Revolutionaries, coercive institutions and the crisis of collaboration in interwar India

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Earlier generations of historians interpreted revolutionary politics of the interwar period within a paradigm of failure, on the basis that it did not bring about an immediate shift in the colonial dominance in South Asia. Following the 'revolutionary turn' in South Asian history, scholars have suggested that revolutionary politics needs to be read for the ways in which it shifted mainstream nationalist strategies and influenced other outcomes, both intended and unintended. This article deepens this analysis, by considering an unexplored outcome of the revolutionary politics of the Hindustan Socialist Republican Association (HSRA): its impact on Indians employed in British institutions, especially coercive institutions such as the police and prisons. These employees may not have resigned from their posts, and ultimately these coercive institutions remained coercive and violent at a macro level. However, based on the evidence presented here, it is clear there was a faintly discernible but important micropolitics emerging from within these institutions, which indicates that some exhibited admiration and sympathy for revolutionary prisoners, quietly and surreptitiously working to ameliorate systems of coercion and punishment, in the process undermining coercive institutions from within. Such a reading prompts a rethinking of paradigms of collaborators as colonial enablers, allowing us to see the withdrawal of cooperation with the colonial regime as a process, which becomes perceptible in the context of anticolonial movements in the late interwar period.

Keywords: Collaboration, anticolonial resistance, revolutionaries, police, prisons, decolonisation, subversion

Revolutionary Strategies of the Hindustan Socialist Republican Association

The primary target of the violent actions of the Hindustan Socialist Republican Association (HSRA) has often been understood to be the British functionaries

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in the Government of India.[1] The HSRA's high-profile assassination of a police officer, John Poyantz Saunders in Lahore on 17 December 1928, and the attempted assassinations of the Viceroy, Lord Irwin in 1929 and the Governor of Punjab, Sir Geoffrey de Montmorency in 1930 are the foremost examples of this. At one level, all of these attempts 'failed'. In a case of mistaken identity, the HSRA accidentally shot the wrong man in 1928, killing Saunders, a recently arrived junior officer, when they had intended to kill the senior police superintendent J. A. Scott. Both Irwin and de Montmorency escaped the HSRA's attempts on their lives, although others were wounded and in the latter case, a bystander killed.[2] These incidents, alongside the observation that the revolutionaries triggered no revolution, encouraged an earlier generation of scholars to be dismissive of revolutionary politics, either on the grounds of ineffectual planning (an analysis which draws straightforwardly on the prose of the Intelligence Bureau),[3] or a failure to radically shift public perceptions.[4]

Recent scholarship, characterised as a 'revolutionary turn' in South Asian Studies,[5] has amply demonstrated that although revolutionary actions were indeed intended to shake British confidence, they also aimed to popularise anticolonial sentiments among the nationalist public—in the HSRA's case, through their effective manipulation of media outlets and the staging of hunger strikes from prison.[6] Throughout their incarceration, the revolutionaries of the HSRA insisted that they were political prisoners who were motivated by their critique of the violent excesses of British imperialism. The violence that they faced during this process has been extensively documented. In the process of undergoing trial, the revolutionaries were beaten in the courtroom for resisting wearing handcuffs, and several surviving HSRA members disclosed the use of torture as a means of extracting a statement.[7] The final act of corporal violence was the execution of Bhagat Singh, Rajguru and Sukhdev on 23 March 1931, in the face of evident legal manoeuvres by the Government of India to rush the trial to conviction, and

[1] The HSRA was an organisation which pushed the boundaries of what constituted legitimate anticolonial action, especially in its willingness to use violence as a means of responding to colonial repression, in particular, acts of police violence. For more on the HSRA, see Maclean, *A Revolutionary History*; Vaidik, *Waiting for Swaraj*.

[2] Maclean, 'Art of Panicking Quietly', p. 150.

[3] Roberts, '*The Holy Fox*', p. 31.

[4] Chandra, *Nationalism and Colonialism in Modern India*.

[5] Amstutz et al., 'New Histories of Political Violence'.

[6] For discussions of 'revolutionary failure', see Nair, 'Bhagat Singh as "Satyagrahi"', p. 650; Maclean, *A Revolutionary History*, pp. 222–27; Vaidik, *Waiting for Swaraj*, p. 27; Moffat, 'Bhagat Singh's Corpse', p. 15.

[7] D. D. Khanna, interviewed by S. L. Manchanda, 16 May 1976, Accession No. 294, Oral History Transcripts (henceforth OHT), Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi (henceforth NMML), p. 40; M. Gupta, interviewed by H. D. Sharma, 22 November 1969, Acc. No. 174, OHT, NMML, p. 65; J. Gupta, interviewed by S. L. Manchanda, 10 May 1978, Acc. No, 346. OHT, NMML, p. 45; S. Verma, interviewed by H. D. Sharma and S. L. Manchanda, 16 February 1972, Acc. No. 50, OHT, NMML, p. 118; See also, 'House searches and Arrests at Lahore', *Amrita Bazaar Patrika*, 23 December 1928, p. 13.

the actual conduct of the executions being carried out in contravention of practices stipulated in prison manuals.[8] In part, the 'revolutionary turn' in South Asian Studies has been enabled by a scholarship which emphasises the violence of British imperialism.[9]

Scholars have elaborated the ways in which the suffering of revolutionaries became transformed into new forms of political martyrdom, which fuelled anticolonial action through vibrant visualisations, which the British came to read as incitement.[10] Such visualisations and memorialisations continue to haunt and shape the political landscape of South Asia.[11] In the 1930s, revolutionary politics demonstrably swayed opinion among Indian nationalist groups, succeeding in radicalising even moderate Congress leaders.[12] This article adds to this body of scholarship by focusing on how the revolutionaries of the HSRA succeeded—to a point—in crafting their actions in such a way as to garner the active sympathies of Indians working within British institutions, especially in what Taylor Sherman describes as the broader 'coercive network' of the colonial state: colonial intelligence, policing, courts and prisons.[13] By focusing on these employees of the colonial state, I wish to interrogate a structural instability in the imperial system: that British security was ultimately dependent on Indian personnel working in the forces, and this in turn was dependent on their members being resistant to the discourses of nationalism. By the 1930s, anticolonial thinking was becoming pervasive, especially in urban centres.

The colonial state had long been aware of this structural instability and had made legislative efforts to discourage Indians in its employ from expressing support for seditious movements, with punitive policies devised from as early as the Swadeshi Movement (c. 1905–11).[14] Government employees were also expected to curtail nationalist sentiments among family members, including students and wives, at the risk of losing their pensions. Anticolonial nationalists were also aware of the Raj's overreliance on Indian labour, which was the basic premise of

[8] Noorani, *Trial of Bhagat Singh*.

[9] There is extensive literature on this, but indicative texts are Kolsky, *Colonial Justice in British India*; Burton, *The Trouble with Empire*; Ghosh, *Gentlemanly Terrorists*; Heath, *Colonial Terror*.

[10] Pinney, *Photos of the Gods*; Ramaswamy, *The Goddess and the Nation.*

[11] Moffat, *India's Revolutionary Inheritance*.

[12] Maclean, 'Revolution and Revelation', pp. 678–94.

[13] Sherman, *State Violence and Punishment in India*.

