

INTRODUCTION

I

The monographs presented in these pages do not seek to offer a detailed history of the multi-facet revolutionary movement of India nor do they cover in their sweep the activities of all the important revolutionary leaders representing different groups and parties. The work confines itself to a study of the political life of two of the greatest revolutionaries of India—Rash Behari Bose and Jyotindra Nath Mukherjee—the organization of their parties, their ideas and ideologies as well as their *modus operandi* in India's revolutionary movement which, in a sense, constitutes the most daring aspect of the national struggle for Independence.

After the suppression of the Manicktola conspiracy as well as the arrest or deportation of many of the prominent leaders, the first phase of the revolutionary movement in India may be said to have come to an end. A hush had then fallen upon the country. The Anusilan Samiti was suppressed and many other samitis with political complexion were also declared unlawful. This, however, did not mean that the revolutionary spirit was stamped out from the country. It had already struck its roots deep into the consciousness of the younger generation. The work of the older group was the preparation of the mind of the people for revolutionary ideals and methods; the work of the new group concerned itself mostly with the execution of the plot. Both Rash Behari Bose and Jyotindra Nath Mukherjee represented the second phase of the revolutionary movement and they gave more realistic orientations to Indian politics. They believed that a nation's liberty could not be achieved merely by political dacoities nor by the murder of a few agents of the alien bureaucracy. They stood for a bolder and more comprehensive scheme of political action or armed rising against the British Indian Empire, first, by securing the support of the Indian army and, secondly, by enlisting the military-cum-financial

assistance of some first class Powers, particularly those inimical to England at that moment. England's involvement in the World War I and the consequent distraction of her resources came as a veritable god-send to the revolutionaries who eagerly seized the opportunity of effecting in India an armed revolution for her emancipation from imperial thrall. They took every possible step to win over the army and forge links with the international forces. Although their dream did not materialise at that very moment, rather it was a frustration—yet, they left behind them a glorious tradition of revolutionary action which had its culmination in the organization of the Azad Hind Fauj in East Asia during the World War II. Jyotindra Nath died in 1915 and Rash Behari in 1945. Neither of them lived long enough to see the political emancipation of India which, however, owes a very good deal to their self-denying spirit and action. It is a pity that even these greatest patriots of history have been denied due recognition by the generation now reaping the fruits of their toil, suffering and sacrifice.

II

Since the achievement of Independence by India in 1947 a number of *idolas* has grown up in the country and has found wide currency due to the persistent propaganda of a section of politicians. One of these *idolas* is the idea that the political consummation of India of August, 1947 was chiefly the handiwork of the Indian National Congress and that it was an inevitable outcome of its strenuous moral and constitutional fight with the British rulers. Closely linked up with this is another myth that the revolutionary movement of India was after all foam and fury, signifying little beyond the wastage of some valuable property and the destruction of many precious human lives. In any case, the role of the revolutionaries in the achievement of India's Independence is still today much too minimised, the official apologists claiming that the crown of martyrdom to the cause of Freedom rightfully belongs to the Congress. This view of Indian history is after all a delusion which instead of being dissipated with time is gaining ground in post-Independence period, producing a good deal of muddle in our political thinking

not merely with regard to the past but also in respect of the present and the future. One who has the opportunity of examining the Intelligence Branch Records of the Government of old Bengal and the Home (Political) Proceedings of the Government of India, particularly those relating to the most crucial stages of our struggle, will find it difficult to accept the current notion about the history of India's Freedom Movement.

Whatever the doctrinaires might say, one undeniable teaching of history is that all political struggles are by their very nature trials of strength and that its success depends, in the main, not on the logicity of the case but on the application of force, armed or otherwise,—on the amount of pressure brought to bear upon the powers that be. In a democratic country constitutional agitation is, no doubt, a potent instrument of public pressure, but there also the main issues at dispute ultimately depend for their solution not on the moral persuasion but on the capacity of the dissatisfied people to hit back the Government if their grievances long remain unredressed. History teaches that even peaceful or constitutional agitation may wrest some beneficial reforms from the rulers only if it is accompanied by a show of force or element of violence in the background. Physical force need not necessarily be applied in every instance, but it must lie ready to be applied if the occasion so demands. It is common experience that in the big international conferences of peace the tone or the voice of a State representative is generally determined by the striking capacity that that particular State has already accumulated at home. It is characteristic of power not to voluntarily surrender any of its fortified privileges except under pressure and without the context of dreadful possibilities of popular revolt and rising. Even in England, the supposed land of peaceful constitutional progress, every stage of Freedom's expansion from the Magna Carta (1215) to the Bill of Rights (1689) was accompanied by either actual violence or potential threat of it. It is a romantic conception of history to regard the course of English constitutional progress as a smooth sailing. The freedom movement of a subject people which has got to throw off the foreign tentacle, has far less chance of success by moral and peaceful methods. Such a fulfilment in history is not given to human destiny.

