

The Firebrand Era: Bold Moves of the Hindustan Socialist Republican Association against British Oppression (1926-1930)

SONIA AKTER

Lecturer, Department of Business Administration,
Daffodil International University

Abstract: This research examines the actions and influence of the Hindustan Socialist Republican Association (HSRA) from 1926 to 1930, a pivotal era in the organization's history characterized by fervent anti-colonial resistance. The group established its foothold through several anti-British initiatives in multiple locations, including Shahjahanpur, Agra, Kolkata, Allahabad, Loknathpur, Jharkhand, Deoband, Baranasi and Punjab. The HSRA, recognized for its extreme approach to attaining Indian independence, participated in several prominent revolutionary endeavors to eradicate British governance through armed opposition and militant tactics. This study employs a blend of primary sources, including personal letters, revolutionary manifestos, and government documents, as well as secondary analyses from historical texts and scholarly interpretations, to comprehensively examine the HSRA's operational tactics, organizational structure, and ideological evolution. An examination of prominent leaders within the HSRA, including Bhagat Singh, Rajguru, and Sukhdev, elucidates their contributions to the organization's militant opposition to colonial subjugation. The study examines the HSRA's deliberate employment of propaganda and media to galvanize popular support and contest British authority. This article further examines the sociological and political ramifications of the HSRA's actions, including its impact on other nationalist groups and its lasting legacy in the struggle for Indian independence. It also elucidates the importance of the HSRA's contributions to the independence movement and reevaluate its role in the narrative of India's battle for freedom through a thorough investigation of the organization's actions and its historical context.

Key Words: Revolutionary, Association, Imprisonment, Conspiracy Case, Hunger Strike

Introduction

A very pertinent question is, why do people rebel? When people lose their legitimate rights, face exploitation, oppression, and torture, they vocalize their protest. However,

the type of protest varies in space and time. Ted Robert Gurr provides the theoretical explanation of why people protest or rebel against existing regimes. His research shows how the psychological aspects of the individual act holistically, from discontent to rebellion and violence. Analyzing the psychological aspects of rebellion, three points emerge: (a) frustration due to deprivation that leads to anger, (b) a wide gap between one's expectations and what is achieved and, (c) distrust and emotional aversion towards the prevailing system of governance.¹ Revolution is the final expression of long-accumulated exploitation and deprivation. There are two methods to obtain rights and fair demands from the ruling group: moderate approach and extreme tactics. The soft method, or systematic method argues that rights can be achieved through non-violent means like sending memoranda, organizing meetings, and making speeches. The extremist view, on the other hand, believes that it is impossible to achieve rights through meetings or speeches and requires applying pressure on the ruling group through creating panic. During British colonial rule, the first decade of the 20th century saw significant events such as the Partition of Bengal (1905-1911), the Swadeshi Movement (1905-1911), the Khilafat Movement (1919-1922) and the Non-Cooperation Movement (1920-1922). Mahatma Gandhi led the non-violent non-cooperation movement, which aimed to awaken the consciousness of the oppressed against tyrannical will. However, as the common people became angry with British rule, educated, rights-conscious citizens and nationalist leaders began to search for new ways to obtain rights, leading to the creation of revolutionary secret organizations like the Hindustan Socialist Republican Association. The Hindustan Socialist Republican Association (HSRA), founded in 1928, was a pivotal revolutionary organization in India's fight for independence, characterized by its strong socialist and anti-imperialist ideologies, and armed resistance.

Literature Review

The impact of British imperialism on Indian socio-political dynamics elucidates the rise of radical organizations such as the HSRA. The HSRA used violent means like murder attempts and bombings to challenge British colonial authority and the Indian National Congress. Although the HSRA was short-lived, it significantly influenced the nationalist movement and established a lasting legacy. Women significantly contributed to the HSRA, serving not only as supporters but as active participants, using gendered colonial attitudes to further the cause.² In the Indian context, the term "revolutionary" covered several political ideologies, including Marxism, anarchism and nationalism, and expanded to discussions on violence, modernism, and utopianism.³ The limitation of existing sources lies in their fragmented discussion of the HSRA. This paper provides a comprehensive analysis of the organization's inception, the nationalist leaders associated with it, and its eventual trajectory.

