



Communism and Communalism in the 1920s. Notes on a Neglected Nexus

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Upon first glance, the relation between Marxism and what has come to be labelled 'communalism' seems sufficiently outlined by the tag 'antagonistic'. Neither is expected to share an appreciable swath of common ground with the other. On the contrary, there has been no dearth of unequivocal rejection particularly from the communist side. Both academic and political Marxism—most notably: the Communist Party of India (CPI) and its major splinter products—have ever undertaken to voice relentless opposition to politicised religion and community politics. This seems self-evident. Categories, social notions, and the political trajectories of communalist outfits contradict the fundamentals of Marxist policy formulation. Most obviously, they posit not 'classes' but mystified 'religious communities' as the main actor in political and social processes. Still, the antagonism of both also thrives on a degree of closeness. In a South Asian context for once, the target audiences and the patronising approaches of both to them exhibit substantial overlap. And if Marxists and other leftists have time and again denounced communalism as an elite project of ideologues essentially alien to the 'masses', the same is true for their own camp, at least from a sociological perspective. —

Nevertheless, with political competition thus reinforcing programmatic divides both currents appear as principally and virtually naturally opposed. This is despite the damage done to their reputation as staunch proponents of secularism by the partly less than impressive post-independence track record of communist parties on the communal terrain. On the one hand, they remain among the least communalised political formations—no small feat in an environment where avowed secularism often eerily coexists with communal clientelism. On the other, the championing of Muslim group demands, particularly in



Kerala and North India, and notably the repeated political alignment with right-wing Hindu outfits such as the Jan Sangh and Janata Party have led some to argue that communist commitment to the cause of secularism was lukewarm at best (Raychaudhuri 2010: 41-57; Engineer 1986: 18).

However, most criticisms levelled at the communists' lacklustre anti-communal commitment respect the basic dichotomy of progressive secular programs and manifestos and unpleasant realities in the political business. Considerations of political gain or mere necessity hence figure as detrimental (yet ultimately determining) pulls on an otherwise firm and clear-minded agenda. In this vein, Thomas Nossiter (1985: 232-3) asserts that in the post-independent political theatre communist parties were "torn between the expediency of supporting [their] notionally backward constituency and [...] doctrinal purity"—a conflict of mounting difficulty given the ever-increasing gap between class and caste concerns.

Accordingly, it is hardly surprising that the undivided CPI's early history in colonial times is viewed somewhat differently. Radical functionalists apart there is a consensus that a mixture of zealous enthusiasm of the communist pioneers and a lack of unpleasant political necessities concomitant with electoral imperatives—occasioned by both the party's long-time illegality and the scarcity of elections—had enabled the CPI to pursue its anti-communal commitments much more consequently. For example, Irfan Habib (1998: 3) deems the communists' vigorous struggle against communalism—especially in the closing days of the British Raj—an "epic chapter" of their colonial period.

However, little light has so far been shed on possible structural, that is, programmatic as against politically induced common ground between communism and communalism. The CPI's ill-reputed support for the Pakistan demand in the mid-1940s forms the lone exception. Yet, (self-) criticism has largely bracketed out the episode from the party's history, opting for its de-contextualisation as a situational aberration rather than looking for links to the programmatic foundations and traditions of the party. This line of criticism is not to pull into doubt either the communists' secular merits or their sincerity in engaging communalism. It does, however, look for the conditions of the possibility of common alignment long before (and topically independent from) the lurid pro-Pakistan period. Central to the understanding of such an alignment are the communist notions of what constitutes 'revolution' and 'emancipation' as against 'reactionary' religiousness



and—perhaps most importantly—their approach to the proletariat and the ‘masses’. A proper situation of these enables one to grasp the contradictory and even downright ambivalent relationship of communism and communalism already in the colonial period. After tracing the problem down to the Marxist foundations of the party, I will demonstrate this relationship on the CPI’s general theoretical meditations on the matter and two case examples: the 1926 Calcutta riots and the 1929 riots among the Bombay workforce.

Communist Responses: Theoretical Modalities

How and on what grounds, then, did the Communist Party of India take up position towards the phenomenon of communalism? In order to approximate an answer, three fundamental circumstances have to be considered. First, the CPI was founded in Tashkent in 1920, and it took the party until the mid-1920s to establish cells in a number of locations in British India—mostly urban centres such as Bombay and Calcutta where factory workers were concentrated. Even beyond this point much of the party work continued to be done by communist émigrés in Europe, particularly Manabendra Nath Roy, founder of the CPI and its leading theorist. Hence, the communists were late-comers to the political theatre presented with the reality of more or less assertive communalism; and for the most part they lacked the organizational clout to stage effective interventions. Rather, they were reduced to the role of critical onlookers.

Second, behind the rigid doctrinal and idiomatic corset governing communist analyses the CPI was not a Marxist retort child, nor could it be. Its cadres, notably the first generation, without exception looked back on some sort of political activity or ideological imprint from before their turn to communism. Although their newly awoken enthusiasm for Marxism was sincere, they carried over various elements from their earlier political socialization. Roughly speaking, in the case of the early communists this socialization had taken place in one of three scenarios: The extremist wing of the swadeshi campaigns and concomitant underground terrorism, both with a marked Hindu tinge; some strand of Islamic anti-imperialism and related identity politics, especially the Khilafat Movement; and the Ghadr revolutionary nationalists who, while avowedly non-communal, exhibited few reservations towards mobilization on religious grounds. These heritages heavily influenced the individual communists', and hence the CPI’s responses to the communal problem.



And third, in contrast to the more acute matters on the communist agenda—independence from British rule and organization of workers and peasants for militant class struggle ‘from below’—, there was very little theoretical or practical input from the mentors of Marxism on the matter of communalism. Neither Marx nor Engels nor Lenin had committed appreciable analytical energy beyond the more general matter of religion, nor did the supreme guiding body of international communist parties, the Moscow-based Communist International (Comintern). Therefore, the CPI found itself in the unfamiliar position of having to analyse this aspect of its environment on its own and apply Marxism accordingly. It had to develop its stances out of writings only indirectly related to communalism—meditations on religion and consciousness on the one hand, and the possible limits of class mobilization on the other. Both decisively moulded the CPI’s approach to communalism in terms of the low incidence of the communalist complex in the party’s publications and their analytical thrust alike.

