

Revolutionary Movements and Militant Nationalism

The revolutionary movements and militant nationalism in India's struggle for independence involved armed resistance and radical methods to oppose British colonial rule. Two significant aspects of this period were the **Ghadar Party** and the **Komagata Maru Incident**, both of which highlighted the intense dissatisfaction with British rule and the rise of militant nationalism among Indians abroad and in India.

1. Ghadar Party

The Ghadar Party was a revolutionary organization founded by Indian immigrants in North America, with the goal of securing India's independence from British rule through armed revolt.

Background and Formation:

- **Founding Year:** The Ghadar Party was founded in 1913 in San Francisco, USA, by a group of Indian expatriates, primarily Punjabis who were deeply influenced by the discrimination they faced in the United States and Canada, as well as by their desire to liberate India from British colonial rule.
- **Key Leaders:** The founding members included **Sohan Singh Bhakna**, **Lala Har Dayal**, **Ras Behari Bose**, and **Kartar Singh Sarabha**. They were inspired by the ideals of equality, nationalism, and revolution.
- **Ghadar Newspaper:** The party published a newspaper called "Ghadar" (meaning "rebellion" or "mutiny") to spread their message of revolt. The newspaper was published in multiple languages, including Punjabi, Hindi, Urdu, and Gujarati, and was circulated among Indians in North America, Southeast Asia, and even India.

Objectives and Ideology:

- The Ghadar Party sought to overthrow British rule in India through armed revolution.
- They were inspired by the 1857 revolt and believed in using militant tactics rather than constitutional methods to achieve independence.
- The party also aimed to create a united India where all communities, including Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs, would live together in harmony.

Activities and Impact:

- **World War I and the Ghadar Conspiracy:** The outbreak of World War I in 1914 provided an opportunity for the Ghadar Party to launch a coordinated uprising against British rule. The party hoped that the British would be weakened by the war, making India more vulnerable to a revolution.
 - Ghadar leaders made efforts to incite mutinies in the British Indian Army, particularly in Punjab and Bengal, and smuggled arms and ammunition into India.



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- The British authorities, however, managed to suppress the movement. Many Ghadar leaders were arrested, and some, like Kartar Singh Sarabha, were executed.
- **Support from Abroad:** The Ghadar movement received support from Indians living in the United States, Canada, and Southeast Asia. The movement highlighted the global nature of India's struggle for independence and the contributions of the Indian diaspora.

Legacy:

- Although the Ghadar movement did not achieve its immediate goal of toppling British rule, it played a significant role in inspiring future revolutionary activities in India.
- The Ghadar Party demonstrated the potential for organized, militant resistance to British rule and contributed to the growing sentiment that armed struggle was necessary for independence.

2. Komagata Maru Incident (1914)

The Komagata Maru incident was a pivotal event that highlighted the challenges faced by Indian immigrants under British colonial rule, particularly in Canada, and the rise of militant nationalism as a response to discrimination and oppression.

Background:

- The **Komagata Maru** was a Japanese steamship that sailed from Hong Kong to Vancouver, Canada, in 1914, carrying 376 passengers, mostly Sikhs from Punjab, who were seeking to immigrate to Canada.
- At that time, Canada had implemented racist immigration policies that aimed to restrict the entry of non-European immigrants, including Indians, who were British subjects.
 - One such law was the **Continuous Journey Regulation**, which required that immigrants arrive in Canada directly from their country of origin. This regulation effectively barred Indian immigrants, as there were no direct ships from India to Canada.

The Incident:

- The Komagata Maru arrived in Vancouver on May 23, 1914, but the passengers were not allowed to disembark due to Canada's immigration policies.
- The ship was anchored in Vancouver's harbor for two months while legal battles and negotiations took place. The Canadian authorities refused entry to most of the passengers, citing the Continuous Journey Regulation.
- After a prolonged standoff, the ship was forced to return to India on July 23, 1914.



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Return to India and Aftermath:

- When the Komagata Maru reached Calcutta (now Kolkata) in September 1914, the British authorities, fearing the passengers might foment revolutionary activities, attempted to arrest them.
- A confrontation ensued at Budge Budge, near Calcutta, in which 20 passengers were killed and many others were arrested.
- The incident galvanized nationalist sentiment among Indians, particularly Punjabis, and further fueled the activities of revolutionary groups like the Ghadar Party.

