

**Educational Institutions and the Making of Revolutionary
Nationalism in Bihar and Jharkhand
(c. 1900–1920)**

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Abstract: *This research paper examines the relationship between the schools and universities in Bihar and Jharkhand that helped to develop revolutionary nationalism in the region roughly between 1900-1920. Moving beyond the dominant historical focus on Bengal and Maharashtra, it throws light on how schools, colleges, hostels and intellectual societies became the fertile ground for the radical political consciousness in the region. The institutions like B. N. College Patna, St. Columba's College Hazaribagh, SIL Lodge Deoghar, etc. emerged as the major centers for ideological mobilization. Utilizing evidence from regional events, underground organisations and information collected through colonial surveillance, the paper argues that educational settings contributed significantly to the articulation of radical anti-colonial political agenda in both Bihar and Jharkhand. This paper makes an effort to establish that Bihar-Jharkhand region was also a site of active development and formulation of revolutionary nationalism vis-a-vis the struggle for Indian independence.*

Keywords: *Anushilan Samiti, Educational Institutions, Student Politics, Swadeshi Movement etc.*

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Introduction

Revolutionary nationalism refers to a stand of the Indian national movement who believes in securing the independence of the motherland through the direct confrontation with the colonisers. Unlike the moderate phase of the Indian National Congress, revolutionary nationalists did not believe in petitioning the colonial state for incremental reforms. They believed in direct confrontation, terror, including the use of arms, secret societies, and mass

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awakening through underground literature and education. Due to their terror activities, they were labelled as terrorist by the colonial government.

According to Bipan Chandra, revolutionary nationalism emerged as a response to the failure of constitutional methods and the betrayal of Indian expectations after the Partition of Bengal (1905) and the Morley-Minto Reforms (1909).¹ Revolutionary groups such as Anushilan Samiti and Jugantar in Bengal, and the Hindustan Republican Association (HRA) and later the Hindustan Socialist Republican Association (HSRA) in northern India, became symbols of this radical wave of nationalism. These revolutionaries drew inspiration from Italian and Irish nationalists, the French Revolution, Russo-Japanese War, and emphasized *martyrdom, sacrifice, secrecy, and discipline* as key components of their ideology.²

The early Congress leadership represented by figures such as Dadabhai Naoroji, Gopal Krishna Gokhale, and M.G. Ranade, had complete faith on the British government so they approached the government in that way. They believed in the process of dialogue, petition, and representation to acquire the rights. The politics moderate leaders were stereotyped as the politics of mendicancy.³

But in contrast if we see the revolutionary nationalists, they rejected the idea of peace and constitutional approach. The idea is believed to be slow and disconnected from the common masses, especially during the times of Partition of Bengal in 1905. Bipan Chandra mentions that, ‘they had advocated persistent opposition to the government and put forward a militant programme of passive resistance and boycott of foreign cloth, foreigners’ courts, education and so on’.⁴

In this light the present-day Bihar and Jharkhand also cannot be ignored. These regions though often eclipsed by the narratives centered around Bengal, Maharashtra, or Punjab, but it holds great significance. These two regions offer a unique lens to explore how revolutionary nationalism evolved beyond the metropolitan centers and permeated the educational and intellectual peripheries of British India. The revolutionary intent against the colonial rule can be traced back from the revolt of 1857 by Kunwar Singh of Jagdishpur. Simultaneously the tribals in Jharkhand particularly, Santhals and Mundas also launched their struggle against the colonial incursion through Santhal revolt in 1855-56 and Ulgulan in 1899-1900. Although these revolts cannot be framed into the modern nationalist term, they struggled for the assertion of their autonomy. But these struggles form the prelude of an organised revolutionary activity in this region in early 20th century.

