
UNIT 24 REVOLUTIONARY AND TERRORIST MOVEMENT: BHAGAT SINGH AND CHITTAGONG ARMOURY RAID

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24.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit we will discuss the nature of revolutionary terrorism which developed in India after 1922. After studying this unit you will be able to:

- explain the origin and nature of revolutionary organisations in India
- describe the objectives and ideology of these revolutionary organisations
- analyse how the revolutionary organisations underwent ideological transformation
- discuss the causes of decline of revolutionary terrorism.

24.1 INTRODUCTION

In Unit 15 (Block 3) you have studied, how revolutionary trends emerged in the early years of 20th century. This unit attempts to explain the two broad strands of revolutionary terrorism which developed in India after 1922. The revolutionaries were mainly active in two regions — Punjab, U.P., Bihar, Madhya Pradesh (old central provinces) and Bengal.

Dissatisfaction with Gandhi's leadership and his strategy of non-violent struggle after the suspension of Non-Cooperation Movement gave impetus to the revolutionary terrorist movement. In both the regions mentioned above the revolutionary movement underwent changes i.e. it moved away from individual heroic action to a mass based movement and from religious nationalism of earlier revolutionaries to secular patriotism. We will discuss how these changes affected the movement. The main activities of the revolutionary organisations in these regions will be traced.

The ideal of freedom which inspired the revolutionary terrorists inculcated the spirit of building a new society free from passion and exploitation. Finally the factors responsible for the decline of the movement will be discussed.

24.2 BACKGROUND

Frustration caused by the failure of the political struggle during early years of 20th century and government repression ultimately resulted in revolutionary terrorism. The revolutionary terrorists believed that passive resistance could not achieve nationalist

aims and therefore they took to the cult of the bomb. The revolutionary terrorists were subjected to severe repressive measures during the First World War and their movement suffered a decline after 1918. Most of them were released from jails during late 1919 and early 1920, since the Government wanted to create a receptive atmosphere for the Montagu Chelmsford reforms. The Non-Cooperation Movement was launched in 1920. Mahatma Gandhi and C.R. Das met many of the revolutionary terrorist leaders and urged them to join the non-violent mass movement or at least to suspend their movement for its duration. The revolutionaries recognized that a new political situation had arisen in the country. Many of the leaders attended the Nagpur session of the National Congress and joined the Congress.

The sudden suspension of the Non-Cooperation Movement in early 1922 after the Chauri-Chaura incident led to a wave of disappointment and discontent among the young participants in the movement. Many of them were disenchanted with Gandhi's leadership and began to question the very basic strategy of non-violent struggle. Once again they turned to the idea of violent overthrow of British rule. In this respect they also drew inspiration from the revolutionary movements and uprisings in Russia, Ireland, Turkey, Egypt and China. While the old revolutionary leaders revived their organizations, many new revolutionary terrorist leaders emerged from the ranks of enthusiastic non-cooperators. Thus, Jogesh Chandra Chatterjee, Sukhdev, Bhagwati Charan Vohra — all had participated in the Non-Cooperation Movement.

Two broad strands of revolutionary terrorism developed after 1922: One in Punjab, U.P., Bihar and Madhya Pradesh (old Central Provinces) and the other in Bengal. Both the strands came under the influence of new social ideological forces.

- One such influence was the growth of socialist ideas and groups all over India.
- Second was the rise of a militant trade union movement.
- And the third was the Russian Revolution of 1917 and the consequent rise of the Soviet Republic.

Nearly all the revolutionary groups wanted to develop contacts with the leadership of the new socialist state and to take their help both in terms of ideas and organization and material assistance.

24.3 REVOLUTIONARIES IN NORTHERN INDIA

Revolutionaries of northern India began their reorganization under the leadership of Sachindranath Sanyal, Jogesh Chatterjee and Ramprasad Bismil. In October 1924, they met at Kanpur and founded the Hindustan Republican Association (or Army) (HRA) and set out the objective of organizing an armed revolution against colonial rule and establishing a Federal Republic of the United States of India with a government elected on the basis of adult franchise.

