



CHETANA
INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF EDUCATION (CIJE)

Peer Reviewed/Refereed Journal

(ISSN: 2455-8729 (E) / 2231-3613 (P))

Impact Factor
SJIF 2023 - 7.286



Prof. A.P. Sharma
Founder Editor, CIJE
(25.12.1932 - 09.01.2019)

Communicating Revolutionary Nationalism during Freedom Struggle: Content Analysis of 'The Philosophy of the Bomb'

Dr Shalini Joshi

Asst. Professor

Haridev Joshi University of Journalism and Mass Communication, Jaipur

Email-shalinidun@gmail.com, Mobile-7023699884

First draft received: 05.03.2024, Reviewed: 08.03.2024, Final proof received: 10.03.2024, Accepted: 26.03.2024

Abstract

Indian freedom struggle is unique in the modern history of world in the sense that anti-colonial forces were fought both with violent and non-violent means simultaneously. Mahatma Gandhi emerged as the champion of ahimsa and satyagraha but there were leaders who considered his leadership and ideology submissive and passive. Chandrashekhkar Azad, Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev, Ramprasad Bismil, Bhagwati Charan Vohra were at the forefront of this revolutionary nationalist ideology. They believed in confronting the British Raj through armed resistance without any kind of compromises. This research paper attempts to study the content and means through which revolutionary ideals were communicated at the mass level with special reference to 'The Philosophy of the Bomb'. The Philosophy of the Bomb, a proscribed publication, though faded from the popular memory is considered as the magnum opus of the revolutionary stream of the freedom movement. Revolutionary freedom fighter Bhagwati Charan Vohra prepared this document in reply to Mahatma Gandhi's article 'The cult of the Bomb'. This is the most significant document to understand the thoughts, ideas and vision of the youth who were fighting largely lonely battles against the brutal colonial power. This paper reposit that the revolutionary leaders were not only fighting against the British raj but they were also aiming to bring radical changes in the society and economy and were on the path of establishing an egalitarian society free of cast, class, capitalism and communalism.

Key-words: Communication, Revolutionary Nationalism, Freedom Struggle, Philosophy of the Bomb, Bhagwati Charan Vohra etc.

Introduction

The sword of revolution is sharpened on the whetting stones of ideas. - Bhagat Singh

'The Philosophy of the Bomb' is a polemical six-page document written in January, 1930. This document is an attempt to communicate the thrust of the revolutionary nationalism to the masses as well as to the congress led by Mahatma Gandhi. Revolutionary leader Bhagwati Charan Vohra prepared this document in close consultation with other revolutionary leaders. Renowned historian Bipan Chandra and K. N. Panikkar says that this draft of the famous statement of revolution was written by Bhagwati Charan Vohra at the instance of Chandrashekhkar Azad and after a full discussion with him.ⁱ In some of the historical texts it is also mentioned that another revolutionary freedom

fighter Yashpal helped Bhagwati Charan Vohra in writing this riposte.

In the records of the British govt the intelligence officers describe The Philosophy of the Bomb as a 'well-written and highly inflammable document'.ⁱⁱ

Philosophy of the Bomb marks the desire of revolutionary leaders to shift from individual heroic action to popular broad-based mass movements. As coined popularly 'revolution by the masses for the masses. This is the most significant and well drafted document about the revolutionary nationalism which breaks the popular image of leaders like Bhagat Singh and Chandrashekhkar Azad that they believed in individual heroism. Apart from individual heroism and sacrifice these youths were sound intellectuals and had prudent vision of a new India.

At the time when Mahatma Gandhi was dominating the Indian political scenario the revolutionary nationalist leaders were fighting at two fronts one against the colonial British Government and the other against the congress dominated moderate nationalism.

The historical context in which this document got prepared was one of the most turbulent period of Indian Freedom struggle. The British govt had heavily cracked down the revolutionary movement post first world war. After the Kakori train robbery in 1925 a large number of revolutionary leaders were convicted and sent to long term imprisonment. It is important to note that Congress led by Mahatma Gandhi had been maintaining a safe distance from the revolutionary ideology.

