

Print Culture and Radical Activism in Punjab: A Case Study of Proscribed Pamphlets and Tracts in the 1920s and 1930s

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Abstract

This article provides an in-depth analysis of the proscribed revolutionary literature published in Urdu in the early twentieth century. The literature, primarily in the form of pamphlets and tracts, became the chief means of disseminating revolutionary ideas among the Indian masses. On the one hand, these pamphlets and tracts exposed British injustices and authoritarian attitudes, and on the other, they created a sense of national awakening and political consciousness among the people of India. To make communication more effective and influential, revolutionaries used a genre of poetry that was more appealing and soothing to the public taste and resonated with the cultural tradition of oral communication, memorisation, and self-expression in Punjab. The verses urged masses, especially youth, to break the shackles of slavery and sacrifice their lives to liberate India from the clutches of foreign rule. To achieve this goal, the pamphlets emphasised that the people should bear oppression temporarily to eradicate it forever. This literature further stressed the need for Hindu-Muslim unity and advised on resolving all communal tensions. Likewise, they exposed the British legal and justice system, which had always been partial when dispensing justice to the natives. In addition, they glorified the deeds of the accused in the Kakori and Lahore Conspiracy Cases and offered them a tribute. They projected the 'afterlives' of martyrs as a source of inspiration and motivation for the living to continue their legacy. However, in the colonial discourse on sedition, these pamphlets and tracts were considered seditious and a potential threat to the 'public safety' and 'maintenance of public order'. The British Government banned this literature under section 124-A (sedition act) of the Indian Penal Code; nonetheless, the revolutionary ideas preached in these pamphlets continued to influence people for a long time.

Key Words

Print Culture, Radical Activism, Colonial Punjab, Revolutionary Literature, Censorship, Proscription.

Introduction

Punjab experienced an upsurge of revolutionary activity since the inception of the 20th century. The partition of Bengal (1905) and the agrarian unrest (1907) engendered a politics of agitation and transformed the static political environment of Punjab into a vibrant arena of political activity.¹ The peasantry unrest of 1907 was followed by radical militancy and a wave of national awakening across India. The revolutionaries exploited the situation and used print media to preach the ideas of freedom and liberty. Through newspapers, pamphlets, and tracts, they began a discourse on slavery and freedom and compared the deteriorating conditions of Indian subjects with those of independent nations of the world who were enjoying civil liberties. Disgusted from conventional politics and constitutional means of attaining freedom, the revolutionaries advocated for an alternative means of overthrowing British colonial rule.

The vernacular newspapers and pamphlets provoked the idea of revolution and began to promote radical ideas among the people. Through editorials, comments, and insightful articles, newspapers and periodicals tried to shape anti-colonial rhetoric and urged masses, especially youth, to participate in the new arena of political activity i.e. revolutionary activity. Gujranwala's *India* and *Hindustan*, and Lahore's *Panjabee* and *Zamindar* were at the forefront of this anti-colonial resistance. However, the British Government violently suppressed critical voices in the press and promulgated various laws to regulate local media. The Press and Registration of Books Act, 1867, regulated printing presses, newspapers, and periodicals containing news, and preserved copies of every book printed or lithographed in British India. The Act required newspapers and books to mention the names of the editor, printer, and publisher as well as the place of printing and the place of publication.² Similarly, the Government gagged the local press through the Vernacular Press Act, 1878, the Newspapers (Incitement to offence) Act, 1908, the Press Act, 1910, and the Indian Press (Emergency Powers) Act, 1931.³ These stringent press laws were further reinforced by sections 124-A and 153-A of the Indian Penal Code, and by section 99-A of the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1898, as amended by the Press Law Repeal and Amendment Act, 1922, Code of Criminal Procedure (Third Amendment) Act, 1926, and the Criminal Law Amendment Act, 1927. In the 1920s, all revolutionary writings were proscribed under the sedition act

¹ For the agrarian unrest in Punjab, Gerald Barrier, "The Punjab Disturbances of 1907: The Response of the British Government in India to Agrarian Unrest", *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 4, 1967, Pp. 353-383.

² Natarajan, J. *History of Indian Journalism* (New Delhi: Publication Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 2017). 93-102.

³ For the history of press laws, see J. Natarajan, *History of Indian Journalism* (New Delhi: Publication Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 2017).

124-A—the section of the Penal Code to check disaffection and contempt against the Government established by *law* in British India. Moreover, the British government, through security demands and forfeitures, increased financial burden on the press; however, it managed to withstand all these odds.