III .

The British bureaucracy in India like its ancient or modern prototype everywhere on earth, could not rise superior to the common human frailties. Once entrenched in power, they clung tenaciously to it and refused to lend their ears to the voice of reason unless and until the situation became surcharged with the spirit of rebellious fury, violence and terror. They saw reason in things only when the blood of their brethren came to be shed by the revolutionaries. What really caused consternation in the mind of the alien bureaucracy in those days was not so much the constitutional agitation led by the Indian National Congress as the policy of violence and terror adumbrated by the leaders of the physical force movement. Even the Congress agitation by constitutional methods came to be feared and respected by the alien Government only when it showed awful signs of disorderly turbulence or tended to develop into a gigantic physical force movement, as in 1942. In 1947, the British rulers ultimately parted with power from India not so much because of the persuasive logic of the Congress agitation as because of the pressure of the surging revolutionary forces stemming out of the World War II. The grim memories of the I. N. A.'s battles in the Imphal-Kohima sector against the British Empire began to weigh heavily since then upon the mind of the British imperialists like a veritable nightmare.

IV

The growth of Extremism in Indian politics and the cult of revolution in the country since 1906, aiming at *Purna Swaraj* or complete Independence for India through passive or active resistance, gave a new dimension to India's struggle for Freedom. The new generation of politicians headed by Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Bipin Chandra Pal, Lajpat Rai and Aurobindo Ghose rejected as fantastic the old mendicant politics of the Congress which sought to secure qualified freedom for India by methods of peaceful and constitutional agitation. Believing in the policy of purification by blood and sacrifice, the revolutionaries or the so-called anarchists went a step further and

laid a widespread network of secret societies advocating the policy of triumph through terror. As the physical force movement leading to acts of violence against the bureaucracy expanded and grew in strength, the British Government launched a counter campaign of repression and hurried through the Imperial Legislature measures of considerable potency to kill the spirit of insurgent nationalism in the land. As part of a larger policy conciliatory measures were also resorted to to rally the Moderates to the cause of the Crown. The basis of this new repression-conciliation policy of British Imperialism was well laid in the famous Arbroath speech of Mr. John Morley (October 21, 1907), then Secretary of State for India. Morley said: "....we shall not be deterred from pursuing to the end, a policy of firmness on the one hand, and of liberal and steady reform on the other". The bureaucratic repression that rained down upon the revolutionaries since 1907 drove the movement underground but instead of killing it kindled the spirit of revolutionary fire all the brighter. Even after the promulgation of the severest repressive measures, secret acts of conspiracy and violence continued unabated and kept the bureaucracy in constant terror. As Bengal was the main bulwark of revolutionary conspiracy in India during 1908-1918 the following statement of the D.I.G., Bengal, dated January 28, 1915, on the political situation of 1914 is worth careful consideration:

"The continued occurrence of these crimes proves conclusively that the forces of revolution have in no way relaxed their activity and, as will be shown later on, in spite of excellent checks administered and notwithstanding the capture during the year of several of the more dangerous members, who were absconding for long periods, this extremely well organised movement defies all our efforts at repression and is considerably more virile and troublesome at the beginning of 1915 than it has been in the past".

