

BHAGAT SINGH AND HIS IDEOLOGY

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When Bhagat Singh was alive and fighting against British imperialism, native exploiting classes, led by Gandhi, in league with the British authorities tried to suppress them. In his writing "Philosophy of the Bomb" written as a rejoinder to the Gandhi's article "Cult of the Bomb", Bhagat Singh wrote, "What Congress has been doing during that period? It has changed its goal from 'Dominion Republic' to the complete independence. As a result, it was hoped-that Congress will declare a war against British govt. But quite contrary to this, it (Congress) has declared war against revolutionaries." The same Congress which "declared war" against Bhagat Singh and his associates alongwith other ruling class parties are now trying to hijack the legacy of these revolutionaries. By doing so, they are suppressing their ideology. They are being presented as enthusiastic and brave but amature patriots. In Punjab there is a special penchant for bravery and sacrifice, only this aspect of Bhagat Singh has caught the imagination of the people. Ideological aspect of Bhagat Singh has remained neglected.

Even the revolutionary forces have some sort of idealistic notion about Bhagat Singh. They consider him such a genius, which was by nature Marxist since he joined political life. They ignore the process of ideological development of Bhagat Singh. Yet there are some fundamentalists who tried to build a notion that in his last days Bhagat Singh became an atheist and a Sikh. The process of ideological development of Bhagat Singh can dispel all such notions and illusions.

Bhagat Singh was born in a family, which had clearly nationalist leaning. His grand father, Arjun Singh exhibited his pro-people and anti-British thinking. Plague spread in Khatkar Kalan. To control the disease, British govt. ordered the evacuation of village putting the whole village to the fire including the belongings of the people. Arjun Singh led the villagers in opposing the govt. order saying that they won't allow evacuation and destruction if the alternative houses were not provided. He had to face the wrath of the govt. He was an Arya Samajist liberal. Bhagat Singh was deeply impressed by the personality of his grandfather. At the time of the "yaggopveet" ceremony of Bhagat Singh and his elder brother Jagat Singh (who died at the age of 11) Arjun Singh dedicated his two grandsons to the freedom struggle. When Bhagat Singh decided to leave his house and join freedom struggle he wrote a letter to his father, where he refers to this.

Respected father Ji,

Namaste

My life has already been dedicated to the great goal i.e. the goal of freedom of India. So I have no penchant for luxuries of life and worldly pleasures.

You must be remembering that when I was just a child, then grandpa at the time of "Yaggopveet" declared that I have been dedicated for the service of the country. So I am going to fulfil that pledge.

I hope you will excuse me.

Yours obedient

Bhagat Singh

Ajit Singh, an uncle of Bhagat Singh was a militant nationalist. In 1907 peasants of Bars, now in Pakistan rose in a big way against the blood-sucking

revenue system imposed by Britishers, against colonisation act and indebtedness of peasantry. Ajit Singh led the peasant movement, which was known as “Pagari Sambal Jatta Movement”, named after a popular song. Ajit Singh was arrested and transported to Mandley Jail in Burma. Bhagat Singh was born in the same year. In the early childhood Bhagat was very close to his aunt, the wife of Ajit Singh. One day he asked his aunt ‘why she is always so melancholic?’ She replied that, because his uncle was not there. Singh said he would bring his uncle back, by throwing Britishers out of the country. This was an initial push toward nationalism.

His father S Kishan Singh himself was a nationalist and a member-activist of Congress. He used to take Bhagat Singh along for political public meetings. In 1924, Kishan Singh as a delegate took Bhagat Singh along with him to the Belagam Congress Conference. In 1922 some nationalists opened National College in Lahore where students were taught nationalism along with formal education. Kishan Singh put Bhagat Singh in this national College. Here Bhagat Singh studied literature of national movement of various countries. This left deep impact on his personality.

