

## BHAGAT: AN IDEOLOGY

SATENDRA KUMAR MISHRA

Assistant Professor, Amity University, Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh, India

### ABSTRACT

Bhagat Singh sacrificed his life for the downtrodden people and the country. After independence the Zamindari system was abolished but the SEZs 'Special economic zones' are not actually the 'Special Exploitative Zones'? The Zamindari system still exists in a new form. Bhagat Singh never got appreciation by the historians of the 'Congress' brand who always tried to belittle his contribution and argued that few enthusiastic people could not bring the mighty British empire down. The Communist party of India often claims to have inherited the legacy of Bhagat Singh but the same party promoted capitalism by extending a helping hand in slaughtering the people fighting for their rights in Nandigram. Bhagat's ideology has become more relevant today. State Governments are blind towards their responsibility to implement the policy of 'Socialist India' and the industrialists and corrupt politicians are promoted, ignoring the socialist demands of the workers and peasants. It is very important to understand the ideology of Bhagat Singh in this era of politicized communalism and regionalism where the political leaders and capitalist have formed a nexus use caste and religion for their nefarious purposes. If observed critically it can be easily located that Religion is the largest growing economy in India and south Asian countries. Religion has become more important than one's love for nation. As a result being a Muslim in Kashmir, a Tamil in south, a Marathi in Maharashtra and a Bengali in W. Bengal comes with additional benefits of its own, but being a Hindu in Kashmir or a Non Marathi in Maharashtra or a North Indian in south invites wrath. Being a Dalit is the biggest crime everywhere despite of the constitutional safeguards for them. Bhagat's vision was a radical change in the existing system and this cannot be brought with mere transfer of power.

**KEYWORDS:** Socialist, Ideology, HSRA, Communism, Emancipation, Comintern

### INTRODUCTION

Bhagat Singh was a revolutionary activist. His search for an ideology started from the school days only. As a young intellectual he was always searching a global view for human emancipation. His journey which started from his school days gathered momentum after he became the student of the National College, Lahore. From the beginning only Bhagat Singh was impressed by the revolutionary leaders and started collecting a good number of newspaper clippings on Sardar Ajit Singh and Lala Lajpat Rai. Within few days he had a collection on major political events and about 50 books, written by the radicals' leaders especially of Lala Hardayal. Lala Hardayal was the first in India to present a full-fledged article on Karl Mar's views on communism named 'Karl Marx: A Modern Rishi' published in March 1912. Under this ideological influence he reconstituted the Hindustan Republican Association /Army as Hindustan Socialist Republican Association /Army, in 1928. This change did not happen as some emotional outburst but was a well thought out nationalist step. Finally he threw harmless bombs in the Constituent Assembly to register his party's protest against the Trade Dispute Bill and Public Safety Bill. Both the bills were basically directed against the Communist political activities going on in India from abroad. He also wrote on several occasions that "Proletariat as the Vanguard of Revolution" and

“the necessity of Dictatorship of the Proletariat for establishing a Socialist Society.” According to him who would do this other than a Marxist?

23rd March 1931, The British government fearing of a possible communist and radical movement by these revolutionary young men, hanged them before the due date. Bhagat Singh with Rajguru and Sukhdev became not only martyrs but gradually they became an ideology. They embraced death in a completely heroic way and so became legend for the Indian mass. There is not a single youth leader of India's independence movement who has inspired a whole generation as Bhagat Singh. It was Unfortunate that the ruling elite of the country marked Bhagat Singh as a 'terrorist'. These revolutionaries were basically non-violent in their thoughts and process and tried to reconstruct India with an ideology which was far beyond the purview of college students. In the absence of knowledge of his ideology and understanding of the then Indian situation, people grossly under evaluate and misrepresent Bhagat Singh.

Bhagat expressed his thoughts from the jail and his works was published which throw much light on the drastic failure of contemporary communist leaders to influence and attach the younger generation in the main stream freedom movement. The CPI leadership acted under the influence of the Comintern and failed to put forward a consistent and effective revolutionary policy. The Stalinists since the mid-1920s directed its leadership which was convinced itself more than the liberation struggle which was to be fought as part of the democratic stage of the revolution. As a result whole focus remained tilted towards attracting the bourgeoisie class and dragging them more towards the left instead of struggling against them for power. They had a misconception that the bourgeoisie were the natural ally of the revolution. Their view was that the Indian National Congress was the edifice of the political purpose between Marxists and capitalists.

