

Beyond Bombs and Bengal: Intellectual History of the Indian Revolutionary Movement, 1900-1931

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Introduction

It is usually argued by historians that the Indian revolutionary movement aimed only at somehow overthrowing the colonial state, with its fuzzy schemes, by using 'terrorist' methods and had no transformative theory and practice before the emergence of socialist ideas. Bhagat Singh and his comrades are considered the first group of revolutionaries, who had a revolutionary programme and ideology due to their leftist leanings.¹

The political philosophy of Bengal revolutionaries is dubbed as being hyper masculine in response to colonial attempts to feminise the Bengali.² This kind of belief has emerged due to the study of the movement in Bengal in isolation instead of looking at the movement in the larger perspective. This has also led to a lot of assumptions about the movement outside Bengal. Physical culture was an important aspect of the revolutionary movement but not central to it, even in Bengal. It is like saying that Gandhian philosophy was all about wearing *khadi* and nothing else.

This paper attempts to study the Indian revolutionary movement not only in the national but also in the international context on one hand and on the other hand, it engages with regions other than Bengal which have been overlooked, to get a more complex picture of the movement. Due to the limited scope of the present study, the paper focusses on only one such region i.e. United Provinces.

Even before moving further into the story of UP, we shall first explore the ideas of major revolutionary thinkers like Sri Aurobindo, Lala Hardayal, Sachindranath Sanyal, Ram Prasad Bismil and Bhagat Singh. I will study the ideas of these thinkers to argue that even before accepting socialism, the revolutionaries did have a

programme for social transformation and their strategies and tactics, when seen in the light of their writings, do have a revolutionary politics of their own. Also, one should not forget that even the programme of throwing out the British, which they were committed to right from the beginning of their movement, was also a very radical one at that time.

Scholars have pointed out two aspects of revolutionary philosophy: Hindu revivalism and foreign revolutionary traditions.³ As a whole, mainstream nationalism has also been understood as selective picking of elements from India's 'spiritual and cultural heritage' and western ideas of the nation-state. For the process of nation-building, it has been argued, the role of state was seen as central by Indian nationalists. Some scholars argue that this nationalist project of imposing homogeneity among the Indian people from above ignored the inherent contradictions in Indian society.⁴ While revolutionaries were also a part of this nationalist project, for a long period of time they differed in two significant ways. First, in contrast to popular belief, they really did have concrete visions for the capture of state power unlike other nationalists and tried their best to realize them. Second, they were also one among those political forces which pioneered attempting to deal with some of the internal contradictions which the homogenizing nationalism ignored, especially the issue of class. On both these counts, revolutionaries also made solid theoretical criticisms of mainstream nationalism, which could only be recovered from their writings and propaganda and not just their actions. One of the major criticisms levelled against them — that they failed to mobilize masses — has also to be scrutinized using the same methodology.

I. Armed Struggle/Armed Revolution

One thing that the revolutionaries were sure about, was the inevitability of the armed struggle. They differed

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and debated about the ways to organize one. But they had no illusions about the character of the colonial state, which they dubbed as a terrorist regime, that had to be resisted with counter-terror.⁵ The colonial state had three coercive forces to repress any kind of political resistance: the police, the army and the Indian Civil Service. The first had a truly colonial character as it was controlled by European officers and Governors with Indians occupying subordinate officer positions. Army was a more powerful tool of state terror as, for two or three Indian sepoys, there was one British soldier.⁶ It was only during the Second World War that more Indianization of the army took place. The ICS, on one hand was an instrument of despotism and on the other hand, a bulwark for reaction due to its proximity with the exploitative classes of the Indian society. The revolutionaries targeted all three of them. While the police and the bureaucracy were always its targets of attack, it tried to win over Indian soldiers in the army throughout the first half of the twentieth century. The attacks on police and bureaucrats were made to boost the morale of the people and reach out to them. The key agenda for most of the revolutionaries was to recruit students and petty-bourgeois youth. Once a nationwide network of secret societies was created, the next step in the programme was inciting the soldiers in the Indian army into open rebellion, preferably with the help of foreign powers. A replica of 1857 was one of the most influential visions of seizure of power. During both the world wars, such efforts were made. While it was not very successful during the first, the leader of that campaign, Rash Bihari Bose, was able to win over at least the Indian prisoners of war in East Asia during the second and handed over their command to Subhas Bose.