After 1909, the Government of India embarked on to initiate a crackdown on revolutionaries and crushed them vigorously; however, few had managed to escape and began their activities abroad. In Britain, Shyamji Krishan Varma's 'India House' became the centre of their activities. Similarly, in Paris, Madam Cama issued the magazine *Bande Mataram* to support the revolutionary cause. In 1913, Har Dayal issued a weekly *Ghadar* from San Francisco and accordingly established the Ghadar Party.⁴ These revolutionary developments coincided with the First World War, when the Ghadar Party abandoned its peacetime programme and planned to overthrow British rule through guerrilla warfare.⁵ The overseas Punjabis were asked to return to India and begin a war against the British. However, the Punjab's Lieutenant Governor Sir Michael O' Dwyer was able to suppress radical activism, and during the Lahore Conspiracy Case, the spearhead of the party was sentenced to death and transportation for life.⁶

For a short period, the revolutionaries went undercover and operated clandestinely, but the tragic incident in Jallianwal Bagh, Amritsar,⁷ provided them a *raison d'être* to reappear and resume their actions. In addition to terrorist attacks, they published literature in abundance that exposed colonial injustices and authoritarian attitudes and evoked ideas of freedom and slavery. During the 1920s and 1930s, the British Government banned this literature under Article 124-A of the Indian Penal Code.

⁴ Background in N. Gerald Barrier, *Banned: Controversial Literature and Political Control in British India 1907-1947* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1974), 66-77.

⁵ For revolutionary activities and Punjabis' participation in the *Ghadar* uprising during the First World War, see Ali Raza, *Revolutionary Past: Communist Internationalism in Colonial India* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2020); Chris Moffatt, *India's Revolutionary Inheritance: Politics and the Promise of Bhagat Singh* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2019); Shalini Sharma, *Radical Politics in Colonial Punjab: Governance and Sedition* (London: Routledge, 2010); Maia Ramnath, *Haj to Utopia: How the Ghadar Movement Charted Global Radicalism and Attempted to Overthrow the British Empire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).

⁶ To study Michael O' Dwyer's policy in Punjab, see, Michael O' Dwyer, *India As I Knew It, 1885-1925* (London: Constable, 1925).

⁷ On April 13, 1919, people assembled at Jallinawala Bagh, Amritsar, to protest the draconian Rowlatt Act, and General Dyer, infuriated by the agitation, opened fire on the unarmed procession and killed hundreds of people. For the history of Jallinawal Bagh, see Rajesh Ramachandran, *Martyrdom to Freedom: 100 Years of Jallianwala Bagh* (New Delhi: Rupa Publications, 2019).

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The Punjab Government launched a crackdown against communist and socialist writings and proscribed number of pamphlets included, Nand Lal's *Qaumi Islah*; Sawaran Singh's *Ghadar* and *Amanat mein Khayanat*; Kishan Singh's *Desi Fauj Zafar Mauj* and *Qaumain Kese Zinda Rahti Hain*; Sufi Amba Parshad's *Baghi Maseeh*; Ajit Singh's *Hindustan Main Angrez Sarkar Ne Ungli Pakratay Hi Kalai Pakar Li* and *Phoot Dalo aur Hakoomat Karo*; and Lal Singh and Kishan Singh's *Sarkari Naukari*.⁸ The authors, editors, and publishers were arrested and punished. For example, Kishan Singh, Nand Lal, Eshwari Parashad, and Munshi Ram were imprisoned and transported for life.⁹

During the period, the Criminal Investigation Department (C.I.D.) of the Punjab Government persistently carried out the surveillance of the revolutionary movements and raided the hideouts of suspected revolutionaries like Dhanpat Rai and his son Arjun Singh of Lyallpur.¹⁰ They raided bookshops and printing presses that were specialised in publishing political literature. During the raids, the C.I.D. traced the bulk of revolutionary literature from the printing presses of Lahore, including the *Inqilab Steam Press*, *Parkash Steam Press*, *Girdar Steam Press*, *National Art Press*, *Virjanan Press*, *Bande Matram Printing Press*, *Hindustan Press*, *Patiala Electric Press*, *Maqbool-i-Am Press*, *Bharat Mata Book Agency*, and *Sabaik Press*. Similarly, in Amritsar, the *Khalsa Pardesi Press*, *Akal Printing Press*, Thara Sahib, *Onkar Press*, Old Telegraph Office, *Sawaraj Printing Press*, and *Shri Ganga Electric Press* were involved in revolutionary activities. In Lyallpur, and Multan, *Narendra Steam Press* and *Iqbal Barqi Press*, respectively, published radical literature. In Rawalpindi, *Lakshami Art Steam Press* and *Aman Sarhad Barqi Press* printed revolutionary tracts.¹¹

Existing scholarship on revolutionary movements in India takes communism and radical activism as indigenous that was deeply embedded in Indian culture and traditions. Ali Raza, for instance, argues that early twentieth-century Indian communism was shaped by deeply rooted politics, even as it was also inspired by

⁸ Aziz-ud-Din Ahmad, *Punjab our Bairooni Hamla Awar* (Lahore: Book Home, 2014), 161. For details of revolutionary activities in Punjab, see M, Satya Rai, *Punjabi Heroic Tradition 1900-1947* (Chandigarh: Publication Bureau Punjab University, 1978).

⁹ *Ibid.* 163.

¹⁰ Dhanpat Rai was the father-in-law of Sardar Ajit Singh, and Ajit Singh was the uncle of the famous revolutionary in Punjab, Sardar Bhagat Singh. For the role of Ajit Singh in the agrarian unrest of 1907, see Savindar Pal, "Agrarian Unrest in Punjab and Sardar Ajit Singh", *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress, 2009-2010*, Vol. 70 (2009-2010), pp. 451-464. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44147692>.

