



ARMED REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENT IN COLONIAL NORTHERN BENGAL WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO DINAJPUR DISTRICT

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Abstract: This article delves into the revolutionary movements in colonial-era Dinajpur district, focusing on its socio-political landscape and interactions with neighboring British colonial districts. It explores the rise of revolutionary organizations like Anushilan Samity and Jugantar, tracing their activities and impact on the region. Despite challenges in sourcing, the study aims to unveil the hidden narratives of armed struggle and societal influences. Notable incidents such as the Hili Mail Robbery highlight the fervour of revolutionaries, led by figures like Prafulla Narayan Sanyal. The involvement of women and Muslims marks a shift in the movement's dynamics. Collaborations between Anushilan and Jugantar underscore tactical alliances amidst ideological differences. Ultimately, while the movement faced limitations and lacked broad support, it significantly contributed to India's quest for independence.

Index Terms: Northern Bengal, Dinajpur, Revolutionary movement, Hili Mail Docoity, Kakna Docoity

INTRODUCTION

In commencing this overview, it is imperative to delineate the scope of the inquiry. This study endeavours to scrutinize the revolutionary activities that transpired during the colonial epoch within the British district of Dinajpur. The year 1947 marked a significant juncture, witnessing the partition of three northern Bengal districts under British dominion—Malda, Dinajpur, and Jalpaiguri. Specifically, Dinajpur district underwent a bifurcation, giving rise to West Dinajpur with Balurghat as its headquarters, while the eastern segment evolved into Dinajpur district within East Pakistan, its headquarters situated in the town of Dinajpur. Subsequently, on April 1, 1991, administrative exigencies necessitated another division, segregating the district into North Dinajpur with headquarters in Raiganj, and South Dinajpur with Balurghat as its administrative centers. A comprehensive analysis of our focal area mandates acknowledgment of its interconnectedness with neighboring British districts—Malda, Darjeeling, Rajshahi, Bogra, Pabna, and Rangpur— which shared a contiguous socio-economic and political milieu during the colonial era.

The revolutionary movement in Bengal stands as a pivotal juncture in India's struggle for independence. Its inception traces back to the early years of the twentieth century, witnessing the emergence of several revolutionary organizations. During its initial phase, many secret societies such as Anushilan Samity, Jugantar, Suhrid Samity, Brati Samity, and Sadhana Samity came into existence, spurred by the prevailing socio-economic and political unrest. Primarily championed by the middle classes and the intelligentsia, this revolutionary fervor predominantly resonated within the Hindu community. From its nascent stages until the ascendancy of the communist movement, it epitomized one of the most formidable anti-imperialist forces in India's struggle for freedom. Notably, these revolutionaries were at the forefront, boldly advocating for complete liberation from British imperialism—a stance that heralded a watershed moment in the annals of India's freedom movement.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology of this research paper on revolutionary movements involves a multifaceted approach. Firstly, it will employ a comprehensive literature review to establish the historical context and theoretical frameworks of revolutionary movements. Secondly, primary sources such as historical documents, speeches, and archival materials have been analyzed to gain insights into the motivations, strategies, and outcomes of various revolutionary activities. Additionally, qualitative methods such as interviews with experts of revolutionary movements are taken to provide firsthand perspectives and enrich the analysis. Finally, comparative analysis has been employed to assess similarities and differences across different revolutionary movements, regions, and time periods. This multi-method approach ensures a comprehensive understanding of revolutionary movements of northern Bengal and their impacts.

ANALYSIS

Concerning the revolutionary endeavors in northern Bengal, a notable challenge persists in the scarcity of reliable sources, albeit some localized efforts have yielded fragmentary insights. Against this backdrop, it is imperative to delve into the untold narratives of secret societies and their armed resistance in this remote enclave of Bengal. Despite the fervent aspirations of the region's populace for freedom and a fervent desire to etch a legacy of self-sacrifice for their homeland, comprehensive exploration remains essential. In this vein, an endeavor is undertaken to scrutinize the trajectory of revolutionary movements in northern Bengal, particularly within the purview of Dinajpur district, along with an assessment of its societal repercussions.

It is rightful to mention here about the pivotal role played by the partition of Bengal in 1905 CE and the subsequent Swadeshi movement in reshaping the political landscape of the region. These events precipitated a significant upheaval within Bengal, marked by the intensifying conflict between the moderates and extremists factions within the Indian National Congress. The widespread resistance against the partition, coupled with the repressive measures adopted by the British administration, catalyzed the steady rise of revolutionary politics in Bengal (Roy 1980, p. 212).