House of Kishan Singh was a ‘contact’ of underground Gadharites including Kartar Singh Sarabha. Bhagat Singh closely saw them. Sarabha, a legendary leader of Gadhar Party, who was hanged at the age of 19 years, was a hero and a role model for Bhagat Singh. So Bhagat Singh from his early childhood grew in an atmosphere of nationalism. This basically contributed in the development of Bhagat Singh.

When Bhagat Singh was learning the politics of nationalism, it was a post world-war (I) period. This was a period of post world-war upsurge. People en-masse were coming on streets against British imperialism. Year 1919 was a year of unprecedented mass mobilisation and brutal repression particularly in Punjab. Thousands of people were coming out on the streets in opposition to Rowlat Act. On 13 April, 1919 Sir Michel O Dier opened fire on innocent people at Jalianwala Bag. It was an unprecedented massacre by the British colonialists. It greatly moved Bhagat Singh. Very next day he went to Jalianwala Bag and brought back the blood-soaked soil.

He was also deeply impressed by the Kuka (Namdhari) movement. When in 1917 Kishan Singh moved to Lahore, Namdhari leaders used to come to Lahore and stay near his house. Bhagat closely watched and studied Kuka movement. In January 1919 a meet of Kukas was held in Jalandhar district. Bhagat Singh attended that and made a short speech.

In 1921 Gurduara reform movement started. Sikh priests, controlling Gurduaras were the touts of British government. Jathedar Aroor Singh (Maternal grandfather of Simranjeet Singh Maan) honoured General Dier at Akal-Takht. Mahant of Nankana Sahib burnt many Sikhs alive. Mahants were backed by Britishers, so a mass-movement to liberate gurduaras from traitor and corrupt Mahants started which met with severe repression. A Jatha of Sikhs was going to Nankana Sahib and govt. announced that jatha should not be given water or food. Bhagat Singh organised a langer (community kitchen) to feed the jatha.

Thus Bhagat Singh was linked to all the movements going on in Punjab. So two aspects, a nationalist and patriotic atmosphere in the family and post world-war

mass upsurges and brutal repression on them, groomed Bhagat Singh to a determined and committed nationalist. In the beginning of 1924, Bhagat Singh left his house and went to Kanpur to join the revolutionaries, secretly working to overthrow the British imperialism. He got the contact from one of his teachers, working in National College, Lahore.

RADICAL NATIONALIST

In 1924, just at the age of 17 years, he completely dedicated himself for the national struggle. In November 1921 Congress under the leadership of Gandhi gave a call for non-cooperation, it was an important mass-movement. On this call thousands of students left their studies. Bhagat Singh was one of them. There was great enthusiasm for this movement, especially among the youth. Similarly in 1922 peasants of Bardoli started a mass-movement under the leadership of M K Gandhi and Sardar Patel. But both these struggles could not succeed. In Bardoli a compromise was reached. Commenting upon this Bhagat Singh wrote, "This is nothing. As we see this Satyagrah was not started with the aim of fight with the government. But this was for the redressal of grievance. Leaders (Gandhi-Patel) have accepted this. It is ununderstandable that instead of quarreling on grievances one by one, why root-cause is not redressed. Actually "responsible leaders" fear to take the responsibility and readily agree for a compromise." Similarly non-cooperation movement was withdrawn halfway, without any conclusion.

Students who had left the educational institutions were greatly pained at these developments. Bhagat Singh was completely disillusioned with the Gandhi leadership and its method of non-violence. He thought this was a great hurdle in the path of persistent and determined struggle for freedom. Thus he moved toward radical nationalism. He wrote extensively about the people's movement against British imperialism and about the patriotic heroes who made great sacrifices for the cause of freedom struggle. Meanwhile, Gurduara reform movement developed which was also known as Akali movement. But this was on the lines of Gandhian method of satyagrah. In reaction to non-violence of this movement, another organisation known as "Babber Akali" started, mainly in Doaba region of Punjab, its main activity was to annihilate the agents and touts of Britishers. Six of its leaders were hanged. Bhagat Singh on March 15, 1926 wrote an article titled "Splashes of blood on the day of Holi" in which he explained about the aims and activities of this party and heroic sacrifice of its leaders. Similarly there was another movement, called Kuka (Namdhari) movement. Though seemingly religious, it was a patriotic movement against British imperialism. Bhagat Singh published two articles on this movement. He also wrote about Gadhar party. Writing about Babber Akali Party he said, "Leave aside, weather it was right or wrong but just imagine a situation that they decided to sacrifice everything for the country. How beautiful, interesting and sacred scene would be. Where is the limit of self-sacrifice." About Kukas he wrote, "They (Kukas) understood that starving is killing the soul of people. People have left the very idea of independence. Perhaps the failure of Gadhar party and untold suffering and repression, resulting form this has contributed to this situation. ...Whatever may be, they completely understood the hollowness of foreign rule, chalked out a programme and started struggle." ... "Their non-co-operation was far more than