As far as Marxist philosophy is concerned, it thoroughly downgraded religion and related matters to secondary importance. However, right from his famous aphorisms in the *Critique of the Hegelian Philosophy of Right* characterising religion as the “opium of the people” Marx didn’t simply brush aside religion as irrelevant. Rather, there was a reason for its being an integral part of society. Marx considered this reason to be the fundamental invertedness, or false configuration of social relations. Religion, their “general theory”, their “logic in popular form”, was rooted in this invertedness and at the same time pointed to it: Religion “is at one and the same time the expression of real suffering and a protest against real suffering” (Marx [1844] 1961: 378). Therefore, it was a wrong, because illusory response; but it contained a grain of historical truth in that it pointed to real problems, namely oppression and economic misery.

Subsequent Marxist thought emphasised notably the illusory character of religion. In his crudish, but immensely popular division of society into “base” (production relations) and “superstructure” (everything else), Engels underscored religion’s alleged fundamental insubstantiality by allotting it to the superstructure, denying it autonomous historical significance. From his studies on the *Condition of the Working Classes in England* ([1845] 1962: 352-3) he concluded that religion had also outlived its empirical significance for the prospective revolutionary subject. Religion among workers was “only nominal, not even theoretical”, clergymen were held in low esteem, and “among the masses one finds complete indifference towards religion everywhere.”



These realizations shaped the well-known passage in the Communist Manifesto stipulating that “the laws, morals, religion are to [the worker] bourgeois prejudices behind which hide as many bourgeois interests” (Marx & Engels [1848] 1990: 472).

However, a lesser known early piece of Engels indicated that his notions of social progress were not at all incompatible with actual incidence of religiousness. Based on travelogues describing Christian peasant communes in the USA he stated that only “irrational religion” (presumably as against a “rational” one) constituted an obstacle in the way of “communal living.” That the community school taught to read and write, but was averse to “sciences” didn’t matter to Engels. Neither did the fact that these “harmonists” had erected a “palace” for their priest to live in (Engels [1845] 1962: 522). Obviously, religion was more than mere bourgeois make-believe. Its social location mattered in its assessment—an important cue for subsequent generations of Marxists.

Lenin, the great operationaliser of Marxism, took up and furthered Engels’s twofold thrust. Organised religion, belonging to the ‘bourgeois’ sphere of society, counted among the “instruments of bourgeois reaction that serve to defend exploitation and to befuddle the working class” (Lenin [1909] 1968: 405). Here Lenin bent Marx’s famous quote almost to the point of declaring religion opium for the masses, administered by the cunning bourgeoisie. Accordingly, he had a clear view of interreligious strife: It was invariably fomented by interested bourgeois quarters to divert the ‘masses’ from the class struggle.

With respect to popular religiousness the situation was somewhat different. Here religion, although itself “one of the forms of spiritual oppression which everywhere weighs down heavily upon the masses,” counted as no more than a “third-rate opinion [...] rapidly being swept out as rubbish by the very course of economic development” (Lenin [1905] 1967: 71-2). But where other radical critics of religion such as Nietzsche called to push what was falling, Lenin opted for a remarkably non-conflicting approach: When dealing with their constituency communists were to avoid even the slightest injury to religious convictions. What’s more, taking recourse to the world of religious terms, for example, in the case of an “agitator” using expressions “closest to the unenlightened mass” for mobilization purposes was a perfectly valid option for Lenin. Unsurprisingly, he regarded bourgeois anti-clericalism as just another device from the arsenal of distractions to confuse and divert the working ‘masses.’ Communists had to proceed cautiously in



order to not create the impression of “overemphasis” of the struggle against religion (Lenin [1909] 1968: 412-14).

What had to be emphasised, then, was the overthrow of capitalist relations of production. Of course this required the identification and localisation of revolutionary agency. Being the most disadvantaged section of society, Marx considered the factory workers—or proletariat—to have the greatest material stake in revolutionary change. Therefore he expected them to lead the struggle against bourgeois society: They were the “only revolutionary class” and the bearers of revolutionary “proletarian consciousness” (Marx and Engels [1846] 1969: 69). However, with the wisdom of hindsight—that is, with the experience of several decades of socialist worker mobilisation—Lenin came to repose comparably little faith in the innate revolutionary capacities of the proletariat. In *What Is to Be Done* he opined that if left to themselves the workers would develop “trade-union consciousness” at best—“the conviction that it is necessary to combine in unions, fight the employers, and strive to compel the government to pass necessary labour legislation, etc.” Lenin’s answer to this realization was twofold. On the one hand, he conceived of an avant-garde party to help the proletariat develop a revolutionary consciousness: “Political consciousness can be brought to the workers *only from without*.²¹ The concept of a clique of professional revolutionaries mobilising and leading the proletariat—the future communist parties—was born.

On the other, Lenin fatefully introduced a novel actor onto the revolutionary stage: The “masses.” Technically, they constituted the “majority”, comprising not only workers, but all “exploited” population segments. Lenin explicitly referred to the rural proletariat and poor peasants (Lenin [1921] 1982). Still, the term’s meaning and scope were generally remarkably vague. It provided a convenient way of referring to large, diffusely downtrodden sections of the population whose concrete identification would have invited disquieting investigations into the adequacy of their inclusion in the revolutionary phalanx. This inclusion was problematic already on a conceptual plane because unlike the proletariat the ‘masses’ had not, or only partially, experienced the purifying ordeals of industrial modernization. Correspondingly, they had not undergone the concomitant radical reconfiguration of their not just material, but ideological predispositions.

Yet, its vagueness together with its broad scope turned out advantageous for the term’s career. The stocks of the “masses”—bolstered



by the supplementary inclusion of 'suppressed nations' into the revolutionary struggle—rose steeply in a Leninist model of revolution, especially in non-European contexts. Henceforth, the task of the communist avant-garde consisted of "serving the masses and expressing their correctly identified interests" (Lenin [1913] 1965: 400). As early as 1902 Lenin imagined the ideal social democrat as a "*tribune of the people*" rather than a petty trade union secretary (Lenin 1902). Shortly before the October Revolution, his historical optimism had blossomed into the conviction that "every popular movement" was to be utilised for the socialist project (Lenin [1916] 1960, 365-6). Accordingly, Marx's original call to shed the ballast of the "traditions of all dead generations" became ever less realistic in proportion with the turn towards unspecified 'masses' (Marx [1852] 1962: 115).

