



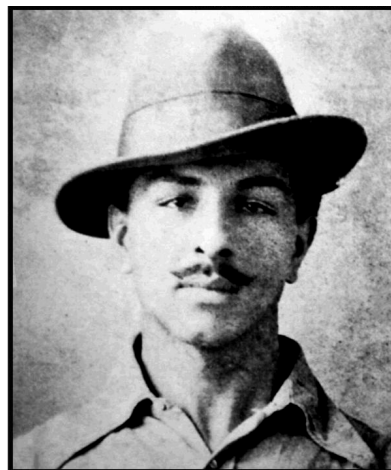
Bhagat Singh: The Manque' - Radicalist

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In colonialist literature, Bhagat Singh has been (mis)identified as "Terrorist". But for the nationalists of India, Bhagat Singh epitomizes "bravery and sacrifice". He is neither an anarchist nor a terrorist. He is a symbol / icon of revolution. A proto-communist, a manque-radicalist and a committed secularist, he is promethean figure with courage and conviction to take on the mighty. An ideologue like M.K. Gandhi, he is a perfect foil to Gandhi himself. Belonging more to the super league of BG Tilak, Lala Lajpat Rai, Bhagat Singh is an apt archetypal image of martyrdom and emancipatory militarism.

Introduction

The third son of Sardar Kishan Singh and Vidyavati of the village Banga in the district of Layalpura, Bhagat Singh was born on the 28th September, 1907. With his birth, his father and uncle were released from the jails into which they had been thrown for their agitational pro-people activities. So the newly born was christened Bhagat, the Fortunate. And he was fortunate to have not only what William Wordsworth calls "a happy and fair seed time" but also baptism through / in fire. Nurtured in such a world of firebrand radicalism he said, "I shall grow guns all over the field". Inspired by the heroism



of his father, of his uncles Swaran Singh and Ajit Singh, and by the silent heroism of his mother, Bhagat, a student of class-IV, declared that his

driving ambition was to "drive the British out of India". By the time he completed his secondary education in Lahore, he had become a spark of revolution. Deeply disturbed by the tragedy of Jallianwala Bagh and deeply moved by the heroic saga of Kartar Singh Sarabha, the prodigious child-MAN became a fountain of fire.

In the beginning Bhagat Singh was a devout Gandhian. But the

Chauri Chaura backlash dismayed not only Gandhiji but also Bhagat Singh, a lad of only fifteen years. Then the heroic martyrdom of Khudi Ram,



Kanailal and Kartar Singh made him pin his faith on armed revolution. He was also deeply moved by the activities of the European anarchists like Proudhon, Bakunin and Kropotkin. He was sensitized by the exploits of the Russian nihilists, of the young Turks in Turkey and the Afro-American Negroes over their racialist tormentors. He subscribed to the theories of the anti-Italy and anti-Russia radicalists. Thus Bhagat Singh, the manque- radicalist grew up on the balanced diet of the European radicalism.

Bhagat Singh's Poetics of Revolution

In Kanpur he met his Krishna in Ganesh Shankar Vidyarthi. A doyen of Gandhianism, Vidyarthi had allowed the radicalists who used his home as their rendezvous. Here Bhagat Singh, then “a tall, thin, and very quiet boy lacking smartness and self confidence” came into contact with Batu Keshwar Dutt, Bejoy Kumar Sinha and Chandra Sekhar Azad. Working under the alias of Balwant, he constantly wrote inflammatory discourses on sundry topics and got them published in the Kirti. And he became impatient, like most of the disillusioned loyalists of Gandhi. Gandhi's promise of winning freedom within a year had failed. Among the youth who had followed the call of Gandhiji in April 1919, there was a sense of all pervasive gloom. These idealists were troubled by the naked orgies of communal violence / riots and they rejected Gandhianism. They found themselves more inclined to support N.C. Kelkar and N.G. Hardikar. In various meetings addressed by them, J.L. Nehru and S.C. Bose inspired the youngsters to strive towards freedom. It was harped on that independence was “a necessary preliminary to communistic society” (Sumit Sarkar: 1983: 266). S.C. Bose inspired the young acolytes to follow the “Youth movements in Germany, Italy, Russia and China”. Dissatisfied with the elderly cant of the elderly

Anushilan, the younger revolt - groups emerged. Surya Sen of Chittagong advocated for and in favour of dramatic actions. *Youths of Bengal*, a leaflet published by the Mechnabazar group insisted on the cult of heroic self - sacrifice by a handful to thwart “the despotism of the blood - thirsty English”. So inspired, Bhagat Singh poured forth his vitriolic hatred against the Britishers in his articles published in *Vir Arjun* from Delhi.