¹¹ Information about printing presses involved in printing revolutionary and communist writings is retrieved from the Provincial Gazette of the Punjab Government, see Punjab Gazette, (Lahore: Government Press, 1930). Further, see Aziz Ahmad, *Punjab our Beruni Hamla Awar* (Urdu), (Lahore: Book Home, 2014).

international radicalism. He challenges the widespread notion that communism was "foreign to the Indian subcontinent and that the Left was "a proxy of communist blocs" and "anti-national force". [Raza, p. 5] He suggests that if we move away from official histories produced by the colonial state, or even communist parties, and view the movement through the lives of ordinary revolutionaries, we can infer that communism was "less rigid, less internally consistent, less party-oriented, less elite-centred and, more importantly, less foreign". [Raza, p. 250]. Similarly, Shalini Sharma also maintains that Punjabi communism was inextricably woven into the local culture and traditions of the Indian region. By investigating the proscribed literature in Punjab scrupulously and taking insights from these scholars' contentions, my study asserts that radical activism in Punjab was, in fact, indigenous in its approach as well as in its content, as the revolutionaries used a local figurative language to inspire masses. They frequently used local allegories, symbols, and metaphors in the poetic expressions to indoctrinate their revolutionary ideology.

Similarly, scholarship on proscribed controversial literature for example—N. Gerald Barrier,¹² Devika Sethi,¹³ and Deana Heath¹⁴—has focussed on regulatory and institutional censorship in British India; however, this article only focuses on revolutionary tracts and pamphlets, and is more in tune with the scholarship of Gurdev Singh Sidhu¹⁵ and Hasan Imam.¹⁶ It extends the debate through a case study of few more proscribed writings. Gurudev Singh Sidhu has traced 200 writings that praise Bhagat Singh and his comrades, and glorify their heroic deeds. He contends that, by proscribing these writings the British Government tried to suppress the spirit of resistance in India. Similarly, Hasan Imam's work highlights Bhagat Singh's sacrifice and bravery in anti-colonial resistance and takes the proscribed revolutionary literature as a form of resistance. He traces Bhagat Singh's connection with Mary Sapirodonoka of Russia who used the Court to propagate her idea of revolution. According to Hasan Imam, it was from Russian influence Bhagat Singh used the platform of the Court to attract print media, and invited the attention of

¹² N. Gerald Barrier, *Banned: Controversial Literature and Political Control in British India 1907-1947* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1974).

¹³ Devika Sethi, *War Over Words: Censorship in India 1930-1960* (New Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

¹⁴ Heath, Deana. 2010. *Purifying Empire: Obscenity and the Politics of Moral Regulation in British India and Australia* (Cambridge University Press, 2010).

¹⁵ Gurdev Singh Sidhu (ed.) *The Hanging of Bhagat Singh, Volume IV: The Banned Literature* (Chandigarh: Unistar Books Pvt. Ltd., 2007).

¹⁶ Hasan Imam, "Proscribed Urdu Print Literature in Praise of Bhagat Singh and His Comrades", *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, Vol. 77 (2016), pp. 665-670. For more writings on Bhagat Singh, see A. G. Noorani, *The Trial of Bhagat Singh, Politics of Justice* (New Delhi: OUP, 1996); Chaman Lal (ed.) *Bhagat Singh: The Jail Notebook and Other Writings* (New Delhi: Leftward, 2007); 137-138; S. Habib, Irfan. *To Make the Deaf Hear: Ideology and Programme of Bhagat Singh and His Comrades* (Gurgaon: Three Essays Collective, 2007), 143-144.

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British authorities towards his ideology of revolution which was opposite of Mahatma Gandhi's ideology of Satyagraha and non-violence.¹⁷

By accentuating these scholars' contentions, this research adds in discussion by analysing some more revolutionary pamphlets banned by the Punjab Government. The study examines major themes and trends of revolutionary discourse through print media and argues that the radical ideas preached in these tracts and pamphlets might become dangerous for the government if not fully checked carefully, and certainly had a potential threat to the colonial authority. I have traced four writings, entitled; *Inqilab ki Lehr urf Toofan-i-Hind*, *Lall Jhanda our Inqilab-i-Hindustan*, *Azadi K Taranay and Tarana-i-Mazloom*, and examined these writings through content and discourse analysis research methodologies.

A Study of Revolutionary Tracts and Pamphlets

Inqilab ki Lehr

One Urdu pamphlet *Inqilab ki Lehr urf Toofan-i-Hind* (a tide of revolution alias storm of India),¹⁸ starting with the slogan '*Inqilab Zindabad*' (long live revolution) inscribed on the top of its title page and printed on Farooqi Press, Saharanpur. It was published in reference to a Congress meeting held in Lahore in 1929. This 16-page pamphlet contains poems by Ram Parshad Bismal, the martyr of Kakori Case, Lalta Parshad Akhtar Saharanpuri, and Kishan Chand Zeba. At the last page, the publisher informed the readers that its second and third parts, *Inqilab ki Lehr urf Azadi ke Phool* (tide of revolution alias flowers of freedom) and *Swaraj ki Pehli Seri* (the first step towards self-rule), would soon be published.

