



Bhagat Singh : A Revolutionary Or A Socialist By Ideology

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INTRODUCTION

Bhagat Singh is one of the most celebrated martyrs of the Indian freedom struggle. He has left behind a legacy that everyone wants to appropriate, yet most do not wish to look beyond the romantic image of a gun-toting young nationalist. Perhaps the reason is that this is the image that was created in the official colonial records partially, an image we inherited and conveniently accepted as truth. The colonial records told the common masses that revolutionary activities were dastardly crimes, committed for the gratification of money and bloodlust. In fact, this is clearly reflected in the contemporary consciousness, particularly the youth, who visualize Bhagat Singh as someone who ‘terrorized’ the British through his ‘violent deeds’. His ‘daring spirit’ is lauded, which has turned him into an icon. His posters are sold on pavements; stickers with his photo are pasted on car windscreens. It may be heartening to see that Bhagat Singh is still loved and venerated, but the question we need to ask is: do we really have any clue to his politics and ideas? In history the pen has not always been mightier than the sword, but at least, it has been as potent a weapon as the sword. Bhagat Singh remains one of the best examples in the Indian revolutionary movement of using the pen instead of the sword.

Bhagat Singh underwent numerous changes to master the understanding of world events in spite of the insane restrictions. He was an actor, singer, swimmer, newspaper vendor, cyclist – thus making him an individual with many ‘common traits’ but also blessed with an extraordinary caliber. His biographical sketches of eminent revolutionary martyrs always took a center stage. He was vocal against the nexus of ‘casteism-communalism’. A pioneer thinker to put these two concepts on one platform – his understanding of ‘class consciousness’ in order to resist communalism through the unity among the ‘working class’ people remains the crux of his understanding of ‘scientific socialism’.

KEYWORDS : Patriotism, Revolutionary, Conspiracy, Pact.



BHAGAT SINGH'S EXECUTION POTRAYED HIM AS A REVOLUTIONARY

Executions of 23RD MARCH 1931 marked the collapse of the hopes of millions of Indians who had believed that Mahatma Gandhi would be able to save the lives of the three young heroes - Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev and Rajguru.. Soon after the executions Gandhi had to face the 'Red' demonstrators in the Karachi session (1931) of the Congress, shouting slogans of "Gandhi go back", "Down with Gandhism", "Gandhi's truce has sent Bhagat Singh to the gallows", and "Long Live Bhagat Singh Leftist scholar revolutionary, Manmathnath Gupta bitterly attacked Mahatma Gandhi over the issue of Bhagat Singh. Another biographer of Bhagat Singh, G. S. Deol (1969), held Mahatma Gandhi responsible for Bhagat Singh's execution. A.G. Nooranij concluded that Gandhi alone could have effectively to save Bhagat Singh's life.He did not, till the very last.Gandhi's critics fail to understand that, he had more to gain by saving the lives of Bhagat Singh and his comrades, if it was possible, than the contrary. Gandhi was well aware that his failure to stop their execution will make the people in general and younger element of the Congress in particular, angry. Moreover, the executions would inevitably glorify the revolutionaries and popularise the ideals underlying the revolutionary violence and thus it will be a tactical setback in his fight with the forces favouring use of violence in the battle for swaraj. If Gandhi had succeeded in saving the lives of Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev and Raj guru, it would have been seen as the victory of nonviolence over violence and moral victory of Gandhi over the revolutionaries. Gandhi's stand in the Bhagat Singh case must be seen in the light of his approach towards the use of violent means for patriotic purpose. He had deep rooted faith in the futility of violence and the efficacy of non-violence. Gandhi had always maintained that means (non-violence) are more important than the end Swarajya. He had adopted a consistent stand towards revolutionary activities since 1908. He had no doubts about the patriotic impulse behind political violence but such patriotism, according to him, was 'misguided'. In 1909, Gandhi wrote: "The assassin is quite convinced in his mind that he is acting in the interest of the country, but it is difficult to see what good assassinations can do, whenever assassinations have taken place, they have done more harm than good." He termed Saunders' murder as a dastardly act but blamed the government for provoking the act: "The fault is of the system of Government. What requires mending is not men



but the system..." At the same time he underlined the utter futility of such acts: "Freedom of a nation can not be won by solitary acts of heroism even though they may be of the true type, never by heroism so called." Gandhi was opposed to all forms of violence including the violence justified by law - prison sentence and capital punishment. He emphasised this fact at a public meeting in Delhi on March 7,1931: "I cannot in all conscience agree to anyone being sent to gallows, much less a brave man like Bhagat Singh." Mahatma Gandhi elaborated his stand on Bhagat Singh and revolutionary violence at the Karachi session of Congress, three days after the execution of the Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev and Rajguru.: You must know that it is against my creed to punish even a murderer, thief or a dacoit. There can be no excuse for suspicion that I did not want to save Bhagat Singh. But I want you to realise Bhagat Singh's error. The way they pursued was wrong and futile. I wish to tell these young men with all the authority with which a father can speak to his children that the way of violence can only lead to perdition.