Bhagat was strongly against this bogus theory proposed by the Stalinists. He had clear vision in the nature of the national capitalists for freedom struggle. Bhagat clearly said that there was no difference in the rule of capitalists, local or foreign. It didn't matter from which country the ruling class came from, what mattered was the condition of the working class in the existing system. If the workers are exploited then the system must be changed and the chances for the same are more in capitalist economy. As proposed by the Stalinists, Imperialism and Colonialism were not only the rule of capitalists under which all social classes of the colonized nation are hostile to, but instead were the direct rule of the global capitalists upon the working class of all nations. Bhagat's ideology was direct rejection of this class collaboration.

It is very important to understand the ideology of Bhagat Singh in this era of politicized communalism and regionalism where the political leaders and capitalist have formed a nexus use caste and religion for their nefarious purposes. If observed critically it can be easily located that Religion is the largest growing economy in India and south Asian countries. Religion has become more important than one's love for nation. As a result being a Muslim in Kashmir, a Tamil in south, a Marathi in Maharashtra and a Bengali in W. Bengal comes with additional benefits of its own, but being a Hindu in Kashmir or a Non Marathi in Maharashtra or a North Indian in south invites wrath. Being a Dalit is the biggest crime everywhere despite of the constitutional safeguards for them. Bhagat's vision was a radical change in the existing system and this cannot be brought with mere transfer of power. It really hurts whenever Bhagat Singh is referred as 'terrorist'. Things looked ridiculous when few of the Leaders from Pakistan did comparison of the terrorist attack on the Parliament to that on the Lahore Assembly. It's very important for the younger generation to know what Bhagat Singh stood for to challenge such malicious views which club revolutionary activities with religious fanatic views. It would be so unpatriotic and antinational that Bhagat Singh is sometimes compared with the religious fundamentalist.

In order to know and feel the revolutionary zeal of Bhagat Singh one has to study his works in which he clearly focused on humanity and brotherhood. It is also important to understand as to why was Bhagat an atheist. Those who compare him with terrorist are exposed to only a part of his ideology. They are ignorant of the depth in his ideology which is not tainted in the narrow fanatic views of religion, in which the so-called democratic liberals are involved in. Bhagat is an icon for the Indian youth struggling against the British colonialism and was hanged at the age of only 23 years, that young age in which a large number of the political leaders are either at the ignorant primary stages of their political career or studying abroad. Bhagat Singh never ever justified violence. He could have very easily killed many political leaders present inside the Lahore Assembly Mohammad Ali Jinnah, but if he had wanted that. His aim was simply to awaken the deaf government who has turned a deaf ear to the demands of the Indians. He said: "It is famous that I am a terrorist but I am not. I am a revolutionary with 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 bombs or pistols. 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." Bhagat Singh had no misconceptions on the reactionary character capitalists. He never subscribed to the views and ideas of the CPI. He neither desired to fight alongside the capitalists in the very first stage nor against the capitalists in the second stage. For Bhagat, the revolution was in fact a complete new socialist revolution which offers the power in the hands of the worker, with the peasants on its side. He never dreamt of a republic which was bourgeois, and also never advocated any possibility of the share of power between the workers and capitalists.

It is also quite interesting to know that the Congress did very little to save the life of Bhagat Singh and his friends. Mohammad Ali Jinnah was the one who termed them nationalists and did so to get support in Lahore's political and legal circle. He wrote about Congress and her views: "What is the motive of Congress? I said that the present movement will end in some sort of compromise or total failure. I have said so because in my opinion the real revolutionary forces have not been invited to join the movement. This movement is being conducted only on the basis of a few middle class shopkeepers and a few capitalists. Both of these classes, specifically the capitalists, cannot venture to endanger their property. The real armies of the revolution are in villages and factories - the peasants and workers. But our bourgeois leaders don't dare take them along, nor can they do so. These sleeping tigers, once they wake up from their slumber, are not going to stop even after the accomplishment of the mission of our leaders." It's a known fact that Bhagat also criticized the type of "non-violence" preached by Gandhiji. According to him Gandhi's doctrine was nothing but just a trap to pull back workers and peasants on taking offensive steps against the capitalists. According to Bhagat his ideology was 'Non-violence and socialism and NO to capitalism' but of Gandhi was 'Non-violence and socialism but preferred capitalism'. History is the proof that in the civil disobedience movement congress took the cause of the industrialists and did not support the grievances of the workers and peasants. The reason congress was in need of funds and it can be provided by capitalist forces only.

