



UNSUNG HEROES Volume II

A compilation

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ABOUT THE BOOK:

In the 19th century India was under British rule. It was also a land in need of social reform. This period gave rise to several movements in the country, some of them reformist, others fighting for independence. In the course of these struggles, many individuals distinguished themselves by leading the campaign for change and bringing about a new awakening in the country. In the face of great adversity they worked selflessly to achieve their objectives. *Unsung Heroes* is a tribute to the courage, vision, and sacrifice of some of these brave sons and daughters of India. This volume features Mahatma Jotirao Phule, Lal Bahadur Shastri, Sarojini Naidu, Bal Gangadhar Kher, Maulana Azad, and Captain Lakshmi. All these visionaries fought for justice and the betterment of their fellowmen. Their commitment, heroism, selfless service, and compassion are an inspiration for all humanity.

Dadabhai Naoroji

1825 - 1917

The Grand Old Man of India

Arvind Mambro

Dadabhai Naoroji, who was fondly called the “Grand Old Man of India”, had this to say about his appellation: “Is it vanity that I should take great pleasure in being hailed as the Grand Old Man of India? No, that title, which speaks volumes for the warm, grateful, and generous hearts of my countrymen, is to me, whether I deserve it or not, the highest reward of my life.”

Dadabhai dominated the political scene of the country during the latter half of the nineteenth and the first two decades of the twentieth century. His name is generally associated in the minds of his countrymen with political, economic, and social reforms. His pioneering researches into the nature and impact of British rule, the acclaimed Drain Theory, laid the foundation for educating more than one generation of Indian nationalists about the debilitating effect of colonialism on hundreds of millions of Indians. Dadabhai’s monumental work *Poverty and Un-British Rule in India* remains a classic to this day.

Son of Naoroji and Maneckbai Dordi, Dadabhai was born in Bombay in 1825. His ancestors hailed from Navsari, a small town in the territory of the Gaekwar of Baroda in the nineteenth century. Having lost his father when still a child, the responsibility of nurturing the young Dadabhai fell solely on the shoulders of his mother. He never failed to acknowledge her dedication and devotion saying, “She made me what I am.” At school he was above average, faring well in mathematics and cricket. It was at the Elphinstone Institution in Bombay that he completed his higher studies.

At a young age Dadabhai decided to devote himself to social work. Writing about his early life in a column “The Days of My Youth” in T. P. O’Connor’s journal *M.A.P.* in 1904, he said, “The thought developed itself in my mind that as my education and all the benefits arising there from came from the people, I must return to them the best I had in me. I must devote myself to the service of the people.”

He was a popular student in his college. Commenting on this, his biographer R. P. Masani says, "In appearance he was handsome, with singularly bright eyes; in his movements agile and alert; in character and demeanor upright and estimable. Academic honours crowned his career, giving unmistakable indication of remarkable vigour of intellect and clearness of thought and judgment." Such fine sentiments were also echoed by Professor Orlebar of the college who called him "The Promise of India".

When Dadabhai completed his studies, some of his well-wishers, including the president of the Board of Education, suggested that he should go to England to qualify as a barrister. As some of the orthodox elements in his community objected he had to drop the idea. He however got the position of head native assistant master at the Elphinstone Institution and soon became assistant professor of mathematics and natural philosophy. He was the first Indian professor to work in such a reputed institution in the country. Dadabhai felt proud of this appointment. Several honours came his way later in life but according to him, "no other title created in me that sense of pride that I felt in being known as a professor". His students called him "Dadabhai Professor".

In 1848, some Bombayites met at the Elphinstone Institution and decided to set up the Students' Literary and Scientific Society. Dadabhai, who presided over the meeting, was appointed treasurer of the society. To begin with the society merely acted as a sort of evening class for those who had left the institution, to which they could come to hear papers read on various subjects. It soon split on communal and linguistic lines. By 1851, the society had three branches, one for Parsis, another for Maharashtrians, and the third for Gujaratis. Each branch published its own journal and brought out pamphlets on scientific and other subjects in their respective languages. The journal of the Parsi branch was edited by Dadabhai.