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Educational institutions as the sites of political awakening

The process of transforming educational institutions into agents of political consciousness continued to occur between the period of British control through colonization as colonial systemic forms of education helped develop the means for resistance to them.⁵ The British policy of "Downward Filtration" developed a compliant administrative class of intermediaries within India; however, through the introduction of Western literature, students of Western rationalism were able to receive training that would develop their ability to perform a thorough analysis of the social conditions that existed within the Indian subcontinent. This analytical approach enabled students to produce a comprehensive economic critique of the British government. Students developed their understanding through their education and through their understanding of their roles as students.⁶ One of the most influential figures to assist in this transition was a scholar named Sakharam Ganesh Deuskar, who was from the Jamtara District of Jharkhand. He published a book called *Deser Katha* in 1904. This book helped to translate a complex set of economic arguments into simple Bengali and helped to galvanize students throughout the region of Jharkhand.⁷

Revolutionary nationalism took shape in covert centers of higher education in urban areas of Bihar, primarily in and around Patna and Bhagalpur. Bihar National College at Patna was a core center for the Anushilan Samiti because of the efforts of Bankim Chandra Mitra to guide students through exposure to European revolutionary philosophy and physical training; from students to extremists.⁸ To the British, this meant that B.N. College was completely under the control of Bengali instructors, who were decaying the minds of Biharis' with anti-British ideas. Likewise, Tej Narain Jubilee College, Bhagalpur functioned as the provincial headquarters for the Dacca Anushilan Samiti, which created a Revolutionary structure nearly all across the district headquarters of the province.⁹ These formations allowed for the transportation of illegal weaponry and the provision of safe haven for immune criminals, and thus university dormitories became supportive points for.¹⁰

Young people mobilized by creating front organizations that essentially closed the gap between academia and the practice of militancy¹¹ The Hindu Boy's Association in Patna provides an example of such an organization: it served as a 'recruitment front' where young men could come to learn about Swami Vivekananda in English and also provide access to

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each other across language barriers (Bihar vs. Bengal) so that everyone could participate in a common revolutionary discourse.¹² Leaders of these organizations also set up a "cellular recruitment structure," with each member choosing and instructing one individual, in this way limiting the impact of a written confession from one individual on the rest of the organization. In addition to these underground organizations, students were also able to engage in physical training through places called akharas, such as the akhara located in Deoghar, Jharkhand, where students were trained in the use of the lathi and the construction of explosives.¹³

The establishment of educational institutions brought increased political awareness through 'territorial self-fashioning'. Institutions such as Bihar and Orissa Research Society (established 1915) and Patna Museum (established 1917) provided a forum for local scholars who supported the view that the Mauryan Empire (325-185 B.C.E.) and the Gupta Empire (320-550 C.E.) were accomplishments of the people of Bihar.¹⁴ The goal of these scholars was to develop a national model using the regional history of Bihar and to refute the traditional colonial definition of the region as backward; therefore, they viewed the region as the birthplace of Indian civilization. Through the intellectual activities of local scholars, they were able to reclaim their cultural history from Western Indologists; thus, creating a foundation upon which to build the new.¹⁵

Swadeshi and anti partition agitation

After the partition of Bengal in 1905 a drastic change could be seen in the environment of educational institutions. It proved to be a political awakening, transforming them from sites of imperial instruction into pedagogical crucibles for nationalist agitation and revolutionary fermentation.¹⁶ The Golden League, which was created in 1904-05 as part of the boycott of British goods, was organized by a coalition of educators in Deoghar, Jharkhand. Among them were Jogen Basu, Headmaster of Deoghar School, and Binoy Sanyal, a local teacher¹⁷. The intent was to educate Hindu boys in the ideals of "Swadeshism" through the establishment of the Swadeshi School Sabha in Monghyr, Khagaria in 1909.¹⁸

In Bhagalpur, collegiate students showed their displeasure using very obvious symbolic means; this involved wearing red and yellow colours and marching in processions

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while wearing Bande Mataram badges, to express their allegiance to the anti-partition movement.¹⁹ During this time, student activism also became formalised with the establishment of the Bihar Students' Conference in 1906; organized by Dr Rajendra Prasad, it was one of the first student organisations established in India and sought to build a sense of brotherhood among the students and develop a new political awareness that the colonial authorities were becoming increasingly apprehensive about.²⁰ In Patna itself a teacher named Tarapada Ganguly of T. k. Ghosh Academy used to induce all students he taught to buy Swadeshi goods. As the students found Swadeshi goods more expensive Ganguly used to pay the differences in price himself.²¹ In Monghyr region a Swadeshi School Sabha was established at Khagaria in 1909 which aimed to educate Hindu boys in Swadeshism.²²