In 1929 after the HSRA's (Hindustan Socialist Republican Army) daring attempt on the life of Viceroy Lord Irwin Gandhi expressed his sympathy with the Viceroy. Gandhiji congratulated Viceroy and Vicereine on their 'fortunate and narrow escape'. He wrote a scathing article in the journal Young India 'The Cult of Bomb' to document his biting critique of the revolutionary praxis. Condemning the violence Gandhi argued that such violent acts against the Britishers will turn into violence against own people in the long run.ⁱⁱⁱ This article agitated the young revolutionaries and they prepared the 'The Philosophy of the Bomb' in reply to this article by Gandhi. It was produced and disseminated with necessary secrecy. Prof. Dr Kama Maclean suggests in her scholarly work that this polemical document was considered offensive and seditious by the British govt and in an attempt to break the steel frame of the violence movement the Intelligence Bureau turned its attention to the distribution of the Philosophy of the Bomb.^{iv} Drawing on both revolutionary and intelligence reports she describes the ways in which the document was prepared and disseminated in early 1930.

The life of Bhagwati Charan Vohra is deeply entrenched with the history of two organisations which he co-founded with other revolutionaries, namely the open mass organization Naujawan Bharat Sabha (NBS) (1926) and the underground organization, Hindustan Socialist Republican Association (HSRA) (1928). Vohra was the propaganda secretary of the Sabha and became president of the latter.^v

Historical evidence suggests that the content of the Philosophy of the Bomb was reported widely in the newspapers to gain mass support for the revolutionary ideas. The researcher studied the front page of the document available online. It carries the masthead of Hindustan Socialist Republican Army in big bold letters and under it is written Manifesto with the title The Philosophy of the Bomb.

Objective

This research paper aims to analyze the content of 'The Philosophy of the Bomb' to understand the main themes and rhetoric of revolutionary nationalism.

The objective of this research article is to study the Philosophy of the Bomb from the political communication perspective.

Methodology

This is a historical communication research study. The data for the study is collected from secondary sources: books, historical texts, research articles and web material. The Philosophy of the Bomb is analyzed following the content analysis method. For the purpose of this research paper major themes and issues raised in the document are identified and discussed.

Advocating Revolutionary Violence-

In sharp contrast to Gandhian philosophy of Ahimsa and Satyagraha The Philosophy of the Bomb expresses firm faith in violent means to eliminate British rule and attain complete freedom. Advocating violent means Vohra argues that oppressed under the British rule for years Indians had lost the self- esteem and confidence. Therefore revolutionary violence was necessary to emancipate them and instil the spirits of courage and sacrifice "...instils fear in the hearts of the oppressors, it brings hopes of revenge and redemption to the oppressed masses, it gives courage and self-confidence to the wavering, it shatters the spell of the superiority of the ruling class and raises the status of the subject race in the eyes of the world".

In a sub heading 'Violence or Non-Violence' it is elaborated that there is a need to differentiate between the violence to cultivate fear and injustice and violence to free the soul from fear. It is argued with an ethical stand that there was no comparison between violence of the oppressor and violence of the oppressed. The violence of the oppressed is for self-confidence and dignity of living. Whereas the oppressor uses violence to cultivate fear of the rule and control the subjects. The consistent symbolic and physical violence of the oppressor creates severe anxiety and fear in the subject population.^{vi}

Idea of revolution and Socio-Economic Transformation:

This document emphasizes the need to broaden the scope and goals of revolution, "Revolution means social, economic and political independence which ends exploitation of man by man."It calls for transformation of social structure that allows exploitation of men by men.

