



## EVOLUTION OF AN IDEOLOGUE: THE MAKING OF BHAGAT SINGH

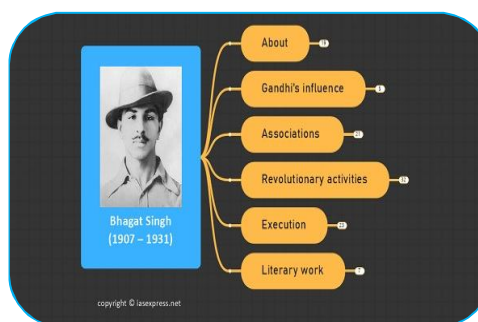
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### ABSTRACT :

Contemporary political debate in India is witnessing a rapid shrinking of the secular heritage. The rise of right-wing forces to power due to the failure of political class in providing governance through the welfarist, democratic and secular mode has yielded space for the emergence of charismatic but populist brand of politics of Narendra Modi. The failure of the opposition in putting up a united fight against those contesting the legitimacy of the legacy of secularism is not only challenging but alarming. Extra-constitutional control by the RSS, the right-wing organisation, of the Government of India has made the threats even deeper and difficult to address. The centralization of authority to individual power centres poses serious questions about the future of democratic institutions and secular ethos as laid down in Indian constitution.



**KEYWORDS :** welfarist, democratic and secular mode, right-wing organization, democratic institutions.

### INTRODUCTION:

The forces nurtured to mock and subvert the secular character of Indian polity and culture are government of the day. The unabated and blatant use of caste and religious sentiments in the periodic elections to state assemblies and Lok Sabha is indicative of the low pitch of political discourse. Rising unemployment, the growth of under-employment has failed to attract the attention of ruling elites. The peasant movement which lasted for more than one year on the threshold of national capital New Delhi, which culminated in the victory of farmers has attracted the attentions of thinkers, writers, political activists, intellectuals, and civil society towards the legacy of Bhagat Singh and his imagination who provided scientific solutions to the problems being faced by the country and her people.

Shaheed Bhagat Singh, a legendary figure is undoubtedly one of the brightest stars in the galaxy of freedom fighters of India. Neta ji Subhash Chandra Bose, while paying his tribute to Bhagat Singh in a speech delivered at New Delhi shortly after the latter's martyrdom said, "Bhagat Singh is not a person, but a symbol. He symbolizes the spirit of revolt that has taken place in the country" <sup>1</sup>. The revolutionary life of Bhagat Singh is not only a source of inspiration for all of us but equally significant is that he stands as a light house for the generations to come. Even his vision and ideas are integral to the recently concluded peasant movement in India which lasted for more than a year. Bhagat Singh

acquired unparalleled stature and glory in his short span of life. He was not just a brave revolutionary activist but also a profound thinker and an ideologue with a deep sense of understanding and scientific analysis that had long term ideological investment for the future of India. He was spirited organiser and a profound thinker who could not only arouse the genuine patriotic emotions among the masses and could also instil in them clear analytical thinking and the revolutionary thinking of those days. His active participation could mobilize the masses. Bhagat Singh's works and deeds personify the rare qualities of courage and sacrifice, he could also through his activities, instil those qualities in ordinary citizens of India particularly in rural areas.

The present paper is a modest attempt to examine the role of early life and contemporary revolutionary activities not only in India but abroad as well that shaped Bhagat Singh's mind of early age and could help him to evolve his own and independent revolutionary ideology. It is difficult to make categories of life of a historical person but in order to fully understand theory and practices of Bhagat Singh as a political man it is essential to understand and examine the initial phase of his life and the objective and subjective conditions of pre-independence period which have deeply influenced his life.

Bhagat Singh was born in a family with full of revolutionary activities and strong nationalist traditions<sup>2</sup>. His birth took place at a time when the political situation in the Punjab, was very tense due to the agitation against the Colonisation act launched by Ajit Singh and Lala Lajput Rai, the well-known revolutionaries of Punjab. Some of the leaders even looked to driving the Britishers out of the country either by force or through passive resistance by the people as a whole<sup>3</sup>. This is further substantiated by the proceedings of the meeting of the Bhagat Mata Sabha of which Kishore Singh, Ajit Singh and Mehta Aanand Kishore were founder members. Addressing the meeting at Lahore Ajit Singh said "I have come to the platform merely to give you the message of our mother country. Efforts are being made to frighten us by saying that we shall be arrested and sent to prison. We do not mind such treats. These are detectives here may disgrace fall upon them. We must take the trade and management of our country in our hands. Do not think that we can do nothing. We would be free in two days. See the devotees of Guru Gobind Singh upset the whole country. The English are tyrants. The English are robbers. We should expel them"<sup>4</sup>.

This was the age of political upheavals when political movement were gaining momentum not only at national level but also at international level. Strong anger and reactions against the division of Bengal were gaining momentum in India in those days, Swaraj movement had taken deep roots in the minds of people across different section of society. Several newspapers like Yuganter, Sandhya and Bandematram were spreading nationalist sentiments at a wider level; political leaders had started deviating from the Congress path and there were sharp reactions against moderate ideologies which led to divisions in Congress in future. Many leaders had started criticising the policies, programmes and strategies adopted by Congress leadership. The youth of those days had started losing faith in the methods suggested by Mahatma Gandhi too. They were gravitating towards revolutionary ideas. Lal Bal Pal<sup>5</sup> had become buzz words and the symbols of emerging politics in India; a number of other leaders including Shyam ji Krishan Verma and Madam Cama were struggling abroad for creating genuine patriotic feeling for Indian liberation; there were armed struggles in many states; in Punjab, the motherland of Bhagat Singh, political movement was at its peak and it was erupting in violent activities at times at different places. The political movement in Punjab was led by Sardar Arjun Singh (Bhagat Singh's grandfather), Kishan Singh, Ajit Singh, Lala Lajpat Roy and Sufi Amka Prasad. The situation in ferment all over the country.<sup>6</sup>

The social, economic and political conditions of a historical age are very significant and are conducive in the making of an individual's personality, Bhagat Singh's ancestors were Sandhu Jats who had been converted to Sikhism. His grandfather Arjun Singh was an agriculturist. He used to do social work in rural areas of Punjab. Sardar Arjun Singh was the first to tilt towards the teachings of Arya Samaj which was already spreading in many parts of North India.

