



REVOLUTIONARY UPSURGE IN INDIAN FREEDOM STRUGGLE WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO KANPUR

Dr. Rajeshwar Shukla

The contribution of revolutionaries is one of those gray areas in the annals of Indian freedom struggle, that have not been researched in depth. Whatever work has been done that remains confined to handful revolutionaries. Countless patriots laid down their lives for the sake of the nation, still pages of history kept mum over their heroic deeds and remained oblivious of them. It was entirely a strange phenomenon and needs to be probed.

In order to understand revolutionary movement in its entirety, It is necessary to have a feel of circumstances in which the seeds of revolt began sprouting. India was not enslaved in a day or two, it was rather a result of continuous intricate conspiracies over a century. It is also not fair to put entire blame over British Raj for Indian submission. The fact is that no institution can ever be so severely damaged unless it is perished within itself and British could not have so easily burgled into its very roots. Even during the rule of Aurangzeb. Mughal empire started shedding its luster and soon became vulnerable to various indigenous forces. It is beyond doubt that some of these forces had enough strength to give a death blow to the empire but they really lacked in art of building a new one. Though they had capabilities of vanquishing the Mughal empire yet they could not do so, as at this juncture the British forces unexpectedly jumped in between and shattered the dreams of other Indian forces that were aspiring to be the masters of India.

This was the era when the British Empire was undoubtedly an industrial giant and possessed the best

of weaponry in the world. It was a progressive capitalist force enriched with intense feelings of new born nationalism. It virtually provided it with a cohesiveness and made it impregnable for any divisive force. On the other hand India being a feudal country in its very core could not withstand aggressive British Raj.

Establishment of British Raj was a gradual process and most likely same was the case with revolutionary upsurge. British rule in India was never guided by the Principle of equality and social justice, it was a plunderer state that eventually created large scale discontentment in form of revolts. Hence English rule and revolutionary virus grew together and prepared the base for future clashes.

A microscopic analysis of the revolutionary trend in Indian freedom struggle reveals that they were nobody else but revolutionaries who evolved freedom movement and compelled English to quit India. It is a sheer thanklessness of nation to call revolutionaries as less gangsters. Manmath Nath Gupta justifies this revolutionary upsurge, "On the one hand the peasants who grow corn for all, starve with their families. The weaver who supplies the world market with textile fabrics can not find enough to cover his own and his children's bodies. Masons, smiths, carpenters, who build magnificent places lived and perished in slums. On the other hand, capitalists, exploiters, parasites of society squander millions on mere whims."1

Bipin Chandra, in his book "Nationalism and Colonialism in modern India" says, "countless Indians refused to be in such inhuman state and

rose in revolt and gave their blood to the foundation of free India. How can there be any parameter to measure their contribution ? Revolutionaries of Northern India during 1920's became popular heroes in their own life time and have remained so since then. There are few to question the magnanimity of the noble ideals they cherish and the grand sacrifices they have offered"² Manmath Nath Gupta further outlines the role of revolutionaries, say, "At the time of First World War, when the British Government stood at the threshold of glorious victory, was not worried about any body and anything except the revolutionaries. The congress had been there since 1885, but it was not even mentioned in 226 pages report of Rowlatt Committee. Tilak and Aurobindo were mentioned, because they were revolutionaries, not because they were congressmen."³

The revolutionaries were not scared of chaos or anarchy which so frightened the middle class intelligentsia of the time. The task of destruction was essential before regeneration could occur. The 'Revolutionary' published by the HRA in January 1925 had proclaimed "Chaos is necessary to the birth of a new star and the birth of life is accompanied by agony and pain." The manifesto of the HSRA (1929) fully endorsed this anarchistic streak.⁴ According to the philosophy of the Bomb, "the revolutionaries already see the advent of the revolution in the restlessness of the youth, in its desire to break free from the mental bondage and religious superstitions that hold them."⁵

It is beyond any doubt that foreign rule itself was very seed that gave birth to revolutionary upsurge in India. But the role of various socioeconomic forces instrumental in

its culmination point, cannot be ruled out. India being the land of diverse social patterns and scarce economy would certainly have been vulnerable to these vital factors. Economic hardships inflicted by British rule compelled the common people of India to live wretched life and it eventually paved the path of revolution.