Methodology

This paper explores the historical growth, revolutionary efforts, intellectual underpinnings, and impact of the Hindustan Socialist Republican Association (HSRA) on the independence movement of India. It employs historical, ideological, textual and socio-political analysis methods to understand the organization's functioning, internal dynamics, and colonial interactions. Primary sources include archival documents, official records, personal communication, and important HSRA members' papers. The study also examines the HSRA's founding, documents, manifestos, and speeches of Bhagat Singh, Rajguru, and Sukhdev, revealing its socialist and revolutionary aims and theoretical roots. The lexicon of these writings reveals revolutionary beliefs and critique of colonial rule. The study also examines the writings and memoirs of HSRA members to understand their revolutionary motivations and their role in achieving HSRA objectives. Socio-political analysis focuses on the HSRA's organizational

architecture, membership composition and leadership dynamics.

Hindustan Socialist Republican Association: Emergence, Ideals, and Revolutionary Vision

At the start of the 20th century, the winds of change began to blow in British India's politics. The politics of loyalty to the British declined, and Indians' sense of self-interest and entitlement increased. Bhagat Singh and his Punjab party gathered at Ferozeshah Kottala in New Delhi on September 8–9, 1928 where the Hindustan Republican Association took its new name, the Hindustan Socialist Republican Association. Reasons for the name change were to escape British government persecution and keep pace with the communist world. They originally embraced Marx's socialist ideals. Bhagat Singh, Shivaram Rajguru, Sukhdev Thapar, Jatindranath Das, Ajay Ghosh, and Phanindranath Ghosh were the backbone of the organization. Among them, Jatindranath Ghosh and Ajay Ghosh came from Uttar Pradesh, while Phanindranath came from Bihar. As a secret organization, the Hindustan Socialist Republican Association's main objectives were to overthrow British rule and establish socialist ideals in India. They believed in revolutionary methods, and their revolutionary ideals were further carried forward by Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose. The organization was most active in Shahjahanpur, Agra, Ayodhya, Kolkata, Allahabad, Lucknow, Kanpur, Deoband in Jharkhand, and Varanasi. Later, the organization's scope expanded to other locations.

HSRA's Path of Vengeance: Retaliation for Lala Lajpat Rai

The Indian Rule Act came into effect in 1919. Ten years later, in 1929, the British government called for a statutory commission to review the political situation in India under the Act's provisions. However, in view of the increasing political unrest in India and the demands of Indians for urgent constitutional reform, the government had set up a Statutory Parliamentary Commission two years earlier in 1927. Two

members of the British House of Lords and four members of the House of Commons formed the Simon Commission, with Sir John Simon serving as its chairman.⁴ The Commission was tasked with examining the effectiveness of the 1919 Act and evaluating the potential for granting or withholding constitutional reforms in British India. Leaders of major Indian political parties reacted against the Simon Commission due to its lack of an Indian representative, earning it the nickname *White Man Commission*. The HSRA was among the organizations that rejected the Simon Commission's report published in May 1930. On February 7, 1928, when the Simon Commission arrived in Bombay, spontaneous protests broke out across India in support of the decision to boycott the Commission. Major cities held meetings and strikes, and the intense opposition eventually forced the Commission to leave India. On October 30, 1928, the British government decided to host the Simon Commission in Lahore. Despite the Indian boycott, the government organized a grand reception for the Commission. Two leaders, Madan Mohan Malaviya and Lala Lajpat Rai, arrived. A large contingent of Congress members and Nau Jawan members gathered at Lajpat Rai's house to request a protest against the Commission. Malaviya and Rai accepted the proposal and led a protest march with around 25,000 activists. The government established a strict security cordon around Lahore Station to prevent protesters from entering the designated area. During the protest, some of the demonstrators began chanting, "Go back, Simon."⁵ Provoked by this chant, Superintendent of Police Scott ordered a lathi charge against the protesters. Police executed the lathi charge with unrestrained force. They had come prepared, needing only a directive to act. Government forces showed no hesitation in attacking an immensely popular leader like Lala Lajpat Rai. With severe injuries to the chest, Rai expressed, "The brutal attack on us this afternoon was a significant blow to the British Empire. Those who witnessed it can't forget it. It has struck deep into our souls. We must

avenge this cowardice—not by attacking them savagely, but by achieving our independence."⁶