Sardar Arjun Singh, being an Arya Samaji was also active in politics and motivated all his three sons to understand and take part in politics and also inspired them to love the nation. Kishan Singh, supported the extremist faction of Indian National Congress and also had close relations with contemporary Indian Gadharies and revolutionaries such as Sachinder Nath Sanyal and Kartar Singh Sarabha. In 1907, he took part in the agitation against the Basi Doaba Canal Act and Colonization Act and was even arrested, Swaran Singh was also a staunch nationalist and a freedom fighter. He too joined and participated in the agitation against the colonization act. Consequently, he was arrested and kept in central jail, Lahore. He developed tuberculosis and died in 1910 at an early age of 23. Vidyawati, the mother of Bhagat Singh was also an inspiring force behind Bhagat Singh. She could inculcate the sense of commitment and responsibility towards the nation. The environment at home felicitated Bhagat Singh to inculcate the value of patriotism and an unquestioning loyalty to the country with the passage of time.

Thus, a family background churning with strong nationalist feelings helped to imbibe the nationalist feeling in Bhagat Singh's mind set at a perceptive age of his early life. At the age of five years, while playing with the peers, he would divide his playmates into two groups and would stage fights between them to promote the feeling of nationalism and to teach them that they have to expel the Britishers from India. The exile of his uncle, Ajit Singh in 1909, because of his nationalist views and his work in the struggle for freedom, made a deep impression on the mind of Bhagat Singh. How deep was that impression could be judged from the following talk? Ajit Singh's wife use to weep most of the time because of the exile of her husband, Bhagat Singh use to say, aunty do not weep, when I grow up, I will drive the Britishers out of India and bring my uncle back<sup>7</sup>.

Bhagat Singh joined the district primary school in 1916-17. He passed the 5<sup>th</sup> class from the village school and he joined the DAV school at Lahore. While at school he was good at studies<sup>8</sup>. In those days the entire environment was charged with the combustible fall out of the life and sacrifices of legends of Ghadar Party. They were heroes and martyrs for the youngsters. The restlessness which he inherited from his family mixed in the atmosphere in which he was breathing. He was perceptive towards the most genuine cause of the freedom of the country. Bhagat Singh was highly impressed by the life, deeds and activities of Kartar Singh Sarabha, the great revolutionary of pre-independence days national movement. The impact of Shahid Kartar Singh Sarabha's heroism and sacrifice on Bhagat Singh could be judged from the fact that when the latter was arrested a photograph of Kartar Singh was recovered from him. He always carried Sarabha's picture in his pocket and derived greater inspiration from the hero of his life. He always uses to show that photograph to his mother and say "see mother, this is my hero, friend and companion"<sup>9</sup>.

The Russian revolution of 1917 had a world-wide impact and was an epochal event which attracted the attention of the revolutionaries all over the world. Revolutionaries in India including Bhagat Singh. He read about the success of Russian revolution and even began to consider the Soviet Union as the state which was nearest to their ideal<sup>10</sup>. The sensitive and analytical mind of Bhagat Singh could sense the contradictions prevailing in the society. Needless to say, it helped Bhagat Singh to develop a vision and make his own worldview regarding future formation of India. The Jallianwala Bagh massacre left a deep imprint on the young impressionable mind of Bhagat Singh. He also drew inspirations from the revolutionaries of Kanpur, Uttar Pradesh. At that time Bhagat Singh was only 12 years old. But when he heard the news, he reached Amritsar instead of going to school and picked up a little soil in a phial. He reached home very late after the escaped. His elder sister informed him that his share of mangoes was waiting for him. Ordinarily he would have jumped at them but that very piece of information appeared too mundane and remote to him. He took his sister aside, showed the phial stuffed with the holy soil and said, "the Britishers have massacred hundred of our man"<sup>11</sup>.

While in College, Bhagat Singh came in contact with Bhagwati Charan Vohra, Sukhder, Yashpal, Ram Krishan and Tirath Ram in college, Bhagat Singh was much impressed by Jai Chander Vidyalkar, his history teacher. His lectures on history of revolution and socialism influenced Bhagat Singh the

most. Besides, special lectures were developed in the college by Lala Lajpat Rai and Bhai Parmanand<sup>12</sup> as a result of these lectures he became conscious and even sensitive towards the issues of social and political nature.

The above discussion leads us to the conclusion that the objective and subjective conditions of those days influenced Bhagat Singh's thinking the most. For the times to come the tense and revolutionary situation had deep impact on his young and impressionable mind. The schooling and higher education, the discussions and deliberation in the educational institutions prepared the ground to design his own political ideology and to emerge as serious 'ideologue' who could analyse the problems with a scientific methodology being confronted by the Indian society in those days. The situation at international level moulded his vision and helped him to evolve an ideology based upon the principle of liberty, equality and justice which will promote the basic principle of equalitarianism for future generation of India.

Even the political vision of Bhagat Singh is integral to the new social movements launched by various sections of society in general and the recently concluded peasant movement in North India. His worldview inspired many youngsters to join the movement and to bring about the changes based on the principles of liberty and equality.

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