Bhagat Singh's Nobler Examples: The “NBS” Chapter

Inspired by inroads of Communism into India, by the philosophy of Karl Marx and Lenin, Bhagat Singh and his friends in March 1926, founded the Naujawan Bharat Sabha with Ram Kishan, as President. Bhagat Singh himself discharged the duties of the Secretary of the “NBS”. The political aims of the “NBS” were:

- (a) to establish a completely independent republic of the labourers and peasants of the whole of India,
- (b) to infuse a sprit of patriotism in the hearts of the youth of the country,
- (c) to express sympathy with and to assist economic, industrial, and social movements... free from communal sentiments, and
- (d) to organize labourers and peasants.

As the report of the CID commented later, “the Sabha owed its inception and existence to Bhagat Singh”. From the facts stated above we can conclude that Bhagat Singh was a socialist by heart. As Jogesh Ch. Chatterjee has proved he was very keen on discussing the Soviet Revolution and Communism. (1967: 2). At the Dwarakadas Library, established by Lala Lajpat Rai, he devoured literature on the Soviet Union



(Yaspal: 1951: 96). Even he took active interest in celebrating “Friends of Russian Week” in August 1928 and “Lenin Day” on the 24th January. Obviously, Bhagat Singh and his cohorts were Russophiles.

Bhagat Singh and the HRA Odyssey

In 1924, Sachindranath Sanyal founded the Hindustan Republican Association (Army). Bhagat Singh came in contact with Chandra Sekhar Azad and took to the philosophy of bombs and pistols as falcons take to hunting / preying. Influenced by Sohan Singh Josh and the Kirti farmers-sena Bhagat Singh carried forward revolutionary programmes with an advanced revolutionary socialist outlook. Now not hesitant to effect actions of a terrorist nature, they engaged themselves in a series of insurrectionary activities. Absorbing the very best of the ideologies of the pioneers of Communism in India, namely Narendra Nath Bhattacharya, Nalini Gupta and M.N. Roy, Bhagat Singh and his comrades engaged themselves in “revolutionary activities” (Bisheshwar Prasad: 1979 : 141). The objective of the HRA being “to establish a federated Republic of the united states of India by an organized and armed revolution”, the HRA unleashed many an armed infiltrations to the British bastion(s). The armed dacoity on the 8-Down train on the Lucknow-Saharanpur line on 9.8.1925 at Kakori, near Lucknow can be taken as a sample case. With a view to arranging funds for the slated intransigent activities, the train was looted by Pandit Ram Prasad Bismal, Roshan Singh, Rajendra Gupta, Ashaf, Sachindra Nath Bakshi, Bhagat Singh and Chandra Sekhar Azad. Though they managed to procure the paltry booty of only Rs.5000/- they suffered a lot. In the farcical trial concluded farcically on 7.4.1927, Bismal, Roshan, and Rajendra Lahir, were given capital punishment.

Manmath Nath Gupta was sentenced with then for 14 years. Bhagat Singh and Chandra Sekhar were arrested. Ashaf and Sachindra Nath Bakshi were nabbed later and were sentenced with capital punishment and transportation for life (deportation) respectively. However, the Kakori case was a major setback. Bhagat Singh was also implicated in a bomb explosion case at Lahore and was let off against the payment of a heavy / hefty security of Rs. 60,000/- pumped in and paid by Duneer Chand and Daulataram. Thus wings of Bhagat Singh, the revolutionary, the indomitable firebrand grew.