To sum it up, the CPI's inherited theoretical armamentarium consisted of a division of the religious complex into the deplorable, yet ultimately irrelevant occurrence of mass religiousness versus dangerous religious institutions and bourgeois 'diverters' on the one hand, and an imperative emphasis on necessarily progressive mass struggle on the other. Of course, this distinction gave rise to serious issues concerning the approach to religious strife (or communalism). If religious, yet technically revolutionary 'masses' joined in a riot, had they gone over to the bourgeoisie? If not, were they merely hapless victims of bourgeois propaganda? Or did their participation even indicate the agency of subcutaneous class struggle and was hence innately progressive? With the first possibility out of the question from a communist point of view, the other two sketch out the spectrum in which communist responses materialised—and hence define the space for the involuntary interaction of communism and communalism.

Colonial Modernity and Antagonistic Community Formation

In a South Asian context, the term "communalism" broadly denotes attempts to construct religious or ethnic identity, incite strife between people identified as different communities, and to stimulate violence between them, often related to economic motives (Smith 1966; Horowitz 1985). In 1909, the poet Mohammed Iqbal referred to communalist currents as "unconscious trends of the two communities", that is, the manifestation of various historical antagonisms in a highly dynamic and conflictual form (cit. in Ikram 1950: 174). Hence, communalism can be considered a medium of expressing unrealised and unconscious social antagonisms; in the words of Ashgar Ali



Engineer (1986: 16), an “ideologization of interests”. And yet, communalism is more than mere appearance, as Bipan Chandra has rightly cautioned: “Communal ideology has its own inner logic” (Chandra 1986: 12).

The conditions enabling religious communities—most prominently, Hindus and Muslims—to eventually become key agents in identity formation and articulation of political will alike developed notably in the last third of the nineteenth century. Until then, inter-communal tensions had largely assumed the form of non-systematic outbursts in occasional violent clashes. The inevitable religious bias of monarchic rule in pre-colonial times had not necessarily fostered religious harmony. Yet, at least the rules were clear: One community was ‘in power’, the other was not. The possibility for fierce competition and ensuing systematic mutual alienation only arose when the British revolutionised governance by conducting it from a position of religious neutrality—while utilising religious divides to their own advantage. Fundamental economic and administrative changes together with the new importance of education suddenly opened up large fields for societal intervention. In the absence of other institutions of civil society, it was the communities as the most ‘natural’ and best organised instances of group formation that scrambled to fill up the new social spaces.

British governance fostered this development by the tendency to recur, consciously (out of pragmatism) or not (out of orientalism), to religious communities and weave them into the fabric of the colonial public sphere at all levels. Matters as diverse as urban planning, employment in the public services, education, and political representation were all affected by varying communal bias ‘from above’. Influential sections among the respective communities eagerly reciprocated this compartmentalising trend. Phrasing a wide array of political and social aspirations—notably elite conflicts over appointments and jobs in the public services—in communal idioms became established practice during the heyday of the British Raj. These idioms hence acquired an increased sense of legitimacy. The resulting broad social process of communalization went a long way towards modernising traditional religious loyalties.

This modernization had a strong political component from the beginning. Religious communities became an early focal point in the formation of nationalist sentiment. Even though the mainstream national movement on the subcontinent, the Indian National Congress



(INC), was a supra-religious body, it consisted overwhelmingly of Hindus. A growing sense of—partly self-inflicted—exclusion from the political arena prodded Muslim dignitaries to set up the Muslim League (ML) in 1906. Even though both organizations at times cooperated closely, the organizational seed for the 1947 partition of the subcontinent had been sown. The communalisation of politics, reinforced by the ascent of the Hindu Mahasabha, accelerated the gradual downward trend in Hindu-Muslim relations.

Eventually, 'All-India' communities of Hindus and Muslims came to be defined and pitted against each other, not to mention the multitude of smaller regional communities. Pan-religious nationalism as preached by M. K. Gandhi during the non-cooperation movement undertook to integrate the major communal entities under the roof of the national movement. Yet, this approach entailed an affirmation of collective identities. Thus, Gandhi paid for a temporal bridge over the communal gap by deepening it. On the institutional side of things, the avenues for participation in politics and administration opened up by the 1919 Government of India Act were constructed on the premises of separate electorates. Thus, they held major incentives for taking the short-cut through the communal quarter (Sarkar 1983: 156-8, 234).

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Following the suspension of non-cooperation, communal tensions erupted with renewed vigour. By the mid-1920s, mutual suspicion, aversion, and fierce competition dominated an increasingly communalised political and social setting. Rather than reconciliation, its general drive was to "reclaim 'victims' and protect the 'faithful'" in the hangover after the failed common struggle for swaraj (Pandey 1990: 233-4). Violent outbursts claiming hundreds of lives, as well as the upsurge of the shuddhi and sanghatan, and tabligh and tanzim movements, respectively, bore testimony to the path community sentiments were going down. A series of abortive attempts of INC and ML to arrive at a common stance on a number of issues such as the constitutional set-up of an independent subcontinent, the extent of cooperation with the British, and even the thrust of political day-to-day demands led to a sustained political deadlock between both.

Theoretic Shenanigans, or That which must not Be Cannot

The upsurge in communal violence in one way or another grew into a concern of most political actors on the subcontinent. INC grandees Motilal Nehru and Abul Kalam Azad made plans for the formation of a novel All-India party in 1924, whose membership was to exclude those



who were also members of communal organizations. In Bengal, Chittaranjan Das negotiated a pact between both communities for the sharing of employment opportunities in the public sector, and Gandhi protested against inter-communal violence with a widely publicised three-week fast in autumn 1924. Yet, these endeavours proved largely ineffective: The Nehru-Azad party never materialised, Das died shortly after the conclusion of his pact, which soon followed him into the grave, and Gandhi's sincere but only momentarily effectual anti-communal fasts and similar efforts did little to dispel long-term constellations for conflict.

The increase in violence and bitterness did not go unnoticed in communist quarters. Of course, the CPI viewed it as a most disquieting and unwelcome development. Yet, coming so soon after the non-cooperation movement, whose successful cross-communal mobilization had presented a rosier picture of mass revolutionary potential, the renewed communal conflict initially had a hard time to penetrate into communist perceptions of their revolutionary subject. Still caught in the whirl of the post-war upsurge, they were loath to acknowledge the bleak reality of widespread religious rifts. At the same time, however, denouncing rising communalism as the 'natural' consequence of a faulty bourgeois protest movement also supported Roy's earlier refusal to forge ties with leading non-co-operators.