This paper will also make an attempt to bring forward the first ever references of those Indian revolts that somehow slipped from the formal history of Indian freedom struggle. One such uprising was "Sanyasi Revolt" in the year 1700. Saints, forest dwellers, Santhals and Bhils held the string of this revolt against the British Raj. This revolt was spread from banks of Ghraghra, in the then United Province (U.P.) to the banks of Brahmaputra river. We also come across instances of Hindu Sanyasin and Sufi Faquirs coming together to challenge British rule. Bankim Chandra wrote historical novel "Anand Math". It was not merely a fiction work. It was in fact based on real happenings between Bhawani Pathak and Sufi Majnu Shah⁶. Dudhar Singh and Mishri Khan, rulers of Burdwan got the help of Sanyasis and Sufis against British rule in 1719, Nawab of Bengal, Mir Kasim sought the help of Sanyasins in 1700.

These small embers of local unrest eventually transformed into a volcano in 1857. Keeping aside their mutual differences, various leaders from different parts of India assembled under the banner of last Mughal Emperor, Bahadur Shah Zafar to challenge their common enemy. Though this revolt was brutally muzzled yet it sent tremors to very roots of English rule in India. Keeping in view its almost national character, it is considered to be the very first war of

Indian Independence. Opposite to this there is another school of thought that does not agree with this and calls it mere a sepoys' mutiny. There is no doubt that participant groups had divergent aims yet they were unanimous on their primary goal, that was immediate expulsion of foreign regime. Had there been a better coordination among leaders of this uprising, most likely they would have given a last nail to the British coffin. Whatsoever was the outcome but it was certainly a great revolutionary effort that further enriched the revolutionary cult and gave a fillip to the growth of Indian Nationalism.

Revolution knocked the doors of Kanpur also. In the mid night of 4th June Revolt began with firing. Next day, platoon no. 1 of Indian troops rose in revolt but they did not harm any English officer. They proceeded towards Nawabganj and plundered treasury and court gate of the jail was opened with the help of two more platoons that rose in revolt later. Nana Saheb was declared the King and Subedar Tikka Singh was deputed with Leadership of platoon no. 53.

The flag of freedom was put on an elephant and a procession was taken out. It was declared that the reign of Nana Saheb had begun.

On 6th June, Nana Saheb attacked the fort of English and three days later, platoon no. 48 staying at Chaubepur also revolted. All English officers were killed except one named Bolton who succeeded in fleeing away. On the same day, from Fatehgarh, 60 to 70 English men, women and children reached to Nawabganj by a boat, through the course of Ganges. All were killed. Fort was under the siege and ration was gradually exhausted. 4th and 5th platoons of Awadh Local Infantry also joined the forces of Nana

Saheb. Eventually, English surrendered and accepted the terms of Nana.7.

Among the main subordinates of Nana Saheb, who assisted him, were Azimullah, Baba Rao, Jwala Prasad and Tikka Singh etc. Apart from them a number of reputed people of Kanpur also supported him:

1. Chaudharies of Bithur
2. King of Thathia
3. Moti Singh
4. Rajputs of Panki - Gangagnaj and Kakadeo
5. King of Shivrajpur, Sati Prasad
6. King of Sachendi, Durga Prasad
7. King of Nar-Dariyav Chand

They all participated in siege of Wheeler. Besides them, Zamindars and Powerful people of Bithur, Jajmau, Shivrajpur, Narval and Rasulabad openly participated in revolt. But this victory could not last for long. On 17th July, Kanpur once again slipped into the hands of English forces. Nana Saheb fled away and took shelter in Bithur to organise his forces again. On 16th August, General Havelock attacked Nana Saheb. A fierce battle took place between revolutionaries and English forces which resulted in a lot of casualties. Finally, English emerged victorious and General Stephenson occupied Bithoor with the help of Sikh and English force. General burnt the palace of Nana Saheb and plundered its treasure9.

November 10th, Tatya Tope, an able army chief of Nana closed Yamuna river to attack English forces at Kanpur and occupied Bhognipur, Shivla, Akbarpur, Shivrajpur and half of the Kanpur. In the month of December, Kanpur once again fell into the hands of English and revolt came to an end. British confiscated the property of those who supported for the cause of Nana Saheb. On 22nd November, Pandu Rang Rao an



adopted son of Nana Saheb's younger brother was hanged to death by English.¹³

By mid twenties, Kanpur again came under the sway of revolutionary activities. Attempts were made to instigate the soldiers in the cantonment of Kanpur. Kartar Singh accompanied by Pingley visited Kanpur cantonment during this period.¹¹ In 1923 Jaychand Vidyalkar a prominent revolutionary of Punjab sent Bhagat Singh to Kanpur for revolutionary work who worked in association with 'Pratap'¹². A week after B. K. Dutta and Bhagat Singh hurled bomb in Assembly. Searches were made at various places in Kanpur and prominent revolutionary Shiv Verma was arrested.