Significance and Impact:

- The Komagata Maru incident became a symbol of the racial discrimination faced by Indians abroad and the injustices of British colonial rule.
- The incident fueled anti-British sentiments among Indians, especially in Punjab, and contributed to the rise of militant nationalism.
- It also brought global attention to the plight of Indian immigrants and their treatment under British colonial policies.

Both the Ghadar Party and the Komagata Maru incident were significant in the broader context of India's revolutionary movements and militant nationalism. They demonstrated the growing radicalism among Indian nationalists and the willingness to adopt armed resistance against British rule. These events also underscored the global dimensions of India's independence struggle, as Indian expatriates and immigrants played crucial roles in challenging colonial oppression both in India and abroad.

Bhagat Singh and the Hindustan Socialist Republican Association (HSRA) were central figures in India's revolutionary movement during the 1920s, symbolizing the shift towards militant nationalism and the fight for India's independence through radical means.

1. Bhagat Singh: Life and Ideology

Bhagat Singh was a revolutionary freedom fighter whose actions and ideas left a profound impact on India's struggle for independence. He became a symbol of courage, self-sacrifice, and the youth's determination to fight against British rule.

Early Life:

- **Birth:** Bhagat Singh was born on September 28, 1907, in the village of Banga, in present-day Pakistan, to a family deeply involved in the freedom struggle. His father, Kishan Singh, and his uncle, Ajit Singh, were active in the fight against British rule.
- **Influence of Jallianwala Bagh Massacre:** The Jallianwala Bagh massacre of 1919 deeply affected Bhagat Singh, intensifying his hatred for British rule and strengthening his resolve to fight for India's independence.



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- **Education and Radicalization:** Bhagat Singh was educated in Lahore, where he was exposed to revolutionary ideas, socialist literature, and the writings of Marx, Lenin, and other communist thinkers. This laid the foundation for his belief in socialism as a means to achieve true freedom for India.

Revolutionary Activities:

- **Involvement in the Naujawan Bharat Sabha:** Bhagat Singh became an active member of the Naujawan Bharat Sabha, an organization focused on mobilizing the youth against British rule through political activism and social reform.
- **Role in the Hindustan Republican Association (HRA):** Bhagat Singh initially joined the Hindustan Republican Association (HRA), a revolutionary group committed to overthrowing British rule through armed struggle. The HRA was founded by prominent revolutionaries like **Ram Prasad Bismil, Ashfaqulla Khan, and Chandrasekhar Azad.**

2. Hindustan Socialist Republican Association (HSRA)

The HRA was later reorganized and renamed the **Hindustan Socialist Republican Association (HSRA)** in 1928, reflecting its shift towards socialist ideals and its commitment to achieving independence through armed revolution and establishing a socialist republic in India.

Formation and Ideology:

- **Socialist Leanings:** The HSRA was founded on the principles of socialism, with the belief that India's struggle for independence was not just against British imperialism but also against the social and economic inequalities present in Indian society. The group sought to create a classless society after independence.
- **Key Leaders:** Bhagat Singh, Chandrasekhar Azad, Sukhdev Thapar, Rajguru, and Bhagwati Charan Vohra were prominent leaders of the HSRA. These leaders were committed to radical action against the British and aimed to inspire the masses to rise against colonial rule.

Major Activities:

- **Kakori Conspiracy (1925):** One of the early acts of the HRA, before its reformation as the HSRA, was the **Kakori train robbery** in 1925. The group looted government funds from a train in Kakori to finance their revolutionary activities. Several key leaders, including Ram Prasad Bismil and Ashfaqulla Khan, were arrested and later executed for their involvement.
- **Lahore Conspiracy Case:**
 - **Saunders' Assassination (1928):** In response to the death of **Lala Lajpat Rai**, who succumbed to injuries from police brutality during a protest against the Simon Commission, Bhagat Singh and Rajguru assassinated **John**



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Saunders, a British police officer, on December 17, 1928, in Lahore. Although their target was James A. Scott, the police superintendent responsible for the lathi charge on Lajpat Rai, they mistakenly killed Saunders.