The first poem in the pamphlet is, "*sarfaroshi ki tamana ab hamaray dil mein hai*" (we have a desire to sacrifice our lives) by Ram Parshad Bismil. This poem was an icon of revolutionaries, articulating patience and determination to stand up against colonial oppression. It challenges the British Government to do whatever it can, but it will never defeat our ambitions. Moreover, the poem eulogies the noble deeds of revolutionary martyrs and pays them tribute for their glorious sacrifices for their homeland. Another poem, "*Bharat na rah sakay ga, hargiz ghulam khana,*" articulates revolutionaries' strong conviction in India's freedom. The poem predicts that India would no longer be subjected to British rule and would soon be freed. This excellent poem, filled with hope and confidence, was recited by Prem Dutt, an accused of Lahore Conspiracy Case, in the Lahore High Court. While reciting this poem, he wept bitterly and expressed a strong desire for freedom:

¹⁷ Hasan Imam, "Proscribed Urdu Print Literature in Praise of Bhagat Singh and His Comrades", p. 667.

¹⁸ S. P. *Inqilab Ki Lehr urf Toofan-i-Hind*, (Saharanpur: Farooqi Press, Saharanpur, 1929).

The time will come when we enjoy freedom and India will be ruled by its own people. There will be equality and justice, and the differences of race and colour will disappear; India will no longer be occupied by the foreigner's rule and not have to pay *kharaj* (tax) to it further. The efforts of the volunteers will come to fruition, and the Congress will ultimately be able to rule her. Imports of foreign goods will be terminated, and the export of wheat from India will be checked. The poor will eat with relish; Gandhi and Nehru will receive congratulations, and the *Bharat Mata* will be enthroned.¹⁹

The poem reflects India's strong ambitions for freedom and self-rule. It also expresses an aspiration for equality and social justice by the natives who had been dehumanised by racial and colour differences. Moreover, the poem highlights the retarding effects of colonial rule on the Indian economy, which destroyed the home-grown industries and made the local artisans and craftsmen jobless. In the poem, it was wished that imports of foreign goods and export of wheat be stopped so that Indians could eat meals with relish and delight.²⁰

One more poem in the tract *Zulm seh ker zulm ki hasti mitaen gay*, (by enduring oppression, we will put an end to it) urges masses to bear oppression to achieve freedom. It urges for 'hunger strikes', a tactic inspired from Mahatma Gandhi's *marn bart* (fasting till death). This presents an idea of achieving freedom by observing hunger strikes and brings the authorities to their senses to dispense justice to the natives. Furthermore, it advocates for sacrificing lives to eradicate *zulm* (oppression) from the country.²¹ Similarly, the poem *Paigham Ba'naam Naujawan-i-Hind* (a message for the Indian youth) stimulates the Indian youth to do something remarkable for their country. It urges them to become the saviours of their coming generations and do something glorious for their country. It urged them to rise up and break the shekels of slavery and overcome all types of fears of imprisonment, ascending on gallows or transportation of life to Kala Pani (Black Waters, a colonial prison of Andaman and Nicobar Islands in India), and face whatever comes in the way of freedom.²² The Punjab Government banned this pamphlet on 4th of April 1930 under 124-A of the Indian Penal Code.²³

¹⁹ *Inqilab Ki Lehr urf Toofan-i-Hind*, p. 7.

²⁰ How did the British colonialism loot India and exploited her resources, see Shashi Throor, *Inglorious Empire: What the British Did to India* (London: Allan Lane, 2018); *An Era of Darkness: The British Empire in India* (New Delhi: Aleph, 2016); Aditya Mukherjee, "Empire: How Colonial India Made Modern Britain", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 45, No. 50 (December 11-17, 2010), pp. 73-82.

²¹ *Ibid.* P. 8.

²² *Ibid.* P. 9.

²³ *The Punjab Gazette*, Part I, Notification No. 1144-XVIII-6-P.B., dated 4th April 1930.

Laal Jhanda our Inqilab-i-Hindustan

This eight-page tract in Urdu *Laal Jhanda our Inqilab-i-Hindustan* (Red flag and Indian revolution) with the slogan “*Inqilab Zindabad*” on its top was published by Ram Singh Chakwalia, the Secretary of Naujawan Bharat Sabha, Sialkot.²⁴ The tract with the emblem of the hammer and sickle, a communist symbol representing proletariat solidarity between agricultural and industrial workers, marked the beginning of a series of revolutionary tracts, as mentioned by Ram Singh Chakwalia on the title page. This tract, at a price of the only two paisa, was intended to be circulated among youth, peasants, and workers. The publisher dedicated it to Giyani Sant Singh Anand, a Professor at Government Murray College, Sialkot, who was a leading figure in the Naujawan Bharat Sabha, a movement launched by the Punjabis against capitalism. Ram Singh published Giyani’s poem “*Raj Mahal Tera Assan hun Dhah Dena*” (we have to demolish your royal palace), which refers to the Irish struggle for freedom from British rule and inspires Indians to follow the footprints of the Irish people. This poem was recited at the conference of Punjab Provincial Naujawan Bharat Sabha, held in August 1929, at Amritsar, Punjab. It articulates a *hasrat* (a strong wish that desires to be fulfilled), as the title indicates, to liberate India by destroying the royal palace (lit. the British Raj), a symbol of colonial ascendancy.²⁵ Apart from a few poems, the tract narrates an interesting and thought-provoking story of revolution in prose, *inqilab ki kahani us ki apni zubani* (the story of revolution in its own words). The story personifies the revolution and to begin with the revolution introduces itself in the following words:

I am the secret of immortal youth. I am the creator of eternal life. Death rules in my absence. I have a dream of comfort and ease for the oppressed. I am his calm and ease, and I am his hope. What will I do? I will destroy everything that exists. But from the rock on which I shine, a new life is blooming. Why do I come to you? I come to you to break all the chains that bind you; to save you from the clutches of death. I'm coming to revitalise you. It is an invariable condition of life that everything that exists must perish. Furthermore, I'm about to destroy everything that exists. I am to fulfil the law to create a new and fresh life. I will reconstruct the foundations of the system in which you live. Why? This system is the result of evil, which begins with trouble and ends with crime. The harvest is here, and I am the reaper. I will wipe out all the false beliefs that have gripped humankind. I will destroy the rule of minority over majority, the inanimate over living things, and the matter over spirituality. I will destroy *dictatorship*, *law*, and *property*. All human beings are under the authority of their own self. Furthermore, everyone has its power

²⁴ Ram Singh Chakwalia, *Lal Jhanda our Inqilab-i-Hindustan*, (Lahore: Maqbool-i-Am Press, Lahore. 1929).

²⁵ *Ibid.*, P.8.

in his own property. A freeman is pure, and nothing is more glorious than a freeman.²⁶

The revolution gives a justification for its desire to destroy the existing order because it has divided human beings into binaries. It divided them into strong and weak, ruler and ruled, and rich and poor. This system enslaves millions in the hands of few and the few in the hands of their own authority and influence. It deprives the labour from joy and happiness. It turns labour into burden and joy into distress. It makes one person uneasy because of scarcity, and the other because of abundance.

The revolution gives some more reasons to destroy the existing order because it wastes the energies of the human race. It has given privilege to one section of society to indulge in worldly pursuits while forcing others to waste their energies in fulfilling the comforts of the former. In addition, people have to sacrifice happiness because of the burden of heavy workload. Here, the revolution becomes more extreme and intends to erase even the memory and ruins of the prevailing system; because it cannot breathe. It is confined in its own dark circle, which is outlined by power and authority, deception and dishonesty, grief and sorrow, jealousy and crime, and where a ray of happiness cannot enter.²⁷ Therefore, it infers the following:

O' people of the world, wake up from your deep slumber of ignorance; rise up O' oppressed; you are futilely busy in fulfilling your inner desires, stand up and walk ahead, join the hands of those who are following me; because I don't know how to differentiate amongst my followers. I merely know that there will be only two types of people in the world; those who will follow me and those who will create hurdles in my way. I will lead the former to happiness and the latter to ruin by crushing them. Because I am the revolution; I am the giver of a new strength; I am the secret that embraces life; I will give you a reward by revitalising you.²⁸

Ram Singh published another poem *Laal Jhanda*, and instructed readers on behalf of the Naujawan Bharat Sabha, to memorise it and recite it on Independence Day, which was to be celebrated by the Indian National Congress on May 10, 1930. The poem suggests that revolutionaries should expand the scope of revolution across the globe even at the cost of their lives. The first verse of the poem says;

Lehnday, charhday, uttar, dakhn, jhanda laal jhulawan gay

Phansi day takhtay tay charh kay, geet esi day gawan gay

²⁶ Ibid., P.2.

²⁷ Ibid., P.3.

²⁸ Ibid., Pp. 3-4.

In the West and East, in the North and South

We will fly the Red Flag.

We will sing its songs, even ascending the gallows.²⁹

Another classical poem “*Bismal Ki Tarap*” of Ram Parshad Bismil, frequently appeared in almost several revolutionary tracts. Its first verse became an icon and slogan to inspire youth to sacrifice and endure colonial oppression.

Sarfaroshi ki tamanna ab hamaray dil mein hai,

Dekhna ha zor kitna bozo 'ay qatil main ha

Our hearts are filled with a passion to sacrifice our lives.

Let us see how strong the killer's hands are! ³⁰

In fact, it was an open challenge by the revolutionaries to the colonial regime and its violence. The tactic was characterised by a nonviolent form of resistance that aimed to expose the colonial justice system.