The analysis took shape accordingly: From the outset the fledgling CPI undertook to separate the communal divide from the spirit of protest—even the religious one—that had carried the movement. Roy's own past as a terrorist brahmachari in Bengal and his resulting familiarity with religious resistancy contributed to his inclination to salvage the 'resistive' part of religious unrest. In June 1923, the first piece dedicated to the communal problem appeared in the CPI's paper, the *Vanguard of Indian Independence* (henceforth *Vanguard*). It contrasted the "helpless" undertakings of political leaders to contain the growing communal tensions by well-meaning appeals with a straightforward analysis that exonerated the plebeian participants: "Communal rivalry is fomented by the upper classes of both the communities, and the Government always stands behind the scene" ("Communal Conflict and the Congress", *Vanguard*, 1 June 1923; Ray 1998). The solution lay in exposing intra-communal class conflicts which alone would foster broad-based unity in the struggle for freedom.



Under bourgeois auspices, however, conflicts around injured communal sentiments would never cease. Hence, India would never be free, as the violent rifts played “into the hands of imperialism”—apparently the biggest problem Roy could identify with relation to the riots. In itself, this was not a product of his imagination. (Pro-) British and conservative newspapers were ever quick to question the viability and reasonability of subcontinental self-government upon the outbreak of communal riots. Nevertheless, Roy’s interpretation of the issue on purely political grounds showcased two fundamental characteristics of his view: First that the problematic of communalism was not religious; and second that he regarded neither the anti-libertine and socially conservative character of communal assertions, nor even their often considerable aggression per se as overly disturbing.

This approach also informed the *Manifesto on the Hindu-Moslem Unity and Swaraj*. Published in the *Vanguard* in October 1923, it is one of the most programmatic and most often-cited communist texts on the issue to date. The pamphlet summarily blasted the non-cooperation movement for the prominent role religion had played in it—yet, typically, not without crediting it for creating “some sort of political consciousness among the [...] masses of India” (“Manifesto”, *Vanguard*, 1 October 1923). This consciousness itself was apparently not worthy of further scrutiny. Under the prevailing circumstances, a thorough investigation into what exactly passed as progressive “political consciousness” might have turned out overly disappointing for Roy. In this light, his allegation that the upsurge in religious conflicts testified to the “essentially reactionary character” only of bourgeois politicians was consequential rather than plausible: The Hindu and Muslim ‘masses’ had been artificially distracted from their actual unity on class grounds and had fallen victim to cunning operationalisers of religion:

The consciousness of [their] union is interfered with by large doses of conflicting religious dogma administered by interested parties. Religious propaganda is an indigenous method of exploitation of the ignorant masses by the able doctors of Divinity. (ibid.)

The latter’s apparent ability to shape the “ignorant masses” at will and Roy’s concomitant call to nationalist middle-class intellectuals to simply “replace the religious propaganda and metaphysical abstractions by economic slogans to make the masses conscious” both indicated the way the CPI worked out its response to popular religiousness in British



India. Acknowledging religion, including religious conflicts, as “opium of the masses”, that is, as an integral component of society apparently was too compromising for the communist vision. In order to save these ‘masses’ from the communal odour (and, thus, for the communist project), Roy instead reduced sociability to emanations from the privileged. Also, incapacitating the broad population as “ignorant masses”, while questionable from a Marxist point of view, made sense from a biographical perspective, as Roy could fall back on his elitist outlook from the olden days of Hindu underground terrorism.

Ultimately, he saw little reason to worry for the time being. Roy considered tensions between the communities “less serious” compared to “other defects in the programme, ideology and organization of the nationalist movement.” Also, “theological politics” were essentially alien to the movement for national liberation, which was following its own messianic teleology: The “inevitable and inexorable” development of nationalism on “purely secular” lines would by itself obliterate communalism, and revolutionary nationalism even was “the deadly enemy of communalism” (“Unity”, *Vanguard*, 15 November 1924). In view of the general readiness of most contemporary ‘revolutionary nationalists’ in- and outside the subcontinent to employ religious and even communal motives in their struggle for independence, this was a remarkable claim. The integrality of religious notions to the outlook of Roy’s own former comrades-in-arms, the Anushila terrorists, is particularly striking. What bridged the gap and enabled him to distil revolutionary merit from fundamentalist religious struggle was his socialization in their sub-cosmos and, hence, his close familiarity with their brand of ‘revolutionariness’.

From the outset, Anushilites figured prominently among those whom Roy sought to recruit for communism. His comrades on the subcontinent exhibited similar leanings towards their respective home turf. Sripad Amrit Dange in Bombay, for example, was as great an admirer of the Hindu-tinged extremist nationalism of Bal Ganghadar Tilak’s swadeshi campaigns as an opponent of the khilafat movement. Hence, it is no surprise that his patron during his early steps towards socialism and communism was Ranchoddas Bhavan Lotvala, an ex-Arya Samajist (Yajnik 1952, chapters 3 and 4). And if Roy’s advances towards the Bengal Hindu terrorists met with vocal opposition from Muzaffar Ahmad of the predominantly Muslim CPI cell in Calcutta, the latter could boast of excellent connections to radical Muslim anti-imperialists (WBIB File 67/24 SL 105/1924: n.p.; Mukhopadhyay 1997: 198-201; Ahmad 1970: 299-301).



Even apart from such tendencies, Roy's criticism of interreligious strife was principled only to the extent that he acknowledged communalism as a thing-in-itself—or, in communist vocabulary, principled only in a subjective, not in an objective sense. While his interventions doubtlessly formed one of the most radical and at the same time most analytic critiques of its time, the tendency to confine communalism to the influence of imperialism and the upper social strata clearly exhibited blind spots towards religious militancy. His advances towards the Bengali revolutionary terrorists form only one of many examples (others being the 1921 Mapilla rebellion and the early Akali movement) for the viability of *revolutionary communalism* in a communist framework. Non-revolutionary, that is, neither anti-colonial nor—however mildly—anti-propertied classes communalism, on the other hand, was exactly the kind of communalism that couldn't be accepted as part of mass consciousness if the latter was to remain an addressee for the communist vision.

Therefore, Roy clung to the conspiratorial character of such non-revolutionary communalism. While the subcontinent was the best example that religion was indeed the opium of the people, "the virulence of this kind of opium-poisoning in the body-politic of India [...] shows" not the critical state of popular consciousness, but merely "to what extent the dealers of this dope have been active" ("The Hindu-Muslim Problem", *Masses of India*, April 1925). Roy deflected the challenge to progressive notions of mass consciousness inherent in the contemporary communalised set-up philosophically and empirically. Philosophically by fashioning religion into 'opium for the masses' for all intents and purposes; and empirically by shifting the problematic into a separate mercenary sub-cosmos where those who actually participated in riots were merely "the scum of society, which cannot be said to possess any sincere religious fanaticism" ("Unity", *Vanguard*, 15 November 1924).