To finance their organization and with the objective of propaganda and collection of arms, etc., the HRA leaders decided to organize dacoities against the Government. The most important of these was the Kakori robbery. On 9th August, 1925, ten revolutionaries held up the 8-Down train from Saharanpur to Lucknow at Kakori, a small village station near Lucknow and looted its official railway cash. The Government, however, succeeded in arresting a large number of HRA members and leaders involved in the dacoity. They were tried in the Kakori conspiracy case. The prisoners were subjected to cruel treatment in the jails; and in protest they had to take recourse to hunger strikes several times. Asfaquallah Khan, Ramprasad Bismil, Roshan Singh and Rajendra Lahiri were hanged, four others were sent to Andamans (Kala Pani) for life, and 17 were sentenced to long terms of imprisonment.

All the four martyrs died with exemplary courage. Ramprasad Bismil and Ashfaquallah went to the gallows chanting verses from the Gita and Koran. Ramprasad declared: "We shall be born again, shall meet again and shall jointly fight once again for the cause of the motherland as comrades-in-arms". The day before his martyrdom Ashfaquallah told his nephew: "You must remember that the Hindu community has dedicated great souls like Khudiram and Kanailal. To me this is a good fortune that, belonging to the Muslim community, I have acquired the privilege of following in the footsteps of those great martyrs". Among the leaders of the HRA, Chandrashekhar Azad alone succeeded in escaping the police net. Thereafter, he was to live the life of a declared absconder.

24.4 THE HINDUSTAN SOCIALIST REPUBLICAN ASSOCIATION

Revolutionary and Terrorist
Movement: Bhagat Singh and
Chittagong Armoury Raid

The Kakori case decimated the revolutionary ranks, but soon a new batch of youngmen came forward to fill the gap. Bejoy Kumar Sinha, Shiv Verma and Jaidev Kumar in U.P. and Bhagat Singh, Bhagwati Charan Vohra and Sukhdev in Punjab started the reorganization of the HRA under the leadership of Chandrashekhar Azad. They also came under the influence of socialist ideas. Finally, the representative revolutionary terrorists of northern India met at Ferozeshah Kotla Ground in Delhi on 9th and 10th September, 1928. They accepted Socialism as their official goal and changed the name of the party of Hindustan Socialist Republican Association (Army) (HSRA).

The leadership of the HSRA was rapidly moving towards the idea of mass-based armed struggle and away from individual heroic action. But when Lala Lajpat Rai, one of the greatest of nationalist leaders, died as a result of a brutal lathi-charge when he was leading an anti-Simon Commission demonstration at Lahore on 30 October, 1928, the angry and romantic youth felt that it was necessary to avenge this grave insult to the nation. This compelled them to take recourse once again to the earlier practice of individual assassination. And so, on 17th December, 1928, Bhagat Singh, Chandrashekhar Azad and Rajguru assassinated at Lahore Saunders, a police official involved in the lathi-charge.

In the poster, put up by the HSRA the assassination, was justified as follows: "The murder of a leader respected by millions of people at the unworthy hands of an ordinary police official... was an insult to the nation. It was the bounden duty of youngmen of India to efface it... We regret we have had to kill a person but he was part and parcel of that inhuman and unjust order which has to be destroyed".

As a part of their advance from positions of individual heroic action, the HSRA leaders now decided to propagate their political thinking among the people so that a mass revolutionary movement could be organised. Bhagat Singh and B.K. Dutt were deputed to throw bombs in the Central Legislative Assembly on 8 April 1929 to protest against the passage of the Public Safety Bill and the Trade Disputes Bill, which would reduce civil liberties in general and curb the right of workers to organise and struggle in particular, and against the "wholesale arrests of leaders of the labour movement". The throwing of the bombs was no terrorist act. The aim was not to kill, for the bombs were relatively harmless. The objective was, as the leaflet they threw into the Assembly proclaimed, "to make the deaf hear". Bhagat Singh and Dutt made no attempt to escape. Their intention was to get arrested and to use the trial court as a forum for propaganda so that the programme and ideology of the HSRA could get widely propagated among the people.

Bhagat Singh and B.K. Dutt were tried in the Assembly Bomb Case. Then the police was able to uncover the details of the Saunders assassination and Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev, Rajguru, and several others were tried in the Lahore Conspiracy case. Bhagat Singh and his comrades turned the court into a forum of propaganda. Their statements were published in the newspapers and widely discussed by the people. Their defiant and courageous conduct in the court won them the admiration of the people. Even believers in non-violence loved them for their patriotism. Everyday they entered the court-room shouting "Inquilab Zindabad", "Down, Down with Imperialism" and "Long Live the Proletariat" and singing patriotic songs. Bhagat Singh became a house-hold name in the land.

