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# The October Revolution and the Anti-colonial Movements in South Asia

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**The histories of the revolutionary anti-colonial movements in South Asia and their engagement with the October Revolution are reflected upon, in this article. Accompanying these reflections is a sensitivity to contemporary problems of Islamophobia, the manipulation of popular protests by imperial powers and the internal ethnic and cultural divisions that invariably prise open the doors for imperialist interventions. The relationship between South Asian anti-colonial movements and the October Revolution was reciprocal.**

World War I unleashed revolutionary tsunamis throughout the world. World War II stemmed the tsunamis. An analysis of the reasons for the ebb and flow of the revolutionary tides is beyond the scope of this article. Riding the crest of the revolutionary wave on the eve of World War I were the socialist movements in Russia, “the weakest link in the chain” of capitalist nations and the anti-colonial movements in South Asia. History, they say, is written by the victors. Equally, those who write our histories control our destinies. Today, the Western allies see the October Revolution as victory of anarchy that was doomed to fail. The Russian Federation did not know whether it should or should not celebrate the most transformative event of the 20<sup>th</sup> century which it led. The Chinese Communist Party, the biggest beneficiary of the October Revolution, held its 19<sup>th</sup> National Congress of the Communist Party of China in the same month as the centenary year of the October Revolution. Xi Jinping spoke eloquently about China as a “great modern socialist country” of the 21<sup>st</sup> century but never mentioned the October Revolution. The Euro-American left are confused about how they should remember the October Revolution if at all. The October Revolution today is remembered by people’s movements in South Asia, Africa, Latin America, Black and Asian people and small fragments of the left in the Euro-American West as evidenced by the large numbers of small commemorative events organised by them throughout 2017, too many to be listed here.<sup>2</sup> This, I argue, is as it should be. It is a tribute to the October Revolution that it continues to be remembered by men and women struggling for a better world. This is the October Revolution’s best legacy. That the HDK (Peoples’ Democratic Congress) in Turkey witnessed over 1,000 representatives of a wide range of left-oriented political parties, social movements and organisations to celebrate the event, is a tribute to the October Revolution as well as an example of its living legacy.

The unfinished business of the world wars is returning to politics around us. The mandate territories, created as war settlements between imperial powers after World War I: Iraq (Mesopotamia), Palestine, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, Cameroon, Togoland, Rwanda and Burundi, are once again engulfed by wars. The truce between the Allies and Russia and China after World War II is strained. In the Euro-American centres of capitalism, bank collapses, business downturns, unemployment, racism and the far-right are on the high. The October Revolution transformed an imperialist war to dismember the Russian empire into a revolutionary war. Today when new forms of proxy imperialist wars and new forms of colonisation are dominating politics, it is time to ask: Can these proxy imperialist wars be transformed into a war for freedom and emancipation? Who will

bring about the transformation and how?

In what follows, I reflect on the revolutionary anti-colonial movements in South Asia by retelling their histories and their engagement with the October Revolution with a sensitivity to contemporary problems of Islamophobia, the manipulation of popular protests by imperial powers and the internal ethnic and cultural divisions that invariably prise open the doors for imperialist interventions. I wish to make three points about the anti-colonial movements in South Asia. First, the relationship between South Asian anti-colonial movements and the October Revolution was reciprocal. Without doubt the October Revolution had a profound influence on South Asian anti-colonial movements. Equally, the South Asian anti-colonial movements influenced the success and consolidation of the October Revolution, especially in the Central Asian republics, a point that is often missed in the narratives of the October Revolution. Second, on the eve of World War I the anti-colonial movements in South Asia were one of the three most important events alongside the dismemberment of the Ottoman empire and the socialist revolution led by the Bolsheviks in Russia. All three movements intersected in ways that are important to comprehend, much more so in today's context. Last, I wish to touch on the importance of theoretical and philosophical problems for a renewed project of freedom and emancipation for oppressed nations and peoples if we are to move from October Revolution to Revolutions.<sup>3</sup>

### **Reciprocal Solidarities**

Typically, narratives of the October Revolution see its influence on the South Asian anti-colonial movements as a linear one-way relationship. Such narratives tell only one part of the story. In the one-way narrative the South Asian freedom movements begin to take shape only in the 1920s. Everything that went before that was "proto-anti-colonial movement" of sorts, nascent and underdeveloped. In reality the anti-colonial movements in the colonies and the socialist movements in Europe were parallel developments, the former in response to imperialism and colonialism in the colonies and the latter in response to capitalism and class polarisations in Europe. Whereas the Haitian Revolution against slavery and French colonialism in 1791 was a historic moment in the challenges to colonialism, the first war of independence in 1857 or the Great Ghadar as it is known in South Asia, was the first major revolution against the British empire after the empire system was established. The Napoleonic wars fuelled primarily by rivalries between the British and the French empires over the colonies were "settled" by the Concert of Vienna in 1815. The Concert of Europe established the empire system by recognising the exclusive rights of the five great powers (Austria, France, Russia, Prussia and Britain) over their respective colonies (D'Souza 2017). The great power system is the precursor to the United Nations Security Council's permanent five with a veto today (Simpson 2004). The war of 1857 shook the foundations of the British empire, the greatest of the great powers. After 1857, there were a series of rebellions throughout the British empire—the Morant Bay rebellion in Jamaica in 1865, the Fenian rebellion in 1867, the escalation of Maori land wars after 1860s amongst many others. The resistances to the British empire never really subsided after 1857.

The point to note is that these anti-colonial movements developed parallel to the rise of socialist movements in Europe which began around 1848, a year that saw a wave of different uprisings throughout Europe and prompted Karl Marx and Frederick Engels to write the *Communist Manifesto*. The International Workingmen's Association, popularly known as the First International, was founded in 1864 even as the anti-colonial movements continued in the empires. It is important to recognise the parallel developments of the anti-colonial and socialist movements. Although many South Asian, Egyptian, Irish and other nationalists organised solidarity actions in Europe, the two parallel movements never intersected except in the October Revolution. The intersection of anti-colonial movements in the colonies and the anti-capitalist movements holds one of the keys to the success of the October Revolution and national liberation struggles, both.

The colonial question did not appear on the agenda of European socialists from nowhere. The question was forced on the agenda of European socialists by the anti-colonial movements, organisations and colonial diaspora in Europe and North America. They lobbied political groups and mobilised public opinion in favour of their independence movements at home and demanded to know what the socialists had to say about the actions of their own empires in the colonies. By the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century there were several well organised movements of expatriate South Asians in Europe. Organisations like the Paris Indian Society and the Indian Home Rule Society founded in 1905, the Berlin India Independence Committee founded in 1915 amongst others, organised expatriates in Europe and North America. The most influential and radical among the expatriate movements was the Ghadar movement started by South Asians in California and Vancouver on the west coast of North America around 1903 which went on to establish the Ghadar Party in 1913 (D'Souza and Tirmizey 2018; Ramnath 2011).

The Second Socialist International's conference in 1907, attended by 886 delegates, including representatives from the colonies and protectorates, expanded the influence of the socialist parties in Europe (Lenin 1972 [1907]). Madam Cama, who attended the conference with others, not only questioned the Second Internationalists about their colonial policy but rather unexpectedly unfurled the Indian flag at the conference and demanded that the socialist delegates stand and pay their respects to it. It was the first time independent India's flag was unfurled. That it was hoisted at a socialist conference by a woman makes the event doubly inspiring (Kamran 2016; The Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica 2018; Sundaram 2006). For the first time a socialist conference was compelled to take the anti-colonial movements seriously. Under Madam Cama, the Paris Indian Society published the journal *Bande Mataram* and Indian Home Rule Society in Britain published the *Indian Sociologist* edited by Shyamji Krishna Varma. Madan Lal Dhingra, another nationalist, was executed in London in 1909. M N Roy and others from the Berlin India Independence Committee engaged with the Spartacus group which included Rosa Luxemburg and Wilhelm Liebknecht as its members.