During this epoch, revolutionary groups commenced recruitment drives in the districts of northern Bengal, including Jalpaiguri, Malda, Coochbehar, and Dinajpur. The current scholarly discourse aims to delineate select instances of revolutionary activities within Dinajpur district. Operating clandestinely, revolutionaries affiliated with organizations such as the Anushilan Samiti and Jugantar proliferated across Bengal. Notably, the Anushilan Samiti's headquarters were located in Dacca, overseeing a network of satellite branches across eastern and northern Bengal (Chatterjee 1979). The proliferation of revolutionary activities in various districts of North Bengal since 1908 underscores the active involvement of segments of the local populace, particularly the student community, despite being categorized as criminal acts by the British authorities (Samanta 1995, p. 11). For facilitating communication with revolutionaries, figures like Jatindranath Banerjee and Umesh Ch. Banerjee journeyed to Dinajpur, where they continued their clandestine operations. In Dinajpur, numerous leaders such as Pramathanath Mitra, Indrabhushan Roy, Sachindra Kumar Singha, Manoronjan Gupta, Satya Basu, and Nalini Gupta spearheaded revolutionary endeavors. Their influence inspired many youths in Dinajpur district to actively resist British imperialism. As noted by Charles Tegart (1983, p. XLIII), 'by the end of 1917 the conspiracies were under control'.

The second phase of terrorist activities had started by 1930 but this time it was marked with slight wind of change which seemed to blow over terrorist in general (Sarkar 1987, p. 36). Notably, this period witnessed the emergence of women activists, whose names began to feature prominently in reports compiled by the Intelligence Branch (Chakraborty, 1372 B.S., p. 13). A substantial influx of women became actively engaged in revolutionary endeavors, marking a notable development. However, perhaps the most striking aspect of this phase was the increasing participation of Muslim individuals in terrorist activities during this period.

During that era, the revolutionary fraternity in Dinajpur was identified as the Anushilan Revolutionary Party, with its central command situated in Calcutta. Prafulla Narayan Sanyal assumed the role of District-in-charge for Dinajpur district. In the 1930s, the revolutionary ethos assumed a notable prominence within Dinajpur district. The Hili Mail Robbery case stands as a testament to the sway exerted by radical elements during this period.

During the trial of the Inter-Provincial Conspiracy Case, the north Bengal unit of the Anushilan decided to strike terror into the hearts of the authority as a reprisal to the above mentioned case. Moreover, the party was suffering from acute financial crisis; it -needed money for the defense of the accused in the above case (Bhattacharyya 2002). The Hilli dacoity was a desperate attempt on the part of the party to meet the cost of legal defenses and to some extent enthruse the cadres in those days of official terrorism (Bhattacharyya 2002).

The revolutionaries in Dinajpur, including individuals such as Prankrishna Chakraborty, Hrisikesh Bhattacharya, Saroj Kumar Basu, Satyabrata Chakraborty, Prafulla Kumar Sanyal, Abdul Kader Chowdhury, Kiran Chandra Dey, Haripada Basu, Ramkrishna Sarkar, Subodh Datta, Kali Sarkar, Bejoy Chakraborty, Lalu Pande, Asoke Ghosh, and Sasadhar Sarkar, resolved to launch an assault on the Hili Railway station with the aim of procuring valuable contents from the postal mail chest. With the exception

of Subodh, all individuals hailed from north Bengal Prankrishna was appointed as the leader of the operation, with Hrisikesh serving as his assistant. Satyabrata was tasked with guarding the northern approach to anticipate any potential enemy attacks. Subodh was armed with a rod, while Saroj was assigned to manage and control the passengers. Prafulla was designated to forcibly open the wooden chest containing mail bags and retrieve the money, with assistance from Kali, Sasadhar, and Lalu. Bijoy, supported by Ramkrishna and Asoke, was entrusted with severing the telephone lines and absconding with the day's proceeds from the Hili station ticket counter.

Their intended assault was scheduled for October 27th, 1933. However, due to the presence of police personnel displaying suspicious behavior and the appearance of individuals arousing doubts, the execution of their plan was postponed to the following day. Consequently, on October 28th, 1933, they congregated near the station, took shelter in an empty bus. After midnight, as the Darjeeling Mail departed the station, the group, amidst chants and sporadic gunfire, seized the mail bags, resulting in injuries to six individuals, one of whom succumbed to their wounds at a later time.

Following the raid, the raiding party vacated the station premises. Subsequently, a significant number of revolutionaries were arrested. Hrishikesh and Prankrishna were initially sentenced to death by a tribunal; however, upon appeal, the High Court commuted their sentences to life imprisonment. Saroj Kumar, Satyabrata, Prafulla, and Abdul received ten years of rigorous imprisonment each. Kiran was sentenced to five years, while Haripada and Ramkrishna received seven years of rigorous imprisonment each (Ghosh, 1973, p. 609; Chakraborty, 1372 BS, p. 19). Notably, this incident marked a rare occurrence wherein the government lodged an appeal with the Privy Council against the High Court's verdict. Nevertheless, the appeal was ultimately dismissed.

During this period, revolutionaries in northern Bengal were engaged in daring acts of robbery, including incidents such as a robbery in Kakna village under Tapan police station (west of Balurghat), a second robbery in Tilni village under Peta Police Station (south of Tapan Thana), and a third robbery in Bolla village under Balurghat Police Station. These robberies were predominantly orchestrated under the leadership of the Jugantar organization, although some members of the Anushilan Samiti were also involved. Initially, neither the district administration nor the police department perceived the robberies in Kakna and Tilni as the handiwork of Swadeshi secret societies. These incidents were initially regarded as ordinary robberies and were thus not given significant attention. However, following the robbery in Bolla village, the police department and administration were rattled, prompting them to commence arrests of individuals associated with these criminal activities.