Revolutionaries always had conflicts over the strategy and tactics to be adopted though they very rarely digressed from their central programme of armed struggle: individual violence versus organized revolution, local insurrections versus nationwide uprising, underground resistance versus mass movement (also known as Irish technique vs. Bolshevik technique), nationalism versus socialism, propaganda by deed versus openly organising workers and peasants etc. The *Jugantar* group split from the *Anushilan* Samiti in 1906 over its insistence on launching immediate attacks on the British rather than preparing for a general uprising at a snail's pace. Insurrectionists also criticized the latter but emphasized on local insurrections to set examples for rest of the country to follow, rather than individual attacks. In the early 1920s, there was an interesting debate between some groups of Bengal and UP over continuing with the supposedly Irish technique of individual violence or switching over to the so-called Bolshevik method of mass movement. Hindustan Republican Association (HRA) represented

the latter side of the debate. Its successor organization, Hindustan Socialist Republican Association (HSRA), also had to confront a faction of Bengal revolutionaries over its acceptance of socialist ideology which ironically the latter wanted nothing to have to do with at that time. Finally, there was the debate between Bhagat Singh and communists in which the former espoused 'propaganda by deed' that would happen by his party's popular actions and sacrifices, which would help the communists in organizing youth, workers and peasants for the cause of proletarian revolution and in fighting against reactionary forces such as communalism, in contrast to the communist party's focus on mass-politics, at the moment.⁷

II. Social transformation, revolutionaries and the subaltern

From the very beginning of the revolutionary movement, we see a concern for the plight of the peasantry or the miserable conditions of the working class and a criticism of the political leadership for ignoring them. However, the position of the subaltern in the revolutionary programme was of diverse and sometimes contradictory hues. Aurobindo, one of the earliest dominant figures of the Indian revolutionary movement, writes something very revealing while attacking the elitism of the Congress, 'the proletariat is ... the real key of the situation. Torpid he is and immobile; he is nothing of an actual force, but he is a very great potential force, and whoever succeeds in understanding and eliciting his strength, becomes by the very fact, master of the future... the right and fruitful policy for the burgess, the only policy that has any chance of eventual success, is to base his cause upon the adroit management of the proletariat. He must awaken and organize the entire power of the country and thus multiply infinitely, his volume and significance, the better to attain supremacy as much social as political.'⁸

Here, the writer is clearly concerned more about the interests of the 'burgess' than the 'proletariat' and wants the former to cleverly use the latter to achieve its goals. This can be seen as a major limitation of Aurobindo's revolutionary vision, at least till 1894 when these lines were written, which does not extend to the emancipation of the subaltern, and calls for their mobilisation for the interests of the burgess. There is a radical change, however, in the revolutionary programme within a decade and the manifesto of the *Anushilan* Samiti, of which Aurobindo was soon to become the top leader, is bold enough to announce:

In Anushilan's dreamland there won't be poor or illiterate, coward or wicked nor would there be any sick. To create such a society, all kinds of inequalities would have to be destroyed.

In presence of inequalities, the humanity of humans cannot be recovered. By destroying economic, social, communal and provincial disparities, equality between all men needs to be established. Only a national government can do this. Anushilan's dreamland cannot be realized in conditions of slavery, hence Anushilan declares a war on slavery. Anushilan demands complete independence for India.⁹

This change occurred as the leadership of the movement passed on from the intellectuals coming out of the landed elite to the lower-middle class intelligentsia represented by students, professors, lawyers and journalists.

For Lala Hardayal, founder of the *Ghadar* Movement, subaltern aspirations were even more pressing as being the leader of the *Ghadar* Party in the United States, he was organizing migrant workers, agricultural labourers, students and retired soldiers for an armed struggle to liberate India. He was also a middle class radical like Aurobindo, who was mobilizing the subaltern for his long cherished goal of Indian independence. But along with the language of religion, which Aurobindo argued should be used to win over the 'proletariat,' Hardayal also uses the language of class exploitation and underlines the internal contradictions within the Indian society. Hence the political programme of *Ghadar* firmly stands for a democratic republic of United States of India. Whether it is due to his acquaintance with socialist and anarchist writings or due to the popular character of the *Ghadar* movement, Hardayal is able to come up with a vision of social transformation which may appear to be deficient from some theoretical standpoints but certainly had the potential to be truly radical at that time.