Other key incidents

The April 30th, 1908 Muzaffarpur Bomb Incident was carried out by young revolutionaries Khudiram Bose and Prafulla Chaki, which marked an abrupt change in the colonial education system, because it changed the regional student body from having secret intellectual dissent, to having open armed rebellion against British imperialism.²³ The event had national ramifications, particularly at educational facilities; most schools were closed for several days as a way of honouring Khudiram, who was seen as a martyr, and to honour him, young "Bengalee bloods" wore "martyr dhotis" and shared Khudiram's picture among themselves.²⁴ The symbolic alignment highlighted that the western rationalist education programme of the Raj, which sought to create compliant civil servants, served as a repository of dialectical instruments for developing a severe critique of the Raj - ultimately highlighting the failure of the "Downward Filtration Theory".²⁵

The "non-regulatory" territories of Jharkhand were home to a tactical nucleus for revolutionaries. The bridge was known as Sil's Lodge and located in Deoghar, served as a secret laboratory and storage for revolutionary armaments and was rented by Barindra Ghosh, who was an alumnus of Deoghar High School, in 1907 for the purpose of establishing a sick retreat for an ill friend, but instead was used as a front for the use of students/gymnasts as

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"nurses" to conduct tests with picric acid explosives and to conduct experiments in the nearby jungles.²⁶ The forensic evidence found in the Alipur Conspiracy Case identified the same bombs that were created in Sil's Lodge and linked them back to the bombings that occurred in Muzaffarpur, thereby identifying a sophisticated infrastructure of educational networks and akharas being used for physical and spiritual training.²⁷ Students and the clandestine hubs, like Sil's Lodge, created networks that served as a critical logistical geography for the Anushilan Samiti's operations against colonial powers in Santal Pargana.

The heavy infiltration of revolutionary cells into college campuses led to a severe administrative response from the colonial regime, leading to the establishment of universities as arenas of surveillance and political warfare. After the Muzaffarpur incident, Calcutta University's Registrar sent circulars in 1909 to headmasters directing them to prohibit their students from taking part in political rallies.²⁸ The Director of Public Instruction (D.P.I.) also took measures to prevent "tainted" students from being accepted into any of the schools across the province. Professors were accused of being ideological leaders and mentors, especially Kamakhya Nath Mitra at Bihar National (B.N.) College and historian Jadu Nath Sarkar at Patna College, and were heavily scrutinized for being accused of "poisoning the well" and influencing youth with anti-British sentiments, and for also providing logistical support to revolutionary leaders like Bankim Chandra Mitra.²⁹ By the second decade of the 20th century, these two institutions became hunting grounds for the creation of a new patriot vanguard. The clash between the imperial educational control paradigm versus the emergence of the spirit of Swaraj was the ultimate catalyst for the formation of revolutionary nationalism in Bihar and Jharkhand.³⁰

At the Nimej murder case in 1913, Mahantha Bhagwan Das was murdered as a result of politics in the Shahabad district.³¹ This provided a critical point of evidence to highlight the way that the revolutionary vanguard were subverting education in schools in Bihar and on the upland of Jharkhand. While the direct killers: Motichand, Manikchand, Jaichand, and Jorawar Singh, came from Arjun Lal Sethi's Vardhman Vidyalaya in Jaipur, it was clear that Bihar was a vital area for logistical support and recruitment for the Anushilan Samitis in Banaras and Dacca. This included intellectual leaders like Sachindra Nath Sanyal and Pandit Bishundutt.³² The case proved to the colonialists that many religious and liberal schools were purposely being turned into sites for the practice of violence. While some students were