The robbery in Kakna village, though relatively minor, marked the earliest occurrence among the three Swadeshi robberies. This incident transpired in late 1933. Situated near the southern boundary of Tapan police station, Kakna village served as the backdrop for this event. The operation was spearheaded by Dinesh Chandra Das, also known as Togar, who was accompanied by Ramendranath Samajdar, Rajni Sarkar, and Ramvallabh Samajdar. The robbery unfolded at the residence of Mahendra Nath Samajdar, a prosperous individual within the Kakna village community.

In June 1933, Dinesh managed to evade police custody while incarcerated. Subsequently, he sought refuge in various hideouts in the vicinity of Balurghat, rallying new recruits for the Yugantar Dal. During this period, facing financial constraints, Dinesh devised a plan to carry out a robbery in Kakna village, enlisting the assistance of accomplices. However, the proceeds from this robbery proved to be minimal.

The robbery in Tilni village occurred shortly after the robbery in Kakna village. Tilni village is situated in the north-western corner of Porya police station, just south of Tapan police station. Peta Thana, which was part of Balurghat subdivision at the time and is now within Naogaon district of Bangladesh, lies approximately 5 miles southwest of Kakna. The intended target of this robbery was the residence of Premchandra Das in Tilni village. Narendra Chandra Ghosh assumed leadership in this operation, supported by accomplices including Nityaranjan Chowdhury, Rajni Sarkar, Ramendranath Samajdar, Upendra Nath Mandal, Kumud Nath Ghosh, Harendra Nath Das, Harendra Nath Das (Mandal), Pranakrishna Chowdhury, Braj Mohan Sarkar, and Ramballab Samajdar. Additionally, some tribal individuals were also involved in the incident. Consequently, the robberies committed in Kakna and Tilni villages of Dinajpur led to the arrest of several individuals, including tribal members such as Dharani Koch, Matla Santal, and Rezka Santal (Majumder, R. C., 1981, p. 633). This development introduced a new facet to the movement, as the names of tribal individuals became associated with the overt activities of the radicals for the first time.

While in hiding, Narendra Chandra recruited several individuals to assist him. Some of these recruits were armed with firearms during the robbery. Narendra and Upen wielded guns during the operation, supplemented by other weaponry. Rajni sustained injuries during a confrontation with the opposition, receiving a blow to his cheek. Despite this, the perpetrators managed to collect some money during the robbery. Subsequently, Narendra, Upen, and Rajni proceeded to Ramchandrapur, while the remaining participants returned to their respective homes.

Another daring robbery occurred in Bolla village, situated within the Balurghat sub-division of Dinajpur. Bolla village lies a few miles northwest of Balurghat town, adjacent to the Balurghat police station along Malda Road. The site is approximately three miles west of Patiram, along National Highway No. 512. This robbery involved the direct participation of five individuals, led by Narendra Chandra Ghosh. Accompanying him were Akshay Kumar Chowdhury, Sheikh Gamiruddin Sarkar, Anath Bandhu Saha, and Nanigopal Das. Narendra, Akshay, and Gamiruddin were associated with the Yugantar team, while the latter two were affiliated with the Anushilan Samiti.

The Bolla robbery transpired on July 13th, 1934, with the aim of acquiring monetary assets. Samarendra Narayan Sarkar, a resident of Bolla village, provided information indicating the presence of a substantial sum of money in the residence of Pranbandhu Chowdhury, the local zamindar. Emboldened by this intelligence, Narendra orchestrated a plan to burglarize the house. Disguised and armed, the group launched a late-night assault on Pranbandhu Chowdhury's residence. Narendra, serving as the party leader, wielded a gun, while Nanigopal carried a revolver. Upon gaining entry, the householders, fearing for their safety, opened their locker. However, to the group's dismay, only a few seals were discovered inside, with

no cash to be found. Consequently, they departed the premises empty-handed, their endeavor ending in failure.

In connection with the Bolla robbery, several individuals including Nanigopal Das, Anath Bandhu Saha, Harendrachandra Das, Samarendra Narayan Sarkar, Akshay Kumar Chaudhuri, Gamir Sheikh, Nani Mahanta, and others were apprehended (Ghosh, 1973, p. 634; Chakraborty, 1372 BS, p. 19). Kamalendu Chakraborty of Balurghat was subjected to prohibitory orders by the authorities following the incident (Chakraborty, 1372 BS, p. 19). Intriguingly, there was evidence of collaborative planning between the Anushilan and Jugantar groups behind the Bolla robbery, indicating occasional cooperation between these two revolutionary factions despite their ideological disparities (Chakraborty, 1372 BS, p. 19).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it can be asserted that the revolutionary movement in Dinajpur district ultimately dissipated and met with failure, primarily due to the lack of widespread support from the general populace. This movement predominantly resonated among the middle and lower-middle-class segments, particularly students and youths. Nonetheless, it significantly propelled the Indian National Movement forward. Despite its limitations, the movement notably succeeded in bolstering the demand for complete independence.

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