The Stuttgart Congress was deeply divided over the colonial question (Lenin 1972 [1907]). Henry Hyndman on behalf of the Social Democratic Federation (Great Britain) presented a report on India (Hyndman 1907). Van Kol of Holland argued that colonialism brought civilisation to the natives and it may not be altogether bad. There was hostility to migrant workers from countries like China. The Second International debated the position that European socialists should take towards their own governments. There were three questions broadly: should the socialists ask for reform of colonial policies? Should they oppose reforms of colonial policies? Does colonialism bring any benefits or advantages or progress to the people of the colonies? On the insistence of the Russian delegation led by Lenin, a committee was appointed to study the colonial question. The Russian delegation was interested in these questions because Russia was also an empire with her own colonies. The splits in the European socialist movement after the Stuttgart conference were to a large extent driven by their failure to recognise the importance of struggles in oppressed nations for European socialism. The Second International's commission to study and report back on the colonial question proposed a "socialist colonial policy." The proposal was defeated, but only very narrowly, because of the presence of delegates from the colonies. Reporting back on the conference Lenin (1972 [1907]) wrote,

The combined vote of the small nations, which either do not pursue a colonial policy, or which suffer from it, outweighed, the vote of nations where even the proletariat has been somewhat infected with the lust of conquest.

The Second International splintered into three fractions: the national chauvinists, the vacillating

centrists and the revolutionary Bolsheviks. Arguably, the Euro-American left today is splintered along comparable lines, each with its own embedded traditions of engagement with their states on questions about war and peace in the third world.

The European socialists were never reconciled to the defeat of the idea of “socialist colonial policy,” a factor that split and ultimately ended the Second Socialist International after World War I. World War I fought by colonial people on colonised lands unleashed tidal waves of resistance. The waves of resistance in South Asia and elsewhere forced the issue of colonialism in ways that was to have a profound influence on the October Revolution that was yet to come. The contributions of the anti-colonial revolutionaries to the socialist movements in Europe are seldom incorporated in the telling of socialist histories. What did the Indians, Egyptians, and others from the colonies say at the Stuttgart conference about “socialist colonial policy”? The omissions of anti-colonial movements in the accounts of socialist struggles sets up a trajectory of knowledge that entrenches the linear narratives where socialists led and anti-colonialists followed.

The linearity is embedded in the very vocabulary of socialism that is commonplace today. Consider the idea that the First and Second Internationals are the first international organisations of working people anywhere. It omits consideration of the possibility that the Ghadar Party might be the first real international of working people, if we take into account the labours of colonial subjects who under-laboured for European capitalism. The Ghadar Party established a network of anti-colonial movements across the British empire which encompassed large parts of the world in Argentina, Brazil, Kenya, Malaysia, Iran, Aden, Hong Kong and many other places, refused to fire on the Shanghai workers, mutinied in Singapore and did much else (Ramnath 2011). It is possible to argue that the former were “socialist internationals” against capitalism and the later were “anti-colonial” networks against imperialism. Such differentiations obscure the reasons for the tensions between anti-capitalist and anti-colonial movements. Above all, they obscure the potential to disrupt capitalism and colonialism when the two intersect as they did in the October Revolution 12 years after the Stuttgart conference in 1907.

## **Russia and Anti-colonial Movements**

On the eve of World War I, Russia was on the brink of collapse. Splinters of Russia’s colonies were up for grabs by Britain, France and the United States (US). Kerensky’s “bourgeois democratic revolution” had failed, World War I took a terrible toll on society and economy and there was unrest in Russia’s colonies (Sanborn 2014). The White Armies of the Allies intervened to defeat the insurrectionary October Revolution by military means, subversion and political and diplomatic machinations. That the Russian colonies sought independence from Tsarist Russia provided fertile grounds for inciting opposition to the October Revolution.<sup>4</sup> The Bolsheviks defended their revolution on all fronts by organising workers and peasants into the Red Guards to confront the White Armies of the Allies, building alternate political institutions to bolster the tottering state apparatus and addressing the colonial question in the Russian colonies. The last issue is relevant for this discussion.

Lenin’s *April Thesis* written before the October Revolution, flagged up the urgent need to establish a new international organisation of revolutionary communist parties as an important cornerstone of the Bolshevik agenda. The Bolshevik decision was informed by the theoretical understanding that socialist revolutions would occur first in the industrialised capitalist countries and that World War I had created the conditions for more revolutions in other European countries, in particular Germany, France and Italy. Revolutions in other European countries were seen as crucial for the survival of Russia. The First Congress of the Third International, the Comintern, was attended by as few as 35 delegates, all from Europe, in March 1919 amidst civil war, breakdown of diplomatic channels, blockades and disruption of communications. The Comintern was set up to counter the Second

Internationalists who had regrouped, capitulated to the idea of a League of Nations and to their national governments and provide a more revolutionary alternative. Contrary to Bolshevik expectations, support for the October Revolution came, not from the European socialists, most of who defended their states, but it came from the anti-colonial movements.

When the Comintern held its Second Congress in July 1920 little over a year later, the colonial question went from being low on the list of Bolshevik priorities to becoming a central plank for the survival of Russia. After 1905 anti-colonial movements, notably from South Asia, China, Ireland, and protectorates like Iran (Persia) unsuccessfully sought Russia's support against the British. In Russia's hour of crisis and isolation, the anti-colonial movements, located in the belly of Russia's enemies, in particular the British empire, were the only allies Russia could find. The anti-colonial movements acquired a new significance in two ways. First, it gave the Bolsheviks political opportunities to disrupt the enemies of Russia from within the belly of the beast as it were: their colonies. Second, the support of the anti-colonial movements was crucial to stem imperialist machinations in Russia's own colonies in Central Asia and in her borders (Turkey, Persia and Afghanistan) to stabilise the revolutionary project. The Second Congress of the Comintern focused on the "national question" and adopted the well-known resolution on *Theses on the National and Colonial Question*. The thesis revised and reformulated pre-existing theoretical understandings about socialist revolutions. The reformulation was brought about because of the engagement of anti-colonial movements with the Bolsheviks. The Bolsheviks did not dream up support for anti-colonial movements for purely ideological reasons as is sometimes made out in the historiography of the October Revolution. Neither was it pure political expediency and Lenin's political manoeuvrings as an astute strategist as is also sometimes argued. Ideology and political necessity of *both struggles* played a role in the meeting of socialist and anti-colonial movements in the Second Congress of the Comintern in 1920.

The nation state, as I have argued elsewhere, is a hyphenated word. World War I ruptured the hyphen and introduced a breach between the nation, as a historically constituted community of people and the modern state as the institutional umbrella for capitalism (D'Souza 2017). Confronted with the collapse of capitalism and the state apparatus, Germany and the Axis powers could not overcome racism and support South Asian anti-colonialists. Britain could not overcome racism towards its colonial subjects and end discrimination to save the empire (D'Souza 2017). Bolshevik Russia, in contrast, sought to overcome racism and discrimination in its colonies for the survival of the Russian state (D'Souza 2017). Russia offered her colonies the repeal of unfair Tsarist treaties, the recognition of national independence for her colonies, the offer of new treaties on equal footing that was beneficial to both and above all the right to secession which was enshrined in the Russian constitution (Lenin 1918 [2000]; Stalin 1936 [1978]). That World War II rolled back the advances made by the October Revolution should not obscure the reasons for the establishment of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), how and why it came about in the first place, its enormous significance for the "settlement" of World War II and the world order that emerged after World War II, and equally the reasons for its relatively peaceful dissolution in 1991. The British Empire's offer to her colonies after World War I in contrast, South Asia more specifically, paled in comparison to Russia's offer to her colonies.