The *Kirti*, a monthly magazine of the Kirti Kisan Party, experienced the worst kind of censorship in Punjab. All issues pertaining to *Kirti* from July 1929 to April 1930 were forfeited under permanent notification numbers 10359 and 11036.³¹ This pamphlet in a poem *Risala Kirti ki Zabtiyon k Silsilay Main* (in reference to *Kirti's* proscription) by Hind Sewak condemned the Punjab Government's authoritarian attitude in proscribing the *Kirti* and praised its editor's courage and determination. It suggests to the government that it can intensify its oppression, but it would never be successful in uprooting the plant of revolution. It also expresses the conviction that the British government imprisoned millions of people but that the *ghadari dal* (revolutionary army) could never have been crushed. It predicted that the tyrannical rule of the Tsar of Russia had ended, and now the days of the British were also about to end. This suggests that the British should pack up their belongings and leave India for ever. It was anticipated that the *ghadar* (revolution) would overturn their rule from India.³²

²⁹ Ibid., P.4.

³⁰ Ibid., P.6.

³¹ The Punjab Gazette, Part-I, Notification Nos. 10359-S.B. and 11036-S.B., dated; from July 1929 to April 1930.

³² *Lal Jhanda our Inqilab-i-Hindustan*. P.7.

The poem “*Hamain zor-i-bazoo dekhana paray ga*” by Comrade Hazara Singh Hamdam from America urges people to display their power and strength against colonial rule. It narrates:

we will have to show our strength and shed our blood; we should save the boat of India from sinking in the whirlpool; how long we will depend on the British, now we will have to pick up dagger; we have lost our patience, now kill them or be killed by them; we are now being fed up by misery and have to progress. Why should we sweat for them and plough with an empty stomach? They have subjugated us through the power of unity; therefore, we too will have to be united. ³³

The poem reflects extreme disappointment and dissatisfaction with British rule, advocates for the use of force, and advises for unity and organisation among the people of India.

Another poem “*Bharat Na Reh Sakay Ga, Hargiz Ghulam Ghana*” (India will no longer remain a slave) by Comrade Amar Singh from New Zealand prophesied that “now India would no more remain enslaved and soon would be freed. The poet takes strengths from the Indian soil and romanticises its glorious past by asserting that “we are the children of Bharat Mata”. ³⁴ The accused of the Lahore Conspiracy Case recited this poem during the hearing of the case. These poems by Hazara Singh and Amar Singh illustrate the revolutionaries’ struggle abroad for the liberation of their motherland. It discloses:

Aih angrez shaitani charkhay, lakh lakh zulm guzaran

Tor wichhod karan hamesha, ehnan wasal na bhawan

These Englishmen with a devilish nature oppress us in hundreds of thousands of ways; they always divide us and can never tolerate unity among the people. ³⁵

The verse reinforces the dominant public perception of ‘divide and rule’ underpinned by the British Raj. The Punjab Government also forfeited this tract under the sedition act, 124-A. ³⁶

Azadi K Taranay

Azadi K Taranay (songs of freedom), a 34-page pamphlet, with a preface of “*Nazr*” (tribute) to Bhagat Singh and his comrades who had sacrificed their lives for the honour and freedom of their motherland and tried to break the chains of slavery with

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid., P.8.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ *Punjab Gazette*, Part I, No. 5311-P.B., dated 18th April 1930.

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their devoted action. The poem *inqilab* (revolution) depicts what the revolution will bring to the future and why people wanted it to happen very soon. Because it would bring peace and tranquility and uproot *zulm-o-jabar* (oppression and tyranny) from the country. This would free India from the *panjja-i-aghyar* (clutches of foreign hands), eliminate poverty, hunger, and starvation, and would turn idleness of youth into a fruitful struggle. Moreover, it would bring prosperity to the country, and the youth would feel pleasure and happiness in an independent country. In this tract, India was metaphorically characterised as a “*Nao*” (boat) caught in the “*ghurbat kay toofan*” (storm of poverty), and it is the revolution alone that can save it from sinking.³⁷ Similarly, the poem *asar hota ha* (indeed, it affects) assures revolutionaries that their sacrifices will never be futile and will come to fruition. It glorifies the actions of martyrs in such a way that after their deaths, people bow their heads at their graves.³⁸

Another poem in the tract “*Sardar Bhagat Singh*” praises Bhagat Singh’s sacrifice for his homeland. This propagates the idea, as Chris Moffatt noted, that *afterlives of martyrs* continue to affect the living, and their sacrifices haunt and affect the memories of living people. The person who sacrifices his life always affects others. He is remembered with pride and honour. His grave is being visited with respect and dignity. People respect him, love him, and glorify his heroic acts. Moffatt provides an overview of Bhagat Singh’s presence in the post-colonial politics of India and Pakistan and asserts that inheritors of revolutionaries’ inheritance have a shared responsibility and obligation to the dead.³⁹ The poem *Sardar Bhagat Singh* also idealises Bhagat Singh’s bravery and his promise of freedom even in prison, which is a clear manifestation of his valour and bravery. He was sentenced to death and hanged on gallows. The only motive behind his sacrifice was his deep love for his motherland. The pamphlet presents such examples of heroic deeds by martyrs only to inspire masses to follow the footprints of martyrs and free India from colonial subjugation. For this purpose, people must overcome the fear of death or imprisonment because they have no value *in comparison to* freedom. The pamphlet urges people to rise up and challenge state oppression and informs authorities that the more they intensify their brutality, the more we will be determined to bear. It

³⁷ Shri Amar Amritsari, *Azadi Ke Taranay* (Songs of Freedom), (Amritsar: Amar Book Depot, Amritsar, 1931), P. 3.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, P. 4.