Bhagat Singh was not only against the capitalism but his views on casteism are also inspiring. He openly mocked the Indian caste system and questioned its legitimacy. He questioned the relevance of a system in which people become untouchable because of being born in a particular caste. He knew well that the capitalist class will always compromise with the British imperial class to save their interests. Since congress took support of capitalists so the workers and peasants will get exploited even after independence. In such a scenario casteism and exploitation will continue. Certainly his conviction

was true and India after 67 years of independence has not been able to get rid of this system based on exploitation. His reservations that capitalism cannot be eliminated by just transfer of power from the hands of British to 'Indian British' have proved right. It needs revolution was what he said. One can easily correlate the nexus between upper castes with that of the capitalists who gained everything after the British left India.

Bhagat's ideology has become more relevant today. State Governments are blind towards their responsibility to implement the policy of 'Socialist India' and the industrialists and corrupt politicians are promoted, ignoring the socialist demands of the workers and peasants. This very vision had disturbed Bhagat Singh and his Hindustan Socialist republican Army (HSRA) comrades. On April 8th, 1929, Lahore Assembly was supposed to pass 'Trade bill', which could nullify the basic rights of the democratic trade unions and labors. The party decided that this was the time to convey their anger and discontent to the deaf government. Bhagat Singh and his comrades became immortal, who were the only voice of the common man, labors and peasants of the country. The bomb was harmless specially designed only to make huge sound to open up the deaf ears of the colonial powers. Their intentions were very clear that the bomb was not meant to kill political leaders. To take extra precaution Bhagat threw the bomb at the vacant space, also called the well, in the assembly to avoid any causality. They would have easily escaped in the chaos but decided to surrender because their voice was not heard till date. They wanted the people and the government to know about their ideology and visions of a free nation. These revolutionaries inspired the entire nation cutting across boundaries, caste and communal lines. Bhagat Singh is still youth icon for the youths all over the nation. On 6th June 1929 Bhagat Singh said -"To change the system based on injustice, we need revolution. Is it not a constructed injustice that the labors 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. Mason, 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."

Bhagat Singh's direction of thought and his vision is very clear by this statement. He was much worried on the caste and class structure of India. He spoke on the plight of the Dalit, working class and peasants. This is remarkable and unparalleled in the history of India as no one before spoke on such issues that too from an early twenties youth. It is something rare for a young man of that age to understand and analyse the caste prejudices and its effects not only in terms of social and cultural background but also on economic prospects. Bhagat Singh in fact was far ahead of contemporary leaders. He was not only worried about the capitalistic system sucking the blood of Indian workers with the support of its imperialist masters but he also clearly understood and criticized the caste dynamics. He wrote the famous essay 'The question of untouchable' and openly questioned the legacy of the Brahmanism.

It was unfortunate that the powerful forces of the British Raj hanged him to silence the legitimate voices of the marginalized but this was something impossible. Bhagat Singh and his ideology have become much relevant in today's era where exploitation is nearly legitimized. The tribals are dying of hunger, the farmers are committing suicide and the Dalits are still facing the brunt of casteism, at every step the ideas of Bhagat are merged in the air. Bhagat Singh sacrificed his life for the downtrodden people and the country. After independence the Zamindari system was abolished but the SEZs 'Special economic zones' are not actually the 'Special Exploitative Zones'? The Zamindari system still exists in a new form. Bhagat Singh never got appreciation by the historians of the 'Congress' brand who always tried to belittle his

contribution and argued that few enthusiastic people could not bring the mighty British empire down. The Communist party of India often claims to have inherited the legacy of Bhagat Singh but the same party promoted capitalism by extending a helping hand in slaughtering the people fighting for their rights in Nandigram. It is matter of shame that people sacrificed their lives for the nation in the hope of a socialist India where every citizen will have equal rights over the natural resources, a socialist India free of caste discrimination and no oppression of the poor farmers, but today what we witness is just the very dangers and reservations put forward by Bhagat Singh.

