

Perceptions of Youth during Indian Freedom Struggle between 1905 to 1930s: A Study

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ABSTRACT

Like any other Freedom struggle, the Indian National movement too witnessed a great deal of revolutionary thought movement in the initial years of 1900AD. A section of people especially well educated in India supported the revolutionary ideas and contributed greatly to the awakening masses and consolidation of freedom struggle against alien rulers. As a result, the revolutionaries rationalized the fight against alien rulers and infused the idea of *self-determination* and *self-reliance* used as a tool to motivate the youth especially. Most of the revolutionaries had common parlance and opined that the British were for the exploitation of resources meant for Indians and nothing more than that. Therefore, the revolutionaries felt that salvation for the motherland thus lay in the attainment of *Swaraj* alone for Indians. In fact, this made them to think in terms of political independence and economic self-sufficiency was the mandatory requirement for attainment of *Swaraj*. The cult of *Swadeshi* movement became vanguard for the youth to imbibe sympathies were manifested in the revolutionary activities. This article elucidates the significant role played by youth in propagating the revolutionary ideals for making national movement as a mass movement. Furthermore, through this paper discussed various issues confronted by youth while profess the prospects of revolutionary thought movement.

Keywords: Freedom struggle, Indian National movement, Indian youth.

INTRODUCTION

The history of revolutionary nationalism in India begins as early as from 1890s. Indeed, Maharashtra was the first center of revolutionary activities and Vasudev Balwant Phadke, who is also known as the father of Indian Armed Rebellion, was its first standard bearer. Nonetheless the political extremism got linked up with the ideology of revolutionary nationalism, which the British choose to call it as '*Terrorism*' and others call it as '*Extremism*'. The partition of Bengal was drawn on religious and communal lines by Lord Curzon in 1905 was one of the most insignificant and inconsequential decision of the British government. In fact, it created chaos among the youth and they were felt that by doing so crush the indigenous cultural identity of Bengali community. It contributed greatly to the awakening among Bengali intelligentsia which lead to revolutionary nationalism in succeeding years. As a result of partition of Bengal, the people of erstwhile Bengal united for the common cause and demanded for withdrawal of partition plan. When the British failed to address the issue in amicable manner, it infused the idea of *Swadeshi* and subsequently independence of the Nation. This uncalled act made them to think in terms of *Swaraj* for both political and economic development. Hence the progress of *Swadeshi* movement became subject of discussion especially among the youth, whose sympathizers were manifested

in the revolutionary activities. Every morning the youth anxiously waited for newspapers at their doors and the students could not attend to their classes without reading the news papers.

The revolutionary nationalist emphasized that every patriotic youth began to realize that India should no longer be exploited by the Britishers. In order to encourage youth, the nationalist projected that youth should be given military training for defensive operation of modern weapons. This would perhaps the idea to drive out the British from India, thus began to think in terms of making India free and *self-reliant*. Being well expressed their role the youth particularly watched the post-partition development with keen interest. Meanwhile the victory of Japan electrified the enthusiasm and paved way for success. Gradually Japan had become one of the main centers where Indian revolutionaries took lesson in the manufacturing of arms and ammunitions. Besides, Indian revolutionaries were inspired by the ideas which were guided by Guru Govind Singh, Shivaji, Mustafa Kamal Pasha, Raza Khan, Washington and Garibaldi, Lafayette and Lenin.

On account of British partition policy – Divide and Rule stimulated the young minds and they were convinced that the partition of Bengal was a device to disrupt the unity of the nation, to weaken the growing political consciousness of the people of Bengal elsewhere and to destroy the closer affinity of the Hindus and Muslims, the Parsis, the Marathas, the Madrasi and Sindhi and Punjabi all arose as one with the Bengali to oppose the partition. Meanwhile, the revolutionaries began to dream of military transformation on similar ideological changes in the Indian sub-continent people soon realized that a war of victory could one day be waged to a successful end. Based on ideological considerations, the revolutionary movement gathered strength and spread to other parts of India due to unprecedented support from youth comrades and followers. The

revolutionaries were fired with patriotic zeal and deeply resented the British rule in India. The outcome of Swadeshi movement had prompted for manufacturing desi bomb made its appearance first time in Indian continent. Innumerable secret organizations were formed to set-up to impart lessons and other techniques required in clandestine warfare. One of such corps viz., National Volunteer Corps, a physical force established in the initial years of 1906. In order to popularize the gospel of revolution, the revolutionaries of Bengal used periodicals and books such as *Bhavani Mandir*, *Yugantar*, *Mukti Kon Patha* and the like and revolutionaries' propaganda was carried on by all of them. The sensational bomb throwing at Muzaffarpur was influenced by Indian youth. In 1909 at Alipur bomb trial the police confessed that they found in the possession of prisoners a series of manuscripts on the Russian and Japanese war. The awakening of Japan was very much popular among the revolutionaries. In 1905, in the *Bhavani Mandir*, it was mentioned that war is unavoidable, where oppression and rampant and therefore it was suggested that the Indians should shake off fear and became experts in sword play. The *Yugantar* also observed that not much physical strength was required to fight Europeans. The revolutionary societies in Bengal injected patriotic sentiments in the minds of youth with violence and active resistance, there developed to attack major British installations causing severe damage to property and loss to life by employing plot of dacoit and murders creating fear of panic and uncertainty among the foreigners especially English.