Ten days after Superintendent of Police A. Scott ordered the brutal lathi charge, the 63-year-old Congress leader Lala Lajpat Rai succumbed to his injuries. His tragic death deeply angered fellow revolutionaries, as he was hugely revered. Discontent grew as the British government took no action regarding this murder. Basanti Devi, wife of Congress member Chittaranjan Das, expressed her condolences and issued a challenge. She said, "I, as a woman of India, ask the youth of India: What are you going to do about this?"⁷ She called on the youth to respond appropriately to the murder. All the country's leaders were shocked by the incident and strongly condemned the government. Annie Besant wrote in *New India*, "The violence and bloodshed in Lahore signal an impending crisis. Will England, having lost its American colonies, now lose India?"⁸

Anti-British sentiment climaxed at that time. The HSRA saw this as the opportune moment for decisive action. Therefore, they drafted plans to avenge Rai's murder and waited for the right opportunity.⁹ On December 9 and 10, the Central Committee of the HSRA held an emergency meeting in Lahore to discuss the assassination of Lala Lajpat Rai. The meeting was attended by Chandrasekhar Azad, Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev Thapar, Vijay Kumar Sinha, and Kundan Lal. Azad emphasized the need to teach the criminals a proper lesson and decided to build Lahore's blood-stained ground as the site of Scott's burial. Jai Gopal, a revolutionary member, was given the responsibility of collecting information about police officer Scott's arrivals and departures. On December 16, Chandrasekhar Azad visited the designated location based on Jaigopal's information. Bhagat Singh and Rajguru would shoot at Scott, while Azad would guide them on the safe escape. On December 17, Bhagat Singh, Rajguru, and Azad arrived at D.A.V College's boarding house and positioned themselves. Bhagat Singh and Rajguru patrolled outside the

police office, while Azad took his position at the college gate. As the European officer departed from the police station, Bhagat Singh and Jaiguru opened fire, causing the officer to fall from the motorcycle. Bhagat Singh fired four or five more rounds to ensure the officer's death. At the sound of gunshots, Inspector Police Fern, Head Constable Channan Singh, and some other constables rushed to the D.A.V College premises to capture the assailants. Realizing that Inspector Fern was chasing Rajguru, Bhagat Singh fired at Fern. Chandrasekhar Azad shot at Head Constable Channan Singh, killing him on the spot.¹⁰

Once the police pursuit halted, the revolutionaries proceeded to the bicycle's parking spot. One of the three parked bicycles was mistakenly taken by one of the revolutionaries. Therefore, Azad, Bhagat Singh, and Rajguru sat on one of the bicycles and immediately proceeded to D.A.V College. Instead of proceeding to the boarding house, Azad went directly to Mojang House. The revolutionaries were aware that the college's boarding house could be searched by the police. Later, a large police force surrounded the college, searching for the revolutionaries. They had left no murder evidence. But Assistant Police Superintendent J.P. Saunders was the murder victim instead of Scott. On December 18, the day after J.P. Saunders died, the HSRA admitted to the murder. The HSRA sincerely wanted the people to know that this was not a criminal act but a revolutionary and patriotic one. Two handwritten posters appeared on various walls in pink color, bearing the words "Bureaucracy Beware" and "Tyrant Government Beware." J. P. Saunders' death had avenged Lala Lajpat Rai's assassination, demonstrating that India's people were not lifeless and could sacrifice their lives for the country's honor. The poster argued that a man who was part of a cruel, despicable, and unjust system was executed. Although they regretted the loss of human life, they believed it was necessary to sacrifice lives for revolution, aiming to end

all exploitation of man by man. The aim was to bring about a revolution that would end all exploitation of man by man.¹¹

Several Congress leaders including Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru reacted negatively to the Saunders murder. Gandhi emphasized the need to stop such acts. He also said that Saunders' murder was a depraved and reprehensible act.¹² Jawaharlal Nehru did not appreciate this act of intimidation by the revolutionaries, saying it was unjust and reprehensible, and they (the revolutionaries) did not try to understand how much suffering would result from such an act.¹³

Following the Saunders murder, the police conducted a massive search operation, sealing off key entry and exit points in Lahore. The CID issued warnings, particularly targeting young people trying to leave the city. Revolutionary members sought refuge with Durgawati Devi, also known as Durga Bhabi, the wife of Bhagwati Charan Vohra, a key member of the HSRA. Before leaving for Kolkata, Vohra arranged for the leaders who avenged Lajpat Rai's murder to leave Lahore safely. Evading security personnel was challenging, so Durga Devi and the revolutionaries decided to leave early in the morning on a mail train bound for Kolkata. Bhagat Singh, Durga Devi, and her two-year-old son Sachin boarded the first-class compartment, posing as a gentleman and his family.¹⁴ Bhagat Singh cut his hair, shaved his beard and wore a cap to disguise himself, and Sachin slept on his lap. To make it more realistic, Rajguru carried their luggage dressed as a servant.¹⁵

Throughout the drama, they presented themselves in such a way that one would say they were a happy and beautiful couple. Rajguru, on the other hand, bid farewell to Lahore in the third-class employee compartment. This disguise allowed them to leave Lahore safely. Bhagwati Charan and Sushila Didi greeted them at the Kolkata station. Durgawati Devi's courage remains as a source of inspiration in the popular imagination.