In this reasoning not even the most vociferous and violent proponents of communal antagonism counted as true fanatics. They were just paid agents of the propertied classes. Yet, even such an approach did not necessarily remove communist uncertainties, and even less did it prove sustainable. Just as Roy had criticised the inclusion of communal unity in the INC's list of prerequisites for swaraj in 1924 (as this paid undue homage to an artificial conflict), he advocated the opposite only a year later when he attacked the veteran nationalist and Hindu Mahasabhite Lala Lajpat Rai for denying the necessity of communal unity for the attainment of independence.



To be sure, Roy was not the only architect of this theoretical edifice. Contemporary communist opinion concurred with the thrust of his analyses. For example, Rajani Palme Dutt, a leading theoretician of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB), confirmed Roy's positions in his immensely influential 1926 oeuvre *Modern India*. If anything, he was even less convinced of any autonomous ideological content of communalism, and more optimistic that the laws of historical materialism would ensure the proper (that is, communist) course of history. While Dutt castigated the bourgeoisie for fishing for "all kinds of cults and superstitions of barbarism, ignorance, submission to God, etc., in order to spread these among the masses", the attempts at influencing the latter were ultimately in vain: It was "idle to believe that this fashionable make-believe can have the slightest effect on the real processes at work" (Dutt 1926: 123-4). However, subsequent events on the subcontinent would cast an eerie light on these "real processes". Through his meditations, Roy had prepared the ground for their conditioned acceptance within a communist framework. The following sections will discuss the implementation by 'communists on the spot' on the basis of two examples: The 1926 Calcutta riots and the 1929 riots in Bombay.

The Domestic Response I: Calcutta 1926

Roy's writings on communalism had developed under the condition of the considerable spatial and temporal distance of his European abode to the actual manifestations of communal consciousness. In contrast, communists on the subcontinent were more directly confronted with the virulence of communal assertions. This led to differences in its assessment: Evidently annoyed by Roy's reluctance to recognize the magnitude of the problem, the Socialist published an open letter to Roy from J. P. Begerhotta, member of the INC Working Committee and future short-time CPI party secretary, in September 1924. It emphasised that "all efforts should be made to abolish religious influence from the people. Hindu Muslim unity cannot be successful until every body is well fed and religious bigotry is removed" (cit. in Communist Party of India [Marxist] 2005: 81). This tells of a more immediate exposure to the "real processes at work", an exposure that reached its tentative climax of intensity in the 1926 Calcutta riots. The ensuing process of theoretical churning on the part of the local communists was only consequential.



Simmering tensions in the city had erupted in early April in attacks by Muslims on Marwari traders before the background of a long-term downward trend in inter-communal relations. In Bengal, assertions of communal identity during the non-cooperation movement and notably the inter-communal rivalry for participation in the political and administrative spheres had lastingly affected the traditionally quiet (if not amicable) coexistence of the two big communities for the worse. Not only the bhadralok, the Bengali Hindu middle-class, that was faced with Muslim competition for jobs in the public services and felt increasingly threatened in its elite position had embarked on a sustained process of communalization. The influx of work migrants from more communalised areas on the upper Ganges had introduced another volatile element into the city. The early abrogation of Das' Hindu-Muslim Pact for the sharing of seats in the administration and public employment, and communal overtones in the campaigns for the approaching elections for the Legislative Council had also contributed to an atmosphere of tension.

Not uncommonly for the time, the riots originated in an Arya Samaj procession playing music in front of a mosque during Ramadan. What happened in several episodes during the following month, however, constituted the worst colonial India had seen of communal violence in decades. Over a hundred people died, almost two-thirds of them in the first couple of days alone. Besides religious buildings, the rioters of both communities also attacked numerous houses and shops. Regular troops had to be called in to restore order (see Dutta 1990).

Faced with the frenzy, the Calcutta communists around Muzaffar Ahmad reedited the *Manifesto on the Hindu-Muslim Unity and Swaraj* and distributed it as one of the few voices of religious neutrality in the city's highly charged communal atmosphere. Ahmad therefore had considerable trouble to have it printed, even though the Manifesto's editors avoided open anti-religious criticism, just as its authors had done. Besides theoretical reasons (namely the desire to classify religious phenomena as ephemeral), more tangible considerations had also influenced such carefulness. After all, open criticism of religion had meant inviting trouble: Earlier in the same year, the renowned lawyer and author Abul Hussain had publicly accused Abdul Kader, a student activist of the communist-led Workers' and Peasants' Party, of offending Muslim sentiments and emphatically warned him not to do so henceforth. Although Kader's 'transgressions' had been rather mild and not directly aimed at Islam or its tenets, he and other activists accept-



ed the rebuttal (WBIB File 320/26 SL 310/1926: n.p.; Chattopadhyay 2011: 166).

Confronted, then, with the choice to either attack “third-rate ideas” (Lenin) and risk influence in a society dominated by them, or acquiesce and tailor political ambitions to the conditions dictated by the environment, domestic communism clearly went with the latter option. However, this did not happen discreetly. As in the case of Muslim anti-colonialism of the early 1920s, the Calcutta communists took the bull by the horns and undertook to appropriate the ideological status quo for the communist project.

In the political constellation of 1926, this was no implausible move. With Gandhi focusing on his “Constructive Work”, militant nationalism was on a long-time low, and Jawarhalal Nehru’s efforts to revive non-cooperation and satyagraha began in earnest only in 1927. Even then, successes were limited to paper politics: The INC’s association to the League Against Imperialism and the moving of a resolution at the Madras Congress session demanding complete independence were not suited to spawn a broad movement against British rule. Sourandra Mohan Ganguly derisively comments that the INC at that time had transformed into a “spinning association”—a fitting assessment even though it overlooks the deep-rooted social entrenchment that “constructive work” brought about over the course of time (Ganguly 1984: 59-61; Joshi 1992). Yet, this long-term strategy hardly was a factor in the faster cycles of communist political activity. Accordingly, the *Manifesto* closed with a blazing call to take the fight to the rich, who after all were responsible for the predominance of religious ideology:

Fatalism, fanaticism, submission, superstition, obedience and faith, the offsprings of religion, are the offensive weapons in the hands of the oppressors; poverty, miseries, self-renunciation, sacrifices are the consoling factors ordained by religion for the poor and oppressed. Our rich people [...] are committing daily highest treason in broad day and tormenting the poor by invoking the aid of God. (WBIB File 35/26 SL 2/1926: 64-5)