### **South Asian Anti-colonialists and the Bolsheviks**

India occupied a special status as the "Indian empire"—a subregional administrative apparatus within the larger British empire (Voigt 1987). By 1905 the embers of the 1857 war that continued to smoulder in the subcontinent ignited into another major conflagration (D'Souza 2014). The most significant milestone in the revolutionary strand of the South Asian anti-colonial movement and its meeting with the Russian Bolsheviks was the establishment of the provisional government-in-exile in Kabul in 1915 two years *before* the October Revolution.

With Mahendra Pratap as its President, Muhammed Barakatullah as the first Prime Minister, Obaidullah Sindhi as the interior minister, Champakraman Pillai as the foreign minister and the involvement of many Ghadar Party members, the provisional government was formed in response to the outbreak of World War I. The economic collapse of liberal capitalism, the overreach of militarism and the inability of imperial powers to govern in old ways provided the revolutionary South Asian anti-colonialists an opportunity to prise open the breaches between imperial powers to advance the agenda of national liberation. The aims of the provisional government were to create alliances with various governments against the British to fight for Indian independence, to exhort the Indian troops to refuse to fight for the British against other colonial subjects, to establish an army for the liberation of India, and more specific to this discussion, to petition the Tsar to support their cause against the British (Ansari 1986: 516). The provisional government approached Ottoman Turkey and Germany for support believing an enemy's enemy would be a friend but with little impact. They also approached the US relying on its proclaimed position of neutrality in World War I (Fraser 1977; Liebau 2011; Mukerjee 2010; Ramnath 2011). South Asian nationalists approached the Kerensky government in Russia which had virtually no colonial policy for Russian, British or any other colony. The Bolsheviks as the successors to the Kerensky government were different however. The revolutionary South Asian anti-colonialists engaged with the Bolsheviks and made significant theoretical and practical contributions that was to have lasting influence on the consolidation of the October Revolution and everything else that such consolidation entails.

The Second Congress is noted for the famous Roy-Lenin debates. Roy, an Indian revolutionary, told the Second Congress,

I am most pleased that I have the opportunity for the first time to take part in the serious discussion of the colonial question at the Congress of the revolutionary proletariat. Until the present time the European parties did not pay sufficient attention to this question; they were too busy with their own affairs, and ignored the colonial questions. (The Communist International 1921: 121)

Roy played a significant role in shaping the direction of the Comintern's colonial policy that held sway in the critical post- World War I years and shaped the trajectory of the Russian Revolution in many ways. Two draft theses were presented, one by Lenin and the other by Roy. Both documents were debated, and both were adopted by the Second Congress.<sup>5</sup> Two theoretical shifts in socialist thinking came out of the Roy-Lenin debates and the Bolshevik engagement with anti-colonial movements more generally. One concerned the attitude of the socialist movements towards the anti-colonial struggles and the other on the agrarian question.<sup>6</sup>

## **The Colonial Question**

Roy highlighted the centrality of the anti-colonial movements for the survival of the Bolshevik Revolution arguing "[o]ne of the main sources from which the European Capitalism draws its chief strength is to be found in the colonial possessions and dependencies."<sup>7</sup> The strength was both economic coming from the "super-profits" as well as the "colonial troops and huge armies of workers" that were "sent to the battle fronts during the war" (The Communist International 1921: 118). Indeed, the "economic interrelation between Europe and the colonies is at the present time the foundation of the entire system of capitalism" (The Communist International 1921: 121-22). Therefore, Roy told the Second Congress, that only "[t]he breaking up of the colonial empire, together with the proletarian revolution in the home country, will overthrow the capitalist system in *Europe*" (The Communist International 1921: 119; emphasis added).

Roy insisted that the Second International must make a distinction between reformist “bourgeois democratic” national liberation struggles and revolutionary anti-colonial struggles in the colonies. The objectives of the bourgeois leadership of the reformist strand were to replace imperial rule by their own. It offered very little to the exploited masses, and therefore, “the Communist International and the parties affected must struggle against such control and help to develop class consciousness in the working of the colonies” (The Communist International 1921: 120). Socialists envisaged revolutions would occur first and foremost in the industrialised countries. Regardless, British courtship of a liberal and conservative pro-British nationalist leadership in South Asia and their rising influence after 1905 was all too obvious to ignore.

Faced with the dismemberment of Russian empire after the failure of Kerensky’s “bourgeois democratic revolution” Lenin’s *April Thesis* modified pre-existing socialist thinking and argued that in the Russian context the historic task of leading the “bourgeois democratic revolution” fell on the Russian proletariat. Roy emphasised that the historical experiences of the colonies did not follow the same trajectory as the capitalist states. Indeed, the South Asian bourgeoisie fared rather well from Britain’s colonial expansion improving their bargaining position after World War I for which they supplied goods and services, a point Roy was at pains to explain to the Bolsheviks.<sup>8</sup> They were hardly about to “dump” the emerging lucrative partnership with Britain in favour of the militant peasant revolts that engulfed the subcontinent and constituted the core of the revolutionary strand in the liberation struggles. What is true for Russia may not be true for the colonies (see The Communist International 1921: 122–23). This distinction between reformist and revolutionary anti-colonial movements and the support of the Comintern for the latter made a significant impact in “swinging” the reformist movements towards more radical positions in South Asia. In South Asia, the shift from the demand for “dominion status” to “total independence” by the liberal “bourgeois democratic leadership” under Nehru and Gandhi demonstrates this “swing.”

During World War I the liberal and conservative nationalist leadership in South Asia demanded “dominion status” within the empire, that is, a form of self-government within the British Commonwealth (Nehru 1928 [1975]a, b). Britain granted its white settler colonies—New Zealand, Canada, Australia and even Ireland—dominion status but declined the same to the coloured South Asians. In contrast, as already noted, Russia under the Bolsheviks offered to tear up unfair Tsarist treaties, give republican status to Russian colonies and form a federation with them on an equal footing. The revolutionary strands in the liberation struggle were vocal and loud in pointing out the Bolshevik example to berate the liberal leadership (Ansari 1986: 518). Indeed, the Ghadar movement had, as early as 1913, declared its programme of forming a federal republic of all nationalities of South Asia, something the USSR did after 1919. By 1930s the sway of the revolutionary leadership of the liberation in South Asia was so complete that the reformist sections were forced to abandon their demand for dominion status and demand complete independence.<sup>9</sup> Elsewhere, the distinction between revolutionary and reformist liberation struggles was to have a profound influence on the course of anti-colonial movements around the world, most notably in China. At the cost of repetition, the fact that the onset of World War II rolled back the revolutionary upsurge ought not to cloud our understanding of the forces at play at the time and their impact on the course of the October Revolution.

## **The Agrarian Question**

Turning to the agrarian question, which proved divisive in the Second Congress, was “swung” in unexpected ways by the anti-colonial movements. The Second Comintern Congress ended with the decision to convene another, more inclusive, congress of anti-colonial movements. The Congress of the Peoples of the East, or the Baku Congress was convened in Baku in September 1920. The Baku Congress took place amidst extraordinary political upheavals throughout the colonial and semi-colonial world. Around 1,900 to 2,000 delegates across 32 nationalities from the Russian colonies,

Turkey, Persia, India and China attended the Congress (Congress of the Peoples of the East 1920 [1977]: X, 187). The Baku Congress swung the Bolsheviks from a theoretically predetermined approach to the agrarian question to one informed by the demands of the anti-colonial political movements informed by the traditions and cultures of the East.

