

*Biography*  
of  
**BHAGAT SINGH**



*M.M. Juneja*





# **Biography of BHAGAT SINGH**



**BE SATGURU'S TRUE GURSIKH  
BE TRUTHFUL, FAITHFUL  
BE NON-VIOLENT, TOLERANT, MERCIFUL  
BE VEGETARIAN - ORGANIC  
BE PEACE-LOVER - PEACEFUL RESPECT WORLD PEACE**

**"CONGRATULATIONS"  
ON BLISSFUL AUSPICIOUS PARKASH DIWAS**

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## PREFACE

In 1765 A.D., Lord Clive, popularly known as the founder of British rule in India, offered to conquer India for England. But the British Prime Minister, William Pitt, declined the offer saying that 'it was beyond the resources of the Government'. It was a 'surprise' for the British but a 'shame' for Indians that Lord Clive conquered India for England with 'Indian money, Indian men and Indian blood'.

Historically speaking, India can hardly be said to have ever been conquered by the foreigners but herself. Similarly, the fact cannot be denied that it also got freed from the clutches of British imperialism herself or without any foreign help. In other words, the emancipation from foreign rule was secured by its people while playing their active role in the Great Revolt of 1857, the movement led by the trio of Bal-Pal-Lal, the Gandhian *satyagrahs*, the Revolutionary activities, the I.N.A. Campaign led by Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, etc. As we know, all these anti-British moves were courageously led by the great leaders of the day, including the *Shaheed-e-Azam* Bhagat Singh (1907-31).

If we have a close look on the account of India's struggle for freedom, we shall find Bhagat Singh as a distinguished personality of the country. As he was born on 28 September 1907, he was just 23 years, 5 months and 25 days old at the time of his martyrdom i.e. 23 March 1931. The execution took place in the evening instead of morning, the bodies of the three martyrs—Bhagat Singh, Rajguru and Sukhdev—were cut into pieces, packed in sacks and hurriedly burnt in oil at Hussainiwala near Ferozepur.

By then, Bhagat Singh had evidently become the most beloved son of the soil, because :

- Besides being an uncompromising fighter against imperialism, he questioned and opposed other oppressions and had also a clear vision both about the contents of the liberation struggle and the aftermath of its success.
- Surprisingly, he struggled against the exploitation of man by



man and of nation by nation between the age of just 17 and 23 years.

— Moreover, he was the enemy of the exploiter and the saviour of the sufferer.

It has been a sinister and deliberate policy of our rulers to put Bhagat Singh and his comrades on a high pedestal to be ritually honoured but not to be followed. Regrettably, the historians have also not done justice with him who was extremely blessed with historical force. It is good that the historians have written a lot on Gandhi and his associates. But it was not 'Gandhi's non-violence alone' that achieved freedom for the country. Its due credit must also go to the revolutionaries who lost their precious lives while battling against the British imperialism. Here, one thing we have to keep in our minds that their violent activities were basically meant only for the surgical bloodshed.

Keeping this vacuum in view, the author has made his humble attempt to prepare the present volume. He does not claim that the book in hand is a monumental work, but believes it to be informative and inspiring for the reader. It embodies Bhagat Singh as a man who rose from among the people and very much as one of them, but not as a superman. Bhagat Singh had also repeatedly said about himself, "I am an ordinary human-being, that is all."

The author is of the opinion that as more literature on the life and work of Shaheed Bhagat Singh is published, it shall certainly inspire our younger generation to live, to work and to die for the sake of suffering humanity. While paying his glowing tributes to the great martyrs of the *Kakori Kaand*—Pandit Ram Prasad Bismil, Ashfaqulla Khan, Rajendranath Lahiri and Thakur Roshan Singh—a close associate of Bhagat Singh, Bhagwati Charan Vohra, befittingly wrote in January 1928:

*"Shaheedon ki izzat karne se,  
Shaheedon ke karnamen yaad karne se,  
Kurbani ka chaav oomrata hai."*

—M.M.Juneja



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## FAMILY BACKGROUND

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Bhagat Singh's forefathers, who were Sikh Jat of Sandhu *gotra*, had the credit of fighting the evils of society and the enemies of the country. The first such prominent name among them is Sardar Fateh Singh, his great-great grandfather\*. According to a family member of Bhagat Singh, his nephew Dr. Jagmohan Singh (the son of Bhagat Singh's sister—Bibi Amar Kaur) :

