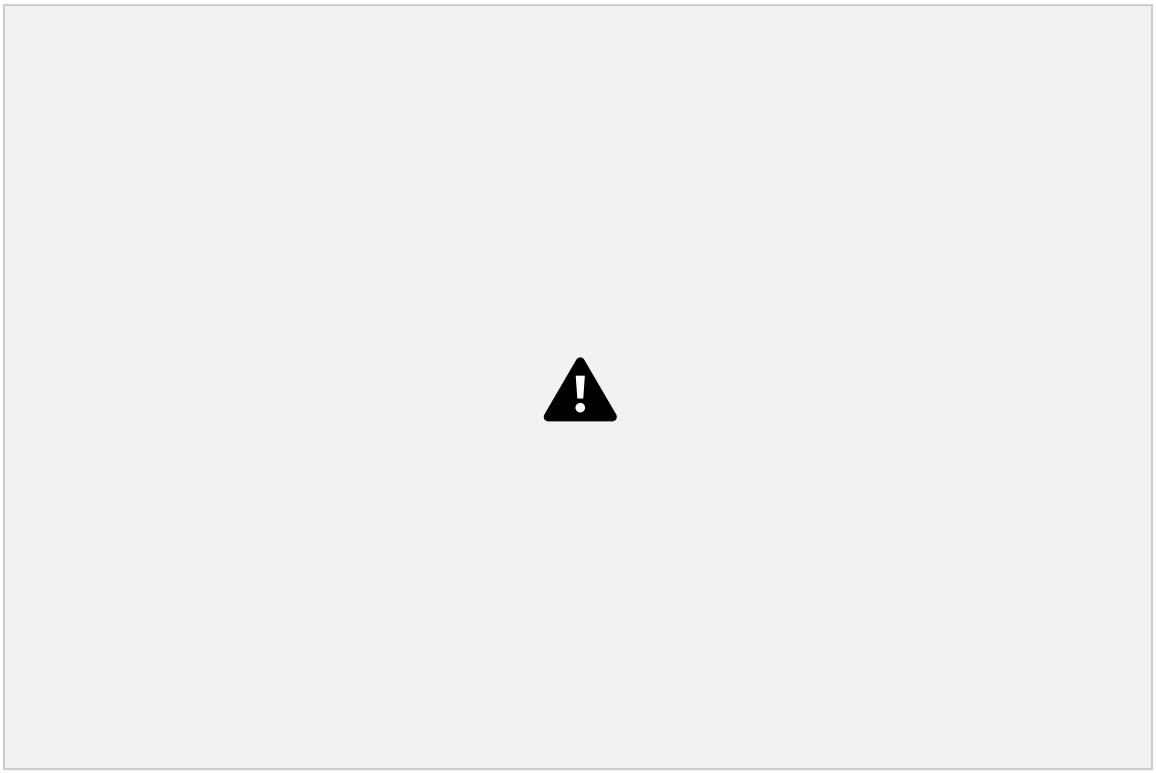
The role the Bolsheviks and Germans played toward India's non-violent independence movement



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Key Inquiry Question: To what extent did Bolshevik and German influences, following WW1, contribute to the development of India's non-violent independence movement?

Hypothesis: Despite external interest and desire from German and Bolshevik political groups (post WW1) to capitalise on the Indian Independence movement, India stayed true to non-violence grounded in Gandhi's ideology of Satyagraha.

Introduction

India's Non-Violent Independence Movement (INVIM) (1919-1947) refers to the movement orchestrated by the native people of India in an attempt to gain independence from the British Raj (1919-1947). Following WW1, anti-British ideologies and state-hoods, including Bolshevism and Germany, sought to capitalise on India's independence movement, through the use of violence, as a means to spread their communist-based ideologies. Although the Germans and Bolsheviks' violent approach had some influence on the movement, Gandhi's political campaign for independence, grounded in the ideology of satyagraha – non-violent resistance, commanded the majority of India's political forefront from 1919 to 1947 (Lenin et al., 2020). Gandhi's commanding support from the masses meant the German and Bolshevik impact on India's emancipation from the British was superficial. Pro-German and Bolshevik perspectives allow us to evaluate the extent to which anti-British groups encouraged violence to spread their ideology, which was subsequently adopted by small nationalist groups. Furthermore, Indian and pro-Gandhi perspectives allow us to gauge how and why Indian natives disregarded violent support and stayed true to Gandhi's ideology of non-violence (Satyagraha).