Articles written by members of the parent society led to a project on female education. The lead was taken by Parsi reformers, Dadabhai being one of them. The first Parsi girls' school was opened in October 1849. By 1852 there were four of them with 371 pupils. Kharsedji Cama, a prominent merchant and reformer, and some of his friends, patronised them. Soon the Parsi Girls' School Fund and a General Fund for Female Education were set up. Five years later the Parsi Girls' School Association was founded, which helped the Parsi community in its struggle for reform. Dadabhai was quite active in the affairs of the association. Dadabhai was also involved in setting up the *Rahnumai Mazdayasnan Sabha*, an organisation whose aim was to purge contemporary Zoroastrianism of its extravagant ceremonies and irrational beliefs, or in other words, to restore the religion to its pristine purity and simplicity.

The middle of the nineteenth century also saw the rise of the earliest and as yet diffused ideas of political reform. With the advent of Western education ideas of political participation had begun to enthuse the educated middle class of Bombay. In August 1852, following a meeting in the Elphinstone Institution, the first political association in the Presidency, the Bombay Association, was launched. Dadabhai was one of its important promoters. Its objective was to promote the political and administrative rights of Indians. The association submitted a petition to the British Parliament asking for an enlightened system of government for the millions of India. It stressed the need to admit Indians into the civil service and suggested steps to be taken for their increased participation in the administration. The petition attracted several friends and well-wishers to the cause of Indians.

Dadabhai felt that there was an urgent need to educate the British public about the state of affairs in India. At the same time he also believed that India's grievances against the British should not blind her to the benefits of British rule. He was of the view that the remedy lay in agitation and that a nation's united voice was bound to be heard. He also wanted to serve his own people in a more meaningful way. In this context he averred: "The desire of my life was to serve people as opportunity permitted." For him, work was worship. His selfless service to the community soon made him a leader not only of the Parsi community but also of the people of Bombay. He therefore felt the need to have an independent newspaper to reach out to the masses. Another compelling reason for him to enter the field of journalism at that time was the Parsi-Muslim riot of 1851, which resulted in tension and confrontation between the communities.

With the help of his friend, Kharshedji Cama, he started a fortnightly, *Rast Goftar*. While Cama financed the journal, Dadabhai edited it. *Rast Goftar* generally dealt with issues revolving around the social tensions in Bombay city and other topics of interest to the intelligentsia. The paper became very popular and by public demand was converted into a weekly newspaper. In 1855 Dadabhai went to England as an agent and partner of the leading Parsi firm M/s. Cama and Co. and took charge of its branch in London. However, Dadabhai could not persuade himself to partake of the earnings from articles like opium and spirits. He therefore severed his connection with M/s. Cama and Co.

In 1859 Dadabhai started his own business in England in the name of Dadabhai Naoroji & Co. By the early 1860s, Dadabhai's firm was doing well. His business dealings were completely above board and he established that successful trading was in no way incompatible with the principles of ethics. He was also connected with several other organisations and gave financial help to various social causes in India.

By now Dadabhai was recognised as an unofficial ambassador of India. While educating the British public about India, he took every opportunity to put forth the grievances of his countrymen, principal among them being the denial of a share in the administration to its citizens. The only solution to the problems of Indians, therefore, was their increased association with the administration. He sought to achieve this by bringing Englishmen and Indians together and set up with his friend W. C. Bonnerji, the London Indian Society in 1865. Dadabhai remained its president until 1907.

How varied and manifold were his activities in England may be realised by a mere recital of the institutions with which he had been associated. He was an active member of the Liverpool Literary and Philosophic Society, the Philomathic Society, the Council of the Liverpool Athenaeum, the Royal Institute of London, the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland, the Ethnological Society, the Anthropological Society, the Society of Arts, and the National Indian Association. Highly respected as a mason, he was also a founder and treasurer of the Lodge, "The Marquis of Dalhousie".

To further the cause of the London Indian Society, Dadabhai set up the East India Association in December 1866. Its membership was open to Indians as well as non-Indians who were interested in the welfare of the country. Several prominent Englishmen joined this association whose aim was dissemination of knowledge about India and the communication of India's problems to the British Parliament.