This conclusion carried a meaning significantly different from the original *Manifesto*’s. The 1926 Calcutta outbreak had been incomparably larger in scope and magnitude than the riots of 1923. The latter had been more akin to isolated occurrences and could, with some stretch of imagination, more plausibly be traced to small groups of instigators. In Calcutta, however, considerable population segments had happily joined in the fray, a fact that did not remain hidden to the



local communists. Hence, in its context the reprint signalled not a reaffirmation, but a departure from Roy's dominant understanding of communalism, which regarded the matter as an entirely bourgeois affair and hence comprehensively rejected its manifestations. Rather, the Calcutta communists undertook to pass the riots as 'revolutionary communalism', that is, as a social movement concealed by a religious misnomer, just as Roy had done in the case of the Mapilla rebellion and the Akali Sikhs. Ahmad's comment in *Langal* ("Plough"), the Bengal Peasants' and Workers' Party's organ, during the worst days of rioting spelled out the shift:

The upper strata of society have all along been plundering the lower ones. The looting which has to-day taken place in Calcutta under the thin cover of Hindu-Moslem dissension, *is but the reaction from that spoliation*. The matter for regret is that, the affair has floated before our eyes tinged with [sic!] a religio-communal line. (*Langal*, 9 April 1926, in PCJ 1926/48: n.p.; emphasis added)

Here Ahmad harked back to the radical strand in Roy's positions that had affirmed community-centred mass action in the wider Mapilla and Akali contexts. In 1926, however, there was much less in terms of a mass movement to latch onto—except for widespread manifestations of communalism. Moreover, as the (from a communist point of view) most pressing question of class had not lost its urgency, Ahmad simply declared it the driving force behind large-scale manifestations of communal unrest. Where Roy had called to foreground issues of class and thus aimed at side-lining communal themes, Ahmad's approach emphasised direct linkages between communal manifestations and progressive aspirations. Thereby communalism acquired a double meaning: 'From above', it cemented the position and increased the bargaining power of a section of upper classes while at the same time weakening the unity of the underprivileged. 'From below', however, it indicated a state of dispossession and depravity, and hence contained the drive to combat the conditions providing for dispossession. Ahmad even argued that the charge of communalism was the last straw of the possessing classes to portray themselves as victims of the just class rage of the underdogs. Even though not consciously rebelling against class rule, the subalterns were performing acts of social desperation indicative of an unfulfilled desire to be free (ibid.; Chattopadhyay 2011, 246-8).

This was a potent radicalisation of Roy's approach and at the same time forcefully recalled the social dimension of Marx's famous "opium



of the masses". The phrase had vented his conviction that religion pointed to social relations necessitating its existence as the "heart of a heartless world". In contrast to Roy's externalising take on communalism, the Calcutta riots had forcefully impressed on the local communists the integrality of religious notions to subcontinental politics. However, rather than rejecting it as an ideology they associated its violent assertion in the shape of a communal outbreak with the struggle against dominant social relations. Obviously, the experience of the riots had shattered the canonical approach of treating communalism and its perpetrators as alien to society's mainstay. The Calcutta group had realised that a communist perspective had to evolve new responses to the fact that communal terror had emanated not only from isolated gangs of paid goondas but also from the 'masses' themselves. Furthermore, it seems that in the absence of a broad political movement communalism was the closest approximation to social or even revolutionary militancy—bearing in mind Lenin's injunction to "utilize every popular movement" for the cause of socialism. Declaring communalism a misguided class struggle was consequential and advantageous. Thereby Ahmad could achieve both: being honest in paying homage to the actual state of the mass psyche *and* still claim its agents for the communist project. The new responses of the Calcutta communists adapted the old imperatives of mass politics to the peculiar environment on the subcontinent.

All this is not to imply that communists supported or even were directly involved in communal propaganda, let alone atrocities. Nor were they perceived to do so, which adversely affected their reputation in both communities. In fact, there was not much the communists could do except for writing against the riots even where they were comparably well-organised. Nevertheless, the sympathetic understanding of the riots as a social phenomenon directly growing out of class constellations indicated that communal radicalism was not necessarily opposed to a communist agenda. The oftentimes close proximity of class conflict and communal rioting undercut a clear distinction between both, which facilitated the latter's indirect appropriation. Against this background, attributing the failure to effectively combat communalism to organisational deficiencies alone merely reiterates traditional left assumptions of a strict dichotomy of neatly separated 'progressive' and 'reactionary' forms of consciousness, and ignores the active role of communist instances in the amalgamation of these categories (see also *ibid.*, 200).



In contrast, Roy's reaction to the riots initially reiterated his externalising paradigm through an elaborate "class analysis" of the communal phalanx. According to him, it consisted of a "parasitic class of priests", reactionary politicians, the unemployed intelligentsia and petty bourgeois traders (both of which faced increasing competition from Muslims), and "lumpen-proletariat and goondas [...] used by the police to start the affray." Behind them was the "hidden hand of imperialism." All of these groups had political and material stakes in sustained communal campaigns, and hence inflamed the widespread "discontent in the name of religion". However, Roy's theoretical efforts at containment obviously could not dispel his own rising doubts about the inherent integrity of mass action. His concerns were reflected in the new tasks of the CPI. Henceforth, it was to expose communal plotters, fight radical Hinduism and extremist Islam alike, and liberate the population from religious fanaticism and "traditional social evils" ("The Communal Strife", *Masses of India*, October 1926).

Yet, Roy also had a more seminal approach in store. As he probably himself sensed the ultimate inadequateness of his externalising paradigm, Roy also introduced a concept that would unfold the true power of its appeal only much later, in the CPI's policies from the late 1930s onwards. As early as March 1926 he had outlined a communist minimum program demanding, inter alia, a "guarantee for national minorities" and envisaging a "solution of the communal question on the basis of democratic rights" (Communist Party of India [Marxist] 2005: 95). Without further explanation the exact meaning of these formulae had remained obscure. Two months later, however, the events in Calcutta had obviously initiated a process of churning. A guest column by a Soviet trade union leader in the *Masses of India* criticised the INC for conceding "inordinate importance" to issues of religion and its erroneous quest for a compromise, for "essentially the question was a question of national minority" ("The Calcutta Riot", *Masses of India*, May 1926).

