

IRIS Post-Fieldwork Report 2024

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My summer 2024 research trip to the British Library and the National Archives in London has been an invaluable experience that significantly advanced the archival part of my PhD dissertation. The primary aim of this visit was to explore the complex interplay between religion and politics, focusing specifically on the nexus between Islam and Marxism during the anti-colonial movement in Bengal and the subsequent liberation movement of Bangladesh. The archival documents pertaining to Bengal and Assam during the 20th century were central to my research, offering insights into the role of Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani (1880-1976), a Sufi saint and peasant leader known for his advocacy for oppressed peasants and toiling masses.

During my summer research trip, I conducted a systematic exploration of the extensive and rare archival collections at the British Library (primarily at the India Office Records section) and The National Archives, meticulously examining a wide range of primary source materials, including letters, colonial office records and documents, newspaper cuttings, rare books and photographs, microfilms and so on. This process was instrumental in gathering critical insights into the historical developments, socio-political contexts, and interactions between religion and Marxism in 20th-century Bengal and Assam.

A key highlight of my research was the discovery of previously underutilized documents that detailed the activities and influence of Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani in shaping political discourse during the anti-colonial struggle before 1947 and liberation movement of Bangladesh during the 1960s. These documents revealed nuanced connections between religious and political forces, particularly highlighting the intersection of Islam and Marxism in the

socio-political landscape of the peasant politics of that time. The archival records allowed me to trace the evolution of Bhashani's thought, from his early involvement in anti-colonial resistance to his later role in advocating for peasant rights and socialism, providing a more comprehensive understanding of the ideological amalgamation that characterized his leadership.

This trip provided me with an opportunity to refine my archival research methodologies, particularly in the areas of document analysis and historical contextualization. Navigating the vast collection required the development of a strategic approach to identifying relevant materials and effectively managing the large volume of data. Engaging directly with primary sources allowed me to apply theoretical frameworks to historical events, leading to a more nuanced analysis of the ideological dynamics at play. The research visit also enhanced my ability to critically assess the reliability and significance of historical documents, an essential skill that will be transferable to my future academic endeavors.

The academic environment at the British Library and The National Archives, combined with interactions with fellow researchers and scholars, greatly enriched my professional experience. I had the opportunity to engage in discussions with experts in South Asian history, which provided diverse perspectives and deepened my understanding of the broader academic discourse surrounding my research topic. Attending academic events in London facilitated valuable networking opportunities, fostering connections that have the potential to evolve into future collaborations.

I sincerely thank IRIS for their generous support, which was instrumental in facilitating my research. This pre-dissertation funding has greatly contributed to the advancement of my PhD research.