Salig Ram Shukla was one such revolutionary of Kanpur who led his activities from D.A.V. College hostel. Chandra Shekhar Azad, Surendera Nath Pandey, Vishwanath and Nand Kishor Nigam were other associates of the Shukla Salig Ram organised 'Uttar Pradesh Youth Guard' which was joined by many young men of Kanpur who were given a special uniform for the purpose. Salig Ram was a fine shooter and Police kept an eye over his activities. Police Sub-Inspector Shambhu Nath was after his life. Shukla started living with his associate Surendra Nath, who lived at Nawabganj¹⁴. On December 2nd, 1930 Shukla was shot dead in a gun duel with Police.¹⁵

Another activist of Kanpur, Ganesh Shanker Vidayarthi started Publication of 'Pratap' on 9th November, 1913. He published the stories of revolutionaries in a series. He was a guide to Bhagat Singh and Chandra Shekhar Azad. He published the incident of 'Kakori' along with important documents in 'Pratap' He also published book titled 'Kakori

Kand' which was sold like a hot cake. On 23rd March, 1931, when Bhagat Singh, Rajguru and Batukeshwar Dutt were hanged he published the whole incident alongwith their biographies and photographs. On the very next day, Vidyarthi lost his life during a communal riot between Hindus and Muslims.

In thirties, not many revolutionary incidents are reported but during the phase of 'Quit India Movement', C.I.D. found a renewed upsurge in revolutionary activities. As per its sources, Gajpati Saxena was acting as a secret Dictator, Ishwar Chandra of Naughada was in charge of organising demonstrations, processions and meetings and Ram Dulare Trivedi of Pratap Press was entrusted with the task of wire cuttings, destruction of railway lines, raids on police stations and Government buildings. Deo Dutt Sharma of Sharma printing works was incharge of publicity of revolutionary activities¹⁶. It was also observed that Acharya Jugal Kishore divided U.P. into three zones, for revolutionary activities with head quarters at Agra, Banaras and Kanpur. Ram Swarup Gupta was in charge of Kanpur zone¹⁷.

Initially revolutionary activities were confined to bomb throwing and cases of burning post boxes. In February, 1943, two bomb were exploded at Kanpur central railway station causing death of three persons. Likewise there was an explosion at Nishat Talkies. As per C.I.D. and police records, two groups were involved in these activities. The first group was responsible for the petty small bomb cases, burning of post offices and second was responsible for Kanpur Railway Station bomb explosion and Nishat Talkies Bomb case.¹⁸

The investigation of the Railway Station Bomb case was started by Government Railway Police while that of Nishat Talkies case by the Kotwali Police. The culprits could not be traced.¹⁹ C.I.D. officials led by Trilok Singh took the investigation in his hands. They were of an opinion that these activities were a part of rebellious programme of the Congress to terrorize the general public.²⁰

Suspected revolutionaries were later challenged in the session's court. 14 persons were sent for session court trial. Uma Shanker had been the approver in his Kanpur Station Bomb case but C.I.D. officials wanted another approver in order to strengthen the case. On 16.10.1943 Deputy Superintendent of police, Tika Ram wrote to superintendent of police, I.B., that they needed a second approver and they might approach Babu Ram, who later refused to be so.²² 13 persons were put on trial and Uma Shanker was also examined as approver in Kanpur Station and Nishat Bomb cases. The judgement was pronounced on 10-11-1944. The session Judge convicted 6 of them and acquitted the rest from all charges. The Judge referred the case to High Court.²³

It is indeed necessary to surface the names of those revolutionaries who played significant role in various subversive activities during Quit India movement in Kanpur. The important ones are, Mohan Lal, Durga Prasad, Baij Nath, Tejnath Pandey, Sri Ram, Bhagwan Das, Anand Prakash, Harbhagwan, G.D. Chawla, Jagdish Prasad Dubey, Shambhu Dayal, Ram Ghulam, Dr. Deo Bharat Som, Bajrang Singh, Baboo Ram Srivastava, Chandra Prabhakar, Dalpat Singh, Ram Niranjana Singh, G. L. Khanolkar, Master Gobardhan, Ram Dulare

Trivedi, Yadunath Singh and Ram Lal.²⁴

It is significant that revolutionaries of Kanpur were in close association with the members of Indian National Congress and Socialist Congress and worked in an ambience. Many H.S.R.A. members belonged to Kanpur. Revolutionaries like Gajpati, Ram Dulari Trivedi and Ishwar Chandra were active participants in anti British Movement. Congress Leaders like Bal Krishna and Ram Manohar Lohia addressed meeting in Kanpur to encourage masses to participate in anti British campaign. Kanpur was also the center of activities for Keshav Das Malviya, Acharya, Jugal Kishore and Ram Swarup Gupta. It is also significant to note that members of Indian National Congress like G.M. Khanolkar and socialist like Dalpat Singh and Devendra Agnihotri were closely associated with revolutionaries of Kanpur.