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studying the Gita and Swami Vivekananda's teachings, they were actually creating a critique of the British through the works of Sakharam Ganesh Deuskar's banned book, *Deser Katha*.³³ The Rodda Arms Theft in August 1914 was a crucial logistical event that led to the militarization of educational institutions in the Bihar and Jharkhand upland regions. Bipin Ganguli, an alumnus of Tej Narain Jubilee College in Bhagalpur, and his "regional student colleagues" organized the transportation of munitions through "non-regulation" routes in the Santal Parganas, and together with the participation of Prabhu Dayal, Himmat Singh and Baidyanath Biswas (the son of a clerk in the Deputy Commissioner's office at Dumka), demonstrated how the revolutionary vanguard mobilized the social capital of the regional literati for military purposes.³⁴ The intense investigation into the Rodda theft led to a draconian administrative response and the systematic surveillance of institutions such as the Dumka Zila School as well as the invocation of the Defence of India Act 1915 to remove "tainted" faculty and students.³⁵

On December 13, 1918, the arrest of Ram Binode Singh by British authorities using the Defence of India Act, marked a crucial point in transforming educational institutions within the Bihar and Jharkhand area into centres for radicalised anti-colonial action.³⁶ Singh had a network across different education institutions including a revolutionary social network at Muzaffarpur and the T.N.J. College, in Bhagalpur; he epitomises the transitory nature of the student vanguard in the region.³⁷ The arrest of Ram Binode Singh at St Columba's College, Hazaribagh triggered a rupture in existing institutional practice resulting in a collective student hartal (a form of strike) and the formation of a militant political consciousness amongst his contemporaries, particularly where Krishna Ballav Sahay and Bajrang Sahay took action to demonstrate solidarity with Singh by following him to the Hazaribagh Central Jail.³⁸ In this instance, Singh's arrest served as a bridge between clandestine cells and mainstream nationalist leadership as evidenced by the provision of finance from Dr Rajendra Prasad to assist in Singh's defence.³⁹ In sum, the transformation of Singh from a dangerous detenu confined at Khunti, into a leading member of the revitalised revolutionary movement demonstrates the inability of colonial pedagogical surveillance to stifle the growth of the Swaraj spirit and has redirected the usage of the regional collegiate network as a setting to advance militant nationalism during the final years of the decade.⁴⁰

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Conclusion

The study found that between c. 1900 and 1920, the educational systems of Bihar and Jharkhand served as incubators for revolutionary nationalism. In examining these institutions, this research also moved beyond the traditional historiographical focus of Bengal and Maharashtra to demonstrate how colleges, schools, hostels, intellectual societies, and akharas provided active sites of ideological propagation, political socialization and clandestine organization in the region. While B.N. College, Tej Narain Jubilee College, St. Columba's College and Sil's Lodge represent only a few of the educational institutions under study, each of them were important pieces of an inter-connected revolutionary network that was associated with organisations such as Anushilan Samiti. Through exposure to western political philosophy, nationalist literature, and reinterpretations of their own regional identity, students from the study developed a critical consciousness and moved from constitutional agitation to military-style anti-colonialism.

In addition to outlining the context in which the changes occurred, the argument has also been put forth that the changes occurred within a context where the conjuncture of the Swadeshi movement, anti-partition protests, and several significant revolutionary events, such as the Muzaffarpur Bomb Case and Rodda Arms Theft, shaped the ways in which education spaces were being altered. The connections between various forms of student organization activity (as well as symbolic protests), underground groups, and centres for military training connected the intellectual ideas of dissent with the practical use of violence. The colonial authorities' use of surveillance to monitor independent activity, regulations designed to limit political activity, and the implementation of the Defence of India Act indicate that the British Government understood these institutions to be politically unstable. As a result of the British colonial project to create loyal intermediary types of people through many methods, a generation of youth who viewed themselves as participants in the struggle for Swaraj were created.

The study highlight that Bihar and Jharkhand were also the significant contributor to the idea of revolutionary nationalism during early 20th century. The educational institutions in this region developed not only as the centres for learning but also as the incubators of anti-colonial awareness and radical ideas. So in this way the paper tries to add to a more

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polycentric understanding of Indian freedom struggle and shows how important the educational spaces were in shaping the course of militant nationalism in early 1900.

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