[14] See, for example, intelligence files which lay out the means of punishing employees found to be taking part in 'seditious movements': 'Question of Action to be taken against Legal Practitioners Guilty of Seditions agitation', File No. 444, Intelligence Section, 1908, State Archives of West Bengal, Kolkata (henceforth SAWB), *passim*; 'Liability to Withdrawal of Pension if Engaged in Seditious Political Movements under Article 351, Civil Service Regulations', File No. 615, Intelligence Section, 1908, SAWB, *passim*. Similarly, during the Non-cooperation movement, 'Procedure to be adopted in the case of military pensioners who make seditious speeches at public meetings', File No. 139, Intelligence Section, 1922, SAWB, *passim*.

the Non-cooperation movement. In 1922, the Government of India responded to this threat by introducing the Police (Incitement to Disaffection) Act to provide the legislative ballast to deal with the Congress's direct calls for Indians to renounce jobs in the police and army.[15] By the 1930s, which saw a rise in political violence as well as the onset of the Civil Disobedience movement, the British supplemented these policies with attempts to nurture and retain loyalty among its Indian employees, with a combination of propaganda and reward systems, including medals and honours for service under difficult conditions.[16] Many of the revolutionaries of the HSRA—which was in its most active phase between 1928 and 1931—who had personal experience in earlier Congress movements and had retained linkages and friendships with Congress workers,[17] also targeted this structural instability, appealing to fellow Indians not to cooperate with the state.

Collaboration and Non-cooperation as Processual

In earlier generations of scholarship, Indians working for the colonial state have been read as irreconcilable collaborators, self-interested loyalists and traitors enabling the colonisation and administration of India. In these models, collaboration has been largely seen as transactional, with the key commodities being wealth or influence. In an insightful reading of the positionality of a revolutionary-turned-approver, Aparna Vaidik has demonstrated that 'literature on revolutionary nationalists tends to posit a martyr-traitor binary, the latter category reserved for those characters—the Indian police, intelligence officers, and other functionaries who collaborated with the Raj—who are held culpable for the very deaths that martyrology celebrates'.[18] I am interested in further complicating this binary by highlighting some of the ways in which, by the interwar years, there were some employees of the Raj who were covertly collaborating with the revolutionaries, while maintaining an outward show of loyalty. Many of these people likely did so as a means of finding a balance between acting on their covert political sentiments on the one hand with the need to retain their livelihood on the other. Nonetheless, it signals that their withdrawal from working for the colonial state was processual rather than immediate, and that colonial institutions could be subtly undermined from within.

[15] Arnold, *Police Power*, p. 201.

[16] See the discussion in 'Publicity and Propaganda to Counteract the Hostile Propaganda of the Congress', File No. 35, Home Political, 1928, National Archives of India, New Delhi (henceforth NAI). On attempts to counteract flagging police morale in the face of attempted assassinations through the courts, see Lord Irwin, Letter to W. W. Benn dated 20 February 1930, in 'Repression of Disorder', File No. IOR/L/PO/6/65 (ii), India Office Records, British Library, London (Henceforth BL), p. 152. For a discussion on the merits of bestowing honours rather than financial rewards on Indian police to retain their morale, see M. C. Chelmsford, Memo dated 31 March 1934, 'Claim of the Punjab Authorities', File No. 31/11, Home Department, Police Branch, 1934, NAI.

[17] See Maclean, *A Revolutionary History*, Chapter 4.

[18] Vaidik, 'History of a Renegade Revolutionary', p. 217.

A reading of memoirs, jail writings, visual sources and oral history interviews contributed by former prisoners turns up significant undercurrents of subversive activities which are revealing of cracks in the mechanisms of colonial control. There are obvious methodological problems in relying on 'self-documentation'; in this case, the assertions of actors desiring to be read as nationalists and revolutionaries in oral history interviews and memoirs. Indeed, there is no shortage of activists who came forward to proclaim revolutionary connections.[19] However there is also extensive evidence in the colonial archive that suggests an awareness and anxiety of widespread nationalist sensibilities 'infecting' the coercive services, which, taken together, suggest a pattern.

Without discounting the extent of violence in the coercive system, I suggest that in the interwar period, there was a significant shift taking place among many Indians who worked for the Raj, which indicates an emerging crisis of collaboration. This reading emerges especially from oral history interviews and memoirs of revolutionaries connected to the HSRA, and others who were subjected to the colonial disciplinary network during the Civil Disobedience movement. Although I rely on evidence from Congress prisoners as well, my focus will be on the revolutionaries, who were classed as criminals and as such were subject to harsher treatment in prisons. This evidence indicates that there was a growth of nationalist sentiment among some Indian employees of coercive institutions of the Raj that led them to undermine the institutions they ostensibly worked for.

Although I will centre my argument on Indian police and prison workers, there are more visible cases at play as well, particularly in the courtroom. The revolutionaries of the HSRA convicted in the Lahore Conspiracy Case were technically guilty but sought to be acknowledged as political prisoners critiquing the violence of colonialism. They sought to protract the court proceedings using legal means to gain public attention for their critique of the British, via daily press reportage. Three of the revolutionaries, including Bhagat Singh, represented themselves therefore were able to cross-examine witnesses personally, and at length, in the courtroom.[20] Other delay tactics included calling 607 prosecution witnesses; by intermittently hunger-striking in protest over prison conditions; and by disrupting proceedings by singing revolutionary songs and shouting slogans.[21]

Frustrated at the slow progress of the trial of the Lahore Conspiracy Case in the courtroom, and anxious about the public attention and popularity that the revolutionaries were attracting, the Government of India passed a Special Ordinance on 1 May 1930 to expeditiously try the accused by a Special Tribunal, drawing on

[19] Elam and Maclean, 'Who Is a Revolutionary?', p. 113.

[20] *Ibid*., p. 113.

[21] See the longer list of tactics employed by the revolutionaries in H. W. Emerson, Letter to H. G. Haig dated 2 March 1930, in 'Difficulty in Proceeding with the Lahore Conspiracy Case', File No. 172, 1930, Home Political, 1930, NAI.

Section 72 of the Government of India Act (1919).[22] This was challenged by the revolutionaries' defence, because according to Section 72, this measure was only justifiable during a state of emergency.[23] This was, of course, a matter of interpretation; however, as Durba Ghosh has argued with reference to the suppression of revolutionaries in Bengal, the sense of emergency requiring exceptional legislation 'never ended'.[24] A Special Tribunal comprised of three High Court Judges was appointed with the aim of expediting the proceedings.

The sole Indian judge appointed to the first Special Tribunal was Justice Syed Agha Haider.[25] Haider wrote a note of dissent against Justice Coldstream's decision to handcuff the revolutionaries in court, after a shoe was thrown at a witness, Jai Gopal, who was giving evidence against them.[26] Shiv Verma, one of the undertrials present that day in the court, recalled that he and his colleagues had appealed to Haider when they were beaten and handcuffed: 'You are the only Indian judge here; at least we expected better from you'.[27] Newspapers of the day also record that Bhagat Singh had specifically called out to 'the Indian judge' to resign in protest.[28] In his oral history interview decades later, Verma disclosed that he believed that the government advocate Qalandar Ali Khan had been sent to bribe Haider with the offer of a knighthood if he would 'stop cross examining witnesses', which Haider refused.[29] Haider's advocacy for the revolutionaries was such that they thought of him as 'their proxy "defence council"'.[30] Noorani records that the rift between Haider and his European colleagues became public, and that when Haider continued to work according to his conscience, he was dropped from the Special Tribunal, and replaced by a more compliant judge.[31] When the final judgment of death was handed down, it was defended on the grounds that the decision was unanimous.[32]

The case of Haider is instructive: he was appointed to speedily exact a sentence on the revolutionaries, not to exercise his own judgement of the case at hand.