Bombs, Slogans, and Revolution: The Historic Assembly Protest of 1929

To the dismay of all political activists, the government passed two bills in the Central Assembly, ignoring the people's voice: the Public Safety Act and the Trade Disputes Act. These laws allowed for the detention of suspected dissenters without trial, aiming to eliminate the influence of socialist ideologies. The socialist threat posed by Russia and the rise of a socialist financial system threatened capitalist nations. The colonial government passed the Communist Expulsion Act and the Trade Disputes Act to address these issues. These Acts empowered government to declare any form of protest as illegal. The law curtailed the freedom of numerous industry workers. Any worker participating in a strike would be subject to retrenchment with a notice period of 15 days.¹⁶ Anti-public laws, such as the Public Safety Act and the Trade Disputes Act alarmed the revolutionaries. The HSRA felt it was their moral duty to take effective action against them.

After the Saunders assassination Bhagat Singh resumed planning further actions of HSRA. He was inspired by French anarchist Auguste Vaillant who had thrown a bomb in the French Chamber of Deputies in 1893 to raise awareness and awaken the Deputies without causing any harm to anyone. Bhagat Singh considered performing the same action in the Indian Central Legislative Assembly to awaken the Indian people. As he proposed this to HSRA, the organization accepted Bhagat Singh's proposal to throw a bomb at the Indian Supreme Assembly, but his name was rejected. However, Sukhdev Thapar emphasized that only Bhagat Singh was empowered to execute the act. Bhagat Singh and Batukeshwar Dutt were picked to play key roles in executing the mission. There was disagreement on how to bring the two out safely after the mission was completed. Bhagat Singh opposed the decision, stating that after the historic mission, neither of them would try to escape but would stay with more enthusiasm and courage, displaying to the British authorities

the earnestness of Indians for attaining independence. The Central Legislative Assembly in Delhi strictly prohibited public access, but people could enter with a permit. On 8 April 1929, Bhagat Singh and Batukeshwar Dutt entered the Central Legislative Assembly in Delhi with permission from Jaidev Kapur, taking their seats in the visitor's gallery. Before the government released statements regarding the Public Safety Bill and the Trade Disputes Bill, Bhagat Singh and Batukeshwar Dutt threw bombs from their pockets without giving the government time to declare the bill's certificate. They did not throw the bombs to hurt anyone, just as Auguste Vaillant had not intended to hurt anyone. No one was injured.¹⁷

The bombing was a symbolic protest against the British government's anti-popular legislation. Everyone in Parliament was shocked and stunned by the incident. Although the Speaker of the Assembly, Motilal Nehru, Malaviya, and James Cleary remained in their seats, Bhagat Singh and Batukeshwar Dutt continued to shout slogans such as "Inqilab Zindabad," "Down with Imperialism," and "Long Live the Proletariat" inside the Assembly.¹⁸

The explosion enveloped the area in smoke and darkness. Although they could have escaped then, they chose to remain in their seats and threw pamphlets at the Assembly members. The leaflets emphasized the lesson that killing individuals is easy, but not ideas that destroy massive empires. Police arrested Bhagat Singh and Batukeshwar Dutt for throwing bombs in the Assembly.

Revolution in Motion: The Unstoppable Efforts of Fellow Revolutionaries

The proceedings against Bhagat Singh and Batukeshwar Dutt for throwing a bomb in the Central Assembly was taking place in the Delhi District Jail. The Additional District Magistrate of Delhi, Mr. F. H. Pole, produced the two on 7 May, 1929. Security forces deployed numerous members around the jail to prevent any untoward situation. Only parents of the

accused and six media persons were allowed to enter the court premises. They continued to chant slogans such as 'Long Live Revolution'.¹⁹ The British authorities decided to incarcerate Bhagat Singh and Batukeshwar Dutt in separate prisons, fearing that they might conspire to cause disturbances if held in the same jail. Bhagat Singh was sent to Mianwali Jail and Batukeshwar Dutt to Lahore Central Jail. Following the bombing incident, the central government instructed the police force to be on even higher alert. Despite the colonial government's various severe measures, revolutionary activities did not cease. The revolutionaries continued their activities with renewed vigor, establishing new hideouts in different locations and hatching new plans.