³⁹ Chris Moffatt, *India’s Revolutionary Inheritance: Politics and the Promise of Bhagat Singh* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2019). Chris Moffatt raises a critical question how does living negotiate a debt to the dead? He takes the force of the dead as entities to whom something is owed. It opens Bhagat Singh out into his afterlives and provides a language to comprehend his widespread popular appeal and continuing potential as an interlocutor and instigator in modern Indian politics. His work draws attention to political communities that tie the living and the dead together in our post-colonial present. It reminds us that the promise of freedom and decolonisation remains unfulfilled.

urges youths to rise up and tell people that their *lethargy* is firming up their chains of slavery, and ask the British to leave India and give them a chance to thank.⁴⁰ This poem and many others like this have common themes of slavery and freedom, oppression, and tolerance. The primary objective of these poems was to educate the masses and prepare them for revolution.

Another poem in this pamphlet “*Ker Dekhanay K liye*” (for doing something), also motivates people to rise up, fight the battle of freedom, and liberate the country. It was advised that “always be ready to sacrifice yourselves; be united, and put an effort to eradicate oppression not only from your country but throughout the world. A life that could not be sacrificed for the country was of no avail.”⁴¹ The poem indicates that the revolutionaries were determined to expand the scope of their efforts across the globe.

During their actions, revolutionaries had to endure many hardships in colonial jails. The poem *kaifiyyat-i-zindan* (a state in prison) reveals such colonial violence in prisons. The poem attributes the authorities’ brutal attitude with *sayyaad*⁴²(hunter) who oppresses his prey in *zindan* (prison). It states that *sayyaad*’s brutality cannot be described in words. One will be surprised if he hears the stories of inhuman behaviours of colonial authorities in jails. The revolutionaries state that “they had accepted the prison as their home where the British authorities were characterised as *sitamgar* (tyrant), *sangdil* (stone-hearted) and *zalim* (oppressor).”⁴³ They oppress us in an indescribable way. The poem *Dar-o-Rasan* (on gallows) portrays how the revolutionaries went to the gallows and were ready for death. They regarded gallows as “swings”. They were glad in the seclusion of prison, hoping to gain freedom. At the bottom, a message raises a question: who is being regarded as ‘backward’, ‘ignorant’ and ‘black coolies’ by independent nations? The answer is Indians.⁴⁴

The revolutionaries’ experiences in prison were inexpressible. The poem “*dilgeer ho jan*” narrates a suffocating prison environment that does not allow to weep the distressed. This poem reflects a mental conflict that overwhelmed a prisoner in solitary confinement when he was far away from his near and dear ones.⁴⁵ This pamphlet propagates that the revolutionaries had committed only the crime of wishing for liberty for their motherland. They had become voiceless and could not

⁴⁰ Ibid., P.5.

⁴¹ Ibid., P.8.

⁴² In Urdu poetry, a beloved is regarded as *Sayyaad* who oppresses her prey (lover) by captivating through number of ways. The metaphor is used to represent and describe colonial tyrannies and oppressions.

⁴³ Ibid., P. 10.

⁴⁴ Ibid. P. 12.

⁴⁵ Ibid., P.13.

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utter even a single word because of the fear of *sayyaad*. They were an epitome of grief and distress. They became introvert and asked themselves, “What could be done?” How could they get out of this trouble? The poem “*hosh sambhalo*” (come to your senses) answers this question. It urges the youth to wake up from deep slumber. They should wake up and come to their senses. They should strive for independence. In an independent country, they would have all the opportunities that life has provided. Otherwise, the people of a slave country would have to choose death over a life of slavery because the people of a slave country could never live a life of dignity and honour. Their ‘self’ had been ruined under the burden of slavery. Their potential had been wasted. Wake up! You have passed centuries of idleness and apathy.⁴⁶

The revolutionary tracts used different symbols of Urdu poetry to encourage masses to take action. In a poem “*Azadi ke Parwane*” (lovers of freedom), freedom was symbolised and personified as *Laila* and *Shama*⁴⁷, and the revolutionaries were epitomised as *Manjun* (literally meaning a mad man) and *Parwana*, who could sacrifice their lives for their love for freedom. Moreover, *Shama* of *azadi* (freedom) was presented as light that illuminates the darkness of subjugation. In addition, the poem portrays Bhgat Singh as *dewana* (lover) of *Laila* (freedom) and *parwana* (lover) of *shama* (freedom).⁴⁸

