

Quadrant II – Notes

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Notes :

In the first decade of the 20th century, along with the open political movements, there arose various revolutionary groups in the different parts of the country. These early revolutionaries, active mainly in Bengal, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu and Punjab had no faith in constitutional agitations. They believed that by terrorizing British officials, they would be able to demoralize the entire machinery of the government and bring about freedom. This led to rise of revolutionary terrorism in India.

Causes for the Rise of Revolutionaries

The early movement of protest by the moderates failed to yield results.

Extremists' failure to give a positive lead to the people. The Extremists had made an effective critique of the Moderates. They had emphasized the role of the masses and the need to go beyond propaganda and agitation. They had advocated persistent opposition to the Government and put forward a militant program of passive resistance and boycott of foreign cloth, foreigners' courts, education, and so on. They had demanded self-sacrifice from the youth. They had talked and written about direct action. But they had failed to find forms through which all these ideas could find practical expression. Consequently, they too had come to a political dead end by the end of 1907. The Extremists' waffling failed to impress the youth who decided to take recourse to physical force. Failure of Swadeshi and Boycott movement to fulfil their aim.

In 1904, V.D. Sarvarkar organized Abhinav Bharat as a secret society of revolutionaries. After 1905 several newspapers openly (and a few leaders secretly) began to advocate revolutionary terrorism.

By the end of 1907 the younger generation became impatient. To channelize their energy, they looked for some leaders to guide them, but there was a scarcity of leaders. This led to

divergence towards newer militant activities. They took to the path of individual heroism and revolutionary terrorism.

Methods adopted by Revolutionaries

Revolutionary youth decided to copy the methods of the Irish Nationalists and Russian Nihilists- and Populists. They decided to organize the assassination of unpopular British officials. Such assassinations would strike terror into the hearts of the rulers, arouse the patriotic instincts of the people, inspire them and remove the fear of authority from their minds. Each assassination, and if the assassins were caught, the consequent trial of the revolutionaries involved, would act as 'propaganda by deed.'

Early Instances of Revolutionary activities

In 1907, an unsuccessful attempt was made on the life of the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal. In 1908, Prafulla Chaki and Khudiram Bose threw a bomb at a carriage which they believed was occupied by Kingsford, the unpopular judge at Muzzafarpur.

Unfortunately, they killed two English ladies instead. Prafulla Chaki shot himself dead while Khudiram Bose was tried and hanged. Thus the era of revolutionary terrorism had begun.

Rise of secret societies

Secret societies of revolutionaries came up all over the country, one of the most famous and long lasting- Anushilan Samiti - established in Bengal by Promod Mitter. His associates started a weekly 'Yugantar'. Their activities took two forms - the assassination of oppressive officials, informers and traitors from their own ranks. Dacoities were used as a means to raise funds for purchase of arms. This came to be popularly known as Swadeshi dacoities.

Most spectacular Revolutionary Terrorist actions

The unsuccessful attempt under the leadership of Rash Behari Bose and Sachin Sanyal to kill the Viceroy, Lord Hardinge who was wounded by the bomb thrown at him while he was riding an elephant in a state procession. The assassination of Curzon-Wylie in London, by Madan Lal Dhingra. In all 186 revolutionaries were killed or convicted between the years 1908-1918

Centres of Activity Abroad

The more famous of them were by Shyamji Krishnavarma, V.D. Savarkar and Har Dayal in London. Madame Cama and Ajit Singh in Europe. Rash Bihari Bose, Raja Mahendra Pratap, Lala Hardayal, Abdul Rahim, Maulana Ubaidillah Sindhi, Champa Karaman Pillai, Sardar Singh Rana.

Movement Declines

It lacked a mass base. The individual revolutionaries organized in small secret groups could not withstand suppression by the still strong colonial state. Despite their small numbers and eventual failure, they made a valuable contribution to the growth of nationalism in India. As a historian has put it, 'they gave us back the pride of our manhood'.

Phase 2

Cause

The failure of the first non-cooperation movement led to the revival of the revolutionary movement. After an all India conference, the Hindustan Republican Association was founded in October 1924 to organize an armed revolution.

Kakori Robbery- 10 men held down a train at Kakori- looted its official railway cash. The Government struck by arresting a large number of youths and trying them in the Kakori conspiracy case (1925). Seventeen were sentenced to long term of imprisonment, four were transported for life to Andamans. Ram Prasad Bismal, Ashfaqullah others were hanged. The terrorists soon came under the influence of socialist ideas, in 1928, under the leadership of Chandra Shekher Azad the name of their organization was changed to the Hindustan Socialist Republican Association (HSRA)

Phase 3

Cause

Hindustan Socialist Republican Association (HSRA) had gradually began to move away from individual heroic action and terrorism. But the brutal lathi-charge on an anti-Simon Commission demonstration on 30 October, 1928 led to a sudden change. The great Punjabi Leader Lala Lajpat Rai died as a result of the lathi blows. This enraged the youth. The HSRA leadership then decided to change their political activities and objectives and emphasized the need for a revolution by the masses.

Role of Bhagat Singh and Associates

On 17 December 1928, Bhagat Singh, Azad and Rajguru assassinated Saunders, the British Police officer who had led the Lathi Charge. On 8 April 1929 Bhagat Singh and B.K. Dutt threw a bomb in the Central Legislative Assembly. The bomb did not harm anyone, for it had been deliberately made harmless. The aim was not to kill but, as their leaflet put it, "to make the deaf hear". Bhagat Singh and B.K. Dutt deliberately chose to be arrested for they wanted to make use of the Court as a forum for revolutionary propaganda. Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev and Rajguru were executed on 23 March 1931.

Activities in Bengal

In April 1930, a well-planned and large-scale armed raid was organised on the Government armoury at Chittagong, under the leadership of Surya Sen. This was the first of many attacks on unpopular government officials. A remarkable aspect- the participation of young women. Under the leadership of Surya Sen, they provided shelter,

acted as messengers and custodians of arms and fought with gun in hand. For instance Pritilata Waddedar, Kalpana Dutt were arrested and given life sentence..

Decline of the Revolutionary Movement

After the government suppressed almost all open political agitations and imprisoned a large number of nationalist leaders, the activities of the revolutionary groups declined. The revolutionary terrorist movement soon abated though stray activities were carried on for several years more. Chandra Shekhar Azad was killed in a shooting encounter with the police in a Public Park. Surya Sen was arrested in February 1933 and hanged soon after. The politics of the Revolutionaries had severe limitation, as it was not the politics of a mass movement. It failed to politically activate the masses or move them into political action. Moreover they could not establish contact with the masses. Nevertheless they made an abiding contribution to the national freedom movement. Their deep patriotism, courage, and determination stirred the Indian people.