



A Historical Review of Revolutionary Connections Between India and Ireland

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Abstract

This article visits moments of connected transnational histories of India and Ireland. Both the nations suffered under colonial rule. While Ireland attained independence from Britain in 1922, it continued to influence Indian revolutionaries and nationalists in several ways. The article provides an overarching review of some historical events that were reported in contemporary newspapers and remain main archives today for our knowledge on transnational anti colonial movements. Beginning with the perception of mutiny in Indian and Irish memory – the author explores key events such as De Valera's address to Gadar Party in America in 1920, reporting of Jallian wala Bagh massacre in Ireland, Connaught Rangers' mutiny of 1920 and 1916 Easter Rising.



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Introduction

The article explores some aspects of revolutionary connections between India and Ireland. The revolutionary connections developed as both the nations were under the British empire. Although an economic critique of colonialism had emerged in India during the early years of the 20th century, political strategies of revisiting the colonial rule could borrow from experiences of the other colonised nations. This article looks at transnationalism around these anti colonial movements and how mutinies, Jallian wala Bagh massacre and revolutionary tactics

formed a volatile ground for anti-imperialism in the two colonies. In the midst of popular Gandhi an strategy of non-violent protest, revolutionary ideals and heroism from Ireland provided a necessary fuel to the diverse and widespread Indian national movement.

Mutinies and Colonial Violence India, Ireland and America

In the recent years in Ireland and India – study of mutinies and revolutionary connections between the two nations have been understood in the

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backdrop of revisiting the empire and to some extent reimagining India and Ireland.¹ Memorials and memory have acquired power as the post-colonial State has promoted narratives of people's participation and inclusion of martyrdom in national history texts. Transnational histories helped the process of decolonisation in some ways, events with commonality of purpose were recalled. Sacralisation of individuals and events was typically indicative of patriotism which was necessary for the nationalist template. This involved official/State and people's consensus towards who the heroes would be.² This sometimes stands as an anomaly as the post-colonial nation states themselves fear rebellion and dissent from separatist forces within their own territory. The celebration of dissent and armed rebellion in the past against the British rule by any post-colonial state therefore is a complex process. It has been argued that during the World War I, a 'morality' of war time was created. In this sense World War I was expected to usher in a revolution; a new world order.³

At the same time, America was an important centre for exchange of political ideas. There were important transnational alliances of the Irish to consolidate their freedom movement in the 1920s. De Valera's speech to the Gadar Party (Indian radical nationalists) in 1920 is highly significant. Several Irish – American newspaper reports and journals of the 1915-1922 show Irish nationalist intensification in America. British heightened vigilance on these Irish groups in America which were already well entrenched historically as Fenians in the 1860s and later in the 1920s as members of the Irish Republican Army (IRA). It is notable that the American government took no action against the Irish-Americans who had conspired with the German embassy to organise the 1916 Rising.

The Connaught Rangers Mutiny of 1920 in India⁴ was a defining event in establishing transnational socio - political narratives in India and Ireland. The post - colonial transnational context of the mutiny is particularly significant. The mutiny of 1920 provided the base for discourses on revolution to emerge in both India and Ireland. Years after independence, Ireland began rediscovering and honouring its heroes of the War of Independence and 1916 Rising. Patriots who were martyred during imprisonment and hunger strikes were honoured.

The other factor which helped push the narrative of martyrdom into the decolonisation phase was the fact that Irish republicans were waging a war to free Northern Ireland from Britain well into the 1990s.

As a comparison to the anti-imperial resistance in India - the Indian 1857 uprising/mutiny/revolt/First War of Independence stands out as a vivid example. The word *Kranti* or revolution features in the literature and press of early 20th century India. Along with women, other marginalised sections of the society began to identify with the revolt in the years after independence.⁵ The other noticeable Mutiny in India was the 1946 Royal Indian Navy (RIN) protest.⁶

In India the anti-colonial protest was embodied as much in the peasant and workers movements⁷ as in the constitutional nationalism or in Gandhian modes of passive resistance, non-cooperation and civil disobedience. After 1947 commemorating these protests/movements or self-styled militant uprisings have been strategic for the Indian state as compared to the armed rebellion by men in army or navy in the colonial period.

In Ireland in the years after independence there was mourning, pain and remembrance for Irish soldiers who died in World War I. However, by the start of the World War II, commemoration had faded away due to Ireland's neutrality. The commemoration further declined with the beginning of Troubles in Northern Ireland in the 1960s.⁸ Some historians have pointed out to the continued commemoration in the Republic as well as in Northern Ireland through memorials and public events.⁹

The events of years 1919 and 1920 in India and Ireland snowballed into anti-colonial solidarity.¹⁰ There was a tremendous show of unity and purpose. In March 1920 De Valera witnessed New York city's greatest parade where Protestants, Indians and Scotch marched together.