- **Escape and Activities:** After the assassination, Bhagat Singh and his comrades managed to evade arrest for a few months by disguising themselves. During this period, they continued their revolutionary activities.
- **Bombing of the Central Legislative Assembly (1929):** On April 8, 1929, Bhagat Singh and **Batukeshwar Dutt** threw non-lethal bombs in the Central Legislative Assembly in Delhi to protest against the repressive Public Safety Bill and the Trade Disputes Bill. The bombs were deliberately thrown in a way that would not cause casualties, and the intent was to make a statement against British colonial policies. After the bombing, Bhagat Singh and Dutt were arrested.

Trial and Execution:

- **Lahore Conspiracy Case Trial:** Bhagat Singh, Rajguru, and Sukhdev were tried for their involvement in the assassination of Saunders and other revolutionary activities. The trial was marked by widespread protests and demands for their release.
- **Martyrdom:** Despite nationwide efforts to save them, Bhagat Singh, Rajguru, and Sukhdev were executed on March 23, 1931, in Lahore. Bhagat Singh was just 23 years old at the time of his execution. Their martyrdom was a turning point in India's freedom struggle, and they were celebrated as heroes and martyrs by millions of Indians.

Bhagat Singh's Legacy:

- **Revolutionary Ideals:** Bhagat Singh's ideas on socialism, anti-imperialism, and secularism continue to influence political and social movements in India. He envisioned a free India where not only British rule but also social inequalities would be eradicated.
- **Martyrdom:** Bhagat Singh's sacrifice inspired a generation of freedom fighters and is remembered as a symbol of resistance against oppression. His defiance in the face of colonial power and his call for a revolution reverberated across the country, making him an enduring icon of India's struggle for independence.
- **Influence on Youth:** Bhagat Singh's emphasis on youth involvement in the freedom struggle inspired a wave of revolutionary activities across India. His legacy continues to motivate young Indians to fight for justice and equality.

Bhagat Singh and the HSRA represent the radical and militant phase of India's independence movement. Their actions were driven by the belief that only through direct confrontation with the British regime could India achieve freedom. Bhagat Singh's intellectual contributions, combined with his revolutionary activities, left an indelible mark on India's history, ensuring his place as one of the most celebrated and revered freedom fighters of the Indian independence movement.



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Surya Sen and Chandrasekhar Azad were two of the most prominent revolutionary leaders who made significant contributions to India's struggle for independence. Their daring actions, dedication, and willingness to sacrifice their lives for the cause of freedom have made them iconic figures in Indian history. Both leaders were involved in armed resistance against British rule, and their activities inspired many young Indians to join the revolutionary movement.

1. Surya Sen (Masterda)

Surya Sen, popularly known as "Masterda," was a revolutionary leader from Bengal. He is best known for his leadership in the **Chittagong Armoury Raid** in 1930, which was one of the most audacious and significant acts of armed resistance against British colonial rule.

Early Life and Ideology:

- **Birth:** Surya Sen was born on March 22, 1894, in the village of Noapara in present-day Bangladesh.
- **Influence of the Swadeshi Movement:** Surya Sen was deeply influenced by the Swadeshi movement during the partition of Bengal in 1905, which ignited his nationalist sentiments. He became involved in revolutionary activities while still a student.
- **Role as a Teacher:** As a school teacher in Chittagong, he earned the nickname "Masterda." His teaching profession allowed him to spread nationalist ideas among young students and the youth in general.

Revolutionary Activities:

- **Association with Anushilan Samiti:** Surya Sen was closely associated with the Anushilan Samiti, a revolutionary organization in Bengal. He believed in the use of armed struggle as a means to achieve independence and began organizing the youth in Chittagong for this purpose.
- **Chittagong Armoury Raid (1930):** The Chittagong Armoury Raid was a bold attempt by revolutionaries to challenge British authority by taking control of key military installations in Chittagong (now in Bangladesh).
 - **Plan:** Surya Sen, along with a group of around 65 young revolutionaries, planned to raid the British armoury in Chittagong to seize arms and ammunition. The objective was to cut off communication and transportation networks and launch an armed rebellion against the British.
 - **Execution:** On April 18, 1930, the group successfully captured the police armoury, cut off telephone and telegraph lines, and temporarily took control of the town. However, they could not locate the ammunition and weapons stored in the armoury, which was a setback.
 - **Aftermath:** The revolutionaries retreated to the Jalalabad hills, where they engaged in a fierce battle with British troops. Although the uprising was



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eventually crushed, the raid was a symbolic act of defiance that inspired future revolutionary activities in India.