[22] *The Gazette of India* (Extraordinary), 1 May 1930, in 'Difficulty in Proceeding with the Lahore Conspiracy Case', File No. 172, Home Political, 1930, NAI.

[23] 'Promulgation of the Lahore Conspiracy Ordinance "Ultra Vires" and "Ill-advised"', *Tribune*, 21 June 1930.

[24] Ghosh, *Gentlemanly Terrorists*, p. 18.

[25] Justice Haider's name is variably spelled in archival and newspaper sources as Haidar, Hyder and Haider. I will use the last of these for the sake of consistency.

[26] Proceedings of the Lahore Conspiracy Case, Vol. 1, 1930, Private Reading Room, NAI, p. 43. Noorani, *Trial of Bhagat Singh*, p. 146; Vaidik, *Revolutionaries on Trial*, p. 204; Verma, OHT, p. 128.

[27] Verma, OHT, p. 128.

[28] 'Lahore Accused Refuse to Attend Court', *Bombay Chronicle*, 14 May 1930, p. 1.

[29] Verma, OHT, p. 131.

[30] Vaidik, *Revolutionaries on Trial*, p. 206.

[31] Noorani, *Trial of Bhagat Singh*, p. 157; *Tribune*, 22 June 1930.

[32] Home Department, Telegram to Commissioner, Sind dated 25 March 1931, 'Regarding Demonstrations in Connection with the Execution of Bhagat Singh, Sukh Dev and Rajguru', File 4/21, Home Political, NAI.

Simply put, collaborators were supposed to collaborate. As a result, the resistance described below was necessarily covert, surfacing largely in the postcolonial period, when the risk of abrupt loss of employment and persecution decreased. These stories emerge from memories recalling a time when the coercive services were strained by an influx of revolutionaries as the Government of India sought to control a surge of political violence, and of Congress-affiliated prisoners who were arrested during the Civil Disobedience movement (1930–34). Civil Disobedience is also a time when complaints and investigations about police brutalities reached their peak.[33] This is not something that can be overlooked, even as the cases described below provide a complicated picture. At the very same time as some officers upheld cruel regimes of coercion, there were other Indian police and prison workers who were able to subtly undermine aspects of the colonial coercive network, by corrupting its official procedures.

Existing studies of the police and the prison system indicate long histories of transactional corruption that permeated both institutions. In his book about the operations of Indian prisons in the nineteenth century, David Arnold describes the extent to which the colonial prison was 'honeycombed from within by laxity and ineptitude, by evasion and intrigue' with 'ill-paid and corrupt subordinates' profiting from regimes of smuggling, extortion and domination.[34] What is different in this period, I suggest, is that a creeping economy of nationalist sentiment was beginning to shape behaviours in a coercive network that was patently becoming less defensible. As Noorani has shown, the trial of the Lahore Conspiracy Case was conducted in legally questionable ways, exposing, in the words of one observer in the court, 'the hollowness of the so-called British justice' system.[35] I therefore want to make an argument for a morphing in the nature of the class of functionaries—usually dismissed as collaborators—in the interwar period, and suggest that these acts constitute a form of subversion of the colonial state. Resisting the state while working for the state therefore emerges as a form of protest against deeply unjust administrative procedures in the coercive network. This was a response to a deep lack of trust in the colonial institutions themselves, but also a response to the propaganda, actions of the revolutionaries, and the long-standing calls of the Indian National Congress to not cooperate with the Raj.

This discussion will have implications for old debates about collaboration with the colonial state.[36] The term 'collaborator' has long been set aside as too one-dimensional, in favour of models of resistance to colonial rule. The work of James C. Scott in particular has highlighted the ways in which those who seem on the

[33] The literature on this is extensive. See for example R. Reynolds, 'India Calling', London, 1930, in 'Allegations of Excesses against Police in India', File IOR/L/PJ/7/24, BL; Arnold, *Police Power and Colonial Rule*, pp. 186–204; Ramaswamy and Bhatnagar, 'Light Writing on the Lathi Raj', 2022.

[34] Arnold, 'The Colonial Prison', pp. 151–54.

[35] J. Gupta, interviewed by S. L. Manchanda, 10 May 1978, Acc. No. 346, OHT, NMML, p. 55.

[36] Seal, *The Emergence of Indian Nationalism*.

surface to be complicit with colonial regimes frequently harbour complex hidden transcripts of opposition.[37] A similar process can be discerned in the behaviour of at least some Indian members of the police and the prison system. Given the extent of the reliance of the colonial state on the violence of the coercive network in recent histories of colonialism, signs of its erosion from within are significant.

The instances I discuss in this article demonstrate that Indian employees working for British coercive institutions directed their labours in ways that ameliorated the revolutionaries' experiences. Surviving revolutionaries tell of instances of active sympathy shown to the three revolutionaries condemned to death, which implies that a subversion of police and prison practices functioned to ameliorate their daily conditions and to build their morale even in the face of oppressive and intolerable conditions. Some of these instances constituted doing nothing—merely turning a blind eye to the contravention of rules and regulations. This is less significant than actively enabling the infiltration of contraband into and out of the prison, of which there is much evidence. There were instances of sympathy and collusion in the mundane operations of the jail, but also in the ways in which the police operated (or declined to operate), most notably at the lower levels of operation, which were within the scope of Indian officials. What I am arguing therefore, is that while at the macro level, the institutions of state coercive power were dangerously oppressive, wielding the power of life and death, there were significant instances of the subversion of authority at a micro-level, almost entirely enacted and overseen by Indian functionaries, who had become covertly nationalist.

The Colonial Police

As one of the most publicly prominent coercive arms of the state, the police were the special object of HSRA plotting. The assassination of Saunders on 17 December 1928 by Bhagat Singh, Rajguru and Chandra Shekhar Azad in Lahore was aimed at sending a message to the British that police brutality—in this instance lathi charges against Congress workers protesting against the Simon Commission on 30 October 1928, which led to the death of Lala Lajpat Rai on 17 November 1928—would be 'answered'.[38] As Durga Das Khanna reflected, if an elderly leader like Rai 'could be manhandled in that way, then Gandhiji, Jawaharlal, Motilal and other leaders could also be handled in the same way'.[39] In this reading, the HSRA was concerned

[37] Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*.

[38] See, for example, the letter by Sukhdev, which he had written prior to sentencing in October 1930, discovered by the British and released on 26 March 1931, to counter widespread doubts about Sukhdev's complicity in the Lahore Conspiracy Case. Sukhdev, Letter to 'Bhaiya', translated in 'Lahore Conspiracy Case', File No. IOR/P/PJ/6/1972, India Office Records, 1972, BL, pp. 15–19. See Moffat, *India's Revolutionary Inheritance*, p. 78.

