

## **Bhagat Singh : His thought and Ideology**

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### **Abstract**

*“Revolution means the ultimate establishment of an order of society in which the sovereignty of the proletariat should be recognized and a world federation should redeem humanity from the bondage of capitalism and misery of imperial wars. Revolution is made by labouring intellectuals and hardworking activists. Unfortunately, the intellectual side of the Indian Revolution has always remained weak. As a result, the essential elements of the revolution as well as the effects of work accomplished have not been sufficiently addressed. Therefore, it is necessary for a revolutionary to consider studying and reflection a sacred duty.”*

*-- Sardar Bhagat Singh*

History of Indian freedom struggle is unique and captivating . It reflects the harmonious blend of the revolutionary and non-violent way to get freedom from the British rule. The dynamic role of Punjab in the freedom struggle was played by Bhagat Singh and his associates consisting of Rajguru, Sukhdev, Chander Shekhar Azaad. Due to his revolutionary actions, outlook, and socialist ideas , Bhagat Singh's fame increased manifold. He gave a new dimension and meaning to his revolutionary movement. To him, gun and grenades were the double-edged instruments , meant to shake off the slumber of Indians on the one hand, and to compel the insensitive bureaucrats to realize that India needed 'Swaraj' and 'Socialism' on the other hand. His revolutionary movement was directed towards the attainment of nationalistic and socialistic goals. Later it was through his works that Indian national consciousness became largely influenced by the writings of Karl Marx and Lenin ( advocates of socialist states).

The most important contribution of Bhagat Singh was to give a new meaning and contents to patriotism. The country till then was equated to mother, the patriotic songs either sang the grandeur and glory of mother India or represented its beauty and pain. For instance - in the song of *Vande Mataram* , all about mother India's lush green fields and soothing cool breeze were given attention and our National Anthem illustrates the map and geography of whole undivided India and the turbulent seas and oceans. In these songs, the people of India , proletariat class, struggling men , women and children who made up this whole country were clearly ignored. Bhagat Singh's patriotism sited the people determinedly at the centre of the country. He redefined the love for the country as love for the people. The people who had already taken up arms against the colonial rulers in “the Great Rebellion of 1857”, and through the Ghadar party which challenged the British rulers from outside India, and the people who had begun to rise in numerous local and national struggles, and had been slaughtered by British bullets at Jallianwalla bagh in Amritsar , or heroes like Kartar Singh Sarabha who had kissed the gallows of death at the tender age of twenty all these real characters began receiving attention and adding new colour and passion to the concept of patriotism.

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There were several issues in Asia and India that exerted a powerful influence on Bhagat Singh like active participation of his father Kishan Singh and uncle Ajit Singh in the fight against the British, agrarian and political agitation in Punjab (1907), deportation of Lala Lajpat Rai and Ajit Singh, victory of Asian country Japan over mighty European power Russia, heroic efforts of Rash Behari Bose ,and Sachindra Nath Sanyal to name a few played an important role in moulding the outlook of Bhagat Singh. He and his companions found a way from Manipur Conspiracy Case and Lahore Conspiracy Case.

Mahatma Gandhi's non-cooperation movement found an immediate appeal in Punjab. The young revolutionaries of Punjab immediately plunged into it whole- heartedly .But the withdrawal of the non-cooperation movement after *Chauri Chaura* in 1922 had disillusioned youth and revolutionaries all over India. Bhagat Singh and the other revolutionaries discarded the Gandhian ideology and the so called constitutional method of struggle for freedom. In their search for new methods, they stumbled at revolutionary terrorism as the only alternative and socialism as its final goal.

At the level of ideas, Ajit Singh, his uncle left a deep impact on Bhagat Singh . Ajit Singh was advanced especially in terms of his perception of what the freedom of India meant. He was also much more revolutionary in thought than he wanted to awaken and organise the peasantry on the basis of their economic exploitation at the hands of the big feudal landlords and the colonial system. Bhagat Singh went beyond this advanced thinking of his uncle and reached the logical end of adopting the Marxist vision of liberation. Dwarkadas Library founded by Lala Lajpat Rai made the Socialist literature available to the keen students of Socialism. It captured the imagination of Bhagat Singh and Sukhdev. They read about the emergence of working class a powerful force during First World War 1914 and Russian Revolution of 1917.It was natural that the Marxist Literature , Writings of Lenin and Socialist Works became their craze.Ideas of scientific Socialism , organization of workers and peasants fell on fertile minds which resulted in the formation of Communist groups in different parts of the country. '*Inquilab Group*' was formed in Lahore.