Arrest and Execution:

- Surya Sen went underground after the failed uprising, but he continued to organize resistance against British rule. However, he was eventually betrayed by a fellow revolutionary and arrested in February 1933.
- He was brutally tortured by the British before being hanged on January 12, 1934. His martyrdom further galvanized the revolutionary movement in Bengal and across India.

Legacy:

- **Symbol of Defiance:** Surya Sen's leadership in the Chittagong Armoury Raid made him a symbol of courage and defiance against British rule. His actions demonstrated that revolutionaries were willing to take extreme risks for the cause of independence.
- **Inspiration to Future Generations:** Masterda's legacy continues to inspire future generations of Indians, especially in Bengal, where he is celebrated as a heroic figure who fought for India's freedom at great personal cost.

2. Chandrasekhar Azad

Chandrasekhar Azad was another towering figure in India's revolutionary movement. Known for his fearless nature and unwavering commitment to the cause of independence, Azad became a symbol of resistance against British rule, particularly in northern India.

Early Life and Ideology:

- **Birth:** Chandrasekhar Azad was born on July 23, 1906, in Bhavra, a village in the present-day Madhya Pradesh. His early life was shaped by the nationalist movements of the time.
- **First Arrest:** At the age of 15, Azad was arrested for participating in the non-cooperation movement led by Mahatma Gandhi. When brought before the magistrate, he famously declared his name as "Azad" (meaning "free"), his father's name as "Swatantra" (meaning "independence"), and his residence as "prison." This bold defiance earned him the nickname "Azad," which he carried for the rest of his life.
- **Shift to Revolutionary Ideals:** Disillusioned by the suspension of the non-cooperation movement after the Chauri Chaura incident in 1922, Azad became involved with the more radical revolutionary groups, seeking to achieve independence through armed resistance.

Role in Hindustan Republican Association (HRA) and HSRA:



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- **HRA and Kakori Conspiracy (1925):** Chandrasekhar Azad was a key member of the Hindustan Republican Association (HRA). He played an important role in the **Kakori train robbery** in 1925, where the revolutionaries looted government money to fund their activities. This daring act made Azad a wanted man by the British authorities.
- **Formation of HSRA:** After the Kakori incident and the execution of some of his comrades, Azad, along with Bhagat Singh, reorganized the HRA into the **Hindustan Socialist Republican Association (HSRA)** in 1928. The HSRA sought to overthrow British rule and establish a socialist republic in India.
- **Ideological Mentor to Bhagat Singh:** Azad was a mentor to Bhagat Singh and other young revolutionaries. Together, they plotted and executed several acts of resistance against the British, including the assassination of British police officer John Saunders in 1928, as retaliation for the death of Lala Lajpat Rai.

Azad's Heroic Death:

- **Encounter at Alfred Park:** Chandrasekhar Azad's life ended in a dramatic showdown with the British police at Alfred Park in Allahabad (now Prayagraj) on February 27, 1931. Surrounded by the police, Azad fought valiantly, refusing to be captured alive. True to his vow never to be taken by the British, he used his last bullet to shoot himself, choosing death over surrender.

Legacy:

- **Eternal Symbol of Freedom:** Chandrasekhar Azad's refusal to surrender and his ultimate sacrifice made him a legendary figure in India's freedom struggle. He became an embodiment of the spirit of resistance and the uncompromising fight for freedom.
- **Inspirational Figure:** Azad continues to inspire Indians, especially the youth, with his fearless determination and his belief in the power of armed struggle to achieve independence. Monuments, parks, and educational institutions across India have been named in his honor.

Surya Sen and Chandrasekhar Azad were two of the most significant revolutionary leaders in India's fight for independence. Their lives and actions symbolized the radical shift towards militant nationalism during the early 20th century. Both leaders demonstrated immense courage and commitment to the cause of freedom, and their sacrifices continue to inspire generations of Indians in their pursuit of justice, equality, and independence.