[39] Khanna, OHT, p. 70.

that the Congress's stated policy of non-violence had rendered its workers vulnerable to police brutality. The HSRA aimed to address this by injecting the fear of reprisal into the police force.[40]

What has perhaps been under-emphasised in this narrative is that the HSRA also made special appeals to the people of Lahore to refrain from passing information to the police. In their proclamations posted around the town declaring responsibility for the assassination of Saunders, readers were specifically 'requested to abstain from offering any sort of assistance to our enemies the police in finding out any clue. Anybody acting contrarily will be severely dealt with'.[41] Reprisal attacks against the police who investigated the case were carried out by splinter groups, such as the Atashi Chakkar, which attempted to bomb the home of Superintendent Khan Bahadur Abdul Aziz, who had taken the lead in the case investigating the revolutionaries in Lahore on 4 October 1930.[42] Durga Devi Vohra took part in the shooting of a British policeman, one Sergeant Taylor and his wife, in Bombay a few days later, on 8 October 1930, although this was somewhat opportunistic, as her original target had been the Governor of Punjab.[43] Both of these attacks, however, took place in contravention of HSRA policy, which was that assassinations were to be resorted to minimally and strategically, targeting problematic colonial individuals rather than institutions as a whole.[44] For example, Chandrashekhar Azad's shooting of Channan Singh, the Indian police constable who came to assist Saunders after he was gunned down in 1928, was greatly regretted by the revolutionaries. Azad had tried to warn Channan Singh to stand down, but the latter ran after Bhagat Singh, his arms outstretched to catch him.[45] Azad attempted to fire a warning shot, hitting Singh in the groin, and he later died of his injury. After the action, Party members expressed their regret for killing both Saunders and especially Channan Singh,[46] even as they believed the act of assassination had been necessary to shift the willingness of the Raj to deploy violence against nonviolent protesters.

In March 1930 the Criminal Intelligence Department (CID) became aware of an attempt by revolutionary groups to win over 'the police and the army to their side', which they did by 'promising better prospects and treatment at the hands of a nationalist government'.[47] HSRA manifestoes indicated the importance of 'seducing the

[40] Maclean, *Revolutionary History*, p. 230; Maclean, 'On the Art of Panicking Quietly', pp. 135–67.

[41] Hindustan Socialist Republican Army, 'Notice', Acc. No. 822, 1928, Miscellaneous Collection, NMML.

[42] Director, Intelligence Bureau of the Home Department, Government of India (henceforth DIB), Report dated 16 October 1930, in 'Revolutionary Activities in India, 1929–1930', File No. IOR/L/PJ/12/389, India Office Records, BL, pp. 75–77.

[43] Maclean, *Revolutionary History*, p. 90.

[44] *Ibid*., pp. 84–86.

[45] Verma, OHT, pp. 84–85.

[46] Vaidik, *Waiting for Swaraj*, p. 121.

[47] DIB, Report dated 13 March 1930, in 'Revolutionary Activities in India, 1929–1930', File No. IOR/L/PJ/12/389, India Office Records, BL, p. 51.

army and the police' with revolutionary sensibilities, specifically naming Punjabi, Sikh, Mahratta and Rajput military personnel as particularly susceptible.[48] The refusal of the Second Division of the Eighteenth Garhwal Rifle Regiment to fire on crowds protesting the arrest of Ghaffar Khan in Peshawar on 23 April 1930 signalled to the British that nationalist sentiments had begun to infiltrate the ranks of the military, that too in a unit heretofore known for its loyalty.[49] This was so shocking to Sir Norman Bolton, the Chief Commissioner of the North-Western Provinces, that he had a nervous breakdown and was forced to retire to England.[50] A subsequent investigation into the 'mutiny' of the Garhwalis, as it was called, found that the soldiers had been demoralised by a combination of the taunting of the crowds—'that our *izzat* (honour) is no better than that of dogs'—and by seditious propaganda that had infiltrated the cantonment.[51] When questioned on 24 April 1930 by the Brigade Commander, one of the non-commissioned officers of the Garhwalis, Nk. Harak Singh, opined that 'India's army is meant to protect India against India's enemies, not for firing upon our own bhaibands (brethren) in the country'.[52] The ensuing crisis that this insubordination sparked in the Government of India led to them banning a range of 'subversive organisations' and publications, and expediting the arrests of Congress leaders.[53] The Garhwali episode buoyed many in the Congress, with Motilal Nehru reportedly advising from his deathbed, on 6 February 1931, as Gandhi was negotiating a truce with Lord Irwin: '*Garwalion ko mat bhuliega*' [do not forget the Garhwalis].[54]

More revealing, however, are some of the direct interactions between the police and revolutionaries which indicate levels of collusion. For example, an absconding HSRA worker, Durga Das Khanna, emerged from hiding to attend court during the trial of the Lahore Conspiracy Case, unable to resist the temptation of the daily courtroom drama that had been relayed in newspapers. In his oral history testimony, Khanna recalled that Bhagat Singh caught his eye and hissed that he was a fool to come, and that he should leave immediately. A Sikh Deputy Superintendent overheard the exchange, and he turned to Khanna, saying: 'Well, your leader is giving you sound advice. I am not going to take any action. I would also advise you to leave at once'.[55] Khanna did, and so remained free a little longer.

[48] Bhagat Singh (attributed to), 'Our Opportunity', in 'Revolutionary Activities in India, 1932', File No. IOR/L/PJ/12/391, India Office Records, undated (c. early 1931), BL, p. 55.

[49] Lord Irwin, Letter to King George V, dated 30 April 1930, Halifax Papers, Mss Eur C 152/2, European Manuscripts, BL. See also Shah, 'The 1930 Civil Disobedience Movement in Peshawar Valley', p. 102.

[50] Maclean, 'The Art of Panicking Quietly', p. 148.

[51] See the text from the interrogation of the Garhwal Rifles in 'Insubordination, Mutiny of the 2/18 Garhwal Rifles', File No. IOR/L/MIL/7/7282, India Office Records, 1931, BL, p. 106.

[52] *Ibid*., p. 215.

[53] Maclean, 'The Art of Panicking Quietly', p. 148.

[54] B. C. Lal, interviewed by H. D. Sharma, 20 June 1969, Acc. No. 637, OHT, NMML, p. 11.

[55] Khanna, OHT, p. 27.

Similarly, Shiv Verma, an HSRA worker from the United Provinces who had helped to orchestrate the bombing of the Assembly, revealed an interesting exchange in his oral history testimony. Verma was arrested on 13 April 1929 in Saharanpur, where he, Gaya Prasad and Jaidev Kapoor had rented a house.[56] Tipped off by the Collector of the arrival of the revolutionaries, who stood out in the town as complete outsiders, the Deputy Superintendent of Police (DSP) organised a raid at 6 am, taking with him 'the Kotwal, 2 or 3 sub inspectors and 8 constables'.[57] The arrest was a dramatic one: bursting into the house, the DSP confronted Shiv Verma and Jaidev Kapoor. Verma leapt to his feet, seizing a bomb from an attaché case, and threatened to hurl it at the DSP.[58] After a scuffle, Verma was arrested, and 'three revolvers and cartridges, (including empty cases of a Mauser pistol), six live bomb shells and three bomb shells' were recovered.[59] In his oral history testimony, Verma remembered that after his arrest, the Kotwal asked him why he had not shot him, to which Verma responded:

> 'Well, we are out to shoot the British. We are not here to shoot our brothers. After all what purpose will be served by shooting you?' This somehow went down his throat and the Kotwal immediately sat down on the ground. He said: 'We are dogs and the dog's life does not carry any value. You are out for your country. Why did you spare us? We were only told that some cocaine smugglers are there and we were brought under that impression.'… Now even those police constables then literally began weeping. One fellow even went so far as to say: 'I am prepared to remove your handcuffs and if you can go out, go out and we shall bear the consequences.'[60]