Russia and German intention and plans

Following heavy casualties, mass economic strain, and political shifts during WWI, Britain began to decline as the world's biggest power. During this period of decline, Indian nationalist campaigner and leading member of the Indian National Congress (INC), Annie Besant, stated throughout her campaign while advocating for Indian self-rule that "England's difficulty is India's opportunity" (Competition Success Review, 2020). The phrase "India's opportunity" within the primary source explicitly references how exploiting Britain's weaknesses – particularly political instability — was seen as a valuable strategy by Indians during the independence movement. Moreover, the source infers that by amalgamating with Britain's enemies, including the Bolsheviks and Germans, Indian nationalists aligned their methods of resistance with such parties. This resulted in the development of smaller radicalised nationalist groups across India. Overall, the source is useful in understanding how Indian nationalists saw Britain's weaknesses as a strategic advantage to advance the independence movement. The source's Indian nationalist perspective offers a nuanced view of the movement while offering a level of contestability and bias toward the legitimacy of any resistance against Britain. Following the establishment of the Communist Party of India (CPI) in 1920, founder Manabendra Nath Roy sought support from the Revolutionary Council in Turkistan, attended by the Soviets. Roy's autobiography recalls to readers that Soviet authorities "decided to give Indian comrades all possible support without involvement in their plans" (Roy, n.d., 436-437). This primary source explicitly references Soviet willingness to support nationalist groups, but the phrase "without being involved" contradicts their motive of co-opting the independence movement to spread communist ideologies. Arun Coomer Bose, Head of History at Jammu University, corroborates this by noting the Soviets provided a "shooting range" for the CPI, implying violent support contrary to Gandhi's principle of Satyagraha. Roy's pro-communist perspective introduces bias, while Bose's secondary academic perspective - while being credible - adds potential bias toward British and communist agendas. However, both sources prove useful in understanding how the Soviets encouraged violent resistance without direct involvement in violent actions. During his speech in the House of Commons, Secretary of State for War and Air Winston Churchill, (1919-1921) expressed concerns on the impact of Bolshevik propaganda toward the British Raj. Specifically, Churchill stated that "the allies abandoned Russia. But Russia will not abandon them," causing "great agitation and unrest among the hundreds of millions of India's population, who had hitherto lived in peace and tranquillity under British rule" (Sielaff, 2011, 43). This primary source explicitly references how soviet presence resulted in perturbation throughout India, while the phrase "great agitation" infers how Britain's indifferent treatment of Indian natives caused increasing defiance of British rule. This defiance was inspired and supported by Soviet influence and guidance. In full, the source proves useful in understanding how Britain sought to deny the potential challenge that India's brewing independence movement – in conjunction with the Soviet's support – would pose towards the integrity of the British Raj. Finally, Churchill - one of the many faces of British imperialism during the 1930s-40s - presents strong pro-British political leanings. His deliberate use of belittling language - referring to the independence movement as an 'agitation' - contains heavy bias that downplays the widespread resistance and discontent of Indian people living under the British Raj. Throughout the independence movement, violent demonstrations orchestrated by communist funded/based groups rarely succeeded or went ahead. Despite this, a bombing attack on the Central Legislative Assembly in Delhi was coined by the Hindustan Socialist Republican Association (HSRA) due to the location's significance in colonial