The country was also stirred by the prolonged hunger strike the revolutionaries on trial undertook as a protest against the horrible conditions in jail. They demanded that they should be treated not as ordinary criminals but as political prisoners. On 13th September, 1929, Jatin Das, a frail youngman possessing an iron-will, died fasting. The entire nation was massively stirred. Thousands came to pay him homage at every station as the train carried his body from Lahore to Calcutta. In Calcutta, a two-mile long procession of more than six lakh people carried his coffin to the cremation ground. The **Tribune** of Lahore wrote on Jatin Das's death; "If ever a man died a hero and martyr to a noble cause, that man is Jatindra Nath Das and the blood of martyrs has in all ages and countries been the seed of higher and nobler life, better social and political order".

A large number of revolutionaries were convicted in the Lahore Conspiracy Case and other similar cases and sentenced to long-terms of imprisonment. Many of them were sent to the Cellular Jail in the Andamans. Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev and Rajguru were sentenced to be hanged. The sentence was carried out on 23rd March, 1931. As the news of their hanging spread, a death-like silence engulfed the entire country. All over the country, millions of people shed tears and fasted and refused to attend schools or carry on their daily work. Bhagat Singh soon became a legend in the country. His photographs adorned homes and shops. Hundreds of songs were composed and sung about him. His popularity rivalled that of Gandhiji.

Check Your Progress 1

1 Enumerate the Social and ideological forces which influenced the two broad strands of revolutionary terrorism which developed in India after 1922. Write in about 5 lines.

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2 What were the objectives of the Hindustan Republican Association? Write in about 5 lines.

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3 Discuss the ideology and strategy of HSRA. Write in about 5 lines.

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24.5 IDEOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE NORTH-INDIAN REVOLUTIONARIES

The HSRA developed an advanced social ideology and thought to guide its activity and the forms of revolutionary struggle that were better defined.

24.5.1 The HRA

Rethinking had of course started on both counts in the earlier Hindustan Republican Association phase itself. The HRA had already started evolving a programme within a broad secular, democratic and socialist framework. In 1925, its manifesto had set forth its objective as the establishment of "a Federal Republic of the United States of India by an organized and armed revolution". The basic principle of the Republic was to be "universal suffrage and the abolition of all systems which make any kind of exploitation of man by man possible". HRA's founding council, in its meeting in October 1924, had decided "to preach social revolution and communistic principles". It had decided "to start labour peasant organizations". It advocated nationalization of the railways and large-scale industries such as steel, ship-building and mines.

24.5.2 Bhagat Singh and the HSRA

A major shift in the ideological development of the revolutionary terrorists occurred when young leaders such as Bejoy Sinha, Shiv Varma, Sukhdev, Bhagwati Charan Vohra and Bhagat Singh turned to Socialism and Marxism. This shift is best epitomised in the life and thought of Bhagat Singh, many of whose letters, statements and writings have now become available.

Bhagat Singh was born in 1907 in a famous patriotic family. His father was a Congressman and his uncle was the famous revolutionary Ajit Singh. Bhagat Singh was deeply influenced by the Ghadar hero, Kartar Singh Sarabh. Bhagat Singh was a voracious reader and had read extensive literature on socialism, the Soviet Union and revolutionary movements the world over. At Lahore he and Sukhdev organized study circles for young students. The HSRA leaders carried on intensive political discussion among themselves. After his arrest he studied intensively in the jails. This devotion to intensive reading was also true of other leaders such as Bejoy Sinha, Yashpal, Shiv Varma and Bhagwati Charan Vohra. Chandrashekhar Azad knew little English; but he too fully participated in political discussions and followed every major turn in the field of ideas. Ajoy Kumar Ghosh, who was tried along with Bhagat Singh and others in the Lahore Conspiracy Case, has written about Chandrashekhar Azad: "In between his active life, he engaged himself in relentless study. His ideas were shaping in maturity day by day. He never hesitated to take the assistance of his English-knowing comrades to explain and clarify many points He was of the opinion that more comrades should devote themselves to work amongst the peasants and workers to make them conscious of the socialist goal".