In retrospect, it is interesting that there was no ambiguity about the reciprocal nature of relations between the Bolsheviks and the anti-colonial movements as two distinct but related struggles. In the *Summons to the Congress*, the executive committee described the Comintern as “[...] the organization of the revolutionary *working masses of Russia, Poland, Germany, France, Britain and America*, [...]” (Congress of the Peoples of the East 1920 [1977]: 1; emphasis added) and set out the reasons for seeking alliance with the anti-colonial movements.

The Executive Committee of the Communist International, *as the representative of the British, French, American, German and Italian workers, are coming to Baku in order to discuss with you the question of how to unite the efforts of the European proletariat with yours for struggle against the common enemy.*<sup>10</sup> (emphasis added)

Karl Radek the secretary of the ECCI told the Baku Congress,

[...] we are bound to you by destiny: either we unite with the peoples of the East and hasten the victory of the West-European proletariat, or we shall perish and *you* will be slaves. (Congress of the Peoples of the East 1920 [1977]: 50) (emphasis added)

The *Summons* is addressed primarily to the peasants of the Near East closer to home: Mesopotamia, Arabia, Syria, Anatolia, Persia and Armenia but also to the representatives of “masses in India” and the Moslem people “who are developing freely in association with Soviet Russia” (Congress of the Peoples of the East 1920 [1977]: 4-5). What is interesting from the standpoint of the influence of the anti-colonial movements on the Bolsheviks is this. Although the agrarian question was of central importance in the Second Congress, the scope of the debate was limited to the role of the agrarian sector in industrialised countries. As Ernst Meyer who introduced Lenin’s “Preliminary Draft Theses on the Agrarian Question” to the plenary meeting said, the communists had not given the agrarian question much attention until the October Revolution made it a matter of urgency (Second Congress of the Communist International 1921 [1977]). Within the Agrarian Commission of the Second International the debate centred on the role of the peasantry in the struggle against European capitalism. The Second Congress was torn between the practical needs of the October Revolution to win over Russian and Central Asian peasants on the one hand and the understandings of private property in socialist theory. German and Italian delegates opposed the idea of proprietary rights and concessions for sections of the relatively better off peasants instead of outright land nationalisation (Second Congress of the Communist International 1921 [1977]; The Communist International 1921: 118).

The political support of the Russian peasantry was crucial for the survival of the October Revolution. The ranks of the pauperised peasantry supplied soldiers for the armies and continued food production was essential for the survival of Russia after the October Revolution. It was the slogan of “bread and peace” that had rallied the Russian people in support of the revolution in the first place. The problem was compounded by the great diversity in the agrarian sector between and within industrial countries making any rough and ready generalisations difficult. Lenin’s “Theses on the Agrarian Question” was debated extensively within the Agrarian Commission and adopted with



modifications, some more significant than others.<sup>11</sup> For the limited purposes of understanding the reciprocal relations of the anti-colonial movements and their role in stabilising the October Revolution, the warnings from the representatives of the anti-colonial struggles about the centrality of the agrarian question for the anti-imperialist struggles foreshadowed the debates in the Baku Congress. Roy warned, "Indeed it would be extremely erroneous in many of the Oriental countries to try to solve the agrarian problem according to pure Communist principles" (The Communist International 1921: 121). And, Djichoun Pak, the Korean representative, said: "The revolutionary movement in Korea at present is of a distinctly agrarian character" (The Communist International 1921: 141).

### **Non-proletarian Movements**

Roy went further and advanced a rather radical proposition for the European socialists at the time by arguing that non-proletarian movements could *also* be revolutionary. The mass upsurge against colonial rule was,

[...] of a revolutionary character, although it cannot be said that- the workers and peasants constituting it are class-conscious. But they are nevertheless revolutionary. This is evident by their daily activity. This stage of the revolutionary movement of the masses *opens a new field of activity for the Communist International*, and it is only a question of finding the proper methods for gathering the fruits of that activity. Naturally, a revolution started by the masses in that stage will not be a Communist revolution, for revolutionary nationalism will be in the foreground. But at any rate *this revolutionary nationalism is going to lead to the downfall of European Imperialism, which would be of enormous significance for the European proletariat.*<sup>12</sup>(emphasis added)

The contrast between the debates on the Agrarian Question at the Second Congress and the Baku Congress could not be starker. The *Summons* addressed the peasants of Mesopotamia, Anatolia, Armenia, Syria, Arabia, India, Korea, China, Egypt and other Asian and African countries and linked their conditions to the occupation of their lands by imperial powers (Congress of the Peoples of the East 1920 [1977]: 1-2). Recognising that the idea of a proletarian revolution (which dominated the Second Congress) may not hold water in the colonies, the report to the Baku Congress stated,

The great mass of the entire population of the Eastern countries consists of peasants. Emancipation of the peoples of the East means emancipation of the peasants. While in the Western countries the productive class consists mainly of industrial workers, and while it is the industrial proletariat that can be called the King of the West, in the Eastern countries the sole producers of material values are the peasants. And so only they can be called the Kings of the East, and the Eastern countries should belong only to them. (Congress of the Peoples of the East 1920 [1977]: 130)

The Baku Congress recognised and acknowledged the reality that capitalism depended on (i) colonialism, its external expansionist dimension for labour and resources, (ii) the economic appropriation of the colonial peasantry, (iii) imperialism's political accommodation with traditional institutions of power and feudal elites in the colonies, and (iv) the continued pauperisation of the peasantry in the colonies as a continuous source of soldiers for imperial armies (Congress of the Peoples of the East 1920 [1977]: 130 Report on the Agrarian Question). Following from these expanded understanding of the agrarian question in the East, the Baku Congress proposed a

political programme in which resistance to imperialism and its feudal elite collaborators were intertwined. The Baku Congress called for abolition of traditional privileges of the feudal elites, redistribution of land including waqf land, repudiation of debts, repeal of land laws, cancellation of debts, community control of irrigation and water supplies, securing the interests of nomadic tribes and their access to pasture lands and tax reforms (Congress of the Peoples of the East 1920 [1977]: 139 Theses on the Agrarian Question). The radical shifts in the Bolshevik position on the agrarian question in the East was informed by the understanding that whereas many social forces participated in the national liberation struggles, the peasants were most open to radical politics whereas the traditional elites were most open to compromises with imperialists (Congress of the Peoples of the East 1920 [1977]: 138).

The leaders of the Baku Congress saw these significant shifts on the agrarian question as a further expansion of Marxism. Zinoviev, the chair of the congress, said in his closing address,

Karl Marx, the teacher of us all, issued 70 years ago the call: "Workers of all lands, unite!" We, Karl Marx's pupils, the continuators of his work, *can expand this formulation, supplementing and broadening it*, and say: "Workers of all lands and oppressed peoples of the whole world, unite!" (Congress of the Peoples of the East 1920 [1977]: 161) (emphasis added)

The Bolsheviks came very close to recognising the possibility that Eastern laws and institutions may not be comparable with laws and institutions that evolved under Christianity.