At the first meeting of the association, Dadabhai read a paper on "England's Duties to India". In this paper he referred to, among other things, the annual drain of the wealth of India to England and the total exclusion of Indians from the administration of their own country. Mention may also be made of two other papers authored by Dadabhai. One of them was on the State of Mysore, where he pleaded for the continuation of a native government in the princely state. The other was on the expenses of the Abyssinian war. This paper showed how India suffered due to the transfer of the troops to the theatre of war. According to him, "If the troops were required for security, then it was unfair that India should have been deprived of that security and yet have been made to pay for it."

In 1866 Dadabhai's business failed and he had to close down his firm. On returning to India he decided to strengthen the activities of the East India Association. He opened a branch in Bombay and went on a lecture tour of the country. In one of his speeches, deliberating on the British attitude to India, he said, "The Englishman is incapable of despotism. He might, and often did, carry things with a high hand, but the instinct and love of liberty, the constitutionalism which is born with and ingrained in him, made him

at the time of trial recoil from being stigmatized a despot.” His lecture tour was quite successful. He received a good reception from some of the princes who also contributed financially to his effort. This motivated Dadabhai to establish branches of the association in other cities. Dadabhai had wanted the association to be controlled by the intelligentsia. In one of his speeches he said, “We have hitherto been in the habit of depending and throwing the whole burden on the rich. The rich in Bombay have at times, done their part nobly as we well know. Let us, the middle class, do our duty also—let us bear our own share of the burden.”

On arriving again in England in the last quarter of 1869, Dadabhai got down to making the association more effective. Several issues were discussed at its meetings. Most of these discussions centred around Indian finance.

By this time, the membership of the association had increased substantially and its influence began to be felt in the British Parliament. At Dadabhai’s instance his friend Henry Fawcett made it a ritual to move a resolution in the House of Commons suggesting simultaneous examinations in India and England for recruitment to the Indian Civil Service. Owing to the pressure of the association, members of Parliament started taking an active part in discussions on India.

Apart from his exertions for the association, after 1873 Dadabhai also remained occupied with urgent matters in the State of Baroda. The administrative machinery of the state had collapsed due to misgovernment of the Gaekwar. Wanting to put his house in order, the Gaekwar offered Dadabhai the post of Dewan of Baroda. Never one to refuse an invitation to serve in the cause of good government, Dadabhai accepted the offer. During the two years that he held this post, he contributed greatly to improving the governance in the state. Dadabhai also served as a member of the Municipal Corporation of Bombay from 1875-1876 and again from 1883-1886, concentrating on municipal reforms during his tenure.

In the years that he spent lecturing and educating Indians and Englishmen, Dadabhai strived to understand the reasons for India’s enduring and growing poverty under British rule. In a series of essays, which continue to remain landmarks in economic thinking till this day, Dadabhai unravelled the complex mechanism governing the transfer of resources from India to England. The finest exposition of his ideas on the drain of wealth from India to England is contained in the classic work *Poverty and Un-British Rule in India*. In this book Dadabhai brought together all his writings, papers, pamphlets,

correspondence with officials, and evidence submitted before committees and commissions, as also his speeches and addresses.

According to him a large portion of India's revenue was carried away annually to England. His famous observation about India deserves quotation in full: "In reality, there are two Indias—one of them prosperous, the other poverty stricken. The prosperous India is the India of the British and other foreigners. They exploit India as officials, non-officials, capitalists in a variety of ways, and carry away enormous wealth to their country . . . The second India is the India of the Indians—the poverty stricken India. This India 'bled' and exploited in every way of their wealth, of their services, of their land, labour and all resources by the foreigners—this India of the Indians becomes the poorest country in the world after one hundred and fifty years of British rule."