It is significant that the Indian police members had been deliberately misinformed about the nature of their task. This suggests that their supervisors knew that they might have a lurking respect for revolutionaries, which could inhibit their enthusiasm for the task of capturing them. Although Verma and Kapoor both declined the opportunity to escape, the exchange earned Verma the respect of the Kotwal. Verma was taken into custody and put in solitary confinement for 24 hours.[61] By the time he was questioned by Peel, the CID officer in charge of the investigations in the Assembly Bomb Case brought from Delhi, he had decided that the best strategy was for him to claim responsibility for everything, in the hope that at least Kapoor

[56] A. Fryer, 'Weekly Report on the Assembly Bomb Case', 17 May 1929, in 'Mr Petrie's Note dated 25/5/1929 on the further investigation into the Delhi Bomb Outrage' (Henceforth, 'Mr Petrie's Note')., File No.192, Home Political, 1929, NAI.

[57] The names of those in the raiding party are given as Mr Danial, Irshad Ahmad, Sheikh Sher Ali, Chaudhury Raghbir Singh, Shabbir Hussain Khan, S. Bane Hassan, Thakur Kehar Singh and Naik Mohd Yasin. See 'Recovery from the House of Shiv Varma and Jai Dev Kapur at Saharanpur', in Wariach and Jain, *The Hanging of Bhagat Singh*, Vol. 3, p. 99.

[58] Collector of Saharanpur, Telegram to J. P. Thompson dated 13 May 1929, in 'Mr Petrie's Note'.

[59] Fryer, 'Weekly Report on the Assembly Bomb Case'.

[60] Verma, OHT, p. 110.

[61] *Ibid*., p. 115.

and Gaya Prasad would not be implicated.[62] He gave a statement and signed it, but was approached later in the lockup by the Kotwal, who quietly advised him not to say anything further. According to Verma, 'He said this very frankly. He said further: "You have signed at the last page. Why did you not sign every page? They will add many more things in between."'[63] This manner of giving confidential advice is quite revealing: the Kotwal subverted procedure by alerting Verma to the routine practice of interpolation into statements to secure convictions, corrupting the anticipated corruption of police evidence, as it were.

There were significant leakages in police networks which enabled the flow of information to revolutionaries throughout this period. Within days of the investigations into the bombing of the Legislative Assembly in New Delhi, this became evident, following the publication of details of the case which had not been released to the press.[64] This prompted the advice in the early stages of the investigation into the bombing of the Legislative Assembly, that in 'an investigation of this nature, often the less put on paper the better'.[65] The Secretary of the Home Department, Haig, responded to defend the Intelligence Bureau officers working on the case: they were members of the Imperial Police, and so unlikely to reveal information.[66]

It emerged decades later from an oral history interview that the source of the leaks was a police inspector in Delhi, Sardar Chet Singh, who was daily debriefing the journalist for the *Hindustan Times*, Chaman Lal, himself a revolutionary worker.[67] There were many other lively networks which kept absconding revolutionaries warned about imminent arrests, giving them the opportunity to stay ahead of police movements.[68] Many of these were related to larger social and kinship networks that policemen were embedded in and more loyal to.[69] In his oral history interview, for example, Durga Das Khanna recounted that a prison functionary, Khan Sahib Khairuddin, allowed him to call his uncle from the prison to warn him that the police were coming to interview him, enabling the pair to synchronise their statements.[70]

[62] *Ibid.*, p. 116.

[63] *Ibid.*, p. 117.

[64] Maclean, *Revolutionary History*, p. 66.

[65] J. P. Thompson to H. G. Haig, Letter dated 1 May 1929, in 'Mr Petrie's Note', pp. 44–45.

[66] H. G. Haig, Letter to J. P. Thompson dated 3 May 1929, in *Ibid.,* pp. 40–41.

[67] B. C. Lal, interviewed by U. Shanker, 19 August 1976, Interview No. 210, OHC, CSAS, p. 18.

[68] L. F. Chand, interviewed by U. Shanker, 28 April 1972, Interview No. 205, OHC, CSAS, p. 57. When he was hiding out in Jhansi, Azad was warned on several occasions by 'someone working inside the CID office' that an arrest was imminent. Verma, OHT, pp. 100, 104. It was his uncanny ability to predict raids that earned Azad the moniker 'Quicksilver'. See Maclean, 'The Embodiment of Quicksilver'.

[69] Raj Chandavarkar demonstrated how police embeddedness in personal, social, caste and kinship groups undermines the view of 'the colonial police as a "monolithic" instrument of coercion'. Chandavarkar, *Imperial Power and Popular Politics*, p. 181. For an insightful discussion on scholarly debates about the powers of the police and by extension, the colonial state, see Kidambi, *The Making of an Indian Metropolis*, pp. 116–17.

[70] Khanna, OHT, p. 56.

Lala Feroze Chand, the editor of *Bande Mataram*, the first newspaper to publish photographs of Bhagat Singh and B. K. Dutt, was questioned by a friend of his father, Gopal Singh, whom he had known since his childhood as 'Uncle'.[71] The interrogator and the suspect played their respective roles; 'he had his duty to do, and I had also my code of professional ethics', recalled Chand. In the course of the discussion, however, Singh told Chand that one of the arrested—Sukhdev—had given a statement to police, and so there was no point in Chand defending him any further. 'I listened to all this quietly and firmly I stood my ground. I said whatever happened I was not going to name my source; if they knew the source already, they need not bother me any more about it'.[72] Chand then used this information to warn a young revolutionary, Hansraj Vohra, about his impending arrest.[73] This was likely not Gopal Singh's intention; yet it reveals a weakness in the British reliance on Indian inspectors, whose imbrication in family and local networks worked to undermine the process of investigation in intelligence and in policing.

Many of the events described above happened in 1929, a year prior to the launch of the Civil Disobedience movement. Similar subversions can be found during the movement itself, as a great burden lay on the Indian police constables to do the work of dispersing crowds of disobedient subjects with lathi charges. An oral history testimony recorded in 1970 with N. R. Phatak, for example, tells of Indian policemen smacking the ground with their lathis:

> I found, on certain occasions, the police when the officers were not nearby, used to strike their lathis on the ground instead of on the bodies of the volunteers or on other persons. The police generally gave me the reply that 'We have to do it on account of orders, and that we get the pay and that we don't like this work, and, on the other hand, we are asked by our household people sometimes mothers, sometimes sisters, sometimes wives: "How many people have you beaten to-day?". And we were ashamed we could not give an answer. Sometimes we did not have a taste for food even, after doing this work.' This was the feeling that the ordinary policeman expressed. The officers also sometimes told, who were very intimate with me, that they had to do this work. And one officer, not only one but three or four – some of them are now big, in very high positions – they told me that 'instead of the Government, if the Congress people give us half the money … we shall serve the Congress very faithfully.' This was the feeling of the officers, as I told you.[74]

Sumathi Ramaswamy and Avrati Bhatnagar also observe, in photographs of police and satyagrahis in Bombay in 1930, the 'hesitation on the part of a native constable—most likely hailing from the humble end of the class and caste

[71] Chand, OHT, p. 54. This is the same Gopal Singh who was photographed interviewing a young Bhagat Singh in prison in 1926. See Nijhar, 'Bhagat Singh ki chori-chhipe khinche gaya chitra', p. 51.