Gandhi. They boycotted British courts and formed their own Panchayats, boycotted British education, boycott of railway, boycott of postal and communication system of the govt. A complete boycott of the govt. and alternative system of their own.” Bhagat Singh also wrote about the peasant movement of 1907, titled “First upsurge of Punjab in the freedom struggle.”

Not only about the revolutionary movements of Punjab he wrote about the revolutionary movement in the rest of India. He wrote about the ‘Kakori incident’ and activities of the revolutionaries in the Hindi heartland of the country. He did not remain confined to India, he wrote an article “freedom struggle in Ireland”, about the revolutionary movement in Russia. He referred to the revolutionary struggles in France, Italy, Turkey and other parts of the world.

Apart from the revolutionary and freedom movements, he wrote about the life-histories of the freedom fighters with a view to imbuing the ideas of sacrifice and nationalism. He wrote an article, “An introduction of Brave-fighters of Kakori”. He wrote life sketches of Dr Mathura Singh, Sufi Amba Parsad, Shaheed Kartar Singh Sarabha, Madan Lal Dhingra, Bhai Bal Mukund, Martyr Khushi Ram, Master Amir Chand, Awadh Bihari, Basant Kumar Biswab etc. With his introduction he published letter of Rajinder Nath Lahiri, last message of Ram Parsad Bismil, Message of Ashfaq Ulla from the gallows.

All these writings were aimed at one thing—to establish the revolutionary tradition and revolutionary stream as an alternative to non-violence trend of Gandhian leadership.

Bhagat Singh at this stage was very definitely opposed to the compromising and nonviolent line and methods of Gandhian leadership. He was firmly for the use of revolutionary methods in the freedom struggle, mainly mass-struggle. *But ideologically he was not very clear.* He was a radical nationalist. His ideological framework was an admixture of Marxism and Anarchism. And he wrote a series of articles, which were published in his pen-name, *Vidrohi* and were, published in May, June and July issues of “Kirti”—the Organ of Kirti Party. Bhagat Singh wrote “These days many voices are coming against the repression and exploitation of the society and many thoughts are emerging for establishing enduring peace. We are hearing much about communism, socialism and many other thoughts. Anarchism is invariably considered to be the best idea among them?” He describes Proudhon and Bakunin as fathers of Anarchism. He quotes extensively from Kropotkin, Emma Goldman, Alexunder Breck-man and Johanen to substantiate his point. In defining anarchism, Bhagat Singh quotes Emma Goldman “Anarchism-The philosophy of a new social order based on liberty unrestricted by man-made law, the theory that all forms of govt. rest on violence and are therefore wrong and harmful, as well as unnecessary.” He says “Anarchists are different from communists on one or two points, otherwise they are same.” In August 1928 he wrote another article about Nihilism. He says, “Nihilism was destructive because it wanted a wholesale destruction but with the pleasure of building up.”