Despite the fact that at the basis of the Moslem religion lay principles of religious communism, by which no man may be slave to another and not a single piece of land may be privately owned, and all religious institutions must make it their principal concern to care for the orphaned and indigent, nevertheless these religious principles have not saved the peasants from being reduced to serfdom, or preserved the land from seizure by landlords and despots. Gradually, these principles have been modified to the advantage of the ruling classes. The land, free and belonging only to God, was first declared to belong to the ruling Sultans and Shahs, and then became the property of feudalists and capitalists. The waqf lands, which were given to the mosques and the clergy so that the income from them might support charitable institutions of value to the people, gradually lost their original function and became lands belonging to the clergy and to private persons, and the income from them, instead of being used for the benefit of the poor, was taken by the secular and ecclesiastical rulers—parasites who used these lands merely in order to exploit the poor peasants. The peasant, a free man according to the shariat, was gradually turned into a slave, either by direct coercion on the part of the khans and beys or by economic compulsion based on the seizure of the land by the landlords. (Congress of the Peoples of the East 1920 [1977]: 131)

From the above analysis, the Bolsheviks developed their political programme not only for colonies outside Russia but also the Central Asian colonies within Russia. The acknowledgement that "[...] [t]he land which according to the shariat was common property has been seized for themselves by the lackeys of the Teheran government. [...]" applied to Central Asia as much as Persia. Indeed, the *Summons* is quite explicit that the links between the collusion of local feudal elites and capitalist interests in the region, and the wars and land-occupations applied to the East outside and within Russia. This is not a bland reiteration of "anti-feudal, anti-imperialist" dogma, as it was to become

later on in South Asia, but rather the recognition of a radically different theoretical source for communal landownership. Where did the Bolsheviks get these ideas from?

It is possible to dismiss the radical eastward swing towards anti-colonial struggles after the Second Congress as populism, pragmatism, deviation from real socialism or political expediency as many Euro-American socialists and South Asian nationalists alike have done and continue to do. Such a view dismisses out of hand the possibility of the anti-colonial movements influencing Bolshevik thinking in any manner or form, or that the anti-colonial movements had something to contribute to the consolidation of the October Revolution. Nothing illustrates this reciprocity as much as the engagement of anti-colonial movements with the Bolsheviks over religion, an issue at the heart of Turkish nationalism.

### **Turkey and South Asian Anti-colonial Movements**

With the rapid expansion of British colonisation of South Asia in the 19<sup>th</sup> century many Indian rulers turned to Turkey for help with little effect (Nanda 1989 [2002], Ch 9). Indeed, during the 1857 war, far from heeding the calls for assistance, the Ottoman ruler permitted Britain the use of Turkish ports to transport soldiers, provided money and even issued directives to the South Asian Muslims not to fight the British which were read out in many mosques in India (Özcan 1997: 16-17). The defeat of the 1857 war ended Muslim rule in South Asia and catapulted Britain into one of the most powerful empires the world had known until then. It is one of the ironies of history that the Ottoman caliph's pro-British stance played a significant role in ending several centuries of Muslim rule in South Asia.

In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century inter-imperialist wars were fought largely over Ottoman colonies in Muslim lands. The scramble for Ottoman colonies in the east and west of the empire put Turkey under siege on both flanks. Like Britain and Russia, Ottoman Turkey was also an empire. Unlike Britain and Russia, Ottoman Turkey was the seat of the caliphate and the only Eastern power in the club of empires. Turkey mimicked British and Russian calls for Christian solidarity in the Eastern European Ottoman colonies and called on Muslims to defend Christian occupation of Muslim lands in North Africa and Arabia. In this new reading, the caliphate became a religious centre for all Muslims and the attack on Turkey became an attack on Islam. Turkey was never a centre of Islam in the same way as Rome was to Christianity and the Muslim world never recognised the caliph as a centralised authority for all Muslims comparable to the Pope (Barakatullah 1925 [1924]). Islamic jurisprudence allowed the use of the title caliph to any Muslim ruler who "governed with justice, and implemented the Sharia" (Özcan 1997: 3). After 1876, riven by inter-imperialist rivalries over Ottoman colonies, sultan Abdul Hamid claimed to speak for all Muslims as the Ottoman caliph (Nanda 1989 [2002], Ch 9). Notwithstanding the questionable doctrine and history, the sultan's claims became politically attractive as a rallying point in South Asia (Nanda 1989 [2002], Ch 9) which was a British, not Ottoman, colony and home to the largest Muslim population in the world.

World War I entwined religion and religious propaganda with imperialist wars. B R Nanda notes that when Prime Minister H H Asquith boasted after the fall of Solankia in 1911 that the gate through which Christianity had spread to Europe had fallen once again, Charles Hardinge, the viceroy of India, was alarmed about the effect such statements would have in India and made the extraordinary claim to Imam Ali, a member of the viceroy's executive council, that Britain was "the greatest Mohamedan power in the world, and the Government of India is the greatest safeguard of the Mohamedan religion" (Nanda 1989 [2002], ch 5). This was by no means a perfunctory statement. The British administration was to revive the claim after the victory of the October Revolution in the Central Asian republics of the new USSR and more widely after the dissolution of the caliphate in 1924 in its negotiations with Arab tribal leaders over the custody of holy sites of Mecca and Medina (more below) (Hogarth 1925). In contrast, although the sultan called for a jihad against Britain and

other central powers, Turkey did not support the South Asian anti-colonial movements even though it was at war with Britain, and even though Britain was inciting rebellion in its Arabian colonies against Turkey. The tensions between the political role of the Ottoman sultans and their religious role as the seat of the caliphate was to daunt the South Asian freedom movements throughout, beginning with the Russo-Turkish war in 1877-78 until the partition of the subcontinent in 1947 (Nanda 1989 [2002]; Niemeijer 1972; Özcan 1997). It played out in particular ways before and during the October Revolution. Understanding the history of the entwinement of religion and imperialist wars is important not least because it has once again emerged as a constitutive element in contemporary imperialist wars.

## **Rise of Pan-Islamism**

The resistance to imperialism and colonial occupation also mirrored this entwinement. The rise of pan-Islamism is located within these developments. Pan-Islamism arose as a political ideology against Western imperialism at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, notably after the defeat of Turkey in the Russo-Turkish wars of 1877-78. Pan-Islamism was an ideological, theoretical and political response to imperialism at a particular conjuncture when empires fought over Muslim lands. Pan-Islamism rose as a political movement at a time when European socialists were unwilling and unable to recognise the significance of anti-colonial movements as discussed above and treated colonialism as an epiphenomenon of capitalism. As a political movement, pan-Islamism sought to free all Muslim lands from imperial occupation. Pan-Islamism mirrored the caliphate in presenting Islam as a universal ideology but diverged from it in its anti-imperialist orientation. For that reason, pan-Islamist influence spread across all empires: Russian, British and Ottoman. In the Central Asian Russian colonies, the collapse of Tsardom in February 1917 was seen as liberation giving fillip to pan-Islamism there. In Turkey the 1908 revolution by the Young Turks was profoundly influenced by pan-Islamism as also in Arabia. When the Bolsheviks came to power after the October Revolution, it is hardly surprising that they were confronted with pan-Islamism as the most influential political and ideological movement with a radically different intellectual history not only in the Russian colonies but throughout the British empire, in Turkey and Persia on its own borders, and indeed in the non-European world more widely. The ideological influence of anti-colonial movements, pan-Islamism more specifically, on the October Revolution are not often acknowledged in the historiography of the revolution.

If European socialists were divided over the theoretical and political practices of socialism as already noted, so were the pan-Islamists. K H Ansari identifies four strands in the pan-Islamic movements that emerged in South Asia in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century in response to British expansionism. There were the Muslim liberals, the pan-Islamists who were influenced by the 1908 revolution in Turkey, the conservative Muslim clergy and lastly the émigré South Asians who left South Asia for Europe and America for various economic and political reasons (Ansari 1986). This last strand was largely responsible for building pan-Indian resistance networks and for linking the South Asian struggles to other movements around the world, including the anti-capitalist movements in Europe and North America.<sup>13</sup> Each of these four strands had a different understanding of Islam and imperialism and responded in different ways to the imperial wars. Islam was mobilised by conservative feudal sections and the liberal sections of society as well as the revolutionary strands in the national liberation struggles in the subcontinent such that it is not possible to speak either of socialism or pan-Islamism or other anti-colonial ideologies as undifferentiated and decontextualised phenomena. The emigre strand is most significant for its engagement with Turkish nationalism and the caliphate issue on the one hand *and* the October Revolution and socialism on the other. Their engagement was theoretical as much as it was practical.