Another feature of the revolutionary movement was that the desire to incite the armed rebellion against foreign masters was the hidden agenda of secret associations which were made its presence felt during this period and there are several sporadic incidents across pan India. It is reported that around 51 attacks were carried out by the various revolutionaries groups active in

Bengal, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh to uproot the Imperial forces from India. For carryout various activities, the groups have been generated finance by the way plundering of Post Offices, banks and government treasures and robbery was advocated by the Yugantar. On April 30, 1908, Shri. Khudiram Bose threw a bomb in Muzaffarpur to kill Mr. Kingsford, the district judge, but unfortunately Mrs. Kennedy and her daughter were killed. Praising the bomb thrower, the Bal Gangadhar Tilak convicted and sentenced to six years rigorous imprisonment. The prosecution of Tilak was followed by big strike of workers in Bombay. This was the first occasion when political consciousness was seen among the workers.

To kindle a revolution in India, the revolutionaries tried to be acquainted with military science. In the course of activities the Indian revolutionaries learned various tactics for making various sizes of bombs, Manual for military engineering, infantry training, machinegun training and quick training for clandestine or Guerilla warfare etc. Meanwhile the factory workers, peasants, weavers and labourers were inspired by Russian Revolution and borrowed the idea of revolution which is inevitable in India. The revolutionaries boldly threw the whole responsibility for the movement on British rule and impressed upon the youth of India to follow the example of the Russian Intelligence in its revolt against the autocracy as brutal and odious as that of Tsarist Russians.

During this period Indian patriots were first time came into contact with International Socialist Movement and began to visit foreign lands. Lala Har Dayal, a member of the Abhinav Bharat joined the Indian Revolutionaries in Britain and established contacts with the Russian Nihilists. Senapati Pandurang Bapat were sent to Russia to get training in bomb making. Hemachandra Kanungo, a member of revolutionary organization in Calcutta went to England to get acquainted with revolutionary method. Later met with

a group of prominent patriots in Paris such as C.R. Vama, S.R. Rana, Shyamji Krishna Verma. Gorky was very much impressed with the activities of Shri. Krishna Verma and wanted an article from him for Russian review. The aggressive nationalism was in highest peak and during the period during 1905 to 1918, no less than 210 incidents had occurred in which 70 police personnel were targeted and around 24 revolutionaries were killed in retaliation. During this period 205 persons were convicted under Indian Penal Code and Arms and Explosive Substance Acts. It is very difficult to give an exact number of political prisoners were transported to Andamans, but it is estimated that around 133 political prisoners were sent to Cellular Jail for life term imprisonment.

To create formidable atmosphere in the India, British released all political prisoners in 1920. Soon Mahatma Gandhi launched his first Non-cooperation movement in India to testify the sentiments of the people and responded favorably for the first time an atmosphere of mass protest against British rule was registered in India. But this was called off because of rampant violence and protest across the country due to active participation of revolutionaries' ideas which culminated into Chowri Chaura incident. Especially moderates felt disappointed particularly Mahatma Gandhi the way youth abrupt peaceful agitation into violent struggle which lead to suspension of the movement. Meanwhile Gandhi gave a call and appealed youth to extend hands to advance the movement.

To break the stagnancy of the post non-cooperation period, the revolutionaries had begun searched alternative methods to strengthen revolutionary movement to check the British rule. The Hindustan Republican Association (HRA) was the main revolutionary party in northern India, Sachindra Nath Sanyal, a Bengali domiciled in Banaras took a leading part in its formation inspired the youth to join the organization including the Suresh Chandra Bhattacharya, Ram Prasad Bismil and Jogesh Chandra Chatterjee. As a result

Bengal and United Provinces were soon covered with a strong network of revolutionary centers. Outside Bengal the HRA was the most important revolutionary organization. The object of this organization as defined in its constitution to establish a Federated Republic of the United States of India by an organized armed revolution. Some of the members of HRA committed crimes and distributed revolutionary literature. Kakori train incident was a political crime and it was an armed challenge to British forces by the desperate revolutionary youth who did not believe in the reforms, but wanted to liberate the country by an armed revolution. The entire trial proceeding attracted the attention of the general public and accused persons was acclaimed as heroes. In another incident Navjeevan Bharat Sabha which was established in 1925 as a result of the joint efforts of Bhagat Singh, Sukhdeo, Bhagwati Charan and Yashpal. Its object was to propagate the aims of militant national sentiments among youth and an open invitation to join armed revolution. The main slogan of the Navjeevan sabha was 'Long Live Revolution, Long Live Hindustan'. The Navjeevan Sabah became tremendously popular in the following years and also played a leading role in the radicalization of the youth.