Yashpal, Jay Gopal, and Sukhdev Thapar were under special police surveillance. They, along with Kishori Lal rented a house in Kashmir Building, Lahore, for bomb production. To evade surveillance, they chose a blacksmith's shop as a location for some of their weapon production. The revolutionaries believed the blacksmith's shop would be less conspicuous to the police and that the blacksmith would be less informed about the weapons. Sukhdev placed an order with the blacksmith for a cartridge prototype, stressing the importance of the part and its urgent completion. However, a police officer, in plain clothes, noticed the cartridge at the blacksmith's shop. Following a thorough interrogation and search, the blacksmith informed that the cartridge was for a gentleman who had left it for prototype creation and would return to collect it. Based on this information, the police waited for the gentleman to arrive. Sukhdev did not recognize the officer in plain clothes. His trail exposed the hideout. The officer reported to the CID that a yellowish liquid was seeping out of a pipe near the house. The CID conducted a raid at the mentioned house on April 15, 1929, based on precise information. Except for Yashpal, the other three—Sukhdev,

Jay Gopal, and Kishori Lal—were present during the raid. The police found all the materials for bomb-making as evidence and arrested the three.

The Battle Within Walls: Singh's and Dutt's Struggle for Justice through Hunger

Bhagat Singh and Batukeshwar Dutt, two of the revolutionary leaders of the HSRA, decided to fight the injustice of the British Empire through non-violent means against the discriminatory policies of the British government in prisons. While few Congress leaders and British convicts enjoyed all facilities in jail, Indian revolutionary political prisoners were treated inhumanely and cruelly. The prison authorities' contempt was evident not only in their behavior but also in various aspects such as food provision, hygiene, bathroom usage, bathing and reading in addition to being subjected to abusive language.²⁰

Bhagat Singh and Batukeshwar Dutt started their hunger strike on June 30, 1929, as part of their protest against all the irregularities and injustices inside the jail. Their non-violent decision created a positive response among the inmates of Mianwali and Lahore jails. This led to a gradual increase in the spontaneous participation of prisoners from various prisons in the hunger strike. The hunger strike started with the aim of ensuring safe and better medical facilities for the Indian prisoners. In a letter to the superintendent, Bhagat Singh made several demands. They were:

1. Indian political prisoners should receive adequate food, and if a consistent menu is not feasible, the food should be standardized.
2. At least one national daily newspaper should be given to them every day to keep them abreast of current events.
3. Political prisoners should have unhindered access to all types of books and written documents.

4. Each prison should set up specially prepared and separate wards for political prisoners.
5. It is important to provide good quality clothing and sanitation facilities.²¹

The authorities completely ignored these demands. Bhagat Singh appeared in court on July 14, as Batukeshwar Dutt's physical condition deteriorated. The government offered medical treatment if Dutt's condition was critical, but Singh rejected it. Thirteen more prisoners joined in the hunger strike. Revolutionaries protested against the government's directive to forcefully feed the starving prisoners. They initiated a small-scale hunger strike that gradually grew in scale.

Protest of Political Prisoners: Hunger Strike, August 17, 1929

Table 1: Lahore Conspiracy Case

Name	Duration of Hunger Strike
Sardar Bhagat Singh	64 days
Batukeshwar Dutta	64 days
Pandit Kamal Nath Tewari	34 days
Mr. Ajay Kumar Ghosh	34 days
Mr. Sanyal	34 days
Dr. Gaya Palace	34 days
Mr. Jaydev	34 days
Mr. Shiv Verma	34 days
Mr. Mahavir Singh	34 days
Mr. Surendra Pandey	34 days
Mr. Arya Ram	34 days
Mr. Kishori Lal Ratan	34 days

Source: Neeti Nair, *Bhagat Singh as 'Satyagrahi': The Limits to Non-violence in Late Colonial India* (New Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 2009) pp. 649-681.