On the pattern of a youth organisation in Italy inspired by Guiseppe Mazzini and Giuseppe Garibaldi the Italian patriots and the apostle of Italian Republicanism, the Naujawan Bharat Sabha (NBS) was formed in 1926. Bhagat Singh was its general secretary and Bhagwati Charan Vohra was propaganda secretary. Among other activities, NBS worked to organise lantern shows of patriot's pictures. They were particularly inspired by the sacrifice of Kartar Singh Sarabha, as he was executed at the young age of 19 years in 1915 at Lahore and whose photograph Bhagat Singh always kept in his pocket. At all their public meetings they used to garland Sarabha's picture put on the dais. During this period, Ghadrite revolutionaries returned from Moscow, trained in communist theory, and had formed the *Kirti* group. Santokh Singh had started *Kirti*, a journal in Punjabi with which Bhagat Singh was associated as a writer. After Sohan Singh Josh became its editor following the untimely passing away of Santokh Singh, Bhagat Singh worked on the staff of *Kirti* for a while, as he was in touch with Sohan Singh Josh in connection with the activities of the NBS.

Bhagat Singh successfully widened the social base of the revolutionary movement. The manifesto of the NBS stated that the future programme of preparing the country would be the motto revolution by the masses and for the masses. In 1931, Bhagat Singh declared the main task of NBS is the organization of labourers and peasants. The hope of revolutionaries of carrying on the struggle

was tied up in the common people because the capitalists and the upper classes had tended to rally round the foreign imperialists. Bhagat Singh's contribution laid in the making of common people as the social base of revolution.

Even prior to forming NBS in Lahore, Bhagat Singh was in touch with the earliest communists of the country in Kanpur. He was in contact with communists such as Satyabhakat, Radha Mohan Gokulji and Shaukat Usmani. In practical terms, Bhagat Singh was part of communist movement in India since its very inception, his later activities testifying to this fact. Of course, he was not formally a member of the Communist Party as it was then still in its formative period. But he had met Muzzafar Ahmad, one of the founders of the communist movement, who had come to Lahore after his release from jail in the Kanpur conspiracy case in 1924.

While Bhagat Singh had no reservations about joining the Communist Party, he and his close companions were at the time trying to shape their own revolutionary organisation, the Hindustan Socialist Republican Association(HSRA). Bhagat Singh his group was of the view that some spectacular revolutionary actions, along with some exemplary deeds on the part of the young revolutionaries were required to awaken the masses from their slumber and initiate a mass upsurge against British colonialism. Sohan Singh Josh had appropriately expressed what needed to be done in his four meetings with Bhagat Singh. But following the formation of the HSRA in September 1928, some political developments took place, which did not allow HSRA the time to transform itself as the nucleus of a set of mass organisations. However, apart from the NBS, mass organisations such as the Lahore Students' Union, Bal Students' Union and Bal Bharat Sabha were formed.

Bhagat Singh's foremost contribution was an ideologue. It was Baknin's , *The God and the State* and Kropotkin 's *Memoirs* which influenced him the most .Bhagat Singh believed that religion should be kept separately from revolution because religion could become main stumbling block in the sincere loyalty of a revolutionary to the policy of revolution. Bhagat Singh took class solidarity and class struggle as the basis of people's harmony, and developed a secular discourse shorn of religious imageries and idioms that firmly rooted in India 's composite cultural heritage. While in personal life , he completed his transition from active religious belief to rationalism and atheism, he respected everybody's right to choose and practice his or her own religion in private life, but in public life he insisted on strict separation of religion from the state and politics. His nationalism was thus clearly non-religious and anti-communal and thus more comprehensive for multi-religious India.

Bhagat Singh and his companions cherished the dreams of liberating India and transforming Indian Society through revolution.It was Bhagat Singh who coined slogan for the revolutionaries, '*Inquilab Zindabad*' or 'Long live the Revolution' and it replaced '*Bande Matram*' as the nationalist war cry. Bhagat Singh and his companions also distinguished themselves from the beginning with their clear goal of complete independence. It was not for them to juggle with half-baked concepts of different legal variants of colonial domination. Complete independence from imperialist subjugation became the obvious bottom line for Bhagat Singh and his comrades. And to be sure, with their people-centric concept of patriotism, they could not remain content with an abstract notion of national independence. Liberation of the country for them was inseparably associated with liberation of the working people.