[72] Chand, OHT, p. 54.

[73] *Ibid*., p. 57.

[74] N. R. Phatak, interviewed by U. Shanker, 4 September 1970, Interview No. 130, OHC, CSAS, p. 2.

spectrum'—to take action against protesting women, pointing to the 'overlapping gender, class and race contradictions captured' in the movement.[75] Nationalist imagery demonised, quite literally, the police personnel who brutalised satyagrahis (Figure 1), depicting them as *rakshasas*, blackened against a sea of khadi-wearing protesters scrambling to the temple of Swarajya.

Nationalist Economies in the Prison

The colonial prison is frequently imagined as an uncompromising mechanism of punishment, discipline and control in the Raj, and after the mass imprisonments following the Civil Disobedience and Quit India movements, it became seen as a 'symbol of the suffering of the Indian people'.[76] Narratives of Bhagat Singh's time in jail, from 8 April 1929 until his execution on 23 March 1931, ultimately uphold this picture. However, as Ujjwal Kumar Singh argues, prisons were 'not merely a site of colonial domination…[but] areas of nationalist resistance'.[77] David Arnold argues that Indian prison systems contained 'abundant evidence of resistance and evasion', indicative of weak models of control.[78] My own research, based on an examination of memoirs, jail writings, visual sources and oral history interviews contributed by surviving prisoners, indicates that similar patterns of prison habitus remained in the 1930s, albeit with a significant difference. The colonial prison remained porous and was beset by a range of subversive behaviours enabled by prison workers, but this could sometimes be seen to be operating according to what might be described as an economy of nationalist sentiment, as opposed to a purely rent-seeking economy of extraction and self-interest, although pockets of this remained. It was due to the porousness of the colonial prison, for example, that Bhagat Singh's jail notes and other writings were smuggled out of prison, and party manifestoes sent to him for his approval and feedback, in contravention of rules governing the correspondence of inmates classed as criminals.[79] This subversion enabled Bhagat Singh to follow developments in the press and to make contributions to his corpus of writings, intervening not only in party discussions but public ones as well.[80]

[75] Bhatnagar and Ramaswamy, 'Light Writing on the Lathi Raj', p. 13. For similar photographs suggesting the disengagement of some Indian police from the same album held in the Alkazi Collection in New Delhi, see examples in Bhatnagar and Ramaswamy, *Words of Light on the Streets of Disobedience*, especially Image 2.19.

[76] Sherman, *State Violence and Punishment in India*, p. 46.

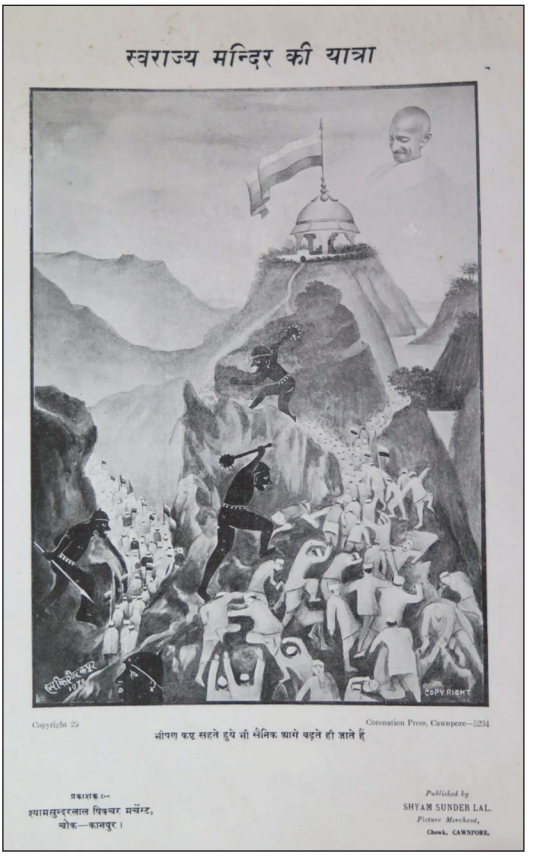
[77] Singh, *Political Prisoners in India*, p. 108.

[78] Arnold, 'The Colonial Prison'; Campion, 'The United Provinces Police', p. 219.

[79] Maclean, 'Returning Insurgency to the Archive'.

[80] Consider his response to the editor of the *Modern Review*'s criticism of revolutionary politics, published as 'Long Live Revolution', *Tribune*, 24 December 1929, p. 2. On Bhagat Singh's corpus of writings, see Moffat, 'Bhagat Singh's Corpse'.

Figure 1. Roop Kishore Kapoor, 'Swarajya Mandir ki Yatra', Kanpur, Shyam Sundar Lal Publishers, 1930.



Source: Author's collection.

While there were undoubtedly brutal jailors in the prison system,[81] some of the Lahore Conspiracy Case convicts recalled sympathetic jailors with fondness and even gratitude. Jaidev Kapoor reported that Bhagat Singh's character was such that he was

[81] See, for example, the Visapur Jail Enquiry Report of 1930, which details terrible jail conditions, and concludes that the treatment meted out to prisoners was itself 'an essay in terrorism'. See 'Visapur Jail Enquiry Report of 1930', *Congress Bulletin*, No. 12, 5 August 1930, File No. G-32/1930, All India Congress Committee Papers, NMML. See also the reports of the treatment of political prisoners in the *Pratap*, abstracted in *Note on the Press*, United Provinces, 20 November 1930, File No. IOR/L/R/5/99, India Office Records, BL.

> …so much loved by the rank and file of the jail administration by his charming and loving nature. They used to carry out and bring in messages for him. Some of them were even ready to serve him with all of their resources. Though he was in jail, he was, as a matter of fact, almost a free person to do whatever he liked there. Khan Saheb Mohammad Akbar Khan, the then Jailor of Central Jail Lahore respected him very much. He gave all the facilities to him which he could.[82]

Khan defied jail procedures which mandated that condemned prisoners be handcuffed at all times when outside the cell.[83] Jaidev Gupta, a close friend of Bhagat Singh's who visited him frequently in the Central Jail, noted that Khan never interfered in the discussions they had in prison, and that on one occasion Khan Saheb 'was cursing government service, that he had to be tough with such young men who were fighting for the freedom of the country. He was a man of that type'.[84]

Bhagat Singh became so close to his jailor that he refused to cooperate with an attempt to rescue him from prison as he was being transferred from the Borstal Jail in June 1930, because he did not want to betray the confidence Khan had placed in him.[85] Jaidev Kapoor also recalled the kindness of Khan,[86] who arranged for a sweeper to take those sentenced for life in the Lahore Conspiracy Case to meet Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev and Rajguru before they were transferred, giving them the opportunity for a final farewell.[87] Kapoor remembered embracing Bhagat Singh through the prison bars and exchanging their feelings on the impending death sentence, in which they shared their elation that the slogan *Inqilab Zindabad*

[82] Kapoor, OHT, p. 81.

[83] Government of Punjab, *Manual for the Superintendence and Management of Jails*, p. 268.

[84] J. Gupta, OHT, pp. 49–50.

[85] Khanna, OHT, p. 28.