This plank of thought, even while it was of little resonance for the time being, seemed to present a workable solution of the communal problem on communist terrain and in communist terms—foremost because it allowed for an analysis of the communalist phenomenon that paid due homage to the involvement of the "masses" without raising the need for their criticism. After all, "national minority" was a valid category in a communist frame of reference. The idea appealed sufficiently to Roy to include it in the CPI's manifesto to the 1926 INC session at Guwahati. It held that democratic principles corresponded to



the interests of national minorities. Roy's weak reference to the superficiality and artificiality of communal boundaries did not forestall their acknowledgement and operationalisation in national terms—not even by Roy himself: With clear cultural overtones, the programmatic section demanded that “one of the main planks in the nationalist platform must be the protection for national and communal minorities” (cit. in Basu et al. 1997a: 333).

Hence, the diverging responses of Roy and the Calcutta communists grew out of a common denominator. While the Calcutta communists sought to appropriate communal conflicts in terms of class struggle, Roy tried the same from a cultural vantage point. Both constituted endeavours to come to grips with the unsavoury effectivity of communalism while avoiding its implications for the communist agenda. These implications would have consisted in a readjustment of the thrust of communist activity towards a committed acknowledgement of the virulent communal outlook with all necessary consequences. Yet, as the imperatives of national independence and socialism were undisputable the communal reality had to be adapted to communist theory instead of the other way round. In both cases, this served to soften the antagonism, and to an extent blur the boundaries between communism and communalism.

The Domestic Response II: Proletarian Communalism

Notwithstanding their tentative appropriation as proto-revolutionary force, the streak of communal riots peaking in the Calcutta bloodshed had to an extent eroded the CPI's zeal for mass politics—and underscored its inability to intervene effectively in the broad political arena. They accelerated the turn towards the communist core constituency that as a social stratum was as unstained from the communal odour as conspicuously absent from communist theorising yet: The working class. Systematic communist efforts to organize workers and set up a 'red' trade union movement began in the mid-1920s, also as a consequence of Comintern pressure and subsequent support from the CPGB.

Together with the mill areas along the Hooghly, it was Bombay that developed into an early hub of communist activity. The local communist group around Shantaram Savlaram Mirajkar, Sachchidanand Vishnu Ghate, and Dange successfully organised workers and led them in strikes. Occasional government repression such as a raid on their paper *Kranti* (Revolution) in July 1927 rather served to increase



its reputation as sales went up appreciably afterwards. However, it was through the momentous victory in the general strike of Bombay's textile workers from April to October 1928 that communist labour activity shot to real prominence and fame. The strike prevented major wage cuts and was marked by considerable tenacity and discipline on the part of the strikers, who were organised in grass-root mill committees, resisted all attempts to break the strike, and joined the communist Girni Kamgar (Red Flag) Union (GKU) in scores (Sarkar 1983: 271; Chandavarkar 1997: 102).

To the Bombay communists, the strike confirmed the correctness of their political line and bolstered the hopes they put into the subcontinent's working class. The cross-communal rejection of the offer of Shaukat Ali, head of the local khilafat committee, to provide strike funds only for Muslim workers strengthened communist trust. *Kranti's* message that the distinction between "Hindu or Musalman [...] does not exist in the law of loot of capitalism"² seemed to stick (see also Basu et al. 1997b: 1154; Dange 1979: 112-3). In early 1929, the GKU was the strongest, most prestigious, and best-organised trade union in Bombay, enjoying support far beyond the textile workers. The communal riot of February 1929 burst into this communist success story.

Its prelude had taken place in mid-January: Striking oil workers had attacked Muslim Pathan blacklegs. The Pathans had not only repelled the assailants, but pursued them to their quarters, where they had attacked and looted indiscriminately. In the aftermath, rumours that the Pathans were kidnapping children quickly spread among Hindu workers, leading to a proletarian "man hunt for Pathans" on 3 February that left two dead. On 4 February, the unrest spread to the mill area, where over 30,000 workers had struck work, armed themselves, and commenced another "regular man hunt for Pathans".³ On the following day, the municipal government called in the army to restore order. Khilafat leader Mohamed Ali displayed considerable anger at the labour leaders, particularly Dange and Nimbkar, and accused them of not doing enough to dispel the false rumours against Pathans. His brother Shaukat announced the organisation of "Muslim self-defence". Unsurprisingly, it was soon Hindu workers who were "battered to death" (*Times of India*, 6 February 1929). The latter however did their best to even out the balance: A large crowd, originally having resumed work, responded to malicious rumours with striking work anew and rushing out to seek revenge. Speeches at strikers' meetings had again roused many against supposed Pathan kidnappers (*Times of India*, 7 February 1929). Over the next days, the riots spread throughout the city. In



total, over a hundred deaths were recorded in the course of just over a week.

The communist response was unequivocal and from the outset clung to an externalising pattern. Dange ever maintained that the “imperialists and their agents [had] decided to involve [...] the whole city in a furious communal rioting” (Dange 1979: 237). The imposition of a curfew and the efforts to nail down the culprits were a mere “smoke-screen” to obscure the true originators of the disturbances—the “agent-provocateurs who had directed the huge crime of a communal strife” (ibid.: 242). Among them counted Shaukat Ali, “who, once an anti-imperialist [on the merits of his khilafat past], is now the active paid agent of imperialism, planted in the bourgeois national movement to disrupt it by communal dissensions” (ibid.: 253). Similarly, Mirajkar remained convinced that the riots had been “deliberately staged by the British Government” (Mirajkar 1974: 85-6). Fellow communist Bhalchandra Trimbak Ranadive traced the disturbances to the British administration’s desire to attack the “powerful arm of the working class” by using provocateurs to engineer a “serious Hindu-Muslim riot to smash the class solidarity of the working class” (Ranadive 1992: 15).

As for the reasons for unleashing the bloodshed, Dange mentioned the GKU’s strength and the intention of the mill-owners to pay back the workers for the successful 1928 general strike. At the same time, he insisted that the working class had remained impervious to these instigations. There never had been “any kind of virile communal feeling among the workers. Though they nominally classify themselves by religion and caste, the Bombay workers are exceptionally free from the Hindu-Muslim feeling.” They had become “class-conscious and not caste-conscious” over the course of time, as demonstrated by their record of united struggle (Dange 1979: 242). Obviously, the almost verbal recourse to Engels’ “Condition of the Working Classes” served to fortify Dange’s trust in the Bombay workforce, and strengthen his resolve to write off the unpleasant fact that ‘his’ workers had indulged in religious frenzy.