This pamphlet published a series of one-line brief messages at the bottom of each page. These messages include: “your idleness is tightening chains of your slavery”; “it is mandatory for everyone to make an effort for their country’s freedom”; “thirty-three crore people has been enslaved by a handful British”; “death is better than a disgraceful life of subjugation”; “alas to the Indians for not waking up despite losing everything”. Furthermore, it includes messages like: “a dweller of a slave country can never lead a life of comfort”; “your mutual differences will destroy you”; “O’ slave Indians rise up and break shekels of slavery”; “O’ peasants and labourers, be united”; “always use Indian-made goods”; “acknowledge your martyrs’ sacrifices”; and “slaves’ lives have no meanings”. Moreover, it published messages such as “O young men!” Rise up and rescue the boat of your country out of the storm of slavery and bring it to the shore of freedom.” “If you don’t want to bear the tortures and sufferings of prison, then obey your foreign masters, because freedom demands sacrifice; a sacrifice of life and property.” It demands a conviction in oneself. It demands a dedication and devotion to high ideals of freedom. It demands a sacrifice

⁴⁶ Ibid. P. 16.

⁴⁷ A legendary character *Laila* is the beloved of *Majnun* in the folklore *Laila Majnun*. Similarly, *Shama* (candle) and *parana*, a small insect that is fond of light, sacrifices his life around candle. For print culture and folktales in Punjabi literary tradition, Mir, Farina (2010), *The Social Space of Language: Vernacular Culture in British Colonial Punjab* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010).

⁴⁸ Ibid., 26, ‘Poem: Azadi ke Parwane,’ P. 20.

of one's calm and tranquillity; a sacrifice of one's wishes and ambitions. It cannot be achieved easily.

Tarana-i-Mazloom

The pamphlet *Tarana-i-Mazloom* was written by Master Nand Laal Qamar, General Secretary of the Congress Committee, Jarranwala, and printed on *Steam Press*, Lyallpur, 1930. The year 1930 was very important because the Indian National Congress announced its independence plan and launched the Civil Disobedience Movement. During the same year, Bhagat Singh and his associates were tried in court. Therefore, a large number of revolutionary writings appeared in India that put a question mark on the British justice system and propagated the idea of freedom through revolutionary action. The purpose of the tract, according to its author, was that the political conditions of the country were changing rapidly, and the youth were thrilled by patriotism; on the other hand, the bureaucracy was overstepping its limits and vigorously suppressing freedom movement. The revolutionaries were excited to sacrifice their lives on the “*azadi ki shama*” (candle of liberty); it was a need of time to motivate youth through speech and writings. The tract was a new anthology of political poems and national songs aimed at inspiring political activists because the old ones had lost their charm and influence. The tract raises questions like when India will start to prosper and how long will differences in religion be resolved? It reveals that the enemies want us to be at a constant fight, but those who fight never progress; if Hindus and Muslims continue to fight each other, they will lose their own lives, and the enemy will benefit from it. The tract stresses on unity and organisation, and suggests resolving all communal tensions.⁴⁹

Conclusion

This study illuminates the proscribed revolutionary literature published in Urdu in the early twentieth century. It has revealed how revolutionaries exploited print media to preach radical ideas of freedom and slavery and why these ideas were perceived by the British authorities as a potential threat to imperial interests in India. The study has also shed light on the content and context of these writings and how these writings proposed an alternative means to achieve freedom. The literature tried to inspire national awakening and political consciousness among masses and mirrored public concerns and grievances for the British government to heed. The tracts and pamphlets exposed the colonial justice system and highlighted colonial bias towards the natives. In these tracts, martyrdom and *sacrifice*, as Shalini Sharma noted, were preached as weapons in the struggle for independence.⁵⁰ These pamphlets provided a ‘discursive space’ for the revolutionaries to preach their ideas

⁴⁹ Master Nand Laal Qamar, *Taran-i-Mazloom*, (Lyallpur: Steam Press, 1930).

⁵⁰ Shalini Sharma, *Radical Politics in Colonial Punjab: Governance and Sedition* (London: Routledge, 2010), P.1.

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to wider audiences. They tried to develop a critical outlook in masses and began a discourse on freedom and slavery. They exposed colonial injustices and raised many questions such as; what does freedom demand of us? How can we liberate our homeland from colonial rule? How can we overcome fear? Furthermore, how will our sacrifices come to fruition? Moreover, these writings invited attention to social inequalities and injustices and created excitement among masses to achieve freedom. They provoked nationalist and patriotic sentiments and urged people to follow the heroic deeds of martyrs and sacrifice their lives for the liberty and freedom of their motherland. They should resolve their mutual differences and create a national harmony among various sections of Indian society to defeat British 'divide and rule' policy.

Furthermore, these writings highlighted the issues of poverty and degradation of Indians and compared India with independent nations of the world who were enjoying citizenship rights and maintaining higher standards of living. Freedom and slavery, state repression and freedom, poverty and wealth, peace, and unrest were the overarching binaries that exposed British rule. Moreover, these writings justify an outbreak of revolution to eradicate the existing order of things and construct a new form of life. Indeed, such ideas represented a potential threat to British rule and could incite people to disrupt public order and lead them to interrupt colonial rule. As precautionary measures, the British Government proscribed all these pamphlets and tracts under sedition act 124-A of the Indian Penal Code.

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