BHAGAT SINGH AS A SOCIALIST

Bhagat Singh's commitment towards 'scientific socialism' remains one of the most important parts of his personality. In short, it can be said that he aspired to be like Lenin. In his autobiographical note, "Why I am an Atheist" he says- "*No more mysticism! No more blind faith! Now realism was our mode of thinking.*" This proves his clear understanding of the 'materialist philosophy' of Marxism. In his court statement with Batukeshwar Dutt he said – "...we humbly claim to be serious students of history and conditions of our country and human aspirations and we despise hypocrisy."

"Let these momentous words of a convict in British India form part of the judicial record in the last court of our democratic republic, the largest democracy in the world", *said the Supreme Court of India in the case of Bhanumati vs the State of UP. It further added: "The ideas of Bhagat Singh, even if not wholly, have substantially been incorporated in the preambular vision of our Constitution. But the dream for which he sacrificed his life has not been fulfilled and the relevance of what he said can hardly be ignored. The ground realities, if at all, changed only marginally." The SC proceeded to quote Bhagat Singh: "It may not be out of context to remember what was said by Bhagat Singh and Batukeshwar Dutta on June 6, 1929 in their joint statement in connection with the criminal trial they faced in Crown vs Bhagat Singh." In this*



manner, the nation's apex court also acknowledged Bhagat Singh's pioneering role in emphasizing socialism.

Even when he was on the threshold of death, Bhagat Singh wanted that the mission of freeing the country from the imperialists must be accomplished. Moreover, the revolutionary movement should take a proper course enlightened by the 'Marxist and the Communist doctrine'. Even his early faith in violence and terrorism was qualitatively different from the contemporary 'terrorist violence' – and he transcended that soon to espouse a revolutionary vision to transform independent India into a secular, socialist, and egalitarian society.

Bhagat Singh needs to be taken out of the iconic image of a 'revolutionary' as we understand it. Viewing him as a 'revolutionary', in commonplace terms, compels the countrymen to consider him as an 'alien' who can just be 'seen', but whose politics cannot be understood, introspected upon or practised. A mere symbolism of the martyr without a deep introspection into his mind and his stand on different issues deserves rejection. Bhagat Singh's intellectual legacy needs to be remembered in these acrimonious times when the danger of inequality, religious fundamentalism, and discrimination based on caste, color, race, and gender is increasingly expanding its reach over the globe. The best legatees inheritors of his legacy are people who stand firmly to strengthen the bond of commonality among people of this society, *nation and the world*. Bhagat Singh was an outright socialist who believed in moulding India into a secular, federal, democratic, socialist nation in which exploitation of one man by other would be impossible. He believed in collective action by the masses rather than individual heroism to overthrow British rule. A fan of Lenin he believed in socialism in letter and spirit and wanted the masses to play a prominent role in winning freedom for India along with socio-economic changes towards building an exploitation free society.

POPULARITY AND CULTURE

Bhagat Singh, his intense patriotism coupled with cultivated idealism, made him an ideal icon for the youth of his generation. Through his written and vocal admonition of the British Imperial Government, he became the voice of his generation. His vehement departure from the Gandhian non-violent route to Swaraj has often been criticized by many, yet through the fearless embracing of martyrdom he inspired hundreds of teens and youths to join the freedom struggle wholeheartedly. His eminence in current times is evident from the fact that Bhagat Singh was voted as the Greatest Indian, ahead of Subhash Chandra Bose and Mahatma Gandhi, in a poll conducted by India Today in 2008. The inspiration that Bhagat Singh still ignites within the soul of Indians can be felt in the popularity of the films and theatrical adaptations on his life. Several films like "Shaheed" (1965) and "The Legend of Bhagat Singh" (2002) were made on the life of 23-year old revolutionary. Popular songs like the "Mohe rang de basanti chola" and "Sarfaroohiki Tamanna" associated with Bhagat Singh are still relevant in inspiring patriotic emotions in the Indians. Numerous books, articles and papers have been written about his life, ideologies and legacy.



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