It is indeed a strange phenomenon that even the blood of countless martyrs did not stir a nation. So called intellectual writers seemed to camouflage their own escapism with modesty. The revolutionaries, who deserved the adoration of the countrymen are being referred as 'Terrorist'. What a mental bankruptcy! It is shocking, that a nation which saw the emergence of 'Geeta' is herself devoid of its essence. The devil must be killed, whether by the bullet of revolutionary or by the Sudarshan Chakra of Krishna. It is abundantly clear that violence or non-violence does not matter, it is the spirit behind the action that is the main deciding factor.

The tails of revolutionaries are endless and their contribution in freedom struggle is beyond any measure, yet an apathy of historians

towards revolutionary history is indeed an intriguing issue. Isn't it a matter of disgrace that about 1654 army men of I.N.A. were killed in the war against British forces and pages of history are still quiet? It was perhaps the cathartic effect of Gandhian philosophy that seemed to blur the vision of historians and adversely affect their objectivity as well. It was the same philosophy that made Indian National congress so much numb that they did not feel any need to observe a condolence meeting at the execution of Bhagat Singh. The life of Bhagat Singh was symbolic to the revolutionary philosophy which gave birth to countless such heroes who laid down their lives for the sake of the nation. The nation that has no consciousness of its past has no future and my work is merely an attempt to rediscover these precious gems who somehow slipped from our hands due to sheer ignorance.

REFERENCES

1. Manmath Nath Gupta, Bhagat Singh and His Times, p. 167
2. Bipin Chandra, National And Colonialism in Modern India, p.228.
3. Manmath Nath Gupta, Bhagat Singh and His Times, p.54
4. Bipin Chandra, Nationalism and colonialism In Modern India, p.235.
5. Bipin Chandra, Nationalism and colonialism In Modern India, p.245
6. Vachnesh Tripathi, Zara Yaad Karo Qurbani part 1; pps. 31, 33
7. Narayan Prasad Arora, Kanpur Ka Itihas, p.113
8. Narayan Prasad Arora, Kanpur Ka Itihas, p.117
9. Narayan Prasad Arora, Kanpur Ka Itihas, p.125
10. Narayan Prasad Arora, Kanpur Ka Itihas, p.152
11. M.N. Gupta, History of Indian Revolutionary Movement, pps 40-46
12. M.N. Gupta, History of Indian Revolutionary Movement, pps 114-115.
13. Shiv Verma, Sansmritian, pps 149-150.
14. Kripa Kant Jha, Uttar Pradesh Ke Amar Shahidon Ki Kahaniyan, pps 108-111
15. M.N. Gupta, Bhartiya Krantikari Andolan Ka Itihas p. 141
16. P. N. Chopra, Quit India Movement British Secret Documents, pps.101-102
17. Ibid, pps. 251-252
18. Letter of M.A. Warsi, Deputy Superintendent of Police, C.I.D., I.B. to Assistant Inspector General of C.I.D. Dated 09.12.1944, p. 2001
19. Report of Deputy Superintendent of Police, N.C. Mishra dated 03.05.1943.
20. Secret Letter of Tika Ram, Deputy Superintendent of police, I.B. dated 22.02.1943, pps. 96-100.
21. Progress Report no. 4 by Phool Chand Gupta, dated 15.10.1943, p.1391.
22. Letter To Tika Ram, Deputy Superintendent of Police, C.I.D., I.B. to Superintendent of Police, dated 16.10.1943, p.1932
23. Advance copy of Judgement Report by M.A. Warsi and Phool Chand Gupta, dated 5.12.1944, pps. 1611-1612
24. History sheets of persons involved in Kanpur Station Bomb case, reported by Phoochand to Colville, Superintendent of Police Kanpur, pps.965-974 and statements on pages 2147-51, 2189, 2109-2119, 2151-59, 2447 etc. (File no. RR 27, C.I.D. Investigation)

