposed the Commission and also that communal tensions had increased instead of decreasing, the British government opted for another method of dealing with the constitutional issues of India.
- Before the publication of the report, the British government stated that Indian opinion would henceforth be taken into account, and that the natural outcome of the constitutional process would be dominion status for India. The outcome of the Simon Commission was the Government of India Act 1935, which established representative government at the provincial level in India and is the basis of many parts of the Indian Constitution.

### NEHRU REPORT

- The “Nehru Report” (1928) was a memorandum outlining a proposed new Dominion constitution





for India. It was prepared by a committee of the All Parties Conference chaired by Motilal Nehru with his son Jawaharlal acting as secretary. There were nine other members in this committee, including two Muslims.

- The Constitution outlined by the Nehru report was for India enjoying dominion status within the British Commonwealth. Some of the important elements of the report were:

- (i) Unlike the eventual Government of India Act 1935, it contained a Bill of Rights;
- (ii) All power of government and all authority - legislative, executive and judicial - were to be derived from the people and the same would be exercised through organizations established by, or under, and in accordance with, the Constitution ;
- (iii) There would be no state religion; men and women would have equal rights as citizens;
- (iv) There was to be federal form of government with residuary powers vested in the centre. (Some scholars, such as Moore in 'The Making of India's Paper Federation, 1927-35' in 1988, considered the Nehru Report proposal as essentially unitary rather than federal.);
- (v) It included a description of the machinery of government, including a proposal for the creation of a Supreme Court and a suggestion that the provinces should be linguistically determined;
- (vi) It did not provide for separate electorates for any community or for weightage for minorities. Both of these were liberally provided in the eventual Government of India Act, 1935. However, it did allow for the reservation of Muslim seats in provinces having a Muslim minority of at least ten per

cent, but this was to be in strict proportion to the size of the community;

- (vii) The language of the British Commonwealth would be Hindustani, which might be written either in Devnagari or in Urdu character. The use of the English language would be permitted.

- The Nehru Report, along with that of the Simon Commission was available to participants in the three Indian Round Table Conferences 1931-1933. However, the Government of India Act 1935 owes much to the Simon Commission report and little, if anything, to the Nehru Report. Historical significance of the Jinnah Report.

#### **JINNAH'S FOURTEEN POINTS**

- With few exceptions, Muslim leaders rejected the Nehru proposals. In reaction, Mohammad AN Jinnah drafted his Fourteen Points in 1929 which became the core demands of the Muslim community put forward as the price of their participating in an independent united India. Their main objections were:
- Separate Electorates and Weightage - the 1916 Congress-Muslim League agreement - the Lucknow Pact, provided these to the Muslim community whereas they were rejected by the Nehru Report;
- Residuary Powers - the Muslims realized that while they would be a majority in the provinces of the North-East and North-West of India, and hence would control their provincial legislatures, they would always be a minority at the Centre. Thus they demanded, contrary to the Nehru Report, that residuary powers go to the provinces.
- The inability of Congress to concede these points must be considered a major factor in the eventual partition of India.