Bhagat Singh and his co-workers had deep impact of Anarchism alongwith Marxism. Their plan to throw a Bomb in Assembly was influenced by Anarchist thinking. Bhagat Singh in his article on Anarchism quotes one Anarchist, saying “Neither money, nor organisation, nor literature was needed for propaganda, one

human being in revolt with a torch or dynamite in his hand was able to instruct the world.” He also quotes Kropotkin “A single deed makes more propaganda in a few days than a thousand pamphlets.” Sukhdev, a very close associate of Bhagat Singh wrote, “Actions have three aims, propaganda, money and special action. Propaganda actions were main. Assembly action is such.” A leaflet thrown in the Assembly after Bomb, starts with “A thunder is needed to make the deaf ear hear; these are the words of brave Anarchists martyr, who said these at a similar occasion. We authenticate our action with these worlds.” So it is clear that up to this point of time he was not yet a mature Marxist, though he had deep influence of Marxism and Russian revolution in his thinking. He was yet a revolutionary, more accurately a radical nationalist with anarchist orientation.

A COMMUNIST REVOLUTIONARY

Though he was not ideologically a clear Marxist but he was very much upset with the people not co-operating with revolutionaries. Especially ordinary people giving evidence against revolutionaries of Kakori. He was realising the limitation of only armed action. This fact was pushing him more and more toward Marxism. He studied Marxism systematically from the available sources, while in jail. In a letter from jail to his friend Jaidev Kapoor, he sent a list of books he needed, which includes *Materialism* by Karl Lebinecht, *Collapse of Second International and Left Wing Communism* by Lenin, *Theory of Historical Materialism* by Bukharin, *Civil War in France* by Marx, *Soviet at work, land revolution in Russia, Field Factories and workshops* etc. He studied whatever of Marxism was available at that time. Thus he developed and matured as a Marxist.

In this process he also assessed his own past critically. He said, “By that time (1925) I was only a romantic and idealist revolutionary. Till then we were only followers,” (*Why I Am an Atheist*). He further writes, “outwardly I worked as a terrorist. But I am not a terrorist. I am a revolutionary, who has ideas about a concrete and long-term programme.” (Draft of a Revolutionary Programme —A letter to the political activists) He continues “You should not read anything between the lines-with whole force at my command, I want to assert that except the early days of my revolutionary life, I was not and I am not a terrorist” (ibid) He realised the limitations of the ideas of Anarchists—“Bukunin’s book, God and state is incomplete” (*Why I am an atheist*). These are just few reflections of his evaluation of the past, which shows the process of his ideological transformation.

Bhagat Singh very correctly assessed the nature and role of native bourgeoisie. “Since the beginning of the twentieth century British bureaucracy is adopting a new approach. It is trying to win over big bourgeoisie. By giving some concessions their interests are being fused (with imperialism) with the increase of British Capital in India such degeneration will be inevitable. Very soon in the future we will see the important leader of this class aligned with foreign rulers. Through some roundtable conference or by some other means a compromise will be struck between them.” (*Manifesto of Naujwan Bharat Sabha*) Writing about the conditions of workers and peasants Bhagat Singh says, “Broad masses of the workers and peasants have been pauperised by foreign oppression and economic plunder. Toiling masses of India are in a serious situation. They are facing twin danger of foreign capital on the one hand and danger of treacherous attack of

Indian Capitalism from the other side. Indian capitalism is increasingly aligning with foreign capital. Acceptance of Dominion status by some leaders reflects this.” (*Manifesto of Hindustan Socialist Republican Army*) He further writes “Indian capitalism wants to have share in the power as price of its treachery with Indian people. That is why the all hopes of the Indian toiling masses are in socialism. Only this can ensure complete independence and can help remove all inequalities in the society.” (ibid) This correct understanding of the situation and prophetic analysis of the coming events shows his Marxist understanding. Writing about Congress agitation he says, “Present agitation of Congress will end either in a compromise or in a total failure (*Draft of Revolutionary Programme*) He had clear understanding that native ruling classes have aligned with imperialism and they will compromise with imperialism for a share in power without any real independence. He says, “It makes no difference for the Indian people if govt is headed by Sir Purshotam Thakur Das instead of Lord Reiding. How it will make any difference for the peasant if Sir Tej Bhadur Saproo replaces Lord Irwin” (*Draft of Revolutionary Programme—A letter to the Political Activists*).