Table 2 Lahore Central Jail Inmates

Name	Duration of Hunger Strike
Sardar Sohan Singh (1914 Conspiracy Case)	19 days
Mr. B.K. Banerjee (Dakshineswar Bomb Case)	14 days
Sardar Ujjal Singh	15 days
Mr. Ratan Chand	15 days

Source: Taylor C Sherman, 'State Practice, Nationalist Politics and the Hunger Strikes of the Lahore Conspiracy Case Prisoners, 1929-39' (New York: *Cultural and Social History*, 2015) pp. 497-508.

Table :3 Mianwali Jail Inmates

Name	Duration of Hunger Strike
Bhai Aror Singh	25 days
Master Kabul Singh	27 days
Lal Ramchandra	14 days
Mohammad Ahmed Din	14 days
Sardar Gopal Singh	14 days

Source: Naoki Kanaboshi, 'Prison Inmates' Right to Hunger Strike: Its Use and its Limits Under the US Constitution' (New York: Criminal Justice Review, 2014), pp. 121-139.

From Hope to Tragedy: The Failed Rescue Mission and the Loss of Bhagwati Charan

While the jailed revolutionaries were protesting inside the prisons against the policies of the despotic British government, the revolutionaries outside were concentrating on keeping the organization active. In February 1930, Bhagwati Charan and Chandrasekhar Azad decided to rescue Bhagat Singh, Rajguru, Sukhdev, and other revolutionary leaders from prison. The decision led to the creation of a comprehensive road map. According to the roadmap, two teams would work in two divisions during the prison rescue. One group of revolutionary members would be ready to stop the military disturbance, while the other group would rescue the prisoners. As part of the plan, they rented a large house on Bahawalpur Road in Lahore. Chandra Shekhar Azad, Sukhdev, Rajguru, Durga Bhabi, Sushila Didi and other revolutionaries camped in the rented house.²²

The task of rescuing the prisoners fell to Chandra Shekhar Azad, while Bhagwati Charan assumed all remaining responsibilities. Sukhdev, Yash Pal, Tehal Singh, Lekh Ram, Dhanwantari, Chail Behari, and Kailas Pati joined the team to contribute. Shooting practice was conducted. Bhagoti Charan, a highly skilled and sharp revolutionary leader, led the practice. The rescue operation was scheduled for June 1, 1930. The prisoners were to be rescued using the same explosives used to attack the Governor-General and Viceroy's trains. Meanwhile, Yash Pal gave instructions to complete the

entire cartridge of explosives so that there are no gaps anywhere. An accident could occur at any moment if there was a gap. Once all the arrangements were in place, Bhagwati Charan ventured into the deep jungle near Ravi, a hidden location in Lahore, to assess the bomb's true effectiveness. He went there with two trusted members, Sukhdev and Vaishampayan. Unfortunately, Bhagwati Charan did not realize that the trigger of the bomb in his hand was loose. Suddenly, the bomb he had taken for testing exploded and his elbow got blown away. Sukhdev's leg suffered serious injuries and was bleeding profusely. Sukhdev managed to reach the camp to inform the other team members about the accident, leaving Vaishpayan with Bhagwati Charan. He ultimately succumbed to the injury, despite all attempts to save him.²³

The news of Bhagwati Charan's death cast a shadow of grief on the camp. Chandrasekhar Azad, Dhanwantari, Sushila Didi and the rest spent a sleepless night surrounding Durga Bhabi.²⁴ The next morning, Dhanwantari, Azad, and Madan Gopal went to Zakira with tears in their eyes and completed the last rites of the revolutionary leader Bhagwati Charan. Durga Bhabi and Sushila Devi wanted to see Bhagoti Charan for the last time, but they did not do it for fear that all the plans of the party might be revealed.²⁵

From Brave Defiance to Tragic Collapse: The Fire Wheel Operation and the Punjab Conspiracy Case

After Bhagwati Charan's death, Chandrasekhar Azad attempted to restructure the organization and planned the next course of action with Inder Pal, Hans Raj, Gulab Singh and Jahangiri Lal. On June 19, 1930, six cities were bombed simultaneously and it was named the fire wheel operation. Police activity increased following the incident, and they began searching for Sukhdev and Yashpal's diaries based on the letters and books seized from Inder Pal's house in Bahawalpur. Inder Pal's house was a gathering place for the

revolutionaries. He was arrested and subjected to inhuman torture. Most of those arrested gave statements under extensive police torture. On December 5, 1930, the police filed a conspiracy case against 40 people in a special court tribunal, known as the Second Conspiracy Case or the Punjab Conspiracy Case.