Apart from an increasing number of political dacoities and assassinations of informers as well as Government officers, the two attempted revolutions in the country with the connivance of the British Indian army and with foreign financial assistance organized respectively by Rash Behari Bose and Jyotindra Nath Mukherjee (February, 1915 and June-July, 1915), followed by free fights between the revolutionaries, on the one hand, and the

agents of the British bureaucracy, on the other, at Balasore (September, 1915), at Salkia (August, 1916), at Gauhati (January, 1918) and at Dacca (June, 1918) very much unnerved the Government. The activities of the Indian revolutionaries from outside India in collaboration with international forces—the *Ghadr* conspiracy in the U. S. A. and the plot of the Berlin-India Committee in Germany—trying to knock at the eastern and western gates of India respectively deepened the crisis for the British Empire, and their representatives had once again to take recourse to a policy of conciliation alongside with sterner measures of repression. As the Morley-Minto Reforms (May, 1909) and the Repeal of the Bengal Partition (December, 1911) seemed too inadequate in the changed political conditions, a new deal of concessions in the shape of Montagu—Chelmsford Reforms (1919) had to be administered by the rulers for facilitating the transformation of a “representative” government into a “responsible” one. Side by side with the passage of Defence of India Rules and the Rowlatt Bills and the perpetration of the horrors at Jallianwallabagh, conciliatory policy was also adopted, not merely by introducing new constitutional reforms but by declaring the Amnesty both for the underground revolutionaries and for the political prisoners already condemned to life or long-term imprisonment. For a time the challenging crisis to the British Indian Empire was averted by the rulers.

V

The advent of Mahatma Gandhi on the Indian political scene and the inauguration of the Non-Co-operation Movement in 1920 was a landmark in the history of India's Freedom Movement. The whole country under his magic influence caught the noble contagion of nationalism and “the ideas of 1905” found through him greater fruition. But the credit for all this must not go to Gandhiji alone. The impact of the World War I together with that of the Indian revolutionary activities on the head and heart of India was to a very large extent responsible for the promotion of a new political consciousness in the country. Gandhiji exploited the situation according to his idea and plan and converted the existing Congress into a powerful fighting

organization. The role of the revolutionaries in this silent transformation was at least as great as that of the constitutionalists of the Congress. At the call of Gandhiji even a large number of old revolutionaries also assembled under the Congress banner and lent strength to it in diverse capacities.

But with all this, the activities of the revolutionaries with their acts of violence and terror did not cease. In darkness and obscurity the revolutionary forces were gathering strength behind the eyes of the bureaucracy. An explosion of their fury as manifest in the Chittagong Armoury Raid led by Surya Sen and others in April, 1930 shook the British Government in India to its foundations. For three days the revolutionaries held the town under their control and the vestiges of British rule were completely wiped out from its face. The murder of a number of high-ranking British officials including three District Magistrates of Midnapore and one of Comilla during the same period (1930-35) struck terror into the mind of the Government which in pursuance of its old repression-cum-conciliation policy granted a further dose of Provincial Autonomy in 1935.

VI

The fourth and final act in the drama was enacted during the years 1942-1947. Whatever the Congress apologists might argue, the national movement of August 1942 was far from being a peaceful and constitutional agitation confined to the limits of law. The Quit India Movement as it was termed virtually developed in no time into a mighty revolutionary movement producing violence, bloodshed and terror. This took place at a time when the British military power was at its lowest ebb and the Indian National Army headed by Rash Behari Bose was enjoying the confidence of Japan, then the deadliest enemy of the British Empire in the East. This was followed by an armed invasion of the British Indian Empire from the east by the Azad Hind Fauj led by Netaji who fought battles of India's freedom in the Imphal-Kohima sector in 1944. Although the armed attack was ultimately repelled by the British, yet the memories of the heroic fight put up by the Indian National Army soon became a permanent possession with Indians. They soon became

embedded in popular consciousness as a potent animating force. On the occasion of the historic I. N. A. trial in the Red Fort of Delhi the whole subcontinent became the scene of a mighty moral and emotional revolution. The Congress veterans who had described the Netaji during the war period as an enemy of the country were swept off their feet by the new tidal waves of nationalism rushing over India at the end of the war. The glorious tradition created by Netaji and the I. N. A. soldiers electrified the whole sub-continent with unprecedented enthusiasm, not even excluding the Congress which was now possessed by the new spirit of nationalism. The dry bones of Hindusthan once again became instinct with life. The alien rulers clearly perceived that the day of their reckoning was fast approaching, and this perception was quickened by the unprecedented sight of the outbreak of the mutiny of the Royal Indian Navy in 1946. The British statesmen with their keen sense of realism could see the handwriting on the wall, for it was being written in blood. Finally, in August 1947, they retired from the Indian scene apparently gracefully, but really under the threat of fearful and terrible consequences of a bloody revolution which they were wisely enough unwilling to face in the future interests of the British nation.