It was in fact the immense popularity of Bhagat Singh among the Indian youth, his ideological differences with Gandhiji and the Congress which made Bhagat Singh a champion of Nationalism. Bhagat Singh was an inspiration to millions of exploited youth to raise voice against the supremacy of the Varnashram. The advocates of Varnashram must realize that it can no more be an easy project as Bhagat Singh had rejected the Varna system, has strongly condemned the caste order and also has proudly embraced modernity. He not only rejected the same but also questioned the so-called 'ancient glorious' culture and heritage on the name of which the casteism and exploitation is carried out. Bhagat Singh was a staunch atheist and remained so even after being imprisoned. His family and colleagues tried to persuade him to have belief in God at least at the last moments. In fact it was the strength in his character that he refused to be cowed down. Bhagat always questioned and exposed the myths of the Social Order claimed to be made by God, if the Hindu scriptures are to be believed. The span of the ideology of Bhagat Singh was however limited by several factors which included his very young age, short life span, politically undeveloped environment and the destructive policy of anti-revolutionism of the Stalinist leadership. But even though there were limits, his ideology was crystal clear. The lessons of Russia entered India and left profound influence upon the young Bhagat Singh. In the last few days of his life in the Lahore jail, it is known that he was reading the books on Lenin and Trotsky. Bhagat Singh was deeply moved by the sacrifice of Sardar Kartar Singh Sarabha (one of the organisers of the Gadar Party). Kartar used political propaganda to infiltrate in the armed forces and planned a revolt to overthrow the colonial regime. Unfortunately he was caught and imprisoned at the young age of nineteen on the charges of treason and conspiracy against the British Empire.

Bhagat Singh was well aware of the dangers of the religious fanaticism and the capitalist's legitimization of the religion. He often raised his voice against the same but it is unfortunate to compare Bhagat Singh with Islamic Jihadis or the same lined Hindutva fanatics who are dragging their respective societies back to the same era when they were exploited over since centuries. One can only feel helpless at such explanation and analysis of those ignorant people who deliberately make such comparison. Bhagat Singh is immortal because of his outstanding ideology and in fact he has become an ideology. His life, struggle and sacrifice for a socialist India is incredible. He dreamt of a society where each individual could focus more on human and national development, a society where caste discrimination no longer exists and where all the religious and non-religious majority and minority live together in an extraordinary brotherhood. Jitendranath Sanyal was imprisoned for publishing the biography of Bhagat Singh in 1931, in the Court he said – "Sardar Bhagat Singh, I knew was neither a terrorist nor an anarchist; therefore to discharge my duty towards my late friend I thought of presenting his true and historical picture. In this I wanted to show that he was a communist and an internationalist and that people had misunderstood him."

People today continue to fight for their legitimate rights which the state has practically failed to provide them despite being a working and world's biggest democracy. This very democracy has turned up to be a 'dubious system' as it

turned out gradually to become only a representative democracy rather than actually to be a participatory one. Youth of the nation, the peasants, the Dalits and the tribals continue to survive under utter marginalisation. The role of Muslims, infact now the second majority of India still remains clueless and used as vote banks without any effective participation in democratic structure. The religious fanaticism is at all time high. The affirmative steps taken by government fail because of the commitment of the people in and outside the system. The political class, the criminals and the industrialist have formed a nexus and they are the one who have actually enjoyed the benefits of democratic freedom and independence. Today they control over the state and the resources without any accountability or responsibility. The caste prejudices have multiplied and every human being's 'God' is hijacked by the priestly class. Those who are oppressed fail to reject the authority of God and are deeply closely attached to religion and therefore remain exploited. India is far behind to be called a 'Socialist' country. One of the reasons for this failure is that even the literate and culturally awakened avoid any debate on religious issues and thus are depriving the society of those ideas. Bhagat Singh is not just a national icon because of his sacrifice for an awakened India but today his ideology is much bigger than the said nationalism. His ideas shook the colonial ruling elite as well as the whole British Empire. His ideology was not only against the British but also for the establishment of an equitable society, a socialist society based on modern values and rational science out rightly rejecting the caste system. India is still unfortunate in failing to embrace his ideas. Today, the market has been successfully using the 'Indian culture' for its own marketing developments therefore completely distorting our thoughts and thinking capabilities resulting in decreasing our sense of responsibility and accountability for the country and humanity.