[86] This is reminiscent of the complex relationship that developed between the Bengal revolutionary Trailokya Nath Chakrabarty and his British jailor Frank Lowman, insightfully discussed by Durba Ghosh in 'The Terrorist and his Jailor', pp. 102–19. Interestingly, there are parallels with the case of HSRA revolutionaries as well. Durga Das Khanna fondly remembered Gordon Walker, a District and Sessions Judge who presided over his trail for the attempted assassination of the Governor of Punjab. Walker assured Khanna and his co-accused, Ranbir and Chaman Lal Azad, that he would treat them fairly, and he gave them lunch breaks during the trial and shared cigarettes with them. Walker did award Khanna the death penalty, but made it subject to confirmation in the High Court, where the case was dismissed by Justices Harrison and Kanwar Dalip Singh. Khanna indicates that like Justice Haider, Walker was subjected to external pressure in the case, prompting him to leave India after it was over. See Khanna, OHT, pp. 47–48. Similarly, Bimal Prasad Jain noted that the Superintendent of Jail in Delhi, Major Espinall, 'was a very good man', who looked after the inmates' health, and even taught them how to play deck tennis. Espinall's decency was counteracted by one Mr Pool, who was a cruel superintendent, indeed Jain claimed that 'there was not a single punishment in the jail manual which was not given to me by Mr Pool'. B. P. Jain, interviewed by U. Shanker, 3 June 1987, Interview no. 221, OHC, CSAS, pp. 12–14.

[87] Kapoor, OHT, p. 236.

had become popularised 'in cities, towns, on roads, in schools, colleges, factories and fields'.[88]

The revolutionaries, both through their personal conduct in the prison, and through the largely sympathetic treatment that they were given in the nationalist press after their hunger strikes, won the sympathy and respect of many Indian prison warders. Durga Das Khanna, who was initially sentenced to death for his role in another attempt to assassinate Sir Geoffrey de Montmorency on 23 December 1930, recalled that after his sentence was passed, when he left the Borstal Jail to go to the condemned cell of the Lahore Central Jail:

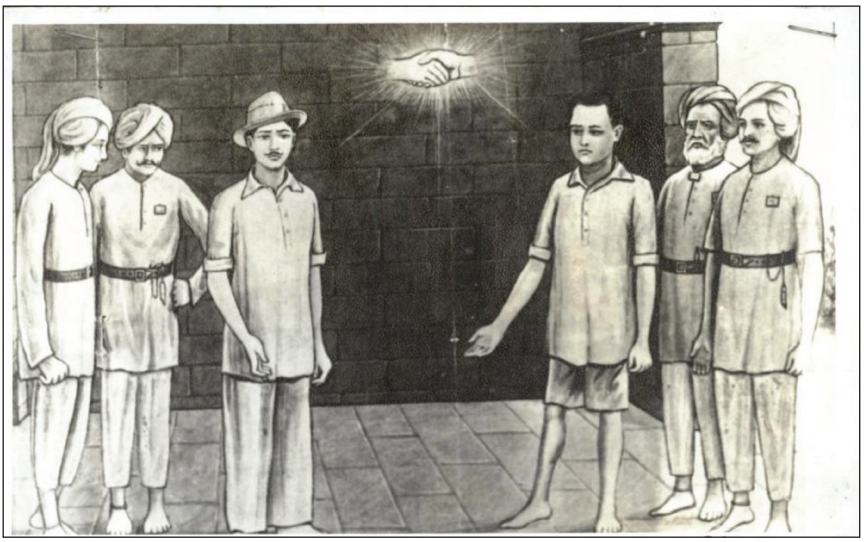
> The whole route inside the jail was lined by jail wardens on both sides. As we proceeded through the line thus formed, it was a very thrilling experience to note that every one of the wardens gave us a salute as a token of his respect for us. Even jail officials came and sympathised with us and showed their keen admiration for the bold stand we took. This is something which has remained with me as the great moment of my stay in Borstal jail.[89]

The large influx of political prisoners during the Civil Disobedience movement, when Congress workers found themselves in the same prisons as revolutionary prisoners, introduced new dynamics into the system. The colonial prison had long been reliant on the use of convict officers as labour, and they appear to have operated in similar conditions as staff guards, with special rules applying to their 'uniform, privileges, salary, selection and duties'.[90] Because the prisons became so quickly bloated with political prisoners in the course of 1930, prisons had to rely more extensively on inmates to work as prison wardens, which had the effect of weakening the regimen of the prison system. Convict warders, Michaela Dimmers argues, 'negotiated the seemingly contradictory state of having great power and being simultaneously powerless' and 'negotiated a pendulum of loyalty to the prison administration and their fellow prisoners'.[91] In Punjab's prisons, they were distinguished from paid employees by a distinctive yellow uniform.

During the Civil Disobedience movement, criminal and political prisoners were generally kept in different quarters and subjected to different rules, however 'Comrade' Ram Chandra reported that robust information mechanisms functioned through convict warders, who kept the revolutionaries informed of fresh arrests. However, he remained cautious, as he knew that some convict warders passed information back to the prison authorities. Others, however, played critical roles.[92] When Bhagat Singh was transferred to Lahore Central Jail from Mianwali, convict warders assisted in conveying messages between the two prisons. It was through convict warders that the revolutionaries were able to coordinate hunger

[88] *Ibid.*, p. 237.
[89] Khanna, OHT, p. 48.
[90] Dimmers, 'Caught in Between', pp. 237–51.
[91] *Ibid*., p. 250.
[92] Chandra, *Naujawan Bharat Sabha*, p. 100.

Figure 2. Bhagat Singh and BK Dutt meeting for a final time in prison, surrounded by prison wardens.



Source: NMML, Kulbir Singh Collection, Album 808, 36505.

strikes across three prisons in Punjab: Lahore, Mianwali and Montgomery.[93] Khanna recalled 'the respect and affection given to me by the convict wardens. They were brave people themselves and appreciated bravery in others. Their company provided a strong, an ennobling and inspiring influence'.[94] The prison warders' intervention seems to be indicated in a popular poster depicting Bhagat Singh and B. K. Dutt's final farewell, after Singh was transferred to Punjab to undergo the Lahore Conspiracy Case trial, reproduced in Figure 2.[95]

The extensive network of corruption in the prison system enabled the flow of goods, privileges and dispensations into and within the jail. Prisoners of means could resort to a system known in the prisons as '*tiggerum*', described by Diwan Chaman Lal as a suite of 'underground methods' of procuring books, writing materials, and other necessities by bribery and negotiation with prison guards.[96] Although the revolutionaries themselves did not have the means to purchase such commodities within the prison, they were the beneficiaries of an economy of admiration that flowed among the prisoners. In 1930, the editor of the *Hindustan*

[93] *Ibid*., p. 95.
[94] Khanna, OHT, p. 50.
[95] Maclean, *Revolutionary History*, p. 133.
[96] D. C. Lal, interviewed by H. Sharma and K. P. Rungachary, 7 February 1967, Acc. No. 220, OHT, NMML, p. 82.