Dadabhai took pains to estimate the size of the drain out of India. In 1887 he calculated it to be about Rs. 395 crores for the period 1883-1892. In 1905 he declared that nearly 515 crores worth of India's resources were being drained out of the country every year. To him goes the credit for being the first Indian to make a systematic attempt to calculate the drain. But having explained and measured the drain, Dadabhai also analysed its implications and even proposed concrete steps to end it. The most compelling result of the drain was the steady impoverishment of India, increased unemployment, and ruination of the nation's productive capacity. In his House of Commons speech of 12 February 1895 Dadabhai illustrated how the drain not only depleted future national savings but also decreased the existing stock of inherited national capital by exporting a large portion of its currently accumulated capital to a foreign country. The consequences of the drain pointed to a possible solution. Not only did Dadabhai insist that Indians be allowed to develop their own resources, he also hoped that the financial relations between India and England be put on a moral and just basis. No less important was the need to protect India's industries.

Ashfaquallah Khan
1900 - 1927
A Life of Patriotism and Secularism

Prof. (Ms.) Farrukh S. Waris

Ashfaquallah Khan, the Pathan patriot with a body of iron and will of steel, is one of the foremost freedom fighters to come to mind whenever we think of the revolutionary phase of the Indian struggle for freedom. Ashfaquallah's life and martyrdom is an inspiring example of heroic patriotism and harmonious secularism. It is important to delve into the life history of Ashfaquallah Khan to be able to understand the man who became a stalwart in his own right by taking unconventional decisions.

Ashfaquallah Khan Warsi was born on 1 October 1900 in the district of Shahjhanpur, Uttar Pradesh. His family home was in Mohalla Amanjai, in Sadar Bazaar locality, which is just a kilometre away from the railway station of Shahjhanpur. After independence, his tomb was also erected in the same locality near his home. Shahjhanpur enjoys the celebrated status of being the birth place of Ashfaquallah Khan and his mentor Ram Prasad. His father, Shafiqur Rehman, was in the government service like most of his male relatives and also enjoyed petty zamindari, which perhaps was bestowed on the family for their exemplary services during and post-1857 episodes. The family was numerically large and financially well off. Ashfaquallah had three elder brothers and a sister. Being the youngest in the family, he was pampered by all. His parents and his older siblings showered a lot of love on him and endearingly called him Acchu Khan. Ashfaq's growing years were full of fun and games. He was always physically well built and towered over other children of his age. He was very close to his mother Mazharulnisa Begum, who belonged to an elite Muslim family and was well versed in Urdu and Persian literature. Mazharulnisa Begum was an organised and disciplined matriarch who managed her family with loving care. She was known to be a helpful lady who enjoyed a popular status especially with her own *mohalla* (locality) women who approached her regularly with their personal problems. She helped them in arranging their daughters' marriages and also provided financial assistance for the same. Mazharulnisa Begum was also an avid reader of books and newspapers, and perhaps it was her influence on Ashfaq that led him to develop a close affinity for books. His mother was also his first tutor in Urdu and Persian till he was sent to study under a maulana. When he was a little older he was sent to the Mission School in Shahjhanpur.

Ashfaquallah's family enjoyed a comfortable status with the British rulers and could never dream of defying them. Yet Ashfaq was different and never played subservient to the British masters. Perhaps the freedom of choice he enjoyed as a child made him bold and confident. He never adopted a servile attitude towards the "Bada Sahebs", a commonly displayed courtesy by the other zamindar gentry of the period. In fact, his actions and statements of the later period show clarity of mind, value-based free will and sincerity of purpose. He loved reading the newspaper like his mother. He read about Khudiram Bose and Kanhailal Dutt, both revolutionaries from Bengal who died fighting for the freedom of the country. Revolutionaries were loved and respected by all; Ashfaq was no different. He was a sensitive individual who once got so carried away with an English poem on "Unsung Heroes" that it brought tears to his eyes. He was a burly Pathan with a heart filled with the "milk of human kindness."