One of his major comrades, Taraknath Das, asked young India to 'demand a revolution in social ideals so that humanity and liberty would be valued above property, special privilege would not overshadow equal opportunity, and women would not be kept under subjection.'¹⁰

Maia Ramnath in her recent study of the Ghadar movement writes about the relationship between Hardayal and the subaltern:

Darisi Chenchiah [a Ghadarite] recalled that as "intellectuals arose" from among "the Punjabee labourers," they began to contribute articles and poems to the newspaper and to address public meetings. "They were sincere and brave," though until quite recently "ignorant and illiterate." But now they had "suddenly become politically conscious, highly patriotic and intensely revolutionary. As a result, the Ghadar movement passed rapidly into the hands of these masses." As a leader Har Dayal evinced great confidence in their potential as revolutionary fighters; this may be why they liked him as well. Moreover, while he may have been a professional intellectual, he was a Punjabi nonetheless. Har Dayal happily supported and encouraged their vernacular contributions, Chenchiah continued, even when they contained mistakes or "abusive

words," precisely because they were— to use an anachronistic term— organic.

She also quotes Hardayal's views on the working class:

'Labor must think in terms of the whole world. . . . Should one nation acquire freedom, the rich of another nation will crush it. . . . We want not only economic emancipation, but moral and intellectual emancipation as well. . . . The rich and respectable cannot lead us. . . . We will have two kinds of leaders. First, the ascetics who have renounced riches and respectability for the love of the working man, men like Kropotkin, the St. Francis and St. Bernards of Labor....Secondly, we must have the sons of toil themselves, who must take up their own cross and lead their brothers on.... The workers and the women are two enslaved classes and must fight their battles together.... We want central labor colleges where our young men can be taught, not by money, but by men. We do not want endowments, because endowments, with their incomes, are another form of exploitation. . . . The poor must love the poor. The shame of labor is that the poor must accept charity from the rich. We are not so poor but we can care for our own poor. . . . We must stand together.'....

Har Dayal condemned parliamentarianism as it was useless, he said, for labor to attempt to free itself using 'the weapons furnished by capitalism.' But he had equally strong criticism for the other extreme, which he had previously advocated: 'Terrorism,' meaning propaganda by the deed, 'is a waste of force and gives the other party a chance for needless persecution.'¹¹

For S.N. Sanyal, founder of the HRA, revolutionary theory has to be a combination of Vedanta and socialism. He forcefully argued later that this position was not due to his lack of understanding of socialism, as some of his comrades (and most scholars) claim, but due to his irresolvable differences with the materialist philosophy. He accepts the economic programme of Marxism, but is opposed to its dialectical materialist philosophy and also its materialist understanding of history. He upholds the significance of religion and idealism. He compares communist utopia to the *sanyasa* ashram of Hinduism as both depend on the highest evolution of human life i.e. renunciation of private property. He writes that at an early stage he thought that perhaps a successful revolution in India would lead to the spread of this aspect of Hindu philosophy in the world.¹²

He argues that one who has not understood the essence of Indian civilization and the historical role it has to play in the emancipation of humanity, cannot realize the fallacies of communism and the fairness of *his* revolutionary programme. He answers to his comrade Manmathnath Gupta's criticism that he had no idea of class struggle, class consciousness and class politics. He explains that he accepted, that after independence the Indian state would protect the interests of workers and

peasants, in contrast to other revolutions in history which betrayed them, but there was no need of class struggle to do this. He claimed that the revolution he envisaged was meant for these classes only. He also explains the reason behind not adding the term communist or socialist to his party's name. His close associate, Jaichandra Vidyalankar, pointed out that such a step would antagonize their sympathizers from the propertied class.¹³

Ram Prasad Bismil was another prominent leader of Sanyal's HRA but his world-view was different from him. Despite being religious, he was not a staunch idealist like Sanyal. His approach to revolution was linked to more mundane issues of life. Miserable conditions of the peasantry bothered him more than the study of Vedanta philosophy done by his Bengali comrades. As a teenager he reacted very sentimentally to the repressive measures of the colonial state, the exploitation by feudal classes and as he grew up he became more sensitive to the injustice and oppression around him. That's why he used the pen-name 'Bismil' which means 'wounded'; his heart was wounded by the sorrows of his motherland. His political philosophy had empathy for all the oppressed and exploited: peasants, workers, *dalits* and women. The spectre of bloodbath during the revolution always haunted him and he vowed never to take any human's life. And yet this man was an armed revolutionary and the leader of the military-wing of the party.