Bhagat Singh had already before his arrest in 1929 abandoned his faith in terrorism and individual heroic action. He had come to believe that broad popular mass-based movements alone could liberate India and mankind from servitude. As he put it, revolution could only be achieved "by the masses for the masses". That is why he helped found the Naujawan Bharat Sabha in 1926 to carry out political work among the youth, peasants, and workers. He became its founding secretary. It was expected to open branches in the villages. Bhagat Singh and Sukhdev also organised the Lahore Students' Union for open political work among students. In fact, Bhagat Singh never identified revolution with the cult of the bomb. As we have pointed out earlier, that is why Bhagat Singh and B.K. Dutt threw a relatively harmless bomb in the Central Legislative Assembly in 1929. Their strategy was to get arrested and then turn the courts into arenas for the propagation of their ideas. And this they did brilliantly.

In the course of their statements and manifestoes from 1929 to 1931, Bhagat Singh and his comrades gave repeated expression to their growing conviction that revolution meant arousing the masses and organizing a mass movement. Just before his execution, Bhagat Singh declared that "the real revolutionary armies are in the villages and in factories". In his last advice — his testament — to young political workers, written on 2 February 1931, he declared: "Apparently I have acted like a terrorist. But I am not a terrorist.... Let me announce with all the strength at my command, that I am not a terrorist and I never was, except perhaps in the beginning of my revolutionary career. And I am convinced that we cannot gain anything through those methods".

Then why did Bhagat Singh not declare his opposition to terrorism openly. This too he explained in his message. He was asking the youth to give up terrorism without hurting in any way the sense of heroic sacrifice that had marked his earlier career and that of the other great terrorist leaders. He did not want it to appear publicly that he had revised his earlier politics under the penalty of death, that he was making a political retraction to get a reprieve for his life from the colonial rulers. Life was bound to teach, sooner or later, correct politics; the sense of sacrifice once lost would not be easy to regain.

Bhagat Singh and his comrades also redefined the scope and meaning of Revolution. Revolution was no longer equated with mere militancy or violence. Its first objective was national liberation and then the building of a new socialist society. In their statement in the court at Delhi in the Legislative Assembly Bomb Case they made a clear statement of what they meant by revolution: "Radical change, therefore, is necessary, and it is the duty of those who realise this to reorganise society on a socialistic basis". What was necessary was to end "exploitation of man by man and of nation by nation".

In the HSRA Manifesto to the Congress in 1929, it was declared: "The hope of the proletariat is, therefore, now centred in socialism which alone can lead to the establishment of complete independence and the removal of all social distinctions and privileges". The **Philosophy of the Bomb**, written by Bhagwati Charan Vohra, Chandrashekhar Azad and Yashwantrao Chavan, defined revolution as "Independence, social, political and economic" and its aim was to establish "a new order of society in which political and economic exploitation will be an impossibility". In the Assembly Bomb Case, Bhagat Singh and B.K. Dutt told the court: "'Revolution' does not necessarily involve sanguinary strife, nor is there any place in it for individual vendetta. It is not the cult of the bomb and the pistol. By 'Revolution' we mean that the present order of things, which is based on manifest injustice, must change".

Bhagat Singh defined socialism in a scientific manner: it meant the abolition of capitalism and class domination. He fully accepted Marxism and the class approach to society. In fact, he saw himself primarily as a propagator of the ideas of socialism and communism, as an initiator of the socialist movement in India. Summing up his political thought, he said in a message from prison in October 1930: "We mean by revolution the uprooting of the present social order. For this, capture of state power is necessary. The state apparatus is now in the hands of the privileged class. The protection of the interests of the masses, the translation of our ideal into reality, that is the laying of the foundation of society in accordance with the principles of Karl Marx, demand our seizure of this apparatus".

Bhagat Singh was one of the few contemporary leaders who understood the full danger that communalism posed to Indian society and the Indian national movement. He often told his audience that communalism was as big a danger as colonialism. He did not hesitate to sharply criticise Lala Lajpat Rai when he took a turn towards communal politics after 1924. Two of the six rules of the Naujawan Bharat Sabha — and these rules were drafted by Bhagat Singh — were: "To have nothing to do with communal bodies or other parties which disseminate communal ideas" and "to create the spirit of general toleration among the public considering religion as a matter of personal belief of man and to act upon the same fully".