Sardar Fateh Singh participated in the Anglo-Sikh wars in the 1840s, which led to the confiscation half of his landed property. During the 1857 upsurge, the British Commissioner of Punjab Sir John Lawrence wanted to enlist the support of the landed class and thus declared to give the confiscated property back in lieu of their support. Sardar Fateh Singh responded by saying, "Guru Gobind Singh has taught us to stand up for the people fighting for their rights and freedom. The help of the oppressor is tantamount to the betrayal of his teachings." Thus, Sardar Fateh Singh stood by the principle and did not succumb to the greed of acquiring back his lost property.<sup>1</sup>

### II

The same spirit was upheld by Bhagat Singh's grandfather Sardar Arjun Singh. He was perhaps the first Sikh who became Arya Samajist in 1877. He was one of the select Indians who got *diksha* and *Yajyopaveet* from Swami Dayanand Saraswati himself.<sup>2</sup> Sardar Arjun Singh was then a *munshi* of Raizada Bhagatram Advocate, Jalandhar. When the British tried to create bickering

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\* For details of the family-members and the forefathers of Bhagat Singh, please see the 'Family Tree' in Appendix-I.



among the Arya Samajists and the Sikhs of Patiala State, Sardar Arjun Singh came forward to pacify the tussle amicably. Furthermore, he preached the doctrines of Arya Samaj among the villagers of his region.

In the end of the 19th century, the Punjab Government decided to colonise the forest area and declared that every coloniser would be awarded 25 acres of free land. At this, Arjun Singh left his job, settled in Banga village of Lyallpur district (now Faisalabad, Pakistan) and adopted the life of a cultivator. Having left their native village Khatkar Kalan, Jalandhar district (now in Nawanshahr), the family of Arjun Singh migrated to Banga in 1897.

In 1893, Arjun Singh, apart from his elder brother Surjan Singh, was one of the delegates to the Indian National Congress session held at Lahore, presided over by Dadabhai Naoroji. During the Non-cooperation Movement (1920-22), Arjun Singh reached Jaranwala Town in February 1922 to participate in the picketing of foreign cloth and liquor shops. However, before he reached the town, the movement had been withdrawn by Mahatma Gandhi.

Arjun Singh was probably the most popular figure of his village Banga. It was he who built two wells, a *gurdwara* and a rest-house known as *sarai* for travellers. He was a *hakim* as well. He used to treat the poor free of charge. Though he was not much educated, yet he had some knowledge of Punjabi, Sanskrit, Persian and Urdu.

The story of Sardar Arjun Singh is incomplete without the mention of his wife Sardarani Jai Kaur (Bhagat Singh's grandmother). She used to assist her husband in preparing medicines. She had also acquired the skill of bone-setting. Secondly, the house was an abode for nationalists. She looked after the galaxy of underground patriots and often saved them from police raids. She was perhaps the first woman of Punjab who, by virtue of her welfare activities, had the honour of becoming a member of the village panchayat. However, she was quite strict as a mother-in-law.

### III

Sardar Arjun Singh was blessed with three sons—Kishan

Singh, Ajit Singh and Swaran Singh. The patriotic spirit of Arjun Singh was followed by his three sons even more enthusiastically. Let us now elaborate the brief life-account of Bhagat Singh's uncles and father.

#### **SARDAR SWARAN SINGH (1887-1910)**

The youngest uncle of Bhagat Singh—Sardar Swaran Singh—was born at Khatkar Kalan in 1887. He was an ardent nationalist and freedom fighter. He joined the *Bharat Mata Society*, founded by his elder brother Sardar Ajit Singh. He published anti-British literature, and also participated in the agitation against the Punjab Colonization of Land Act. There was one more episode which had a special reference to the public life of Sardar Swaran Singh :

On 11 April 1906, an article, entitled 'A Deliberate Murder', appeared in the *The Punjabee* (Lahore) which brought to light the inhuman and brutish practices committed by the British. The article dealt with the deliberate murder by shooting of a Muslim orderly who refused to carry the dead carcass of a pig shot by an Englishman (the Police Superintendent) out for sport. As no action was taken against the European officer, the story published in *The Punjabee* stirred the native mind. So far the British had not been accustomed to such a lashing criticism. They, therefore, now started prosecuting Lala Jaswant Rai and Mr. K.K. Athavale, the manager and editor of the paper respectively. Consequently, on 15 February 1907, the District Magistrate Mr. R.A. Mant sentenced Jaswant Rai to two years of rigorous imprisonment and Mr. Athavale to six months imprisonment.<sup>3</sup>

This conviction had a strong reaction among the Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs alike. Numerous public meetings were held and anti-British agitations were arranged in different parts of the Punjab. One such agitation was effectively organised in Lahore. It was led by Sardar Swarna Singh. As a result, he, alongwith his co-workers, was arrested and prosecuted by the vindictive authorities. On 20 July 1907, Swaran Singh, Ghasita Ram, Bahaali



Ram, Ram Singh and Govardhan Das were sentenced to 1½ years rigorous imprisonment, Lal Chand Falak to one year imprisonment, and Gandharva Sen to thirty lashes of flogging.