## CONCLUSIONS

Bhagat has very carefully analysed the concept of religion and God. His article 'Why I Am an Atheist', 1930, is the most famous. One of his impressive article is 'Anarchism' published in 1928. In his writings he emphasised on the basic nature of these concepts which were exploitative and iniquitous. The social institutions based on the same and also that how religion today has become an instrument in the hands of capitalist powers who twist and turn the norms and ideas depending upon their interest. He also analysed the origin and the actual need religion for a human being and also for the society. He found that the faith for God and religion lies in their deeply rooted lack of scientific knowledge and understanding of the nature and environment, and also up to a certain level the lack of power and commitment to control their own self, society and destiny. He gave logics as to how religion became useful myth for the people living in acute hardships. According to Bhagat religion best suits a man in distress. This entire logical presentation of God and religion put forward by Bhagat Singh shows a remarkable resemblance with many of the often quoted paragraphs of Karl Marx. No doubt Bhagat Singh was inspired by the works of Karl Marx. We find many references for the same in his jail notebook.

Bhagat has openly criticised the situations when revivalism does become hindrance in awakening people's consciousness on scientific and rational revolutionary thought along with modern values. As a student of National College, Bhagat Singh participated in the Gurudwara Reform movement during non-cooperation movement because it represented the peasants and others who were against the domination of capitalist and colonial powers over the Gurudwara. He later on withdrew himself from it when he felt that the movement was assuming to a kind of communal character. In the article 'Different Thoughts of New Leaders', 1928, he criticises the 'Back to Vedas' approach along with the revivalist philosophy of Sage Wasvani. He underlined the anti-Bolshevik and anti-class ideological character of Sadhu Wasvani's arguments. Bhagat Singh compared and admired both Subhash Bose and Jawaharlal Nehru and acknowledged their



greatness but he criticised the basic nationalist limitations of Netaji who advocates only political change. Bhagat Singh then advised the Punjab youth to follow Nehru's ideology because it was based on modern and socialist values. He advocated revolutionary change in the existing social system.

He gave a clear caution that the untouchables are the backbone of this country and they must organise themselves to find a solution to the problem of untouchability. He always welcomed demand for equality of rights for the untouchables and also gave the idea of projecting equal opportunities and treatment in all walks of life. He advocated special rights to overcome the barrier of inequality. He reminds the contributions and sacrifices done by these untouchables in our historical past and appeals to awaken and aware, rise and revolt against the existing system as they are the 'real proletariat.' Cautiously he warns them not to be moved by the offers of the capitalist bureaucracy which is the sole cause of their poverty and cautions them that the slow reforms promised will not bring them any benefit. He said that they should organise to unleash a socialist revolution along with the political and economic revolution. Bhagat Singh's ideas have the strength to bring hope in millions of struggling people. Bhagat Singh was and will always remain an icon for those who believe in modern secular and socialist values rejecting the caste based system. His legacy will continue to inspire those who are still hopefully waiting for a modern India with modern ideas. Bhagat Singh and his ideology have become more relevant in today's era for the youth to stand and challenge the entire corrupt system, which has become dysfunctional and practically captivated by parochial communal and capitalist thugs. Bhagat has gradually become an ideology, an ideology which has the power to topple corrupt government and replace it with socialist government.

## REFERENCES

1. Nirupama Dutt, 24 July 2005, "The Tribune stood up for Bhagat Singh". The Tribune, India.
2. S.R.Bakshi, 1988, Revolutionaries and the British Raj, Atlantic Publishers & Distributors. pp.134-137
3. Irfan Habib, June 1982, "The Congress and the Revolutionaries in the 1920s", Social Scientist 10: pp.20-37.
4. Kuldip Nayyar, 2000, the Martyr Bhagat Singh: Experiments in Revolution, Har-Anand Publications. pp.212
5. Niraja Rao, April 1997, "Bhagat Singh and the Revolutionary Movement", Revolutionary Democracy, pp.167-186.
6. Bhawan Singh Rana, 2005, Bhagat Singh, Diamond Pocket Books (P) Ltd. pp. 47-49.
7. Randhir Singh, Trilochan Singh, 1993, Autobiography of Bhai Sahib Randhir Singh: freedom fighter, reformer, theologian, saint and hero of Lahore conspiracy case, first prisoner of Gurdwara reform movement, Bhai Sahib Randhir Singh Trust.
8. Irfan Habib, 'Bhagat Singh', 2007. To make the deaf hear: ideology and programme of Bhagat Singh and his comrades. Three Essays Collective.
9. "The Trial of Bhagat Singh", India Law Journal 1 (3), July–September 2008.
10. Bhupendra Hooja, 2007, the Jail Notebook and Other Writings, LeftWord Books. pp. 112-127.
11. Paresh. R. Vaidya, 14–27 April 2001, "Historical Analysis: Of means and ends", Frontline 18, archived from the original on 29 August 2007.

