

'I Believe My Name is Not Unknown in India'

Emma Goldman and the Indian Revolutionary Movement, 1909–1925

Ole Birk Laursen

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In January 1909, the British Department of Criminal Intelligence (DCI) was concerned that the famous anarchist Emma Goldman would visit India to support the Indian revolutionary movement. According to their reports, she had letters of invitation from “‘Hindous” in British Columbia’ to the leaders of the movement in India, and she would give a few talks in India on her way back from Australia. ‘The Arch Priestess of Anarchy’, as the DCI report refers to Goldman, never made it to India, but she did take an interest in the Indian revolutionary movement at the time.

Mother Earth

As editors of *Mother Earth*, Goldman and Alexander Berkman reprinted articles from the New York-based Indian nationalist journal *Free Hindusthan* in 1909, covering the repression of free speech, the imprisonment and deportation of Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Aurobindo Ghose and Chidambaram Pillai, among others.

In July 1909, the Indian nationalist Madan Lal Dhingra assassinated political aide-de-camp Sir William Curzon Wylie in London. Dhingra was quickly apprehended and sentenced to death. Goldman compared ‘the legal farce of “judging” the Hindu student’ to the ‘judicial murder of Robert Emmet’. ‘Indeed’, she noted, ‘the comparison is highly appropriate, since British rule in India to-day is, in all essentials, an exact replica of the conditions of Ireland in Emmet’s time’.

When Shyamaji Krishnavarma defended the assassination in *The Indian Sociologist*, the publication was suppressed and its printers sentenced to jail (Krishnavarma lived in Paris, outside the jurisdiction of the British Government). The British anarchist Guy Aldred assumed printing of the journal and was quickly arrested, tried and imprisoned as well. ‘Evidently the boasted English liberty of the press’, wrote Goldman, ‘is no less a humbug than its “free” speech’. Making comparisons to the deportation of Johann Most and Vladimir Burtsev, the subsequent ‘Savarkar Case’ was covered extensively in the pages of *Mother Earth* too: ‘The English governing class is supposed always to have had respect for the right of asylum. It should, therefore, be bound by honor to set Savarkar free. But no trust is to be reposed in the governing class’.

These issues of *Mother Earth* were proscribed by the Government of India, as were Goldman’s essays ‘Anarchism: What It Really Stands For’, ‘Patriotism: A Menace to Liberty’, ‘Lectures on the Dynamics of Modern Drama, and Six Propaganda Lectures’, and ‘Syndicalism: The Modern Menace to Capitalism’.

Goldman and the Ghadar Party

Lala Har Dayal, IWW member and co-founder of the Ghadar Party in 1913, accompanied Goldman on her tour of the US West Coast in 1912 and 1913. Faced with deportation from the US in March 1914 on account of being an anarchist, Goldman commented in *Mother Earth*: ‘Har Dyal, one of the biggest intellects of India, has long been a thorn in the side of the British government because of his effective work in spreading revolutionary ideas among his fellow countrymen. Many attempts have been made to silence Har Dyal, both in India and in this country. And now the English government seems to have succeeded in persuading its lackeys in Washington to do its dirty work’. Har Dayal was released on bail and fled to Switzerland, where he became in-

volved with the International Pro-India Committee and mingled with Egyptian anti-colonialists, Turkish nationalists and Italian anarchists.

From 1915 to 1917, *Mother Earth* carried several features on the Ghadar Party, and Ram Chandra, editor of the *Hindustan Ghadar*, often contributed to the paper. Writing on press censorship in India and the power of propaganda, Chandra stated that: 'Hindu journalism from abroad has been consistently the champion of the underlying truths of modern culture, namely Democracy and Science, as opposed to Medievalism, which stood for blind faith, tradition, status and privilege'. When he and fifteen other Indians were arrested in San Francisco in 1917, *Mother Earth* noted that: 'We feel confident that war or no war, the Hindu revolutionists in America will continue their propaganda for the liberation of India, and against all iniquity and injustice, as will all other true revolutionists in America'.

In Berlin

Goldman herself was deported from the United States in 1920 and eventually ended up in Berlin in early 1922. In post-Russian Revolution Berlin, she and Berkman became close friends with the American author Agnes Smedley. Smedley had also been in contact with the Ghadarites in the US, and was now living with Virendranath 'Chatto' Chattopadhyaya.

Smedley wrote to Goldman that 'the Indian movement is not an Anarchist movement, or even a Socialist one. It is, from the social viewpoint, reactionary and nationalistic'. Similarly, Goldman wrote in her autobiography: 'Chatto was intellectual and witty, but he impressed me as a somewhat crafty individual. He called himself an anarchist, though it was evident that it was Hindu nationalism to which he had devoted himself entirely'. Nevertheless, Smedley also confessed to Goldman that 'Often I think that he is of far more value than I am; everybody knows that – all of you Anarchists and revolutionaries, all of the Indians'.

Smedley and Chatto had a tumultuous relationship, and she often relayed her woes to Goldman. Chatto, of course, had associated with French anarchists in Paris and Luigi Bertoni in Switzerland, and he and Berkman formed a friendship. Chatto and Berkman would discuss and argue like old friends, Smedley wrote to Goldman. It was at the suggestion of Chatto, however, that Goldman sent her manuscript 'My Disillusionment in Russia' to Indian publishers in 1924. 'I believe my name is not unknown in India', she wrote. 'Certainly the Indians in America, Russia, and Germany know me well, and will, I believe, be interested in reading a critical analysis of the Bolshevik regime in their own language'. Whether the publisher accepted it is unknown, but Goldman's article 'Heroic Women of the Revolution' was published in *Welfare* (Calcutta) in 1925, earning her 25 Rupees.

Goldman left Berlin in 1924, but Berkman stayed on. Perhaps through Chatto, he befriended M. P. T. Acharya and sent him books and essays on anarchism. Acharya claimed that he knew Goldman as well, but this is uncertain. Nevertheless, although Goldman never made it to India, as the DCI feared in 1909, she did have some influence on the Indian revolutionary movement.

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