Another incident that involved him emotionally was Gandhiji's call for launching a movement of non-cooperation against the British rule in India. In 1921, the echo of non-cooperation resounded throughout the country. Mahatma Gandhi had called on Indians not to pay taxes to the government or cooperate with the British. This had rekindled the fire of freedom in the hearts of all Indians. The Non-cooperation Movement was greatly applauded by the younger generation of Indian nationalists and they eagerly backed Gandhi. The Congress Party too backed his plans and he received extensive support from Muslim leaders like Maulana Azad, Abbas Tyabji and the Ali brothers (Maulana Mohammad Ali and Maulana Shaukat Ali). Gandhi was elected president of the Indian National Congress in 1919 and 1920 as well as of the All India Home Rule League. The latter was once dominated by Gandhi's critics like Jinnah, Besant and Tilak. The success of the new revolt was a total shock to the British authorities and a massive encouragement to millions of Indians. Then, on 4 February 1922, in the serene township of Chauri Chaura, violent clashes took place between the local police and the protestors in which three protestors were killed in police firing. The angry mob set the police station on fire killing some twenty-two policemen on duty.

Gandhi was very disturbed that the movement had lost its non-violent nature. He did not want it to degenerate into a contest of violence, with police and angry mobs attacking each other and victimising innocent civilians. On 10 March 1922, Gandhi appealed to the Indian public to end all resistance and he went on a fast lasting three weeks. He was arrested on 18 March 1922 and imprisoned for two years for publishing seditious material.

The sudden suspension of the movement created widespread dissatisfaction. Although most Congress leaders remained firmly behind Gandhi, the disillusioned broke away. The Ali brothers became fierce critics. Motilal Nehru and Chittaranjan Das formed the Swaraj Party. Many nationalists felt that the Non-cooperation Movement should not have been discontinued due to some isolated incidents of violence; most nationalists still trusted Gandhi but were disappointed. Ashfaqullah was one such dejected youth. He wanted to free his country as early as possible. This yearning made him turn to other revolutionaries.

Ashfaq's love for reading had kept him politically aware and he expressed a desire to his friend Banwari Lal to be introduced to Ram Prasad, the hero of the "Maenpuri Conspiracy" who was very popular and respected as a revolutionary. (Banwari Lal turned an approver against the group after the Kakori incident.) Ram Prasad Bismil, a prominent revolutionary of Shahjahanpur, was a member of the Arya Samaj and believed in bringing back converts to the Hindu fold with a *shuddhi* process.

Ashfaq, on the other hand, was a devout Muslim. But the commonality of their intentions paved the way for their friendship, which crossed all hurdles. Both wanted to see a free India. Banwari got Ashfaq introduced to Ram Prasad Bismil sometime in 1922, as Ashfaq was keen to befriend Ram Prasad and to know his involvement in the Maenpuri episode. Ram Prasad, in his autobiography, mentions: "I remember clearly my first meeting with you [Ashfaqullah] in Shahjahanpur School. We met after the British Government declared its policy towards India. You were sincerely trying to meet me. You wanted to talk to me about the Maenpuri Plot. I suspected your intentions because you were a Muslim and I talked to you in an insulting way. You were then greatly pained and tried to convince me through friends that you were honest and earnest, and that there was no pretence in you. You were determined to work hard for the good of the country. At last you won the day, and by your efforts you won a place for yourself in my heart."

Ram Prasad's friendship with Ashfaqullah grew with great warmth after the walls of suspicions were pulled down. He says, "You became my brother in a few days but you were not content to remain in the position of a brother. You wanted equality and to be my friend. You succeeded in your efforts. You became my honoured and loved friend." Bismil writes rather emotionally about his equation with Ashfaq time and again. He says, "Ashfaq, nothing could stand between us now. We ate from the same plate often. I began to get over the feeling that there is any difference between Hindus and Muslims. You had great love and faith for me. You stopped calling me by my full name. Always, I was just

‘Ram’ to you. Once you were running a very high temperature and in your delirious state kept calling out to me ‘Ram, Ram.’ The family and friends around you were shocked that a Muslim was remembering a Hindu God in his moments of pain. They told you to remember Allah but you kept humming ‘Ram, Ram,’ till a common friend informed me and others about the truth behind the chanting of ‘Ram, Ram’. I immediately rushed to your bedside and you became calm.”

Both Ram Prasad and Ashfaq were bred and groomed differently, one as an ardent Arya Samajist and the other as a devout Muslim, but their friendship and joint martyrdom became a widespread symbol of communal unity. However it would be trivial to reduce their roles to mere representation of their respective faiths. They were both primarily revolutionaries who came together to work out a strategy to free India from British rule, which resulted in the formation of the Hindustan Republican Association (HRA).