As the idea of independence led to the goal of *Inquilab* or revolution, in conceptualising this revolution. Bhagat Singh also completed his ideological transition from shades of terrorism,

anarchism and nihilism to Marxism-Leninism. With Marxism-Leninism as his guide to action, Bhagat Singh began paying close attention to the task of developing a programmatic blueprint for the Indian revolution. In his last writings, he made it repeatedly clear that revolution could not be accomplished without a revolutionary programme and a revolutionary party. While he used the word socialism to indicate the direction of India's revolutionary journey, he was quite alive to the fact that India was still overwhelmingly feudal and that Indian capitalists were developing organic ties of collaboration and compromise with foreign capital. Elimination of feudalism figured on top of the programmatic tasks highlighted in his draft of revolutionary programme. Just as Lenin and Mao had developed revolutionary programmes for Russia and China by applying Marxism to the concrete socio-economic and historical conditions obtaining in their countries, Bhagat Singh too was working in a similar direction in colonial India.

Bhagat Singh had a deep conviction that revolution was the harbinger of progress, human urge for change and revolution could not be strangled by suppression. A society which put a stop to revolution would decay. Hence, a revolution was needed to throw off the dead weight of obsolete traditions and rejuvenate itself. Bhagat Singh enriched the concept of revolution by adding more dimensions and definitions to it. Revolution had usually been associated with violence. Sometimes adoption of violence became essential. Earlier his predecessors had regarded revolution as political act. He endowed it with social significance when he observed: by revolution we mean the ultimate establishment of an order of society, which may not be threatened by such breakdowns and in which the sovereignty of the proletariat should be recognized and as a result of which a world federation should redeem humanity from the bondage of capitalism, misery and peril of wars.

Along with the revolutionary programme, Bhagat Singh also paid detailed attention to the tactical and organisational aspects of revolutionary preparation. He was remarkably free from dogmatism or sectarianism and displayed a highly rational and analytical mind while remaining absolutely firm in purpose and in strategic commitment to the revolutionary goal. He was convinced about the necessity of armed struggle and having an underground organisational apparatus, but increasingly he laid overwhelming emphasis on extensive revolutionary preparation through open mass work.

Bhagat Singh regarded the National Independence as a stepping stone to the world federation. His fervent hope that a world federation should redeem humanity from the bondage of capitalism, misery and perils of war is a match for the bright vision envisaged by Karl Marx: Let the ruling classes tremble at the communistic revolution. The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win. Bhagat Singh saw the close alliance between capitalism and modern imperialism, between economic exploitation and enslavement nations. British rule in India was regarded as the rule of foreign capital of foreign capitalists. Socialism was the panacea for all the ills, ending exploitation of man by man as well as for winning national independence. Another aspect of this fight against capitalism was an onslaught on the domestic exploiting classes because they were tending to work together with the foreign capitalists to guarantee its own continued existence. Bhagat Singh, in a letter from jail specified that the peasants have to unshackle themselves not only from the foreign bondage but also from the bondage of domestic landlords and capitalists. He further added that this state of affair can not last long. The whole edifice of this civilization, if not saved in time shall crumble. Radical change is therefore necessary and it is duty of those who realize this re-organise society on a socialistic basis. Unless this is done and the exploitation of man by man, and of nation by nation can not be prevented and all talk of ending wars, and ushering an era of universal peace is undisguised hypocrisy.

Bhagat Singh and his companions decided to take the support of students, the youth, the peasants, radical intelligentsia and labourers and increasingly insisted that they would go deep among the masses, to the colonies of workers and hamlet of the rural poor. He keenly followed the struggles of workers and peasants, wrote enthusiastically about the no-rent movement of peasants and economic as well as political strikes of workers. While placing the toiling and oppressed masses at the centre of his definition of the people, he laid particular stress on establishing worker-peasant domination in the national movement for he could clearly see that the propertied sections of Indian society, capitalists, traders, princes and big landlords were only capable of striking a deal with imperialism and hence they could only be treated as unreliable friends, if not sworn enemies, of Indian independence. As Bhagat Singh and his companions wanted to involve the peasants and labourers, they hardly became a part and parcel of Indian Revolutionary Movement owing to the fact that the peasants and the workers were then ignorant, dumb and unaware of their potential force.

It is a matter of surprise that the Congress particularly Mahatama Gandhi did very little to save the lives of Bhagat Singh and his companions. Bhagat Singh became an icon of Indian youth fighting against the British Imperialism and was hanged at the young age of 23 years when a large number of Indian political leaders were either at the primary stages of their career or enjoying their life abroad. Bhagat Singh never justified violence as he could have easily killed numerous political leaders present in the Lahore Assembly including Moti Lal Nehru, Madan Mohan Malviya and Mohammad Ali Jinnah, if he had wanted that. The aim was just to awaken the ruling establishment about India's long pending freedom. He said, it is well-known that I am a terrorist but I am not that. I am a revolutionary who has certain ideology, defined ideals and a long programme and if people think that after living in for a long period in the jail, there is any change in my ideologies then they are wrong. It is my firm belief that we cannot get any benefit from either guns or grenades. Throwing bomb is not only dangerous but also harmful. It is required in certain specific conditions. Our main aim is the organization of laborers and farmers."