The Philosophy of bomb not only talks about the overthrow of the British rule but provides a roadmap for complete transformation of the socio-economic system. The document highlights the exploitative nature of the capitalist and feudal forces who had been ruling in connivance with the British Raj. "Indian capital was preparing to betray the [Indian] masses into the hands of foreign capitalism" and as a price of this betrayal received "a little share in the government of the country".^{vii} The wealth drain theory propagated by Dada Bhai Naoroji is reflected in the document where it explains that how colonial capitalism had destroyed Indian cottage industries and commerce.

He dreamt of a new India free of caste and class. He argued that mere change of rulers would not break the chains of slavery which the poor masses are subjected to. The document called for establishment of a new order of things and a new state to introduce the spirit of social justice along with complete freedom.

This reminds us of what Baba Saheb Ambedkar said in the debates of constituent assembly almost two decades later. He warned that political democracy will not be able to thrive without social democracy “We must make our political democracy a social democracy as well. Political Democracy cannot last unless their lies at the base of it social democracy. What does social democracy mean? It means a way of life, which recognises liberty, equality and fraternity as the principles of life.”^{viii}

It was made mandatory that all the members of the revolutionary organizations should have no association with any communal outfits. It was emphasized that there was a need to propagate the spirit of general toleration among the public. The religion should be treated as a matter of personal belief of man and to act upon the same fully so that all citizens could live in harmony irrespective of their religions.

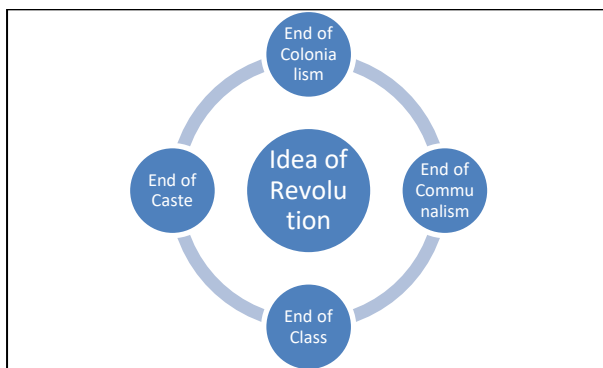


Figure 1

Strategic Communication to Sacrifice, Serve and Suffer

Political communication is one of the most important form of persuasion. The Philosophy of Bomb is also an apt example of strategic political communication and propaganda. Propaganda is communication that is deliberately designed by one group in society to influence the attitudes and behaviour of others. It often uses symbolism and rhetoric and appeals to the emotional and irrational aspects of our sensibility.^{ix}

Vohra sets a well-defined philosophy and narrative of revolutionary nationalism. The need and desire to sacrifice and suffer for the cause of the Nation. Political communication as described by media scholars is also about performance. The ideas of revolutionary methods of bombings and assassinations should be seen as performance by revolutionary leaders. Such incidents were carefully planned and had deep impact on the psyche of the masses. The reporting and coverage in newspapers and court room trials used to emotionally agitate the public and garner sympathy and support for the revolutionary nationalists.

This document emphasizes on spreading courage, determination and nationalist consciousness among youths. Through persuasion and propaganda the revolutionary leaders tried to establish effective connection with the public. They exalted the youth to show supreme sacrifice for the motherland without any hesitation and showed the path to create an egalitarian society on the foundations of equality, fraternity and liberty. Youth were asked to attain mental strength and participate in the great struggle for independence.

To be a revolutionary one required immense moral strength, but one also required criticism and independent thinking.^x

Exposing Compromising Character of Congress

Amidst the popular discourse and debate about violence and non-violence this document attempted to expose the allegedly compromising attitude of congress under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. The ‘Philosophy of the Bomb’ sets out its argument against nonviolence,

and critiques Gandhi, before concluding with a flourish:

There is no crime that Britain has not committed in India. Deliberate

misrule has reduced us to paupers, has ‘bled us white’. As a race and a

people we stand dishonoured and outraged. Do people still expect us to

forget and to forgive? We shall have our revenge – a people’s righteous

revenge on the Tyrant. Let cowards fall back and cringe for compromise

and peace. We ask not for mercy and we give no quarter. Ours is a war to

the end. Victory or Death!^{xi}

Gandhian ways of satyagraha and ahimsa had been criticized for not being a success and development and organization of a mass movement of the exploited class was considered necessary to overthrow the British Raj. It was claimed that the real revolutionary armies are in the villages and the factories.^{xii}

There is not much reference in the history books regarding the ways in which revolutionary literature used to be distribute at the mass level. It is said that the revolutionary leaders used to distribute the pamphlets in secret manners. They were used to be pasted on public places overnight, thrown in public gatherings and sometimes sent through the royal mails.