On 27 February 1931, Allahabad CID Head Sir John Reginald Hornby Nott Boyer discovered Chandrasekhar Azad and his associate Sukhdev Raj in Alfred Park. Boyer requested Azad's arrest and police surrounded the area. Azad helped Raj escape, ordering the freedom struggle to continue, shot and killed three policemen and then shot himself in the head. People gathered at the scene and began raising slogans against the British government.²⁶ On 23 March 1931, three other important party members, Shivram Rajguru, Sukhdev, and Bhagat Singh were executed, becoming immortal heroes of Indian independence.²⁷

Table 4: Convictions and Sentences in the Punjab Conspiracy Case: December 13, 1933 Report

Name	Type of Punishment
Gulab Singh	Executed
Amrik Singh	Executed
Jahangiri Lal	Exiled
Roop Chand	Exiled
Malik Kundan Lal	Exiled
Nathu Ram	7 years rigorous imprisonment
Sukhdev Raj	3 years rigorous imprisonment
Harnam Singh	Acquitted
Bansi Lal	Acquitted
Dharma Pal	Acquitted
Bhag Ram	Released due to illness during trial
Vishan Das	Died in prison during trial
Jai Prakash	Released
Dayanat Rai	Released
Dharma Veer	Released
Seba Ram	Released
Hyrati Lal	Released due to testimony
Sharan Das	Released due to testimony
Shiv Ram	Released due to testimony
Madan Gopal	Released due to testimony

Source: John McLeod, *Sovereignty, Power, Control: Politics in the States of Western India, 1916-1947* (Boston: Brill, 1999).

Inder Pal, an Indian patriot, was exiled after being convicted of a conspiracy. Despite pressure to apologize, he remained firm in his decision not to. During the trial, he revealed that the details in the case dossier were false, fabricated, and pre-planned. The police altered the information according to their needs, leading to the decision not to impose death sentences in the Second Conspiracy Case verdict. Jurist Shyam Lal praised Inder Pal's courage, patriotism, honesty, and fearlessness. Tragically, Inder Pal suffered from paralysis and mental agony in his final days. The absence of leaders hindered the party's progress, and by 1933, the leaderless party had become stagnant and inactive.

Conclusion

The course of history and the success or failure of events are largely dependent on the general people's participation. Hindustan Socialist Republican Association was an anti-British secret organization, for which reason people's involvement was negligible. Furthermore, there was no participation from Muslim leaders in this organization except for a handful such as Ashfaq Ullah Khan. Due to the separation of nationalistic ideologies, the two communities could not unite. Notable Congress leaders did not support HSRA's activities but rather aggressively criticized them at various times. The organization's activities from 1924 to 1933 may have compelled the British government to take positive initiatives for British India. Women also did not lag behind in revolutionary activities. Each individual within the organization demonstrated unwavering dedication, serving as a prime example. The HSRA was significantly weakened after the Kakori Conspiracy case resulted in the hanging, exile, and rigorous imprisonment of many leaders. But prominent nationalist leaders like Bhagat Singh, Chandrasekhar Azad, Sukhdev, Rajguru, and Batukeshwar Dutt took the organization forward with renewed fervor. Life in prison, inhumane torture, and death were nothing for the revolutionaries. It would not be an exaggeration to say that

the revolutionary activities left the British imperialist government apprehensive and wary, ultimately leading to India's independence. In his book *Modern India 1885–1947*, Sumit Sarkar refers to the members of the HSRA as heroes and martyrs, stating, 'The heroes and martyrs of the organization have achieved notable popularity through their actions.'²⁸ The correctness of the revolutionaries' chosen path to freedom may be debatable but their patriotism, awareness of their environment and global events, commitment to the cause, and readiness to make the ultimate sacrifice for the nation are indisputable. They undoubtedly enhanced the independence movement by introducing a new dimension and showing remarkable determination and courage.

Notes and References

- 1 Ted Robert Gurr, *Why Men Rebel* (London: Routledge, 2015).
- 2 Kama Maclean, 'A Revolutionary History of Interwar India: Violence, Image, Voice and Text' (London: Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, 2015); Kama Maclean, 'What Durga Bhabhi did next: or, was there a gendered agenda in revolutionary circles?' (South Asia: South Asian History and Culture: 2013).
- 3 Kama Maclean & J Daniel Elam, 'Reading Revolutionaries: Texts, Acts, and Afterlives of Political Action in Late Colonial South Asia :Who Is a Revolutionary?' (South Asia: Postcolonial Studies,2013).
- 4 Charles Freer Andrews, *India and the Simon Report* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 2007).
- 5 Ranjit Kumar Roy, 'Sikh Participation in Calcutta Urban Politics: A Case Study of Simon Commission Boycott' (Poona: Indian History Congress, 1998), pp. 716-723.
- 6 Braham Parkash, 'Political Life of Lala Lajpat Rai' (New Delhi: *Think India Journal*, 2019), pp. 547-552.
- 7 Kama Maclean, *The Portrait's Journey: The Image, Social Communication and Martyr-Making in Colonial India* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), pp. 1051-1082.