Bhagat Singh also believed that people must free themselves from the mental bondage of religion and superstition. Just before his martyrdom he wrote the article "Why I am an atheist" in which he subjected religion to a critique. A revolutionary, he wrote, must be not only courageous but also possess the faculty of critical and independent thinking. "Any man who stands for progress", he wrote, "has to criticize, disbelieve and challenge every item of the old faith. Item by item he has to reason out every nook and corner of the prevailing faith". Proclaiming his own faith in atheism and materialism, he asserted that he was "trying to stand like a man with an erect head to the last; even on the gallows".

Check Your Progress 2

1 What was the ideology and strategy of HRA? Write in about 5 lines.

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2 Discuss the political ideology of Bhagat Singh. Write in about 5 lines.

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Name a few leaders of HSRA.

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24.6 REVOLUTIONARY TERRORISTS IN BENGAL

In Bengal too the revolutionary terrorists began reorganization after 1922. They resumed large-scale terrorist propaganda in the press and developed their underground activities. At the same time they continued to work in the Congress organization from the village to the provincial levels. This was because they realized that the Congress had developed under Gandhiji's leadership a mass base, and work inside the Congress enabled the revolutionaries to get access to the masses, in particular the youth. At the same time their role within the Congress enabled it to acquire active workers in the small towns and rural areas. In many ways, C.R. Das acted as an emotional link between the revolutionaries and the Congress. After his death, the Congress leadership gradually got divided into two wings, one led by Subhas Chandra Bose and the other by J.M. Sengupta. The revolutionaries too got divided. The Yugantar joined forces with the Bose wing and the Anushilan group with the Sengupta wing.

Already, by 1924, major revolutionary terrorists had understood the utter inadequacy of individual heroic action, and intellectually and programmatically accepted the strategy of national liberation through armed seizure of power by mass uprisings. But, in practice, they still relied upon small scale 'actions', in particular dacoities and assassination of officials. One of the several such 'actions' was Gopinath Saha's attempt in January 1924 to assassinate Charles Tegart, the hated Police Commissioner of Calcutta. Even though the attempt failed, Gopinath Saha was arrested, tried and hanged on 1 March 1924 despite massive popular protest. The Government now took alarm and started large scale repression. It arrested a large number of revolutionary leaders and activists under a newly promulgated ordinance. Moreover, a large number of Congressmen, including Subhas Bose, suspected of being sympathetic to the revolutionaries were also arrested. Nearly all the major leaders being in jail, revolutionary activity suffered a severe setback.

Revolutionary activity also suffered because of factional and personal quarrels within the ranks of the old revolutionary leaders. Quarrels on the basis of Yugantar vs Anushilan were endemic. However, after their release after 1926 many of the younger revolutionaries, critical of the older leaders, began to organize themselves into a large number of new groups which came to be known as Revolt Groups. These groups tried to base themselves on the experience of Russian and Irish revolutionaries. Learning from the past experience, the new Revolt Groups developed friendly relations with the active elements of both the Anushilan and Yugantar Samitis. Among the new groups, it was the Chittagong group led by Surya Sen, that acquired great fame and prominence.

24.7 THE CHITTAGONG ARMOURY RAID

Surya Sen had actively participated in the Non-Cooperation Movement and had become a teacher in a national school in a village in Chittagong. This led to his being popularly known as Masterda. He was arrested in 1926 and released in 1928. In 1929, Surya Sen was the Secretary of the Chittagong District Congress Committee. Surya Sen was a frail, unpretentious, and transparently sincere person. He was a brilliant organiser who inspired and attracted young men and women.

Surya Sen soon gathered a large band of revolutionary youth including Anant Singh, Ganesh Ghosh, Ambika Chakravarty and Loknath Paul. In early 1929 they formed a

plan to organize an armed rebellion, even though on a small scale, to demonstrate that British rule could be challenged through arms. In order to equip themselves adequately with arms, they planned to raid armouries in several districts. They also started a vigorous propaganda campaign.

The first action was to be in Chittagong. Their action-plan was carefully prepared and included the occupation of the two main armouries in Chittagong and the arming of a large band of revolutionaries with the seized arms. The telephone, telegraph and the railway communication systems between Chittagong and the rest of the Bengal were to be disrupted. The young band of revolutionaries, who were to participate in the armoury raid, were selected and trained with great care. The plan was put into operation at 10 O'clock on the night of 18 April 1930. Six young men, led by Ganesh Ghosh, captured the police armoury shouting "Inquilab Zindabad", "Down with Imperialism" and "Gandhiji's Raj has been established". Another group of revolutionaries captured the Auxiliary Force Armoury. The raid was undertaken in the name of Indian Republican Army, Chittagong Branch. All the revolutionary groups gathered outside the Police Armoury. Surya Sen was formally declared the President of the Provisional Revolutionary Government. The Union Jack was pulled down and the National Flag was hoisted instead among slogans of "Bande Matram" and "Inquilab Zindabad".

