

A Study of Ideology of Shaheed Bhagat Singh

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Bhagat Singh, better known as, Shaheed Bhagat Singh was a freedom fighter who left no stone unturned to bring about reforms in the fight against the British. He is said to be one of the most influential revolutionaries of the Indian freedom struggle. He was born in a Sikh family in Punjab on the 28th of September 1907. Many of his family members including his father and uncles were actively involved in the struggle for Indian independence. His family as well as certain events that occurred during that time was an inspiration for him to dive into the freedom struggle at an early age. Till today he is the inspiration of all Indians. This paper is an attempt to study Ideology of Shaheed Bhagat Singh.

Bhagat Singh symbolizes the essence of revolutionary cult and character. A Political thinker with clear-cut views on rationalism, revolution and the future society the revolutionaries wanted to build. Bhagat Singh was born in Khatkar Kalan Banga(the place which is now a part of Pakistan), Punjab in the year 1907. His family was completely involved in India's struggle for freedom. In fact, around the time of Bhagat Singh's birth his father was in imprisonment due to his involvement in political agitation. Inspired by the family atmosphere, Bhagat Singh dived into the freedom struggle at the tender age of thirteen.

Bhagat Singh's Education

As mentioned above, Bhagat Singh's family was deeply involved in the freedom struggle. His father supported Mahatma Gandhi and when the later called for boycotting government aided institutions, Singh was asked to leave school. He was 13 when he left school and joined the National College at Lahore. There he studied about the European revolutionary movements that inspired him immensely.

Unknown Facts about Bhagat Singh : Here are some interesting and lesser known facts about Shaheed Bhagat Singh:

- Bhagat Singh was an avid reader and felt that to inspire the youth it was essential to write revolutionary articles and books rather than merely distributing pamphlets and leaflets. He wrote several revolutionary articles for Kirti Kisan Party's magazine, the "Kirti" and certain newspapers.
- His publications include Why I Am An Atheist: An Autobiographical Discourse, Ideas of a Nation and The Jail Notebook And Other Writings. His works hold relevance even today.
- He left his home when his parents forced him to get married stating if he married in slave India his bride shall only be died.
- Though born in a Sikh family, he shaved his head and beard so that he could not be recognized and arrested for killing the British official, John Saunders.
- He did not offer any defence at the time of his trial.

He was sentenced to be hanged on 24th March 1931 however he was executed on the 23rd It is said that no magistrate wanted to supervise his hanging

Shift in Bhagat Singh's Ideology

While Bhagat Singh's family supported the Gandhian ideology completely and he too had been working in accordance with it for a while, he soon became disillusioned with the same. He felt that non-violent movements wouldn't get them anywhere and the only way to fight the British is by armed conflict. Two major incidences during his teenage contributed to the shift in his ideology. These were the Jallianwala Bagh Masacre that took place in 1919 and the killing of the unarmed Akali protesters at Nankana Sahib in the year 1921.

After the Chauri Chaura incident, Mahatma Gandhi announced the withdrawal of the Non-Cooperation movement. Bhagat Singh did not conform to his decision and cut off from the non-violent movements led by Gandhi. He then joined the Young Revolutionary Movement and began advocating violence as a means to drive the British out. He took part in numerous such revolutionary acts and inspired several youths to join the same.

The Defence of Atheism

Bhagat Singh's political thought finds its expression in three of his writings as well as numerous statements he made during trial. In an interesting article captioned "Why I am an Atheist" he tried to explain away his differences with other revolutionaries who became devout and God-fearing in their prison life. Tracing his own evolution from theism to atheism, Bhagat Singh tells us how he started questioning the existence of God in his college days. As he started to study arguments to refute the notions of the believers he lost much of his romantic ideas about terrorism and became a realist. "No more mysticism, no more blind faith. Realism became our cult. Use of force justifiable when resorted to as a matter of terrible necessity; non-violence as policy indispensable for all mass movements. So much about methods." Bhagat Singh pointed out that the transition that took place in him was due to the study of Bakunin, Marx, Lenin and Trotsky. A book, 'Common sense' by Nirlamba Swami in which a sort of mystic atheism was preached also influenced his ideas. When he was first arrested in 1927, the police wanted to get information from him about the Kakori Case. They threatened to hang him and asked him to say his last prayers. He found after much thought that he had no inclination to pray and thus survived the first test in atheism.