Meanwhile Simon Commission visited Lahore on 20th October 1928, the revolutionaries' demonstrated shouting 'Simon Commission Go Back' resulted into Lala Lajpat Rai grievously injured causing death. This incident fueled youth and more youth joined in this movement boycotting studies. In order to topple down British rule in India revolutionaries contended and resorted to throwing bombs in the Central Legislative assembly in Delhi which leads sentenced to death of Bhagat Singh, Rajguru and Shukdev in Lahore Jail on 23rd March 1931.

The youth had great appreciation for revolutionary activities in India. The news of Chittagong armory raid case unprecedented in the annals of the

revolutionary movement gave a powerful fillip to the younger generation who were fixed with enthusiasm to drive the British from India by the force of arms. Its effects was electric and recruits were poured into the various groups in a steady stream. Later most of them were transported to Cellular Jail. The great success which the revolutionaries achieved during this period was in arousing the anti-imperialist sentiments and they also succeeded in arriving at socialist understanding of society, state, imperialism, nationalism and revolution.

Cellular Jail: A mute witness of sufferings

Deportation and capital punishments had increased tremendously during 1900AD. This was a consequence which lead to even more stringent and dishonest measures being taken by the Imperial British. The Andaman Islands are very intimately associated with the Indian Freedom struggle since it began. Innumerable political prisoners were jailed in galos and every act of these great sons conveys the spirit of national unity and integrated struggle for the salvation of motherland. The political prisoners who were sent to Cellular Jail execute intolerable and perpetual victimization fully in human form. The young political prisoners transported to Kalapani started with the Alipore Conspiracy case in 1908. Except Aurobindo Ghosh, who was acquitted, the other four suspects namely Birendra Kumar Ghosh, Hem Chandra Das, Ulaskar Dutta and Indu Bhusan were sentenced to transportation for life to these islands. In 1911. Another well known name Vinayak Damodar Savarkar of the Nasik Conspiracy case was sentenced to transportation for life. Gopal Mukherjee was sentenced to 14 years of imprisonment in the Dalhousie square bomb case. The conditions of these prisoners were extremely hard since they had to undergo severe work pressures. Some of the political prisoners turned insane and some of them committed suicide because of

the ill human treatment and atrocities infused by Jailor, David Barry.

Due to fresh violence, around 300 political prisoners had sent to cellular Jail in 1932. Among the most prominent, Batukeshwar Dutta, Mahabir Singh, Kundan Lal and Gaya Prasad, all political prisoners of Lahore Conspiracy case were deported to Andamans in January 1933. Jai Dev Kapoor, Bejoy Kumar Sinha and Sheo Verma also deported to Andamans. This was the period mass hunger strikes organised against the barbaric and inhuman behaviour of the British authorities. Some heroic acts and slogans raised in the jail were crushed with high-handedness.

The revolutionaries spent a gruesome and agonizing life in the cellular jail until they were released. The memories of Barinder Kumar Ghose titled '*The Tale of My Exile*' (1922), Shri. Upendra Nath Bandyopadhaya '*Nirvaster Atmakatha*', Vinauak Damodar Savarkar '*The story of my Transportation for Life*' were portrayed in detail about the excess of intimidation, which prisoners underwent in the godforsaken place. Administering physical and mental torture to the political prisoners was the premeditated plan of the British, with the idea that such severe punishment would keep them in check. However, they misapprehended the magnitude of the national spirit. These revolutionary patriots were built up quite a different mould. Even after solitary confinement they did not veer off. They held out against all odds. This was major victory of the political prisoners and they stood united like a rock and succeeded in defeating British, although it was at the price of numerous physical sufferings and sacrifices.

CONCLUSION

The spirit of fighting against injustice implied in the freedom struggle has been pervading the minds of younger generations. They met all odds of resistance and fought against the mighty imperial

power. The real spirit and zeal of freedom was celebrated when they were at prime youth for the sake of motherland. The youth were closely connected with the sage of India's freedom struggle and exonerated great contribution towards national spirit which is primary source for inspiration for the present generation. The youth contribution to Indian freedom struggle was instrumental in posing serious challenge to British colonial regime despite of adversity and authority, the spirit of youth never ceased and they were ready to accept death for the sake of salvation of motherland.

Conflict of Interest: None

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