Ram Prasad Bismil, Ashfaqullah’s friend, philosopher and guide, has spoken in depth about him in his autobiography, which he completed and smuggled out of the prison cell just three days prior to his hanging. Bismil writes: “You convinced me that you are not a hypocrite, and a true nationalist who aspired for Hindu-Muslim unity. You were a true Muslim and a true nationalist. It was your ardent prayer that the Muslims of India should join in with the Hindus and fight the British. You wanted me to write articles in Urdu so that the Muslims should be able to read them too.” Ashfaqullah had tutored himself in Hindi. His mother and brothers were often taken aback with his fluency in Hindi. His religious inclination was often doubted by others in the community, who feared that the company of an Arya Samajist friend may have convinced him to go through *shuddhi*. Bismil writes: “Your heart was so pure, which needed no purification.” Ashfaq and Bismil trusted each other implicitly in spite of each being warned by their own community members to be wary of the other. Strangely enough, Bismil was spied on and betrayed by Banwari Lal, a devout Hindu, and similarly, Ashfaqullah Khan was handed over to the British by a fellow Pathan.

Bismil refers to Ashfaqullah as a die-hard revolutionary who worked incessantly to motivate and involve the Muslim youth into revolutionary activities. He tried to convince his friends and relatives with his revolutionary ideologies. Perhaps if destiny had allowed him a longer life, he would have had greater success in achieving his desired goals. Bismil writes: “I am satisfied that you have done me proud. History of India will remember your contribution to her freedom struggle. You remained firm in your beliefs till the end. Your personality displayed strength of physique, thought and character.”

Bismil was happy that his bosom friend had not compromised his high nationalist principles at the altar of persuasion and punishment.

Ashfaqullah's patriotic involvement was perhaps more individual-centric and did not represent the mood of the community at large at that point of time. But if Ashfaqullah had lived on to see the success of his movement then maybe a uniform cultural and intellectual regeneration would have been possible.

It is more romantic for the youth to take inspiration from characters like Ram Prasad Bismil and Ashfaqullah Khan. India's freedom may have ultimately been a result of Gandhi's non-violent movement but the armed struggle is also an important part of its history right from the 1857 mutiny. India owes its freedom to many heroes from Ashfaqullah Khan to Bhagat Singh to Subhas Chandra Bose. Ashfaq was clear in communicating to whoever he interacted with that the *tabligh and shuddhi* movements were dividing the country and coming in the way of the struggle for independence. The *tabligh* movement aimed at inviting Muslims to adopt an Islamic way of life in total confirmation with Quran as interpreted by the *Ulema* (Muslims scholars). *Shuddhi* was a campaign to counsel Hindus who had converted to other religions to return to the Hindu fold by undergoing the process of *shuddhi* or purification. Ashfaqullah was a sharp critic of these movements as he rightly feared the bifurcation of the strengths of the two communities who could otherwise put up a strong united front against British imperialism. Ashfaqullah was of the opinion that religion should not take precedence over national interest. The bond between Ashfaqullah and Bismil is a glorious example of how unity and communal harmony can be maintained even if we follow different faiths. We just have to restrict the growth of fundamentalism, which stalls democratic thinking and encourages a partisan and parochial view of others.

Though Ashfaqullah, like other HRA members, seemed to be impressed with the success of the Bolshevik Revolution and Communism, perhaps his nationalistic fervour prompted him to caution the communists that "now that you have come to Hindustan with this non-national movement, it will not do to think of yourself as non-national, to hate the things of the nation, to prefer foreign dress and lifestyle. Come into your real colours, live for the nation, die for the nation. I agree with you to a considerable extent, and will say that my heart has always been heavy for poor peasants and suffering workers. While in hiding I had the chance to spend time among them and often wept to see their condition. If you ask me, I would say that if I had my way, I would give up every possible thing in the world for them (peasants and the labour). Our factories

function and prosper due to their labour. Their hands pull water from our pumps. All necessary things in the world take place due to them alone.”