When Bismil was arrested in September 1925, among other articles claimed to have been recovered from him, there was a copy with notes on Hindu religion and *Samyavad* (alternatively used for socialism or communism in the 1920s). Translation of an extract was made as follows during the Kakori trial:

It is the duty of every Hindu that he, while observing the principles of his own religion, should preach communism. At every place communist societies should be established. Every person be he young or old, male or female, should become the member of the society. There are many defects in Russian Communism. When communism will be started in India according to the ancient Hindu religion then alone the world would realise its true nature, because this communism would be for all living beings. One will not be the enemy of the other, so much so, that the very idea of violence would disappear from the world. Vedic Raj will be established and every one will enjoy peace and happiness.

Last month the U.P. Government, by confiscating the English version of the communist rules published at Cawnpore, has shown her meanness. The Government should know that it is a religious right of the Hindus to preach communism, to deprive it of which is to cause injury to Hinduism. Therefore every follower of Hinduism is requested that he in order to protect his own religion, should give a crushing retort to the U.P. Government.

Sd. Ram Prasad Bismil¹⁴

While the authenticity and translation of this extract is questionable, it resembles the world view of people like Bismil and Sanyal, who tried to locate communism/socialism in Hinduism.

Bismil's discourse on revolution, in his autobiography written in the condemned cell in December 1927, shows a far deep understanding of the class-struggle. Bismil upheld the principles of modern democracy in his autobiography and asserted that revolutionary movement has a historical role to play in its establishment. But he advocates going beyond bourgeois democracy which he calls '*arthatantra*' (rule of money). He cites the example of America and France where revolutions established bourgeois democracy and workers and peasants continued to fight for their rights. He calls the Bolshevik Revolution as establishment of 'true democracy.'

Another layer of Bismil's ideas is his criticism of the urban way of living, of lawyers and physicians and of celebration of rural life despite recognizing the class and caste contradictions in it. This has similarity with Gandhi's *Hind Swaraj* but Bismil makes no mention of it and instead attacks Gandhi's non-cooperation movement for avoiding villages. He advocates learning of handicraft, artisanal skills and usage of Hindi language. He insists on equal access to natural resources for all, end to all kind of domination and establishment of true democracy worldwide.

He is disillusioned with the tactics of Indian revolutionaries by 1927 and complains about the lack of popular sympathy for them. Bismil knew that the activities of HRA were only the preliminary stage of the struggle. He even got into a dilemma when he imagined the bloodshed that was inevitable in the advanced stages of the movement. So, in his autobiography he gives priority to spreading political awareness, to create an environment for acceptance of revolutionary ideals. He suggests adoption of a 'mass-line' generally and organizing workers, peasants, *dalits* and women particularly. In sharp contrast to his party HRA's pamphlet *The Revolutionary* he shows a distrust of the middle class. But his discourse is addressed to the same class and not the subaltern and he tells them to educate the peasants, 'untouchables' and unionize the industrial, railway, shipping and mining workers.

Being an Arya Samaji, the women's question was also very close to Bismil's heart which is evident from most of his writings. He begins his autobiography by pointing out to the exploitation of women and oppressed castes in the conservative feudal society of Chambal valley where his ancestors lived. He appreciates the courage of his grandmother in coming out of home to work and his mother's determination in saving and educating her daughters. He dedicates a section of his autobiography

in praise of his mother and for inspiring him to serve the society even when it meant conflicts with her husband. However for Bismil, woman was not just a wife or a mother, as is proved from his admiration for Catherine Breshkovsky, who divorced her husband and abandoned her child for the cause of the Russian Revolution. There is a mix of orthodox principles like *brahmacharya* (celibacy) and sincere appeals for women empowerment in his writings. This aspect of Bismil's world-view and further analysis of the debates over gender in the revolutionary circles, need more research, which is beyond the scope of this study.