In a nutshell, Bhagat Singh's uncle, Sardar Swaran Singh, was arrested on the fabricated charge of sedition, tried and imprisoned. He was kept in the Lahore Central Jail, where he was forced to do the job of a bullock, as a result he became a chronic patient of tuberculosis (T.B.), and eventually met an untimely death in 1910 at the young age of just 23.

On certain counts, Sardar Swaran Singh can be called the 'forerunner' of his nephew Bhagat Singh. Firstly, like his uncle, Bhagat Singh was kept in the same Lahore Central Jail. Secondly, Bhagat Singh's life was cut short, when he was also merely 23.

It has rightly been said by Lokmanya Tilak, 'To be the wife of a great man is a dangerous task'. It also applies to the wife of Sardar Swaran Singh—Sardarani Hukam Kaur. She lost her beloved husband at the very young age, and survived for 56 years as an issueless widow. She died on 14 January 1966. She was the only darling daughter of her parents and the dear sister of several brothers. She often refused to worship God, stating: "*Mujhe kya diya hai Bhagwan ne, jo main uski pooja karoon. Sir par pati naheen, gaud mein santaan nahi.*"<sup>4</sup>

#### SARDAR AJIT SINGH (1881-1947)

A well-known radical freedom fighter of India, Sardar Ajit Singh, was another uncle of Bhagat Singh. He was born on 23 February 1881 at Khatkar Kalan village. Having passed Intermediate from the D.A.V. College, Lahore, he started his career as a teacher. But soon after, he began to serve the Arya Samaj movement and then the freedom movement. He did all this at a time when raising a finger towards the British was regarded as an invitation to death.

Sardar Ajit Singh was a fiery speaker. On 21 April 1907, in a public meeting at Rawalpindi he, while condemning the Punjab Colonization of Land Act, made a violent attack on the increase of land assessment. Such was the effect of his speech that the crowd, in a fit of excitement after the meeting, began to set fire to government buildings. The Government took a very serious view of his speech and



arrested him. He, alongwith Lala Lajpat Rai, was deported to Mandalay for nearly six months. After his release, Ajit Singh became more active and aggressive. Considering his activities dangerous for the *Raj*, the government now planned to arrest him again, but he fled away to Iran then to Europe in 1909. During the World War I, he shifted to South America, mainly Brazil, and kept himself in close touch with the *Ghadar* Party in San Francisco. During the World War II, he again shifted to Europe, and met Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose. After the fall of Italy and Germany, Ajit Singh was arrested and kept in different jails. Eventually, the Interim Government, headed by Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru, was formed in India from September 1946 to August 1947. As a result of Nehru's efforts, Sardar Ajit Singh returned to India in March 1947. Coincidentally, he died on the very day of India's Independence i.e. 15 August 1947 at Dalhousie (Himachal Pradesh). Throwing some light on the scene of his funeral, one of the mourners as well as a social activist of Ludhiana—Avinash Singh—recalls :

Thousands of people thronged Dalhousie for the cremation of Ajit Singh, the uncle of Bhagat Singh. Surely, those thousands of people did not live in Dalhousie but came from far-off places. My grandmother was busy in the kitchen when the procession passed our house. She grabbed her *duppata* and told all of us to cover our heads and join the procession. All through the route, she was crying as if someone from her own family had passed away. She also continued to tell us about Ajit Singh and Bhagat Singh. We were at the impressionable age and it left a deep mark on our mind. Till date, we have immense reverence for both Ajit Singh and Bhagat Singh.<sup>5</sup>

If we look into the history of India's struggle for freedom, we shall find a good number of freedom fighters who went abroad to seek foreign help to get their country freed from the clutches of the British. So far as Ajit Singh is concerned, the period of his exile, full of risks and challenges, is probably the longest i.e. of nearly four decades from 1909 to 1947. Secondly, he was the only Indian who had the credit of knowing forty languages of the world, and his writings are in six languages.