*"A band of dark-skinned Hindu men and women, their ranks literally entwined in the blooming folds of the Stars and Stripes and the tri-color of Ireland, their proud bearing endorsing their emblem: 315,000 in India Are with Ireland to the Last"*¹¹

De Valera supported Women's Prisoners Defence League in London which demanded that British

empire in India must come to an end.¹² He also expressed hope that the non-violent method endorsed by the Indian nationalists would succeed. If Gandhi succeeded on the non violent programme it was going to give a new weapon to the suffering humanity.

In 1928 a man named John Flannery was fined 20s in Dublin for being possession of a six chambered Smith and Weeson. 45 revolver at the Queen's Theatre.¹³ Flannery revealed he was in the National Army and had got the revolver for the purpose of a play. The gun was meant to produce incidental sounds. He claimed he was the Secretary of the Ex Connaught Rangers' Distress Fund and he was arranging a play in Dublin to present a sketch of 'realistic incidents' connected with the mutiny of the Connaught Rangers. He complained that the Free State Government had done nothing for these men.

By 1930s, even as Ireland had resolved its own question of independence from Britain, *The Irish Press* was keeping a close watch on the revolutionary movement in India. Immediately after the execution of Bhagat Singh,¹⁵ Rajguru and Sukhdev after the Lahore Conspiracy Case, *Irish Independent* reported that impassioned speeches were delivered exhorting the members of *Nawjawan* conference to take 'mass action' for overthrow of imperialism and establishment of Workers' and Peasants' Republic. It was reported that *Nawjawan* conference critiqued Gandhi's 'utopian' promises of *Swaraj* (self rule) and urged its members to be ready with war material for any political struggle.

News on Jallian wala Bagh¹⁶ Massacre was fully covered in the Irish newspapers. Word by word transcript of General Dyer's prosecution was published and Irish public read it with great interest. Historically it may be justified to presume that the Irish soldiers posted in India were politically aware of the Indian resistance to imperial rule. The mass protest led by Gandhi, Dr Saifuddin Kitchlew and Dr Satyapal against the Rowlatt Act in 1919 was well known in Ireland and USA. JallianwalaBagh was a site for this protest where nearly twenty thousand people had gathered. Brigadier – General Dyer ordered opening of 1650 rounds of fire. Nearly five hundred people died in the bloody massacre. Several hundred were injured. Given these developments in

India, *Chicago Daily Tribune* immediately attributed nationalist motive to the 1920 Mutiny.¹⁷ It reported that three fourths of a battalion of Irish Connaught Rangers stationed at Jalandhar in Punjab, mutinied following arrival of recent events in Ireland. On receipt of this news at Solan, another detachment was reported to have attempted to seize arms and ammunition. Here two Irish soldiers were killed and one was wounded. The troops told their seniors that they were unable to serve any longer as their sympathies were with their people in Ireland. The soldiers however remained extremely 'respectful' to their officers but announced that they would ground their weapons. According to the dispatch the officers regarded the whole affair as a development of Sinn Fein agitation.

Irish press in 1952 reported that after reading the serial 'Mutiny Under the Sun', Aibhe O Monachain was inspired to write a street ballad as a tribute to the 'gallant' men of the Connaught Rangers who, in 1920, isolated thousands of miles from Ireland, revolted against England in protest against the atrocities being committed by Black and Tans and soldiery in Ireland. The ballad was based on the tune of "The Wild Colonial Boy".¹⁸

Execution of those who led the 1916 Easter Rising had exposed the most violent facet of the imperial rule in Ireland. Prison sentence for the Connaught Rangers mutineers and execution of James Daly, must have tainted the image of imperial army as innocuous and helpful employment generator for the Irish young men. This marked a difference between the Connaught Rangers of 1880s and 1920).

In 1966, the Federation of I.R.A. 1916-1921 expressed disappointment at the attitude of the government regarding the plans to bring home the remains of Daly.¹⁹ Various files in the National Archives of Ireland contain correspondence on allocations of pensions to the ex soldiers / mutineers of the Connaught Rangers in India. The pensions awarded by the Irish government in the 1930s to some those who had been involved (they had forfeited their British pensions).

Both Irish and Indian revolutionary societies were well informed about the 1920 mutiny.²⁰ Connaught Rangers was seen as a reassuring image, one which showed that any fears people might have that

Ireland was no longer able to produce fine soldiers for England's army were, unfounded.

From an interesting perspective Silvestri²¹ explores the differences in the composition of the Indian revolutionaries in India and America. In America the Irish population was deeply concerned about the treatment of Irish people but the Indian revolutionaries in India were composed of the elite/upper caste Hindus but in America they came from peasant and middle class backgrounds. Newspaper *Gaelic American* often published news from *Amar Bazaar Patrika* reporting demonstrations in Bengal after the Swadeshi Movement was launched in 1905. USA was racist but not imperialist. Organising struggle against the British oppression was possible and to a large extent successful. It is interesting to note that Bengali nationalism from 1919 onwards was inspired by Sinn Finn model, however inability to incorporate Muslim youth, the violent revolutionary movement was left with a narrow social base.