Sanyal and Bismil's protégé, Bhagat Singh, started with radical nationalism of his *gurus*, moved towards anarchism, subsequently got influenced by socialism and finally became a Marxist. As an anarchist, he made a vehement attack on God, state and private property. He held Bakunin in great respect. Shiv Varma, one of his closest comrades, explains that it was Lala Chhabil Das, his principal at National College, and Sohan Singh Josh, communist leader and editor of *Kirti*, who converted Bhagat Singh to socialism. Singh and his comrades not only studied literature on Marxism and Soviet Union available in libraries but also arranged to get proscribed literature from England. Major leftist intellectuals of the time like Radhamohan Gokul, Satyabhakt, Hasrat Mohani and Ganesh Vidarthi also influenced the revolutionaries a lot. Varma, however, claims that this inclination towards socialism was more emotional, rather than ideological.¹⁵ Singh argued that the short life of the party was inevitable. He was of the opinion that there was no need to expand the party too much and even if few individuals did their job efficiently, they could create a suitable environment in which the upcoming mass revolution could be organized in a proper way.¹⁶ This job was 'propaganda by deed,' through which a revolutionary spirit could be developed in the country to eradicate the reactionary atmosphere of late 1920s.

III. Internationalism of Indian revolutionaries

Another important element in the programme of Indian revolutionaries was their internationalism, which had an uninterrupted continuity in the five decades of their movement. Aurobindo wanted an armed revolution in India which would throw out the British and revive India's past glory so that it can lead humanity to the next stage of evolution through its cultural and spiritual heritage.¹⁷ According to Ramnath, the *Ghadar* Party even debated the principles of nationalism and internationalism. Hardayal had declared himself an internationalist in 1912 who did not believe in 'narrow views of nationalism'.¹⁸

Hardayal also came out of the same revolutionary discourse theorized by Aurobindo and expanded it, due to his anarchist and socialist leanings but subsequently came up with different and seemingly contradictory ideas at various points of time. The variations in Hardayal's beliefs have perplexed his most well-known biographer Emily Brown who was surprised that he jumped from one ideology to another so frequently.¹⁹ However, recent scholarship has shown that the intermingling of various ideas which appear to be contradictory to us retrospectively were really a quest of an exile from the colonial world for a better future for his country and the world.

Sanyal and Bismil also upheld the internationalism emphasized by the Indian revolutionary movement. They announced that after liberating India, revolutionaries will strive for the independence of other slave nations. Their ultimate goal was to end exploitation of man by man in any manner.²⁰ Bhagat Singh more powerfully acknowledged the internationalist character of the movement and declared that he saw his party as a constituent of the Third International. He also came up with his theory of 'world federation' which he claimed would be essential for the emancipation of humankind, once all kinds of exploitation of a man by another man and of a nation by another nation comes to an end through reorganization of the society on socialist basis.

Now the question arises, why in the first place did the Indian revolutionaries have to profess internationalism in such a strong manner? There are many plausible explanations. One can be that myths like 'civilizing mission' of Indian cultural heritage were created to catch the fancy of the middle class youth. Another can be the strategic needs of Indian revolutionaries to ally with radicals throughout the world to facilitate both logistical and moral support for their national cause. In case of HRA and HSRA, internationalism can also be attributed to their socialist leanings. But from the reading of works by Aurobindo, Hardayal, Sanyal, Bismil and Singh, another important explanation emerges. It is linked to the psychology of the colonial intelligentsia which was subalternized at one level due to the colonial experience but was also socially better placed than crores of their fellow countrymen. The oppression around them made them rebel from their own society and placed arms in the hands of some of them. The feeling of 'how to change the world' pours out in their writings and the immediate restrictions which they see on their ambitions of epoch-making, is India's slavery. Hence, their anticolonialism was not necessarily nationalist, it was expressed in many different ways in the first half of the twentieth century. Tagore and Gandhi had their own versions of

internationalism which challenged western hegemony. The mind of the educated middle class youth also became sensitive to the problems of the world and their idealism inspired them to take bold initiatives in figuring out the solutions. Revolutionary movement can be perhaps seen as one such outburst of youth rebellion which envisioned in a variety of ways, (Vedanta, anarchism, socialism, Pan-Islamism, Asianism etc.) the liberation of their native land, which would enable them to work for the emancipation of the entire human race.