Still, even Dange’s account had to admit the unadmittable. Ultimately, it had been only communist intervention that had prevented the workers “from being excited into a suicidal fury” (Basu et al. 1997b: 1270). While the efforts of labour leaders on the spot to stop the riots are beyond doubt, this was a shaky claim. Other passages allow more realistic glimpses, such as when Dange conceded that the



“rioting was never serious in the workers’ locality”, or more clearly, that the GKU had undertaken everything in its power “to stop the mad fury that had possessed the people. We issued every day one or two handbills, telling them of the *great harm they were doing to their class* by such action” (ibid.: 1278-9, emphasis added). Even eventual success (“the temporary communal deviation was checked and corrected by the G.K.U.”) renders his claim of an “inherent superior proletariat morality of the workers” (ibid: 1280) doubtful at the very least.

In Ghate’s recollection, a lone example of admitting uncertainty and personal experience into the picture, this “morality” takes more concrete shape:

One day such a situation was created that we did not know what to do: [the workers] became very militant. The same people came with dandas [sticks]. They said that they wanted to kill some Muslims [...] The workers would not go back [to work] because all sorts of rumours were being spread. (Ghate 1970: 53-5).

At least with the reflective distance of several decades, Ghate’s perception was acute enough to acknowledge not only disturbances between Hindu and Muslim workers, but also that they had been “provoked by the workers themselves, not by the management” (ibid: 57-8). The latter had sought to maintain peace and keep production going. Diplomatically ambiguous, British communist Clemens Dutt summarised in late 1929 that the events of 1928-9 had left “no ground for uncertainty as to the advance of the revolutionary tide there” (Dutt 1929: 741).

Apparently, the “great harm” Dange spoke of had been done to communist notions of the working class no less than anything else. The outbreak dismayed the Bombay activists, who felt the need to support the best in ‘their’ workers against empirical evidence. After all, the same workforce had achieved a resounding victory in the general strike just a few months before. This incredulity explains the contradictory fashion of coupling the outsourcing of a disagreeable fact (a riot with worker participation) to social adversaries with its outright denial. The inconsistency also bore out the degree of desperation. After the loss of revolutionary immersion with the ‘masses’, the working class was the only remaining bulwark of communist hopes. Hence, they had chosen to chain themselves to their object of agitation. Mirajkar later named this fateful bond: “Whatever Tata may say, he is always wrong, whatever worker says, he is always right” (Mirajkar 1974: 60).



The 1929 riot, then, was a tough nut to swallow for the communists. The workers had obviously not been right when they joined in the fray; yet, they were indispensable as an anchor for progressive politics. Communist rationalisations hence undertook to absolve the proletariat as far as remotely plausible by separating unbecoming mind-sets from their physical agents. Although such a separation was only theoretical and predictably had little tangible effect on the outlook of the workers, it was indispensable for continued communist fondness for the working class. Due to latter's central position in Marxist coordinates, the sobering effect communal manifestations had yielded with regard to the 'masses'—that is, the turn towards other population sections—never materialised in a working class context. The externalising paradigm, having passed the Bombay stress test without breaking in the face of empirical evidence, remained the standard formula vis-à-vis communal unrest for much of the future. For example, Dutt maintained even just before partition that "hooliganism always arises from above, and never from below" (Dutt 1946: 217). Thus, a consequent 'shifting' of communalism effectively worked to neutralize the anti-communal edge of the communist agenda.

Closing Thoughts

Contrary to what could be gleaned from Marxism's atheist façade, the communist handling of communalism did not follow a unitarily dismissive pattern. Being an integral part of the British Indian political landscape, communalism's significance even for communist politics was a given. Even where strict delineations prevailed it turned out impossible to sever all its connections and linkages to the area of communist activity. Three factors decisively determined this unfeasibility. First, the pre-established, pervading virulence of communal thought patterns upon the inception of the CPI. Second, the biographical ideological ballast of individual communists that let certain assertions of communalism appear as less problematic than others. Third, the thrust of communist grand policy that left more than one backdoor for religion and communalism. Hence, they asserted themselves implicitly (as in the case of the "class-conscious" Bombay workers) or explicitly (as in the tentative patronisation of communal protest potential) in a communist framework.

Again, it has to be stressed that the communists were exceedingly committed, at least subjectively. They rejected tactical compromises with communal leaders in both words and deeds and missed few



opportunities to voice their opposition to religious and communal politics and outlooks. In contrast to most other contemporaries on the political stage, their assessments of communalism did not originate from moralism. Roy's analyses were innovative in their context in that they undertook to ground the phenomenon in social and political constellations, and provided a materialist explanation of motivations and interests in communal mobilisation.

However, narrowing communalism to ulterior motives of certain elite factions led to its sustained de-ideologisation. E. M. S. Namboodiripad's later praise of Roy, according to which his grounding of the religious question in the class struggle had been as seminal as the solutions he had offered, acquires its proper meaning less in a theoretical sense (as Roy did not transcend established Marxist formulae) than in a historical one (Namboodiripad 1997: 3-4). Both an areligious understanding of communalism and the blaming of problematic aspects of religion onto communalism remain characteristic of the communist position. Roy's problematisation of communalism as a mere means rather than as an end in itself has paved the way for an understanding of communalism as an essentially imperialist and reactionary technique—an understanding that, in the meantime, has become entrenched in subcontinental communism.

At the same time, the excesses of communalism coupled with the absence of a broad protest movement rendered simple, externalising models of explanation untenable if a communist perspective for intervention was to be maintained. The ensuing process of theoretical churning yielded different results. First, the Calcutta communists responded to 'their' riots with a qualified elevation of communalism. They considered its connotation of militant social unrest not as a substantiation of, but rather the best surrogate for national or class struggle to be had in the mid-1920s. Second, Roy made tentative steps towards an understanding of communalism as a problem of national minorities, whose momentousness for communist theory would manifest itself in the late 1930s. And third, a re-orientation set in from unspecified mass politics towards a clearer identification of target population segments. In this context, communist efforts at definition and organisation turned towards the proletariat—whose own communal encumbrance the communists gave their best to write off, and hence ultimately conserved rather than confronted.



Endnotes

¹ Lenin, Vladimir. 1902. What Is to Be Done?, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1901/witbd/ii.htm> [retrieved 14.05.15]. All emphases are original if not indicated otherwise.

² Thoughts. Treacherous to the People, of Delusive Patriots. *Kranti*, 16 July 1927, <http://dspace.gipe.ac.in/jspui/handle/1/6008:73> [retrieved 27.10.12]

³ *Times of India*, <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/archive.cms>, subscription required [retrieved 26.10.12]

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