Not only was Bhagat Singh against the communal parties and ideas but also his views on caste are equally inspiring. He mocked at India's caste system and questioned the legitimacy of a system, which make people untouchable on the basis of their birth in a particular caste. He was equally aware of the capitalist class, which was compromising with the British imperial class. And certainly his conviction that this system based on exploitation can not be eliminated with just transfer of power from the British to 'Indian British', it needs revolution he said. As far as India was concerned, one can easily correlate the upper caste feudal power forces with that of the capitalist class in India who gained everything from the British occupation in India.

In fact, Bhagat Singh has become more relevant today when the state is abdicating its responsibility and private goons are being legitimized by it in the name of obstacles free capital while ignoring the same demand of the labour. It was this fact, which had disturbed Bhagat Singh and his comrades. April 8th, 1929, the Lahore Assembly was to pass a bill, which could have nullified the rights of the trade unions and labours. And this was the occasion, he felt, best, to convey his anger to those in powers. Bhagat Singh and his friends became immortal, the de-facto voice of the common man, labours and farmers of the country. While the bomb was not really meant to destroy the assembly and kill political leaders as they had made their intentions very clear. They became revolutionaries who inspired an entire nation cutting across caste and communal lines.

On 6th June 1929 Bhagat Singh and Batukeshwar Dutt said in a statement, 'To change the system based on injustice, we need revolution. Is it not a constructed injustice that the labours and producers, despite being the part of mainstream, are victim of exploitation and have been denied basic



human rights? Farmers, who produces die of hunger. The weaver who weaves cloths for others cannot do so for his own family and children. Masons, Carpenters, Ironsmiths build huge palaces die living in huts and slums. On the other side, capitalist exploiters, anti social elements, spend crores of rupees on their fashion and enjoyment. Those who enjoy at the cost of hardworking and hungry people should understand that they are sitting on such a volcano which is about to erupt.'

The above statement clearly indicates the direction of Bhagat Singh's thought. How worried he was about the caste and class structure in India. That he narrated the plight of the *Dalits* who he called as working classes is a remarkable and unparallel for a young man who was in his early twenties. It is rare for a person of that age to understand the caste prejudices and its dynamics not in terms of social and cultural but economical basis. Bhagat Singh that way was far ahead of his contemporaries. Not only he was worried about the capitalist class sucking the blood of common Indian with the blessing its imperialist masters but he clearly understood the caste dynamics and questioned the very legacy of the *Brahmanical* legacy when he wrote his famous essay 'The Question of Untouchable'.

But the powerful forces of British Raj hanged him so that the legitimate voices of the marginalized are silent but it was not to be. Bhagat Singh and his ideas have become doubly relevant in today's world where exploitation is legitimized. When the tribal are dying of hunger, when the farmers are committing suicide and when the *Dalits* have to face the brunt of assertion, ideas of Bhagat Singh echoes in the air. Here was a man who unapologetically sacrificed his life for the cause of the people and country. That the country's ruler's are today creating 'Special Exploitative Zones', to rebuild the Zamindari system which they proudly claim to have destroyed.

Today we must learn from Bhagat Singh's message. He was the one who had warned the country that mere replacement of the British rulers by our own 'brown sahibs' would hardly make any difference. He was the one who told us that in order to challenge imperialism we must demolish the domestic basis of foreign rule feudal forces and capitalist collaborators, the Indian supporter of colonial raj and imperialist domination. He was the one to warn against the disastrous potential of communal politics and call for complete elimination of the squalid historical reality of social oppression and untouchability.

In ending, I shall say that Bhagat Singh made an stupendous contribution to the Indian revolutionary movement by enriching and widening its ideological content. Bhagat Singh was surely a communist pioneer in our country who produced the first effective blueprint of a revolutionary programme and vision of a comprehensive revolutionary party and movement. Through his youthful exuberance, sincerity, devotion, and grim determination, he did advance on the path of freedom and socialism and ultimately embraced the hangman's rope shouting, 'Long Live Revolution', 'Down Down with British Imperialism'. Bhagat Singh has become immortal because of his outstanding ideas. Bhagat Singh's ideas and sacrifice have the strength to bring hope in the lives of millions of struggling masses. Bhagat Singh will always remain a hope for all those who believe in secular socialist values and reject the caste based hierarchical system. His legacy continue to inspire all of us. Bhagat Singh and his ideas have become more relevant today for the youths to stand up and challenge an entire system, which has become corrupted, dysfunctional and captive to parochial religious thugs.

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