Since it was not possible to fight the British forces which were expected to arrive soon, the revolutionary band took its positions on the Jalalabad hill where on 22 April they were surrounded by thousands of enemy troops. After a fierce and heroic fight in which 12 revolutionaries died, Surya Sen decided to abandon frontal warfare and launch instead guerilla warfare from the neighbouring villages. Despite severe suppressive measures, the revolutionaries survived for nearly three years because of shelter and support provided by the villages, most of them Muslim. Surya Sen was finally arrested on 16 February 1933, tried and hanged on 12 January 1934.

The Chittagong Armoury Raid had an immense impact on the people of Bengal. As an official report noted, "the younger section could no longer be restrained. Recruits poured into the various terrorist groups in a steady stream." Even sections of the bureaucracy, police and army were affected. Kalpana Joshi (then Datta) has narrated an interesting incident in this respect. When a group including Kalpana Datta, surrendered in May 1933 after a bitter fight, a Subedar of the Jat Regiment slapped her. Immediately, she was surrounded by other soldiers who warned the Subedar: "She is not to be touched. If you raise your hand once again, we will not obey you".

Consequent upon the Armoury Raid, there was a major revival of revolutionary activity. In Midnapore alone, three British magistrates were assassinated. Two Inspector-Generals of Police were killed and attempts were made on the lives of two Governors.

The Government responded with massive repression. It armed itself with 20 repressive acts. In Chittagong, it burnt several villages and imposed punitive fines on many others. It arrested nationalists indiscriminately. In 1933, it arrested and sentenced Jawaharlal Nehru to a two-year term in jail for sedition because he had, even while criticising the politics of terrorism, praised the heroism of the revolutionaries and condemned police repression.

The new phase of revolutionary terrorism in Bengal made an advance in three aspects. One was the large-scale participation by young women. In Surya Sen's group, they not only provided shelter and acted as messengers and carriers of arms, but also fought with a gun in hand. Pritilata Waddadar died while conducting a raid on the Railway Institute at Paharatali, Chittagong, while Kalpana Datta was arrested and tried along with Surya Sen and given a life sentence. In December 1931, two school girls of Comilla, Santi Ghosh and Suniti Chowdhury, shot dead the District Magistrate. In February 1932, Bina Das shot at the Governor while receiving her degree at the Convocation.

Chittagong Armoury Raid showed that unlike the older Bengal revolutionaries and the northern Indian revolutionaries, the new Revolt Groups in Bengal had moved onto group action aimed at an armed uprising. Though they failed to organize an armed uprising on a significant scale, the direction of their activities was clear.

The Bengal revolutionary terrorists were never communal but their ideology had been tinged in the earlier phases with Hindu religiosity. The revolutionaries of the 1920s and

1930s gradually shed this religiosity. Many of the groups now included Muslims. The Chittagong group included many Muslims such as Sattar, Mir Ahmed, Fakir Ahmed Mian, and Tunu Mian. Surya Sen and his comrades were given active and massive support by Muslim villagers which enabled them to avoid and resist arrest for nearly three years. Abdur Rezzaque Khan of Calcutta was the founder of one of the Revolt Groups and cooperated with the Yugantar, Anushilan and other revolutionary groups. Serajul Haq and Hamidul Haq were sent to Andamans for their revolutionary activities. Many other Muslims, including Rezia Khatun, were associated with Yugantar and Anushilan Samitis. Dr. Fazlul Kader Chowdhury of Bogra participated in the Hijli Robbery Case and was sent to Andamans.

However, unlike Bhagat Singh and his comrades, Bengal revolutionaries failed to evolve a broader radical socio-economic programme. Most of the revolutionaries, working in the Swaraj Party, also failed to support the cause of the peasantry against the zamindars.