governance. During the attack, pamphlets, – written by HSRA founder Chandrasekhar Azad – known as 'the red pamphlet,' were thrown into the council by the HSRA. Referencing a pro-communist perspective, the pamphlet states that "it takes a loud voice to make the deaf hear." (Singh, 1929) The phrase "deaf hear" infers Britain's willful ignorance towards their belligerent treatment of the native Indians. Moreover, the phrase "loud voice" infers how Indian communist groups believed that to break through Britain's benightedness, Indians needed to take a more violent and aggressive approach towards the independence movement. In full, the primary source is useful in contextualising the violent ideas of Indian communist groups. Despite this, as the source is propaganda and the author has a pro-communist perspective, there is a high level of bias and subjectivity towards the communist agenda – spreading communism. Therefore, the range of perspectives offered suggests that Bolshevik and Communist support for violence, despite being spurred by an indifferent imperial power following WW1, failed to substantially alter the non-violent strategy that defined the struggle for Indian independence. Conversely, the perspectives investigated uncover how Indian nationalists, who sought refuge in Communist and Bolshevik ideologies, disregarded Gandhi's ideology of Satyagraha in their fight for independence.

How these plans came to fruition

In his honours thesis on 'Soviet influence in British India', University of Colorado Honours student, Alan Sielaff stated that the "[CPI's] willingness to use violence...arms, and funding from sources foreign to India within the USSR, repelled many supporters of Gandhi" (Farrington, 1880-1950). The secondary source' explicitly references that violent civil disobedience was frowned upon by supporters of Gandhi as it went against their ideology of Satyagraha. Moreover, the source underscores the ideological divide within the independence movement, illustrating the masses' commitment to Gandhi's satyagraha despite more radical groups advocating for violence. This proves useful in understanding why the CPI and other communist groups failed to have any significant impact on the independence movement—reasons stemming from their lack of support from the INC and their overwhelming commitment to non-violence. Moreover, the secondary source's scholarly perspective focuses on Soviet influence in India. This restricts its applicability to broader contexts of the independence movement, offering a limitation. As the political leanings of the author are unaccounted for, and it was written by a university student, there is a level of contestability toward the rigour in analysis and unaccounted bias. Furthermore, as INVIM progressed, Gandhi's ideology of satyagraha became increasingly revered not only in India but globally. In an impassioned defence of Gandhi and Gandhism, Romain Rolland – an advocate for the rapprochement between Gandhi and communists – wrote a book on Gandhi's impact on the Indian masses. In his book, Rolland states that "Gandhi's non-violence appealed to the masses because it was deeply rooted in the Indian ethos of ahimsa [non-injury]." This allowed "his [Gandhi's] message of peace and love to transcend social and religious divisions, uniting people in a common cause" (Rolland, 1924). The primary source explicitly references Satyagraha's ability to "transcend social and religious divisions" and unite the people of India. This infers why the masses rejected violent ideologies to reinforce their commitment to achieving independence through non-violent means. Overall, this source is useful in determining how Gandhi's

ideology of Satyagraha resonated with the masses and united them under a common cause – to gain independence. The authors' pro-Gandhi and communist perspectives offer contestability and bias towards Gandhi and the Communist agenda – emancipation from the British and spreading communism. Therefore, the perspectives above highlight the ideological tension within the independence movement, contrasting the CPI's advocacy for violence with Gandhi's movement of non-violence (Satyagraha). While the CPI's involvement with the Soviets alienated many, Gandhi's Satyagraha resonated with India's masses who reinforced their commitment to achieving independence through non-violent means.

Conclusion

From the information above, it can be concluded that the collapse of the British Raj (1947) was unlikely a result of communism and the inception of similar ideologies throughout India. Due to the violent undertones of communist-influenced Indian nationalist groups, the masses of India who had already sought sanction in Gandhi's principle of Satyagraha – non-violent civil disobedience – failed to resonate with their movement. Because of this, communist-based revolutionary groups across India could not garner enough support to employ their violent methods of civil disobedience and in turn, have any significant impact on the revolution, and almost no effect towards the non-violent independence movement.

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