The revolutionary pan-Islamists toured the Central Asian republics at a critical moment after the

October Revolution to counter the Basmachi rebellion armed and supported by the British and the opposition organised by the Emir of Bukhara rallying wealthy Indian merchants living there and the clergy with British support (Khan 2014; Roy 1964 [1984]). In their writings and speeches the South Asian revolutionaries addressed the reasons why the Central Asian Muslims, *as Muslims*, should support the October Revolution (Abdullah Khan 1998; Mohammed Ayub Khan 2014; M Hassan Khan and Kamal 2008). Who else could convince the Central Asian Muslims about the true face of British imperialism and expose British propaganda better than the South Asian anti-colonialists? Besides personal meetings, a delegation of the provisional government visited Moscow in March 1919 and held discussions with many high-ranking Bolsheviks, including Lenin (Abdullah Khan 1998; Mohammed Ayub Khan 2014; M Hassan Khan and Kamal 2008). The question of religion was an important subject in their discussions. Their engagement modified Bolshevik stances from an adamant commitment to atheism based on European modernity's opposition to church and theology to an openness to the *possibility* that Eastern religions may be different from European ones. Historical research on the exchanges between the socialists and anti-colonialists about politics, religion and theory, and their work during their stay in Central Asia, a significant part of the anti-colonial as well as the Bolshevik revolutions, is sketchy at best.

Many leaders of the provisional government were erudite Islamic scholars. For example, the Prime Minister of the provisional government, Muhammed Barakatullah was trained as an *alim* and in 1894 the Ottoman sultan conferred on him the title of Sheikh al-Islam of the British Isles (Ansari 2014: 184). That did not stop him from criticising the corruption and opportunism of the Ottoman sultan and even predicting the downfall of the Ottoman empire as early as 1903 (Khan 2014: 62). Obaidullah Sindhi, the interior minister in the provisional government, was trained in the Deoband seminary. What is interesting about this revolutionary anti-colonial strand is that unlike the other pan-Islamists, their arguments were grounded, not in atavistic invocations of Islam, or in mimicking the Turkish nationalists, but rather in reinterpretations of Islamic teachings in anti-imperialist and egalitarian ways. These reinterpretations provided many shared grounds with socialist politics. What were the common shared grounds between European socialism and the South Asian pan-Islamists, Sikhs and other strands of the revolutionary anti-colonial movement in South Asia before and during World War I?

## **Socialists and Anti-colonialists**

In what follows I identify the main points of convergence and divergence between the socialists and the anti-colonialists without attempting a deeper engagement with the theoretical, philosophical, historical, sociological, economic and political basis for it. Such an engagement is an important task in the present context. The convergences and divergences between socialists and anti-colonialists can be found in a variety of philosophical and social traditions in the subcontinent, including Sikhs, South Asian Sufism and various sects emerging from the South Asian Bhakti traditions that were constitutive of what elsewhere I have called the Indic Enlightenment (D'Souza 2018a). For the purposes of this section I limit the discussion to examples from important pan-Islamists who were required, given their political circumstances, to engage with the socialist revolution on the one hand and the political angst caused by the dissolution of the caliphate on the other.

Muhammed Barakatullah's pamphlet titled *The Khalifet* written in 1924 while he lived in Turkey provides an example of how he arrived at a revolutionary position on the question of the dissolution of the caliphate from Islamic history and sources. After the Amir of Afghanistan made peace with the British and expelled the members of the provisional government, Barakatullah was forced to move to Istanbul at a time when Turkey was in the throes of Mustafa Kemal's secular republican revolution. How should South Asians respond to the Kemalist coup? *The Khalifet* addresses this question. When Barakatullah wrote the pamphlet, Britain, France and Italy had occupied Istanbul and dismembered the Ottoman empire distributing the territorial-booty in Syria, Iraq, Palestine and elsewhere

amongst themselves. Britain, the occupying force, proclaimed itself as the champion of the religious freedoms and therefore the only guarantor of Islam for Muslims in Arabia, South Asia and elsewhere. At least since 1870 Britain promoted the idea of an Arab caliph located in Arabia, considered the home of Islam instead of the Turkish one in Istanbul (Teitelbaum 1998). With the occupation of Palestine and the siege of Jerusalem at the end of 1917, there was a scramble amongst different Arab religious leaders to proclaim themselves as the new Arab caliph (Friedman 1970; Hogarth 1925; Teitelbaum 1998).

Summarising the prevailing political conditions, Barakatullah writes that sultan Wahiduddin, the last Ottoman caliph, “cooperated with the enemies of Turkey while exiling patriotic Turks to Malta” (and became) “for all practical purposes a prisoner, still his political intrigues never ceased” (Barakatullah 1925 [1924]: 10). Secret negotiations began between Britain’s general Harrington and the deposed Wahiduddin who had fled to Mecca on a British ship (Barakatullah 1925 [1924], Ch 1). None other than the shareef of Mecca betrayed the sultan-caliph and switched to the British side against the Ottoman caliph. Stories of underhand dealings between him and the British were rife. As Ronald Storrs, the oriental secretary in Cairo and military governor of Jerusalem commented, “[...], that the Sharif [of Mecca] opened his mouth and the British Government their purse a good deal too wide ...” (Quoted in Friedman 1970, 87). The sheer scale of manipulation and the crassness of corruption in the British scramble for Arab colonies of the Ottoman empire, and one might add, British desperation in the face of the implosion of the empire, is without parallel in the histories of empires. Some of these scandals spilled over into the media. Barakatullah’s critique begins by summarising the pervasive corruption and opportunism that was rife everywhere, including India.

As home to the largest Muslim population in the world, and located between Central Asia and West Asia, that is, politically between the Bolsheviks and the Arabs, South Asia was crucial for Britain. At a crucial juncture Mohandas K Gandhi, a political conservative and conservative Hindu (Niemeijer 1972: 28), returned from South Africa in 1915 and was immediately recognised by the British as a leader of the Indian nationalist movement.<sup>14</sup> In South Africa, where he lived until 1915, he was an ardent supporter of British rule (Datta 2007) and opposed concessions or reforms for black Africans.<sup>15</sup> General Appleby’s siege of Jerusalem intensified competing claims to the caliphate by the Sheriff of Mecca and Ibn Saud, another pro-British/anti-Ottoman Emir and other claimants. In 1919, Gandhi gave a call to all South Asians, Hindus and Muslims alike, to support the restoration of the caliphate arguing: “[t]he Khilafat has become an Indian question, [...]. It is no longer merely a Muslim grievance” (Nanda 1989 [2002], Ch 14, p 1). Gandhi’s overtures to the Muslims leaders in South Asia came at a time when the vacuum created by the dissolution of the caliphate in particular the custody of the cities of Mecca and Medina became an urgent political question for Britain’s struggle to keep India (Friedman 1970; Hogarth 1925; Teitelbaum 1998). Gandhi withdrew the movement in 1924 as abruptly as he started it when the British finally threw the weight of the empire behind Ibn Saud after he accepted British terms seeking guarantees that pilgrims to Mecca and Medina would not be subject to harsh Wahabi fundamentalist norms (Hogarth 1925). Britain’s claims to bargain for the status of Mecca and Medina was based on its self-representations as the largest Muslim power. Barakatullah notes the backhand machinations and the complicity of the Aga Khan, the Indian conservatives and the Indian media, and above all, the efforts to gain the support of the South Asian elite, religious and secular, to back British efforts to hand over the custody of the holy cities of Mecca and Medina to its own political proteges in Arabia (Barakatullah 1925 [1924]).