Kama Maclean, Associate Professor of South Asian and World History at the University of New South Wales describes in her scholarly work how the document was disseminated. She writes on the basis of Govt records and documents accessed in the British library that Post office clerks and royal mail was used profusely to disseminate the document from Calcutta to Bareilly to Patna. Yashpal, one of the ‘absconding’ organizers of the HSRA who became a noted writer in independent

India, writes in his memoirs that the tracts were printed in Calcutta at the revolutionaries' own printing press. The Intelligence Bureau, however, believed that Azad had the tract printed in a press in Kanpur. The leaflet was published in great numbers – an informer reported that Yashpal received a trunk in Lahore containing four thousand copies – under a striking masthead of 'The Hindustan Socialist Republican

Association Manifesto'.^{xiii}

Conclusion

The Philosophy of the Bomb is the boldest statement of social justice and economic equality in the history of Indian freedom struggle. The stream of revolutionary nationalism contributed in the freedom struggle on their own terms and did not limit their struggle for political freedom only but articulated their vision for a better world. The document marks a clear shift from individual romanticism to mass rebellion in the face of the British obduracy.

ⁱ India's Struggle for Independence, Bipan Chandra, K. N. Panikkar et al, Penguin Books, 1987

ⁱⁱ Letter from Chief Secretary to Government of Bengal to Home Department, Government of India, 5 Feb. 1930: British Library

ⁱⁱⁱ M. K. Gandhi, Proceedings of the Forty-Fourth Session, 31 Dec. 1929, in The Encyclopedia of the Indian National Congress, vol. 9: India Demands Independence, 1925–1929, ed. A. M. Zaidi and others, New Delhi, 1980, p. 566. Found in History Workshop Journal

^{iv} *History Workshop Journal*, Volume 89, Spring 2020, Pages 154–168, <https://doi.org/10.1093/hwj/dbz050>, Kama Maclean

^v 'I Want To Die In Such A Place And Manner That Nobody Knows Of It And Sheds Tears', <https://thewire.in/history/i-want-to-die-in-such-a-place-and-manner-that-nobody-knows-of-it-and-shed-tears>, accessed on 13.8.21

^{vi} <https://www.newsclick.in/Bhagwati-Charan-Vohra-Intellectual-Giant-Indian-Revolutionaries>, Harshwardhan, Prabal Saran Agarwal, 28 May 2021, accessed on 8.8.21

^{vii} 'I Want To Die In Such A Place And Manner That Nobody Knows Of It And Sheds Tears', <https://thewire.in/history/i-want-to-die-in-such-a-place-and-manner-that-nobody-knows-of-it-and-shed-tears>, accessed on 13.8.21

^{viii} Dr B. R. Ambedkar, CAD, Vol. XI, p.979, 25 November, 1949

^{ix} https://people.unica.it/fulvioventurino/files/2015/10/LILLEKER_Key-concepts-in-political-communication.pdf

^x Why I am an atheist, Bhagat Singh

^{xi} *History Workshop Journal*, Volume 89, Spring 2020, Pages 154–168, <https://doi.org/10.1093/hwj/dbz050>, Kama Maclean

^{xii} India's Struggle for Independence, Bipan Chandra, K. N. Panikkar et al, Penguin Books, 1987

^{xiii} *History Workshop Journal*, Volume 89, Spring 2020, Pages 154–168, <https://doi.org/10.1093/hwj/dbz050>, Kama Maclean