Scholars have also drawn attention to the fact that Irish nationalists were making extensive and coherent anti-colonial and anti-imperial arguments as early as 1830s and 1840s.²² Cross-colonial comparisons between Ireland and India featured prominently in the arguments of both pro and anti-imperial Irish writers in the early nineteenth century. It has been argued that some of the recent writings on nineteenth-century Irish orientalism have told only a partial story of Irish nationalism's representation of India and other Oriental cultures, largely because such readings have confined their attention to antiquarian tracts and romantic literary texts. Scholars have recently begun exploring the colonial complexities of those Irish men who served the interests of the British empire in India and its socio-political impact on Ireland.²³

Irish press was inclined to favour the revolutionaries in the way they reported. Despite the common political goal of resisting colonial rule, the notion of what revolution meant differed for Indians and the Irish.

The other important factor in making of a transnational revolutionary memory was the camaraderie between Jawaharlal Nehru and De Valera.

By the year 1920 DeValera showed unfettered support to the Indian revolutionary groups in America. In his highly significant address to the Ghadar Party²⁴ in New York in 1920.

*'I do not think anyone anywhere needs a book of facts to be convinced that the British have bled India to death, not only in wealth but in actual blood, but if anyone does need such a book it is not Irishman or one who has read the history of Ireland. The book tells us that Britain has plundered India. Ofcourse she has plundered India, what else is she in India for? The books only settle the question whether it is a few billion more or less.'*²⁵

We in Ireland, comparatively small in numbers, close to the seat of Britain 's imperial power, have never despaired. You, people of India, remote from her, a continent in yourselves, 70 times as numerous as we are, surely you do not despair – surely you will not despair!

In the context of 1920 itself, the Indo – Irish relationship was driven by colonial violence and revolutionary responses - WWI, Jallian wala Bagh, Rowlatt Act, atrocities by Black and Tans, memory of 1916 Easter Rising.

India witnessed Non Cooperation movement led by Gandhi from 1921-22. He had rejected violence or any form of rebellion as a mode of protest.

His Important Piece in Young India in 1920 Vividly Reflects his view of the Sinn Finn

I isolate this non-cooperation from Sinn Feinism, for, it is so conceived as to be incapable of being offered side by side with violence. But I invite even the school of violence to give this peaceful non-cooperation a trial. It will not fail through its inherent weakness. It may fail because of poverty of response. Then will be one time for real danger. The high-souled men, who are unable to suffer national humiliation any longer, will want to vent their wrath. They will take to violence. So far as I know, they must perish without delivering themselves or their country from the wrong, If India takes up the doctrine of the sword, she may gain momentary victory. Then India will cease to be the pride of my heart. I am wedded to India because I owe my all to her. I believe absolutely that she has a mission for the world. She is not to copy

*Europe blindly, India's acceptance of the doctrine of the sword will be the hour of my trial. I hope I shall not be found wanting.*²⁶

In Nehru's narration of world history, Ireland is contextualised – '*as a brave and irrepressible country, and not all the might of the British Empire has been able to crush the spirit or cow it into submission.*'²⁷

Nehru's visit to Ireland in 1956 was significant in the sense the *Irish press* expressed confidence that as long as Nehru is around, India will remain a democracy. He was pushing his country towards Socialism but demands that the means be democratic. Nehru asserted that India was friends with all because of its policy of non-alignment and cold war. The *Irish press* exemplified him as a 'rebel ruler' and was also received on the floor of DailEirean.²⁸

The Indo – Irish relationship was driven by colonial violence and revolutionary responses - WWI, Jallian wala Bagh massacre, Rowlatt Act, atrocities by Black and Tans, memory of 1916 Easter Rising etc. By the end of World War I, space was created for discourses on revolution to emerge in various European nations.

Conclusion

In present day Ireland, remembrance and historical pasts has been significant as we see diverse Tagore, Nehru, Bose and Gandhi -- all are celebrated as

Indian /global connections of the revolutionary period in Ireland. This space could be created due to commonality of democratic modernity in both the countries. National memory and internationalisation have been important to both India and Ireland. The imperial and anti imperial connections between India and Ireland are central to history. Royal Irish Constabulary inspired the development of policing in India.

Ireland has been hugely successful in transforming revolutionary memory (both real and imagined) into public history which transcends their own national boundaries and thrives on the Irish diaspora. This public history appears to be primarily dependent on State patronage and is largely a shared history. One can see employment of historians and the historical method outside of academia: in government, private corporations, the media, historical societies and museums, even in private practice.

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