Bhagat Singh was not for independence from British rule only, but he was the first person to popularise the slogan of “Long Live Revolution.” It was not an abstract slogan for him, he explained its meaning at many places. He writes “Revolution does not mean merely upheaval or bloody-war. Revolution necessarily means complete destruction of present conditions (State-Power) and programme of construction of new and better society” (An introduction to *The Dreamland*). He further writes “By revolution we mean complete destruction of present social-structure and establishment of socialism. Actually the government i.e. State power is an instrument for the defence and promotion of the interest of the ruling classes. We want to snatch this instrument and use it for our ideals.” (*Draft of Revolutionary Programme*) “Our meaning of revolution is very clear. In this century there can be no other meaning of it, it is only seizure of power by people for the people. All other revolts only changed the sticking form of private property.” (*A Golden Opportunity*) So one can see that he had not only a romantic notion of revolution, mechanically adopted from other countries, but he had scientific and Marxist concept of revolution. As he beautifully explains the meaning of revolution : “Social change always creates fear in the minds of privileged classes in power. Revolution is a phenomenon loved by nature without which no progress is possible, neither in nature nor in human. Revolution is a not unthought and barbarous campaign of murders and destruction. Neither it means throwing some bombs and firing some bullets, nor it is for destroying icons of culture and principle of equality and justice. Revolution is not a philosophy born out of frustration and a theory of only self-sacrifice. Revolution can be against God but not against man. This is solid and lively force, which is reflection of confrontation between life and death, between light and darkness. This is not a coincidence. No rythm, no music is possible without revolution.” (*Manifesto of HSRA*)

Bhagat Singh had a clear idea about the basic classes of revolution. He says, “Revolution weather it is national or socialist, the forces which we can depend upon, are workers and peasants” (*Draft of Revolutionary Programme*). So he is

not only clear about the concept of revolution but also about how to make it. He writes, "Name of the party should be, communist party. This party with solid discipline will lead the other parties. It will have to lead the other parties (organising) of workers and peasants. Party will strive to dominate the congress of trade unions and other such mass and political organisations. Party will conduct a printing campaign disseminating not only national politics but also class-consciousness. A simple and easy socialist theory shall be given to the masses....Apart from this; party must have a military wing. It is very important." (ibid) Negating his earlier methods, he writes, "It is not necessary that party shall work only secretly. Though policy of voluntarily going to jails should be abandoned. Many activists may have to head an underground life." (ibid) The core of this party shall be a professional revolutionary, stressing this Bhagat writes "We would like to use very clear word of Lenin, 'Professional Revolutionary'. Those who have no other aim except revolution. More such activists, nearer will be revolution." (ibid)

Bhagat Singh clearly rejects the terrorist methods for revolution. He says, "Pistols and Bombs do not bring revolution, sword of revolution is sharpened with the ideas (Statement in the Court, In Assembly Bomb Case). "Revolution does not believe in pistols and bombs only, on the other hand those become necessary for completion of some part of it. Those cannot be revolution." (A letter to the editor of *Modern Review*) He analyses terrorism very beautifully, "Terrorism is a lamentation resulting from the failure of revolutionary philosophy going deep into the masses. It is confessional statement of our failure.... In all countries, France, Russia, Germany, Balkan courtiers and Spain, its history is history of failure.... At best terrorism can force imperialism to compromise with revolutionary party—it can squeeze out compromise and an instalment of reforms. That is what Gandhi-ism is all about" (*On Terrorism*). He rejects terrorism, he is clearly for a revolutionary mass-line. He says, "We cannot ask young men to take up bombs and pistols. They have greater tasks to take up....Youth is to take the message of revolution to the millions of workers in slums and peasants in the rural areas. Revolution, which will bring such freedom where exploitation of man by man will not be possible (*Message to the Second Congress of Punjab Students Unions, 19-20 Oct, 1929*). □□□