24.8 DECLINE OF THE REVOLUTIONARY TERRORIST MOVEMENT

The revolutionary terrorist movement gradually declined in the 1930s. This was for several reasons. The mainstream of the national movement, led by Gandhiji, was opposed to violence and terrorism even when its leaders admired the heroism of its youthful practitioners and defended them in the courts and condemned the police repression directed against them. Government's strong action also gradually decimated the revolutionary ranks. With the death of Chandrashekar Azad on 27 February 1931 in an encounter with the police in a public park at Allahabad, the revolutionary movement in northern India came to a virtual end. Surya Sen's martyrdom marked the virtual collapse of revolutionary terrorism in Bengal. Revolutionaries in jail or in Andamans started a serious rethinking about their politics. A large number of them turned to Marxism as Bhagat Singh and many of his comrades had already done in the 1920s. Many joined the Communist Party, the Congress Socialist Party, the Revolutionary Socialist Party and other left parties and groups. Others joined the Gandhian wing of the Congress.



7. Chandrashekar Azad – After his death.

Even though the revolutionary terrorists of the 1920s and 1930s failed in their stated objective of leading a mass-based armed struggle or failed even to establish contact with the masses, they made a major contribution to the ongoing national struggle against colonialism. Their courage and sacrifice and their deep patriotism aroused the Indian people, especially the youth and gave them pride and self-confidence. In north India, Bhagat Singh and his comrades also sowed the seeds of socialist thought and movement.

Check Your Progress 3

1 Discuss the main activities of revolutionary terrorists in Bengal. Write about 5 lines.

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2 What was the impact of the Chittagong Armoury Raid on the people of Bengal? Write in about 5 lines.

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3 What were the factors responsible for the decline of revolutionary terrorist movement in India? Write in about 5 lines.

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24.9 LET US SUM UP

In this unit you have studied the two broad strands of revolutionary terrorism which developed in India after 1922 — one in Punjab, U.P., Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and the other in Bengal.

You have also seen how the revolutionaries organised themselves, what was their strategy and how their actions were backed by an ideology. In both regions mentioned above, the revolutionaries were moving away from the idea of individual heroic action to the idea of mass based armed struggle. Although the movement failed in its stated objective of leading a mass-based armed struggle but it made a major contribution to the ongoing national struggle against colonialism. The courage, sacrifice and patriotism of the revolutionary terrorists inspired the Indian youth and restored their pride and self-confidence.

24.10 KEY WORDS

Adult Franchise: The right to vote to all citizens of the age of 21 and above.

Communism: Final stage of history in Marx's analysis which visualises a classless society.

Martyrdom: A condition which causes suffering or death of a person for a cause.

Marxism: A body of ideas propounded by Marx. He emphasised the role of productive forces in relation to society, polity & culture in shaping the development of society.

Revolutionary Terrorist Movement: A movement which aims to bring about social change through violent acts intended to terrorise.

Socialism: A stage in transition to communism which calls for dictatorship of proletariat under whose control resources and wealth can be equitably distributed.

24.11 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1 Your answer should include the following points: the growth of socialist ideas and groups, the rise of militant trade union movement and the rise of Soviet Republic. See Section 24.2.
- 2 Your answer should include the following points: to organise an armed revolution against colonial rule, to establish a Federal Republic elected on the basis of adult franchise, etc. See Section 24.3.
- 3 Your answer should include the following points: it was being influenced by socialist ideas, it was moving towards the idea of mass-based armed struggle etc. See Section 24.4.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1 Your answer should include the following points: it evolved a programme within a broad socialist, democratic and secular frame work; to establish a Federal Republic by armed revolution, to preach social revolutionary principles etc. See Sub-sec. 24.5.1.
- 2 Your answer should include the following points: turned towards Marxism and Socialism, abandoned belief in terrorism and individual heroic action, believed that broad popular mass-based movements could liberate India etc. See Sub-sec. 24.5.2.
- 3 Bejoy Sinha, Shiv Varma etc. See Sub-sec. 24.5.2.

Check Your Progress 3

- 1 Your answer should include the following points: started large-scale terrorist propaganda in the press and developed underground activities, continued to work in the Congress organisation from the village to provincial levels because they realized that Congress had a mass base, accepted the strategy of national liberation by mass armed uprisings etc. See Section 24.6.
- 2 Your answer should include the following points: Sections of bureaucracy, police and army came under the influence of the Chittagong armoury raid, more and more people including women joined the revolutionary movement etc. See Section 24.7.
- 3 Your answer should include the following points: the main-stream of national movement was opposed to terrorism, death of many of the revolutionary leaders, government repression etc. See Section 24.8.