Times, J. N. Sahni, was arrested in Delhi for making salt, and was sent to the Lahore Central Jail, where Bhagat Singh, Rajguru and Sukhdev were kept during their trial. He recalled a mechanism through which he and other A-Class prisoners could share their provisions with the revolutionaries:

> Not only fellow convicts, but also most of the jail staff had a wholesome respect for them, even more than they had for us [satyagrahis].… In due course, our convict companions worked up a secret arrangement whereby we could send them fruits, nuts and some of our own special food. We also established a secret code whereby we could be informed that the gifts had been duly received. At night they always sang patriotic songs in chorus followed by slogans like Inquilab Zindabad which almost rent the skies. Some slogans conveyed receipt. Other slogans repeated twice indicated demand for a repeat performance. It was an ingenious manner in which cream was sneaked out to them. They loved cream and apples. The barber, who went to shave them every time they were to appear in court, had a traditional metal container in which he made soap suds before shaving… he would fill up whipped cream in the container, which he would pass to them under the cover of soap suds. Many a time when rations were in short supply, we went on austerity diet ourselves, only to have the pleasure of listening to their soul-stirring slogans, which told us of the joy they felt in sharing these forbidden luxuries with us. I still treasure the fond memory of the few times they smilingly passed us giving a nod of recognition, fettered and manacled, while being escorted to the prison van.[97]

These solidarities, expressed in the form of contraband cream and exchanged for slogans of appreciation, strengthened the resolve and morale of both the revolutionaries and the satyagrahis. Suruchi Thapar-Björkert points to similar dynamics in women's prisons of the same era, in which a 'sympathetic jail matron would sometimes smuggle a newspaper inside for the prisoners to read', helping to maintain a 'collective feeling of struggle' which flowed both ways, with prisoners giving seditious literature to the warders to educate them.[98]

Conclusion: Working Against the Raj from Within

One of the consistent programmes of Congress campaigns from the interwar period onward was to exhort people to withdraw from cooperating with the Raj. Revolutionaries were deeply imbricated in Congress politics, many of them from their formative years, and they remained engaged in—even when they critiqued—Congress policies. During the Civil Disobedience movement, the two institutions of police and prisons became key sites of nationalist action, throwing anticolonial actors into provocation and confrontation with the former, and then into residence in the latter. Interfacing this dual assault was the Indian employee, as the Indianisation of the coercive services had escalated after the Great War, partly driven by

[97] Sahni, *Truth about the Indian Press*, p. 97.
[98] Thapar-Björkert, *Women in the Indian National Movement*, pp. 157, 163.

costs and a need for skilled labour, but also by an apparent lack of enthusiasm for British school-leavers for joining colonial service in India.[99] The quiet and largely unacknowledged presence of covert supporters of Indian nationalism within the ranks of coercive institutions at times assisted the advancement of anticolonial politics, subverting the institutions of the Raj from within. Of course, this meant that there were sufficient levels of cooperation to enable the Raj to endure a little longer, as the British continued to rely on Indian employees to function; but the levels of subversion detailed above are indicative of a trend towards dysfunction from within, as nationalist sentiments grew.

These narratives of covert collaboration with revolutionaries and nationalists destabilise straightforward models of collaboration. Michael Silvestri has shown how Indian police during the Non-cooperation movement cultivated nationalist sentiments and networks, even as they continued to work for the colonial state.[100] Partha Chatterjee has written of the 'secret history of Indian nationalism', in which the gradual Indianisation of the Indian courts constituted 'the dismantling of the structures of colonial rule within the institutions of the colonial state', leading to 'the transfer of power…slowly, quietly and in the end, decisively'.[101] To this we can add that at the micro-level of coercive institutions in British India, procedures were stealthily undermined by sympathetic Indian workers which would in the following decade culminate in the crisis of collaboration in British India.

Aparna Vaidik argues that anticolonial historiography has tended to focus on the heroic figures, the undisputed leaders and nationalist martyrs.[102] Those who worked for the colonial state amidst a rising tide of nationalist sentiment in the early twentieth century tend to fall off the scholarly radar. Campion argued in the early 2000s that studies of the colonial police have rarely considered the 'psychological burdens' borne by employees, rarely admitted by the actors themselves, but evidenced by high suicide rates and reflected in literary accounts, such as in George Orwell's ostensibly confessional 'Shooting an Elephant'.[103] There is extensive evidence of anticolonial actors openly taunting Indian workers for the colonial state, particularly in the heightened context of mobilisations of 1930, which can only have further pressured the forces.[104] Perhaps in these contexts, subverting procedure and taking the role of a covert nationalist helped to address the strain that such workers suffered. In what appears to have been his final essay, James C. Scott reflected on his contribution to understanding 'below the radar' resistance, urging scholars to seek:

[99] Campion, 'Authority, Accountability and Representation', p. 229.

[100] Silvestri, 'Fanatical Reverence for Gandhi', pp. 969–97.

[101] Chatterjee, *A Princely Imposter?*, p. 378.

[102] Vaidik, 'History of a Renegade Revolutionary', p. 216.

[103] Campion, 'Authority, Accountability and Representation', p. 222. On Orwell's classic story, see Tyner, 'Landscape and the Mask of Self'.

[104] Verma, OHT, p. 49.

> …a wider lens that encompasses activities of resistance and subversion that are cultural, playful, and quasi-hidden, and that also involve politics in its most important sense. In all those settings where public activity and open protest are dangerous, if not lethal, it becomes important to wrap one's differences in forms that are disguised enough that the authorities can't prosecute someone, but most of those who observe the activity understand that it has subversive content. It is the expression of agency for subjects who have very little in the way of legal protection.[105]

Perhaps there is more happening here. Many of the employees of the Raj who covertly worked against it as described above had everyday experience of the moral bankruptcy of the administration and of the daily corruption of official procedures. The Kotwal warning revolutionaries about interpolations in statements which could be used to cook evidence to enable quicker conviction; the policemen who were lied to by their superiors about taking part in a drug raid; the questionable nature of the trial proceedings, including the beating of revolutionaries in the courtroom; and the unexplained removal of an inconvenient judge: subverting these breaches of conduct—corrupting the corruption—may in this light be seen as a form of anticolonial politics. If we define corruption as 'government servant misconduct and transgression of professional norms',[106] and if the professional norms being subverted are indefensible, then we can read this form of subversion as an anticolonial politics in a nationalist economy. The decision to subvert colonial procedure then is a form of resistance to an unjust order, and a response to a deep lack of trust in colonial institutions, which demonstrated multiple obfuscations and deviations from its own stated procedures.

In this article, I have tried to draw out some of the secret alliances made between revolutionaries of the HSRA and Indian workers of the coercive forces. This is not to overlook the ongoing brutality that existed within the system, and which over-zealous Indian officers and officials took part in. Rather, it is to point to moments of subversion which boosted morale, built tentative solidarities, and buoyed anticolonial sentiments within and without ostensibly colonial institutions. I draw on the case of the HSRA revolutionaries as this pattern of covert behaviours emerged in my readings of materials about the interwar period. Many of these 'hidden transcripts' of resistance come to light in oral history interviews, of which there are so many from revolutionary workers, and some from Congress workers who were imprisoned about the same time. The Government of India was increasingly aware of the structural instability of its reliance on Indian security personnel but was unable to settle on a cogent policy to arrest the flow of nationalist sentiment to them, short of isolating them from their own families and larger societal networks. This was an impossible task.

[105] Scott, 'Intellectual Diary of an Iconoclast', p. 4.

[106] Gould, *Bureaucracy, Community, and Influence in India*, p. 4. For a nuanced discussion of evolving concepts of corruption as it pertains to the police circa 1930s–50s, see *ibid*., Chapter 4.

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