IV. Phase of Transition: Case Study of UP

From the early 1920s, the revolutionary movement faced two hurdles in UP—the Swaraj Party which was gearing up to contest assembly and council elections, and communal organizations which were becoming aggressive. The Hindu communalists defeated the comparatively secular Swaraj Party in the municipal elections of 1925. This led to an increasing tension between Hindus and Muslims and between 1923 and 1927 there were 88 riots in the province.²¹ Despite religiosity of individual revolutionaries, as a force they chose to support the former over the latter. Bismil himself filed his candidature for Shahjahanpur district board on behalf of *Swarajists*. In his defence in front of court during the Kakori case he told,

Those days I was touring about in villages in connection with the district board elections as I was candidate and it was intended to put up many Congress candidates. For it I threw a meeting of the Swaraj Party in Shahjahanpur and it was decided to send candidates for district board and municipal board elections.²²

However, this appears more to be a cover for his revolutionary activities, as the HRA leaflet *The Revolutionary* came out vehemently against constitutionalism.²³ Another leaflet, *An Appeal To My Countrymen* written by Sanyal, persuaded 'Indians that Constitutional agitation will achieve nothing, and that there is a strong Revolutionary party which should be supported as it will lead to the complete freedom of India.'²⁴ Yet revolutionaries in UP continued to participate in the Congress, perhaps because it was certainly a good place to recruit for *their* movement. Bismil was auditor of the Shahjahanpur District Congress Committee and one of his comrades Banarasi Lal (later turned approver) was the Secretary. Revolutionaries made it a point to attend annual Congress sessions where they could also hold their own clandestine conferences.

The attitude of HRA towards the issue of communal polarization is a more complex one. A concern for religion and for the spiritual was a crucial part of Bismil's world-view. He firmly believed in God and had deep faith in

rebirth. He translated Aurobindo's *Yogic Sadhan* in Hindi and laid great stress on spiritual development. But this concern was not reactionary as it was linked to his larger vision for nation-building and social reform—two issues central to his politics. As an Arya Samaji, Bismil had participated in the *shuddhi* movement and in his defence in the Kakori case, he even went to the extent of making hostile remarks about Muslims of Shahjahanpur and also underlined his own role in the local Hindu organization. He differentiated between 'Mahomedans and nationalist Mahomedans' claiming that the CID supported former.²⁵ It is true that Bismil's defence was a tactical move and generally based on lies but would he have not thought about the impact of his words in the public sphere as he himself, for example, points out that the *Indian Daily Telegraph* regularly published about the case?²⁶

His defence in the court is in sharp contrast to the lines he wrote on his comrade Ashfaqullah Khan in his autobiography few days before his execution in December 1927. He passionately argued that Ashfaq had no need for *shuddhi* and their friendship had transformed the two of them. Bismil informs here that he has accepted that there is no difference between a Hindu and a Muslim.²⁷ But this realization came after being an activist and publicist of the revolutionary movement for many years. The position on Muslims of earlier revolutionaries and groups (like Matrivedi) with whom he worked, needs to be looked at. If we look at the collection of poems he published at that time, it insists on Hindu-Muslim unity,

*Hindu aur Musalman mil karke, jo chahein so karsaktehain,
Ay charkhe-kuhanhoshiyar ho tu, purjoshhamarenalehain.*

[And]

*Muhammad par sab-kuchhkurbaan, mautke hon to hon mehman
Krishna kimurliki sun taanchalo, ho sab milkarbalidan*²⁸

[Hindu & Muslim together can do anything they want,
O' time beware of us as our determination is strong.]

And

Lay down everything to Muhammad, even if it means death
Follow Krishna's flute, everyone should sacrifice together]

For most revolutionary groups who aimed at nothing less than an 'absolute independence' through a national armed revolution, Hindu-Muslim unity was very important. It is found that due to their Arya Samaji background and the communal propaganda around them in the 1920s, some of the revolutionaries saw Muslim communalism as the major hurdle instead of the Hindu one. It was only later that Bhagat Singh and his comrades attacked all kinds of religious-identity based organizations, including Arya Samaj, equally.²⁹ Interestingly Sanyal had approached the problem differently from Singh (different also from

the approach of Congressmen like Jawaharlal Nehru who saw 'communal' politics as simply anti-national) as he was ready to concede to various demands of religious communities if that did not hurt the 'national interest.'³⁰ Hence, variety in attitudes of the revolutionaries to the question of communitarian politics needs to be taken cognisance of and they could not be simplified as either an everlasting position of Hindu revivalism, communalism or even that of secularism.