Bhagat Singh, The Lynch-pin of The HSRA

Being hungry for more action, more fruitful action, Bhagat Singh, Jatindra Nath Sanyal, Ajay Ghosh and Phanindranath Ghosh established, after the prolonged deliberations made on 9th and 10th September, 1928, in the midst of the living ruins of the historic Feroze Shah Kotla in Delhi, the HSRA (Hindustan Socialist Republican Association (Army)). This HSRA does not only indicate the growth of Bhagat Singh’s stature as a leader but also indicates his revolutionary progress to military atheism via Marxian socialism. When Sir John Simon and the members of the Simon Commission thwarted the liberatory aspiration of the Indians, Gandhi and other resorted to peaceful disobedience. Gandhi’s Civil Disobedience was encapsulated and embodied in his famous Dandi Yatra to make salt to violate the Salt Act of the British Government in India. In this context, Mrs Brailsford, a British journalist ridiculed the Gandhian temerity to dare the British Govt. in India by “boiling sea water in a kettle” (G.S Chhabra: 1981: 48). Other Rules / Acts/ Ordinances were also flouted. Seditious literature was deliberately brought out to break the Sedition Law. In the Central Province, the Forest Laws were violated, with impunity. And in



response to Gandhiji's call more than 60,000 Satyagrahis (peaceful) got themselves arrested and imprisoned. Even non-violent volunteers were brutally tortured. As the story published in the Young India, dated the 12th June 1930, indicates, at Bulsar in Gujarat, peaceful Satyagrahis were killed. J.L. Nehru was jailed on the 16th April, 1930. Gandhi was imprisoned and sent to the Yerwada Central Jail in Pune on the 5th May 1930. Peacemakers like George Solocomb, Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru and Mr. Jaykar failed in their pacifist missions. There were peaceful agitations everywhere against the British Raj. After the Simon Commission visited India on the 20th October, 1928, the HSRA under the leadership of Lala Lajpat Rai staged a protest procession. Saunders gave blows on the head and chest of Lala Lajpat Rai on 30.10.1928 and thereby injured the Shere-Punjab grievously. Lala Lajpat Rai succumbed to the injuries received on 17.11.1928. Angered and incensed Bhagat Singh and Rajguru murdered Saunders on 17.12.1928. After the murder they could escape from the place of crime to safety. They killed Saunders because "the death of this great Punjabi leader was seen by the romantic youthful leadership of the HSRA as a direct challenge" (Bipan Chandra: 249). In a poster, put up by the HSRA after the assassination, they justified the assassination of Saunders:

The murder of a leader respected by millions of people at the unworthy hands of an ordinary police official..... was an insult to the nation. It was the bounden duty of young men of India to efface it.

.....We regret to have had to kill a person but he was part and parcel of what inhuman and unjust order which has to be destroyed. (Jagamohan Singh and Chamanlal : 1986: 266.

Bhagat Singh's Crowning Act of Defiance

The HSRA leadership now decided to let people know about its changed objectives and the need for a revolution by the masses. Bhagat Singh and BK Dutt were asked to throw a bomb in the Central Legislative Assembly on 8th April 1929 against the passage of the Public Safety Bill and the Trade Disputes' Bill (Bipan Chandra, 249). Bhagat Singh was chosen because he was very articulate and well-versed in the conflictual aesthetics and BK Dutt was chosen to lend a pan-India coloration to the entire operation. After dropping the innocuous bomb that, as expected and designed, injured none from the Public Gallery of the CLA, Delhi, Bhagat Singh and BK Dutt stood rooted to the ground. They stated that they threw bombs to register their "protests" and "to give expression to their heart-rending agony". Further they declared that their sole purpose was "to make the deaf hear" and "give the heedless a timely warning". Yet they were tried in the Assembly Bomb Case. Later Chandra Sekhar Azad, Rajguru and Sukdev were arrested. The trial began on 7.5.1929 and only in 37 days the trial was over. On 6.6.1929 Bhagat Singh stated:

We despise hypocrisy.

No personal grudge.

Beware! Ye bureaucracy!!

They were sentenced with life deportation on 12.6.1929. In connection with the Saunders murder case (Accidentally Saunders was killed in place of Scott), they were sentenced with capital punishment, to be hanged till death, on 24.3.1931. However, Bhagat Singh was hanged on 23.3.1931 to pre-empt any untoward happening.