Barakatullah asks South Asians to be sympathetic to the Turkish nation. Mustafa Kemal is not the first person in Islamic history to dissolve the caliphate, he argues. Seven hundred years ago in 1171 AD Sultan Salahuddin,

[...] put an end to the Khilafet in the house of Fatimeh—the daughter of the Prophet—in

Egypt by more crude methods than the present ones employed by the Grand National Assembly of Angora. The Moselm world did not forget the great services rendered by Sultan Salahuddin to Islam in crusade wars in spite of his abolition of the Fatimite Khilafet, [...] (Barakatullah 1925 [1924]: 11-12)

If there are precedents to the dissolution of the caliphate in Islamic history, then Muslims must give weight to Mustafa Kemal's reasons for the dissolution. The corruption, opportunism and collaboration with enemies of Turkey by the sultan-caliphs were around them and their actions had brought the Turkish nation to the brink of death. Referring to Koranic verses, Barakatullah writes,

[t]he struggle for existence is common to individuals as well as to nations: Thou art endowed with light of wisdom from on high; be not, therefore, helpless like dumb animals. Whatever is possible for others is possible for thee, too. (Barakatullah 1925 [1924]: 12)

Because Turkish people have a right to survive as a nation, it does not follow that South Asians must support calls for restoration of the caliphate, Arab or Turkish. South Asians must not thrust a caliphate on an unwilling Turkey under Kemal (Khan 2014: 62) as Gandhi and the clergy demanded. Instead, Muslims around the world must oppose the economic and political sanctions that Britain and her allies had imposed on the young struggling Turkish republic. Barakatullah delinks the sultanate and the caliphate but he does so by reinterpreting the teachings of the Prophet in just and egalitarian ways and drawing on Islamic history and texts. He provides two reasons, one normative and the other political (Barakatullah 1925 [1924], Ch VII). First, the prophet's teachings and actions suggest that a caliph must be elected by consensus. At the time of writing the pamphlet, parallel conferences, one in Mecca and the other in Cairo, one backed by Britain and the other by Egypt, were underway with states vying with each other for the custody of Mecca and Medina. No consensus was possible under the circumstances that prevailed. Second, the most important qualification to become a caliph is his ability "to protect the lives, the property and the honour of Moslems" (Barakatullah 1925 [1924], 53). None of the Muslim states had the capacity to discharge these obligations as all of them had become subsidiary powers of European imperialists. Even the mighty Ottoman empire, "notwithstanding its vast resources in money and men could not escape the constant onslaught of the designing European powers on its vitals" (Barakatullah 1925 [1924]: 53-54). The claimants to the caliphate,

[...] are bolstered up by the foreign monetary and military props. So long as they are dependent for their very existence upon such foreign aid they are creatures of a non-Moslem power. If the Shareef [of Mecca] be elected as the Khalif, it will amount to this, that up to now the Khilafet has been an engine for the aggrandisement of Islamic despotism and henceforth it will become an instrument for the aggrandisement of a non-Islamic imperialism. [...] It will be the realization of that dream for which forces in Europe were set in motion for centuries. (Barakatullah 1925 [1924]: 57)

The custody of Mecca and Medina must vest in an international trust to be managed by Muslims collectively. Barakatulla's arguments for separation of religion and state are not based on opposition to church and theology as in European modernity but rather it is derived from the normative standards established by the prophet and from Islamic history.

At the same time, what is right for Turkey is not necessarily right for India. The support for Turkey's

survival and the opposition to the restoration of the caliphate did not mean India too must become a secular republic like Turkey. The Kemalist style secular republicanism cannot work in South Asia which was a multiethnic, multilingual, multireligious, multiracial society. In a speech at the London Roundtable conference in 1930 Mohammed Ali, Barakatullah's student, described the identity of Indian Muslims in the following words:

I belong to two circles of equal size, but which are not concentric. One is India, and the other is the Muslim world ... We as Indian Muslims came in both circles [...] We belong to these two circles, each of more than 300 millions, and we can leave neither. (Ali 1930)

Instead South Asia must become a republic of many nationalities, or a confederation of *quoms*(nations) that belong to a common *watan* (homeland).<sup>16</sup>

What about socialism, the other flank of the revolutionary South Asian anti-colonial movements?

### **Indian Enlightenment**

South Asian radicals, pan-Islamists and others, had little difficulty in relating to core Bolshevik ideas about socialism. Socialistic and communitarian ideas of egalitarian shared collective life have deep roots in the dissident traditions of the Indic Enlightenment.<sup>17</sup> As early as 1912, Mushir Hussain Kidwai published a pamphlet titled *Islam and Socialism* in which he mapped the similarities between socialism and the teachings of the prophet quoting verses from the Koran (Kidwai 1912; see also Kidwai 1937). If the Bolshevik *Summons* (above) noted that land belonged to Allah in Islam the argument is recognition of pan-Islamists who argued abolition of private property, a cornerstone of Bolshevik programme, far from being contrary to Islam, helped them to correct the corruption, despotism and tyranny of Islamic rulers who had deviated from the teachings of the prophet.

Sociologically, the idea that all land belongs to Allah has profound ramifications for law, institutions and governance. Kidwai argues, as men, including kings had no superior claims to land, the Islamic world developed a variety of land tenure systems based on contractual arrangements between cultivators and administrators. Kings may be entitled to revenue but could not claim proprietary entitlements. It was precisely this red line between entitlement to revenue and proprietary rights over land that the British crossed in the subcontinent when they claimed ownership of land vested in the colonial state. Periodic peasant revolts continued to destabilise colonial government throughout and became the nucleus together with the soldiers, of the revolutionary strands in the anti-colonial movements that confronted Bolsheviks and their socialism.<sup>18</sup> These land relations also meant systems like primogeniture in Europe and hereditary succession were unfamiliar to Islam leading to political instability over questions of kingship and succession perhaps but not in communitarian/collective life.<sup>19</sup>

Nor did the South Asian anti-colonialists have differences with the Bolsheviks about the need to fight tyranny, despotism and injustice—whether it was tyranny of the British in South Asia, the Tsars in Central Asia or capitalism against workers in Europe and North America. If Sikh religion obliges Sikhs to fight tyranny wherever it occurs (Uberoi 1996), the foundations of Islam, the pan-Islamists argued, was against despotism in any form. If there was no god except Allah, it follows that Muslims must not kow-tow to any earthly power (Barakatullah 1903: 17-18; also see Kidwai 1937: 47). “Man can only be a fellow-man to others, *not to god*” (Kidwai 1937: 47). The South Asian revolutionaries were on their most familiar turf with regards to Bolshevik opposition to the collusion of priests, property and political power. In South Asia there is an uninterrupted tradition from at least the 12<sup>th</sup> century AD in all strands of the Indic Enlightenment from Kabir and Nizamuddin Auliya in the 12<sup>th</sup>



century to the Kukas and the Nath traditions in late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, across the subcontinent from Tamil regions in the south to Kashmir and Afghanistan in the north in which the collusion of priests, property and political power is central to critique and acts as guides to rebellions against tyranny. The Bolshevik critique of collusion of priests, property owners and political power was hardly new to the South Asian revolutionaries. Indeed, they were themselves products of those traditions (D'Souza 2018a). For the Bolsheviks however, the idea that the critique of priests, property owners and political tyrants does not necessarily entail atheism was a novel one.