It is possible that Bismil's ambiguity on Muslims was a result of the polarizing atmosphere of 1920s in UP to which he was a witness in Shahjahanpur. Many revolutionaries were attracted to the Hindu organizations at this time but soon realized their pro-British and opportunistic character. Bismil was able to come out of communal politics and even work for communal harmony in riot torn areas of Rohilkhand region along with Ashfaq, who also tried his best to recruit Muslims in the revolutionary movement. By 1927, he advocates capital punishment for those involved in inciting communal riots and tells Hindus to trust the Muslims. He asks both of them to accept the leadership of Congress. His emphasis on Congress was attributed by later revolutionaries, to his pessimism in the condemned cell, but there was more to it.

Bismil had by now realised the importance of open mass organizations, propaganda (which he calls 'mass education') and mobilizing workers, peasants, Dalits and women to organize an effective anticolonial movement in the country. While he saw Congress as the most suitable platform for this project owing to the revival of its agitation-based politics with the coming of Simon Commission, his comrade Ashfaq was ready to see even communists as an alternative. The latter was a very significant development in the revolutionary theory as it brought it more and more close to Marxism.³¹

Conclusion

In this way, we can conclude that the anticolonial revolutionary movement had a rich intellectual tradition even before the rise of its celebrated ideologue Bhagat Singh. Also, the Bengal-centric studies on the movement which restrict it to Hindu revivalism and physical culture needs to be revised to get a wholesome picture of revolutionary ideas as they struggled with international political currents and local developments.

Notes

1. But even their actions are seen as 'terrorism' by most scholars as a result of their alleged petty-bourgeois individualism.

2. Vinay Lal, 'Subaltern Studies and Its Critics: Debates over Indian History,' *History and Theory*, Vol.40, No.1, February 2001, pp.135-148. <http://abahlali.org/files/vinay%20lal.pdf>
3. P. Heehs, *Nationalism and Communalism in India*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002.
4. Gyan Prakash. *Another Reason*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999.
5. Manmathnath Gupta, *Chandrashekhar Azad*, Delhi: Hind Pocket Books, 2012.
6. S. Bandyopadhyay, *From Plassey to Partition*. Delhi: Orient Black Swan, 2013.
7. Bejoy Kumar Sinha has called his party HSRA's politics as 'Blanquist.' While this might have been the perspective of some leaders, others like Bhagat Singh did not advocate that a conspiratorial organization would capture power and instead agreed with the communist programme in the long term. Instead of HSRA, HRA qualifies more for the term.
8. 'New Lamps for Old' No. 11, *Indu Prakash*, 6 March 1894 as quoted in Karan Singh, *Prophet of Indian Nationalism*, London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1963.
9. Tarini Shankar Chakravarti. *Bharat Mein Sashtra Kranti Ki Bhumika*. Mirzapur: Krantikari Prakashan. This declaration negates the theory that early revolutionaries of Bengal were mainly products of the hyper masculine aspirations generated by physical culture movement. Now it can be argued that these were the musings of the leadership and the cadre had nothing to with it. However the histories of inner life of these secret societies show that between the leaders and the followers, there were several theoretical debates including on issues of theism and atheism, religion and secularism, democracy and monarchy which prove that the cadre, coming out of some brilliant university and college students, also attached great importance to the organization's political philosophy.
10. Harish K. Puri, *The Ghadar Movement*. New Delhi: National Book Trust, 2007.
11. Maia Ramnath, *Haj to Utopia*. University of California Press, 2011.
12. S.N. Sanyal, *Bandi Jivan*. Delhi: Atmaram & Sons, 1967.
13. Such spinelessness was typical of Vidyalankar and has been written on a lot by his comrades and followers.
14. Exhibit no. P8. Kakori Case Papers. English A. Vol. 30, Uttar Pradesh State Archives, Lucknow.
15. Shiv Varma, 'Krantikari Andolan Ka Vaicharik Vikas,' Chamanlal et al. ed. *Bhagat Singh*.
16. Jaidev Kapoor, OHT, New Delhi: NMML.
17. Singh, *Prophet*.
18. Ramnath, *Haj*.
19. Emily C. Brown, *Har Dayal: Hindu Revolutionary and Rationalist*, Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1975.
20. 'Manifesto of HRA,' Kakori Case Papers.
21. Judith M Brown, *Gandhi and Civil Disobedience*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977.
22. Kakori Case, Vol. 14, Statement of Ram Prasad Bismil, p.69.
23. 'Manifesto of HRA'
24. Sachindranath Sanyal. *An Appeal To My Countrymen*. Patriotic Writings. New Delhi: National Archives of India.

25. Kakori Case, Vol. 14, Statement of Ram Prasad Bismil, p. 69.
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