-
- 8 S. R Bakshi 'Simon Common and Lala Lajpat Rai: An Assessment' (Poona: Indian History Congress, 1989), pp. 507-518.
 - 9 Kama Maclean, 'Imagining the Indian Nationalist Movement: Revolutionary Metaphors in Imagery of the Freedom Struggle' (Journal of Materials, 2013), pp. 10-29.
 - 10 Bhawan Singh Rana, *Chandra Shekhar Azad: An Immortal Revolutionary of India* (Diamond Books, 2023).
 - 11 Chaman Lal, *Life and Legend of Bhagat Singh: A Pictorial Volume* (New Delhi: Publications Division, 2022).
 - 12 S. K. Mittal, and Irfan Habib, 'The Congress and the Revolutionaries in the 1920s' (New Delhi: *Social Scientist*, 1982), pp. 20-37.
 - 13 Jawaharlal Nehru, *Jawaharlal Nehru: An Autobiography* (London: Oxford University Press, 1938), pp. 132-134.
 - 14 Varinder Grover, *The Story of Punjab, Yesterday and Today: Political History and Development with Chronology of Major Political Events* (New Delhi: Deep & Deep publications, 1995).
 - 15 Y. Ramchandra Reddy, and Surya Prakash. 'Imprints of Bhagat Singh in India Independence Movement: A Historical Overview' (New Delhi: Impact Journals, 2014), pp. 2-10. Kuldip Nayar, *The Martyr: Bhagat Singh Experiments in Evolution* (Har-Anand Publications, 2000).
 - 16 S. P. Kashyap, 'The Government of India's Policy Towards Communism ,1928-29' (Poona: Indian History Congress, 1978), pp. 745-754.
 - 17 Jyoti Arun, 'India's Freedom Struggle: Role of Revolutionaries' (New Delhi: International Journal of Advanced Research in Arts, Science, Engineering & Management, 2021), pp. 1-7.
 - 18 Bipan Chandra, Mridula Mukherjee, Aditya Mukherjee, Kandiyur Narayana Panikkar, and Sucheta Mahajan, *India's struggle for independence 1857-1947* (Delhi: Penguin, 2016).
 - 19 Bhagat Singh, 'On the slogan of "Long Live Revolution"' (*Kanpur*,1929), p. 2.
 - 20 Hansraj Rahbar, *Bhagat Singh and his Thought* (New Delhi: Manak Publications, 1990).

-
- 21 Anam Iftikhar, and Muhammad Iqbal Chawla, 'Re-contextualizing Bhagat Singh's Freedom Struggle for Independence of India' (Lahore: *Journal of the Research Society of Pakistan*, 2018), pp. 18-25.
 - 22 George Jomia, N. K. Amaljith, and Robin George. 'Patriarchy through Patriotic Lens: A Study on the Portrayal of Women Freedom Fighters in Indian Patriotic Films' (New Delhi: *A journal of Multidisciplinary Studies and Research*, 2023), pp. 1-9.
 - 23 Ram Chandra, *Ideology and Battle Cries of Indian Revolutionaries* (Delhi: Ram Chandra, 1989).
 - 24 Kama Maclean, 'What Durga Bhabhi did next: or, was there a gendered agenda in revolutionary circles?' In *Gender and Masculinities* (London: Routledge, 2017), pp. 10-29.
 - 25 Śrīlāla Śukla, *Bhagwati Charan Verma* (Sahitya Academy, 1994).
 - 26 Khatri R.K, '*Shaheedon Ki Chhaya Mein*' (Nagpur: Vishwabharati Prakashan, 1983), pp. 138-139.
 - 27 Amit Kumar Gupta, 'Defying Death: Nationalist Revolutionism in India, 1897-1938' (New Delhi: Social Scientist, 1997), pp. 3-27.
 - 28 Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India 1885-1947* (Delhi: MacMillan, 1983).