The Chain (Re) Action

Bhagat Singh, Rajguru, Sukhdev and Chandra Sekhar Azad became cult figures. The



war they conducted themselves both in and off the court, both in and off the jail endeared them to the mass. Though Gandhi hesitated to plead for them, he pleaded for the commutation of the punishment given to lifelong deportation. On 17.02.1931, Irwin signed a pact with M.K. Gandhi and yet Gandhi could not save the young heroes of India. Though Irwin rose and rose up in the socio- political ladder of England to be raised to an Earldom in 1944, Gandhiji's popularity plummeted. Consequently like Khudi Ram and Jatin Das (who fasted in the jail and died on the 64th day of the self - imposed starvation), Bhagat Singh, Sukhram, Rajguru and Chandra Sekhar Azad became toasts of the entire Hindusthan (Undivided). Bhagat Singh, despite his involvement in 26 terrorist activities alone then in Punjab in one year said, "Revolution to me was not the cult of pistol and bomb". He, further, expanded: "Revolution is the inalienable right of the mankind. Freedom is the imprescriptible birth right of all". So he himself and his comrades were glorious in welcoming death. Further they explicated: "We are content. We await the advent of revolution". Explaining his own ethical position, in the article "Why I am an atheist?", he stated that he was "trying to stand like a man with an erect head to the last; even on the gallows". Six days before the Indian National Congress met on 29.3.1931 in Karachi, Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev and Rajguru were executed allegedly for their terrorist activities "(K Dwarakadas: 1966 : 394). Vallabhbbhai Patel, in his presidential address said:

The execution of young Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev and Rajguru has filled the country with deep resentment. I cannot identify myself with their methods, but the patriotism, daring and sacrifice of Bhagat Singh and his comrades, commend my admiration. The heartless and foreign nature of the Govt. was never more strikingly demonstrated than in

their carrying out the executions in the teeth of the all but the universal demand for the commutation of the death sentence.

In a ratificatory manner, the INC resolved:

This Congress, while dissociating itself from and disapproving of political violence in any shape or form, places on record its admiration of the bravery and sacrifice of the late Sardar Bhagat Singh and his comrades, Sukhdev and Rajguru.

Gandhiji, the apostle of non- violence, "salved his conscience by condemning violence": (Dwarakadas: 1966: 394) but also admired Bhagat Singh's "violent activities" for the sake of liberation of India. Yet, his public reputation slumped alarmingly. For the Indians, Bhagat Singh was not just a Chapekar / Khudi Ram / Kanailal / Kartar Singh shooting / killing" unpopular British officials as well as Indian traitors" (PN Chopra: 2003 : 205) but was a champion of communism, socialist welfarism, national solidarity, secularism, and emancipatory humanism. So after the execution the entire nation immersed itself in condolence.

An Essentialist Summation

Read together with Bhagat Singh's "Why I am an atheist?" his article "To Young Political Workers" helps us formulate his *weltanschauung* / C.S.V. Written on 02.02.1931 "To Young Political Workers" is an expose on Bhagat Singh's modus operandi and modus vivendi. Hence it merits an indepth analysis:

The future of India rests with the youths... Do not vegetate. Grow! Sow the seeds of disgust and hatred against British imperialism in the fertile minds of your fellow youths. And the seeds shall sprout and there shall grow a jungle of sturdy trees, because you



shall water the seeds with your warm blood.
(Quoted in V. Shandhu : 1968: 323)

The Open - Ended Closure

With reference to the revisionist neo - historicist masculine mystique just completed in the sections stated above, it is concluded that Bhagat Singh is neither an anarchist nor a terrorist. He is a symbol/icon / archetype of revolution / radical innocence. A proto - communist, a manque - radicalist and a committed secularist, he is a promethean figure with tremendous courage and conviction to take on the mighty. An ideologue like M.K. Gandhi, he is a perfect foil to Gandhi himself. Belonging more to the super league of B.G. Tilak, Lala Lajpat Rai, Ras Behari Bose, Subhas Ch. Bose, Bhagat Singh is an iconic / cult figure of nascent mind of revolution. That is why, V. D. Mahajan has rightly concluded that “Bhagat Singh and his comrades - at - arms taught the people not by precept but by praxis and taught them to face death for the sake of their motherland. Hence their daring plans, cool action, and studied disregard for death have won for them a lasting place in the memory of the nation. For their’ individual and collective actions of glorious activism, they have been able to leave their “footprints on the sands of time” (2006: 407).

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