Ashfaq had great empathy for the poor and was pained at the adversities they endured and at their unacknowledged existence. He writes that “the poor have no share in what they produce, what they make, thus always unhappy and tattered.” Ashfaqullah blamed the white masters and their agents for causing all that misery to the poor. He felt that working with the poor at the grassroots level and sharing an equal space with them would create awareness amongst the “elite” of the hardships endured by the poor and would therefore reduce the distance between the two.

Ashfaqullah seems to have moved on with multiple personal identities rather well. For example, he never compromised on his Indianness as he often expressed his pride in being an Indian and a fierce nationalist. At the same time, he remained a devout practising Muslim who embraced death with “La Ilaaha illal laho, Mohammad ur Rasool Allah.” He learnt to write in Hindi while hiding in Bihar after the Kakori episode, reflecting his regional bonding. Politically he identified with his revolutionary brothers whom he addressed as “comrades” in Bolshevik style.

Ashfaq aspired for an independent India in which equality prevailed. He stated in his last message: “After I am gone, may the almighty Allah soon bring that day to pass when Abdullah the carpenter, and Dhania Chamar (Dalit) and the peasant too, will be seen to sit on an equal footing with Mr. Khaliqzama, Jagat Narayan Mulla and Nawab Mahmudabad.”

The revolutionaries felt that a passive attitude and soft words of non-violence could not win India its independence and therefore a decision was taken to make use of bombs and weapons to instil fear in the heart of the British Empire. Benaras became the centre of all revolutionary activities. The process of revolution is long and winding but in India it cut across timelines when Gandhi abruptly called off the Non-cooperation Movement. The youth of the country suffered great disillusionment and felt hopelessly rudderless. The stage was almost set for a coup-d'état. The young revolutionaries, bursting with nationalistic fervour and enthusiasm, could not be reined in easily. The revolutionaries had formed the Hindustan Republican Association (HRA) with the goal of struggling for an egalitarian and democratic order internationally and in India too. Bismil and Ashfaq desired to initiate a mass revolutionary movement rather than guerrilla warfare alone. Both of them read and urged others to read the Bolshevik literature. They were

forerunners of Bhagat Singh's intellectual Marxist tradition. In the early stages, the revolutionaries could infuse neither much life nor a sharp ideological orientation into the organisation. The Kakori episode is a typical milestone in the Indian revolutionary movement and in the freedom struggle that filled in the void left by the suspension of the Non-cooperation Movement by Gandhi in 1922. More importantly, at a time when communal violence was spreading in the wake of the aborted Non-cooperation Movement, the HRA members effectively diverted and re-focused the nation's attention away from destructive communalism towards a constructive freedom struggle. Ashfaq's own final message to the nation repeatedly challenged the orthodoxies of the *shuddhi* campaign as well as the *tabligh* campaign. It was marked by an urgent approach against communal divide and a warm espousal of Communism. Ashfaq did not hesitate in chiding communists for their gentlemanly manners and urged them to take up the task of living with and organising the rural and urban working class. Ashfaq was by no means the first Muslim to hang on the colonial gallows—thousands of Muslims in 1857 had preceded him. However, his claim to be the “first and foremost Muslim” to die for the nation is probably a sign of the pressure of widespread communal propaganda of the time, which Ashfaq and Bismil hoped to counter with their joint martyrdom. Ashfaq once wrote: “The government spies are spreading propaganda on a communal basis. Their aim is not to safeguard or develop religion, but rather is to create obstacles in the path of a moving vehicle.” He goes on with his lament on the growing wedge between the Hindus and the Muslims: “Your civil war, your mutual rift, will not prove beneficial to either of you and it is impossible that 7 crore Muslims commit *shuddhi* (purification). And it is meaningless to imagine that 22 crore Hindus can be turned into Muslims. But yes, it is too easy for them all together to throw away the shackles of slavery from around their necks . . . *Tabligh and Shuddhiwalas!* For God's sake open your eyes. Where did you begin and where have you reached? Live in Peace with each other and become united; if not, the assault of Hindustan's misfortune will fall on your necks and you will be the reason for slavery.”

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