The **Naval Mutiny of 1946** and various other revolutionary activities marked the final phases of India's struggle for independence, showcasing the growing discontent among various sections of Indian society against British rule. These events were significant in accelerating the end of British colonial rule in India.

1. Naval Mutiny of 1946

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The Naval Mutiny of 1946 was a major revolt by Indian sailors against British colonial rule, which had profound implications for the independence movement and the eventual end of British rule in India.

Background:

- **World War II Impact:** During World War II, Indian sailors were recruited into the Royal Indian Navy (RIN). The war's demands, along with the harsh treatment of sailors and the deteriorating conditions, led to growing discontent among the naval personnel.
- **Economic and Social Conditions:** Post-war, the conditions of the sailors were poor, with inadequate pay, unsanitary living conditions, and racial discrimination. The discontent was compounded by the broader political situation in India, where nationalist sentiments were at a peak.

The Mutiny:

- **Triggering Factors:** The immediate cause of the mutiny was the worsening conditions aboard naval ships and the denial of basic rights to the sailors. The situation was further inflamed by the arrest and ill-treatment of prominent leaders of the All India Naval Ratings Federation (AINRF).
- **Commencement:** The mutiny began on February 18, 1946, when sailors on the HMIS *Talwar* in Bombay (now Mumbai) went on strike. The protest quickly spread to other ships and naval establishments across major ports like Karachi, Calcutta (now Kolkata), and Madras (now Chennai).
- **Demands:** The mutineers demanded better pay, improved conditions, and the release of arrested leaders. They also sought the right to unionize and the abolition of racial discrimination.

Government Response:

- **Repression:** The British government initially responded with force, deploying troops and using violence to suppress the mutiny. The Royal Navy also declared martial law and made mass arrests.
- **Political Impact:** The mutiny garnered widespread support from the Indian public and the political leaders, including the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League. It highlighted the deep-seated discontent among Indian soldiers and the weakening of British control.

Consequences:

- **Impact on British Policy:** The mutiny exposed the vulnerability of British rule in India and contributed to the British decision to expedite the process of decolonization. It became a turning point that accelerated the negotiations for independence.



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- **Legacy:** The naval mutiny is remembered as a significant act of defiance against British rule. It demonstrated the unity and strength of the Indian armed forces in the struggle for independence.

2. Other Revolutionary Activities

Apart from the Naval Mutiny, several other revolutionary activities and movements took place during the final years of British rule, contributing to the overall momentum towards independence.

Quit India Movement (1942):

- **Background:** The Quit India Movement was launched by the Indian National Congress in August 1942, calling for an end to British rule in India. The movement was a response to the failure of the Cripps Mission and the continued economic hardships faced by Indians during World War II.
- **Repression and Impact:** The British authorities responded with mass arrests, including the detention of key Congress leaders. Despite severe repression, the movement generated widespread unrest and civil disobedience across the country, increasing pressure on the British government.

Revolutionary Activities by INA (Indian National Army):

- **Formation:** The Indian National Army (INA), led by **Subhas Chandra Bose**, was formed to fight against the British during World War II. The INA, with support from Japan, sought to liberate India from British rule through military means.
- **Impact and Legacy:** The INA's activities, including battles in Burma and the Indian subcontinent, contributed to the weakening of British control. Although the INA did not achieve its immediate objectives, it played a crucial role in fostering nationalist sentiments and highlighting the capability of an Indian armed force.

Other Notable Movements and Incidents:

- **RIN Revolt (Royal Indian Navy Revolt):** As part of the broader naval mutiny, there were individual acts of resistance and revolt by sailors and soldiers in various parts of India.
- **Revolutionary Groups and Activities:** Various revolutionary groups continued to operate, including the Hindustan Socialist Republican Association (HSRA) and individual revolutionaries like Bhagat Singh, Rajguru, and Sukhdev, who had a lasting impact on the independence movement.

The Naval Mutiny of 1946, along with other revolutionary activities, played a critical role in the final push towards India's independence. These events demonstrated the widespread dissatisfaction with British rule and the readiness of various segments of Indian society to challenge colonial authority. The combined impact of these revolutionary activities, along



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with political negotiations and growing nationalist fervor, led to the eventual end of British colonial rule and the emergence of India as an independent nation on August 15, 1947.