The most important ideological difference between South Asian anti-colonialists and the Bolsheviks was about the place of ethics or more appropriately over ontological understandings of the sources of ethics for collective life. For the pan-Islamists, Sikhs as well as others, the centrality of materialism in Bolshevism left humankind without any tools to address questions about human purpose, human destiny and human relations to each other and to nature. Such ontological questions, traditionally addressed by religions, are essential conceptual foundations for the communitarian, socialist societies that Bolsheviks wished to establish. Bolshevism went only halfway. Because religion was corrupted by the priests, the property owners and the political powers does not mean that understandings of human existence, human purpose and human destiny are not important to establish a just society. The Bolsheviks must therefore take their revolution further by recognising that the foundations of communitarian life lie, not only in providing for material needs, but also recognising that society and community is much more than food, clothing and shelter.

For the South Asian anti-colonialists nurtured by long established traditions of *non-dualist* relations between mind and matter the separation of material life from social and spiritual life was inconceivable.<sup>20</sup> For the Bolsheviks nurtured by equally long-established traditions of *dualism* of mind and matter, the South Asians were “idealists” who were opposed to materialism. Such questions invite renewed consideration of the philosophical foundations of Western and Eastern thought and their ramifications for state-community relations.<sup>21</sup> In hindsight, it is interesting that the socialist states imploded precisely because their materialism was no match to the far superior consumerist-competitive materialism of Western capitalism.

## Conclusions

“God made man and the Devil made the nation,” Mohammed Ali said in 1930 (Ali 1930). I suspect Ali meant the devil made the nation state. And, if people seeking freedom came together in the October Revolution, the devil of nation states destroyed that freedom. Contrary to Bolshevik expectations, revolutions did not follow in the other European nation states. The failure of revolutions in the rest of Europe became the pivotal factor in the trajectory of socialism as well as anti-colonialism. It forced Russian communists into isolation and to propose “socialism in one country” instead. Socialism in one country suited the imperialists well as it enabled them to resume a game they are most adept at—wars. Encirclement, economic sanctions and ideological propaganda pushed USSR into a corner and transformed the struggle for socialism for all humankind into the Great Patriotic War that claimed the lives of 27 million Russians. World War II redrew boundaries in the colonial world, including India and realigned the Great Powers.<sup>22</sup> Notwithstanding these developments, the October Revolution left a taste of freedom and the desire for human emancipation in the colonial world.

The purpose of this discussion is neither to defend religion nor atheism nor to draw lines in the idealism/materialism duality of Western thought. My purpose is more modest and limited to illuminate the fact that linear accounts of October Revolution's influence on anti-colonial movements may tell only half the story. My purpose is to highlight the other half of the story of October Revolution, that is, the influence of the anti-colonial struggles in theories and practices. The anti-colonial movements were by no means “clean slates” on which the Bolsheviks wrote their socialism.

The untold half of the story of the October Revolution may be more significant for future revolutions against new forms of colonialism and imperialism that we see around us today. If we are to go from the “October Revolution to Other Revolutions” which is the theme of the HDK conference, then, much greater understanding of the other half of the story may be needed.

## Notes

1 Baba Sohan Singh Bhakna was a Ghadarite and a revolutionary and this is a quote from his pamphlet *Dukh* in Josh (1970: xxi).

2 For recent publications on the contributions of anti-colonial and anti-racism movements to the October Revolution, see Adi (2013); Stevens (2017).

3 See note No 1.

4 For an account of the White Armies from British military standpoints, see Stewart (2009).

5 For a historical account of the Roy-Lenin debates, see Haithcox (1963).

6 See M N Roy's exposition of the Supplementary Thesis of the National and Colonial Question at the Second Congress (The Communist International 1921: 117).

7 See M N Roy's exposition of the Supplementary Thesis of the National and Colonial Question at the Second Congress (The Communist International 1921: 117 at 118).

8 See M N Roy's exposition of the Supplementary Thesis of the National and Colonial Question at the Second Congress (The Communist International 1921: 117, 122).

9 Mohandas K Gandhi, the conservative leader of the reformist Indian National Congress, in a letter to Lord Irwin, the Viceroy of India, wrote:

In common with many of my countrymen, I had hugged the fond hope that the proposed Round Table Conference might furnish a solution. But when you said plainly that you could not give any assurance that you or the British Cabinet would pledge yourselves to support a scheme of full Dominion Status, the Round Table Conference could not possibly furnish the solution for which vocal India is consciously, and the dumb millions are unconsciously, thirsting. [...] *It is common cause that, however disorganised, and, for the time being, insignificant, it may be, the party of violence is gaining ground and making itself felt.* Its end is the same as mine. [...] Many think that non-violence is not an active force. My experience, limited though it undoubtedly is, shows that non-violence can be intensely active force. It is my purpose to set in motion that force as well against the organised violent force of the British rule *as the unorganised violent force of the growing party of violence* (Gandhi 1930) (emphasis added).

10 Congress of the Peoples of the East (1920 [1977]: 4). Note that there is no attempt to speak as the voice of the entire world or to propose that the entire world must reshape itself in the image of Bolshevik Russia, a tendency that was to become prominent with the onset of World War II.

11 Comparisons of the draft Thesis on Agrarian Question (Lenin 1920 [2002]) and the Minutes of the Second Congress of the Communist International: Thesis on the Agrarian Question present interesting insights into the Bolshevik thinking on the Agrarian question that is significant in light of the changes in that thinking later on after the onset of World War II.

12 The Communist International (1921: 122-23). M N Roy did not attend the Baku Congress due to

his differences with the Second International. In the follow-up to the Second Congress the organising committee decided on two action points: to convene a congress of the oppressed people in Baku and to set up a Central Asiatic Bureau of the COMINTERN in Tashkent. Roy believed that the Congress could only be symbolic whereas he wished to prioritise the second task which was in practical organisational terms more important (Roy 1964 [1984]: 391).

13 These four strands can also be identified in the non-Muslim strands of the anti-colonial mobilisations in the Punjab, Bengal, Maharashtra, Sindh, and other parts of South Asia.

14 For an expanded analysis, see D'Souza (2014). Also see Nanda (1989 [2002]); Niemeijer (1972).

15 For example, Gandhi launched the magazine *Indian Opinion* on 4 June 1904, the object of which was "to bring the European and the Indian subjects of the King Edward closer together" (*Mahatma Gandhi Collected Works* Vol IV, p 320). In an editorial published on 9 September 1905, Gandhi responded to Rev Dube, a respected African leader who argued that Africans could be as competent as anyone else if the colonials allowed them a chance for self-improvement, as follows: "A little judicious extra taxation would do no harm; in the majority of cases it compels the native to work for at least a few days a year. [...] Now let us turn our attention to another and entirely unrepresented community—the Indian. He is in striking contrast with the native. While the native has been of little benefit to the state, it owes its prosperity largely to the Indians. While native loafers abound on every side, that species of humanity is almost unknown among Indians here" (emphasis mine; Gandhi, *Collected Works*, Vol IV, p 320).

16 For an expanded discussion, see D'Souza (2014, 2018a). For Ubaidullah Sindhi's draft constitution for independent India elaborating the confederation's structure, see appendix to Shahjahanpuri (1995).

17 For an expanded discussion of the Indic Enlightenment, see D'Souza (2018a).

18 For an expanded discussion, see D'Souza (2014).

19 For analyses of land, labour and ideology, see in Central and South Asia, see Uberoi (1994, 2012). For comparisons between Bolshevik socio-economic policies and the early Islamic republic under the first three caliphs, see Kidwai (1937). This distinction between state and community is once again addressed in recent times in the writings of the Kurdish leader Abdullah Ocalan.

20 See an expanded discussion of this in Uberoi (1994, 1996, 2012).

21 In recent times, the Kurdish leader Abdullah Ocalan's writings returns us to precisely these types of questions.

22 For an expanded discussion, see D'Souza (2018b, Ch 3).

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