The Rejection of Congress Leadership

Bhagat Singh's 'last message' explains the differences the revolutionaries had with the Congress leadership. The withdrawal of non-cooperation movement after the Chauri Chaura incident, where a police station with policemen inside was burnt by an angry mob, was greatly resented as a betrayal. Similarly, the postponement of Civil Disobedience Movement and the so called Gandhi-Irwin Pact was also considered a great mistake. Even the declaration by the Congress of its goal as Purna Swaraj was considered a half hearted attempt to wrest some concessions from the British. . Bhagat Singh's charge against the Congress was that it did not represent any revolutionary force. It represented the interests of the bourgeoisie which did not want to lose its property in any struggle. The real revolutionary elements were to be found in the peasantry and the workers. The Congress however did not mobilize these forces. The Congress was afraid of the participation of workers and poor peasants in the struggle because it found it difficult to contain them against the interests of the Capitalists or the Landlords. Bhagat Singh

held the view that the Congress really represented the middle classes and the petty bourgeoisie and was not really interested in social revolution.

Thoughts on Social Revolution

Bhagat Singh's ideas on Socialism and the type of society he envisaged for India were influenced by Marxism and Russian Communism. Explaining what he considered the revolution he had made it clear before the court that he understood by it reorganizing society "On the Socialistic basis ... 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." Some of these ideas he further explained in his 'Introduction to the Dreamland' Dreamland was a poetical work by Ram Saran Das who underwent transportation for life. Bhagat Singh pointed out in the introduction that the political parties had lacked any conception of the society they wanted to create after independence. They only had put freedom from foreign rule as their goal and the only exception was the Ghadar Party which wanted India to be a Republic. These parties according to him were not revolutionary. To him Revolution implied 'the programme of systematic reconstruction of society on new and adapted basis, after complete destruction of the existing state of affairs.' He rejected the contention made by the Gandhians that destruction is not the way to construction. To him 'Destruction is not only essential but indispensable for construction.' From violent revolution he would propose to construct a society where violence is no more the character of social relationships. He also dismissed the idea of reconciling the ideas of various religions to avoid strife. Instead, he advocated a secular life.

Bhagat Singh's Active Involvement in the Freedom Struggle

Bhagat Singh read a lot about the European nationalist movements and got inspired by the same in 1925. He founded the Naujawan Bharat Sabha the following year and later joined the Hindustan Republican Association where he came in contact with a number of prominent revolutionaries including Sukhdev and Chandrashekhar Azad. He also began contributing articles to Kirti Kisan Party's magazine, the "Kirti". While his parents wanted him to marry around the same time, he rejected their offer outright telling them that he wanted to dedicate his life to the freedom struggle. Due to his active involvement in numerous revolutionary activities, he soon became a person of interest for the British police and was arrested in May 1927. A few months later he was released and got involved in writing revolutionary articles for newspapers.

The Turning Point

In the year 1928, the British government held the Simon Commission for the discussion of autonomy for the Indians. It was boycotted by several Indian political organizations as the event did not include any Indian representative. Lala Lajpat Rai protested against the same by leading a procession and marching towards the Lahore station. In an attempt to control the mob, the police used the weapon of lathi charge and brutally hit the protestors. Lala Lajpat Rai got severely injured and was hospitalised. He succumbed to his injuries a few weeks later. The incident left Bhagat Singh enraged and he planned to avenge Rai's death. Singh killed British police officer John P. Saunders soon after. He and one of his associates later bombed the Central Legislative Assembly in Delhi. He then confessed his involvement in the incident and surrendered to the police. During the trial period, Bhagat Singh led hunger strike in the prison. He and his co-conspirators, Rajguru and Sukhdev were executed on the 23rd of March 1931..

Conclusion



Bhagat Singh represents the character of Indian Revolutionaries in the third decade of this century. His rejection of Gandhian philosophy of non-violence, his antipathy towards the reformist attitude of the Congress, his belief in Marxian Communism, his atheism, his belief in terrorism as a mode to uphold the dignity of a suppressed and humiliated people, his claim of revolution as a Birth right, were all ideas typical of the Indian youth in the twenties and the thirties. The trial and execution of Bhagat Singh, uncier what was called the Lahore. Conspiracy Case, not only made the Indians aware of the unjust and repressive character of the British rule but also popularised the ideas and activities of the revolutionaries. Bhagat Singh was just 23 years old when he happily gave his life for the country. His death proved to be an inspiration for several Indians to join the struggle for freedom. His supporters gave him the title, Shaheed (the martyr). He was indeed a martyr in the true sense.

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