Sardar Ajit Singh was married to Sardarani Harnam Kaur, hailing from the Sufi saint Bulle Shah's town Kasur. She was a rare woman of the country who could not meet her husband for nearly four decades together. While leaving his ailing wife at Banga village in the beginning of 1909, Ajit Singh, before going abroad secretly, falsely assured her to return by *parson* (day after tomorrow). During his exile, she once lodged her complaint through a letter written in Urdu, stating: "*Aap to 'parson' lotne ka vada kar gaye the, ab to 'barson' beet gaye.*" Pat came the reply: "*'Parson' aur 'Barson' mein, do nukton ka hi to furq hai.*"<sup>6</sup>

It is true that Ajit Singh served his nation enthusiastically, but failed to look after his ailing wife. Admitting this fact, he said the following words to his wife, just a moment before his death. Reproducing the memorable scene, Bhagat Singh's niece Virendra Sindhu writes :

With folded hands, he stood before his wife. Begging her pardon, he said, "I am sorry that I could not serve you in illness." He then bowed before her, touched her feet and soon after collapsed.<sup>7</sup>

### SARDAR KISHAN SINGH (1878-1951)

A well-known nationalist of India and the father of *Shaheed-e-Azam* Bhagat Singh, Sardar Kishan Singh, was born in 1878. He was originally named Gobind Singh and as a child he was often called 'Gobinda'. It was felt by some elder members of the family that this amounted to an affront to 'Guru Gobind Singh', the tenth and the last Guru of the *Khalsa Panth*. During these days, the family collected at Anandpur Saheb (where Guru Saheb had spent his childhood) in 1886 to celebrate *Holi*. There the child Gobind Singh was given a drink of nectar or was baptised as 'Kishan Singh'. The child was then eight years old.

Apart from being a Sikh devotee, Kishan Singh was a noble Arya Samajist, too. He served the cause of Arya Samaj in collaboration with Mahatma Hans Raj. Later, he joined the Indian National Congress and remained an active worker throughout. In 1906, Kishan Singh—alongwith his brothers (Ajit Singh and Swaran Singh), Sufi Amba Prasad and Mahasha Ghasita Ram—

joined active politics, and founded a party known as the *Bharat Mata Society*. In 1907, he took part in the agitation against the *Bari Doab Canal Act* and the *Punjab Colonization of Land Act*, and was arrested. Besides, he was a great supporter of the underground patriots. As per some report, Kartar Singh Sarabha, one of the heroes of the *Ghadar* movement, once received Rs. 1,000 from Sardar Kishan Singh. In consequence of his work during the freedom movement, Sardar Kishan Singh had to face 42 political trials, remained prisoner for two years, and was an internee for another two. He was a rare freedom fighter of the country who faced such a big number of trials.

Kishan Singh's was a struggling family dabbling in insurance, settling in a new village, cultivating tobacco, doing dairy work, etc. to improve their economic condition. Having spent 73 years of struggling life, Sardar Kishan Singh breathed his last on 30th May 1951 unsung and unwept.

#### SMT. VIDYAWATI (1886-1975)

How can the story of Bhagat Singh's forefathers be complete without the mention of his revered mother—Smt. Vidyawati? Surprisingly, she had snake-bites not only once or twice but four times, and yet she survived! She hailed from a Sikh family, and so did Kishan Singh. Yet their marriage was solemnized according to Arya Samaj rites in 1897. Throwing some more light on her life, Prof. M.J.S. Waraich, who had interviewed her in detail on several occasions, writes :

Born in a Sikh family, she was called 'Indo'. Her in-laws, being Arya Samajists, gave her the new identity—'Vidyawati'. Ironical as it may seem, she was totally unlettered, and was named *Vidyawati*—the educated! Her father-in-law (Sardar Arjun Singh) was bent upon arranging her stay in a boarding house at Jalandhar for her education. The child bride became so scared of the proposal that she suffered almost a nervous breakdown. Her mother, in order to rescue her from this predicament, arranged a *sanyasi* to teach her Hindi, and she learnt Punjabi at the village *Gurhvara*.<sup>8</sup>

Smt. Vidyawati came to live in Kishan Singh's house in 1900



at Banga village. Henceforth, it became her matrimonial home. Virtually speaking, it was more a hideout of absconding rebels than a traditional farmer's abode, to which she accustomed herself with the passage of time.

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# Illustrations







Bhagat Singh, just before his teen-age, in 1919





**Bhagat Singh, the sweet sixteen, in 1923**



**Bhagat Singh, in his confinement at Lahore  
in May-July 1927 (Age : 20 years)**



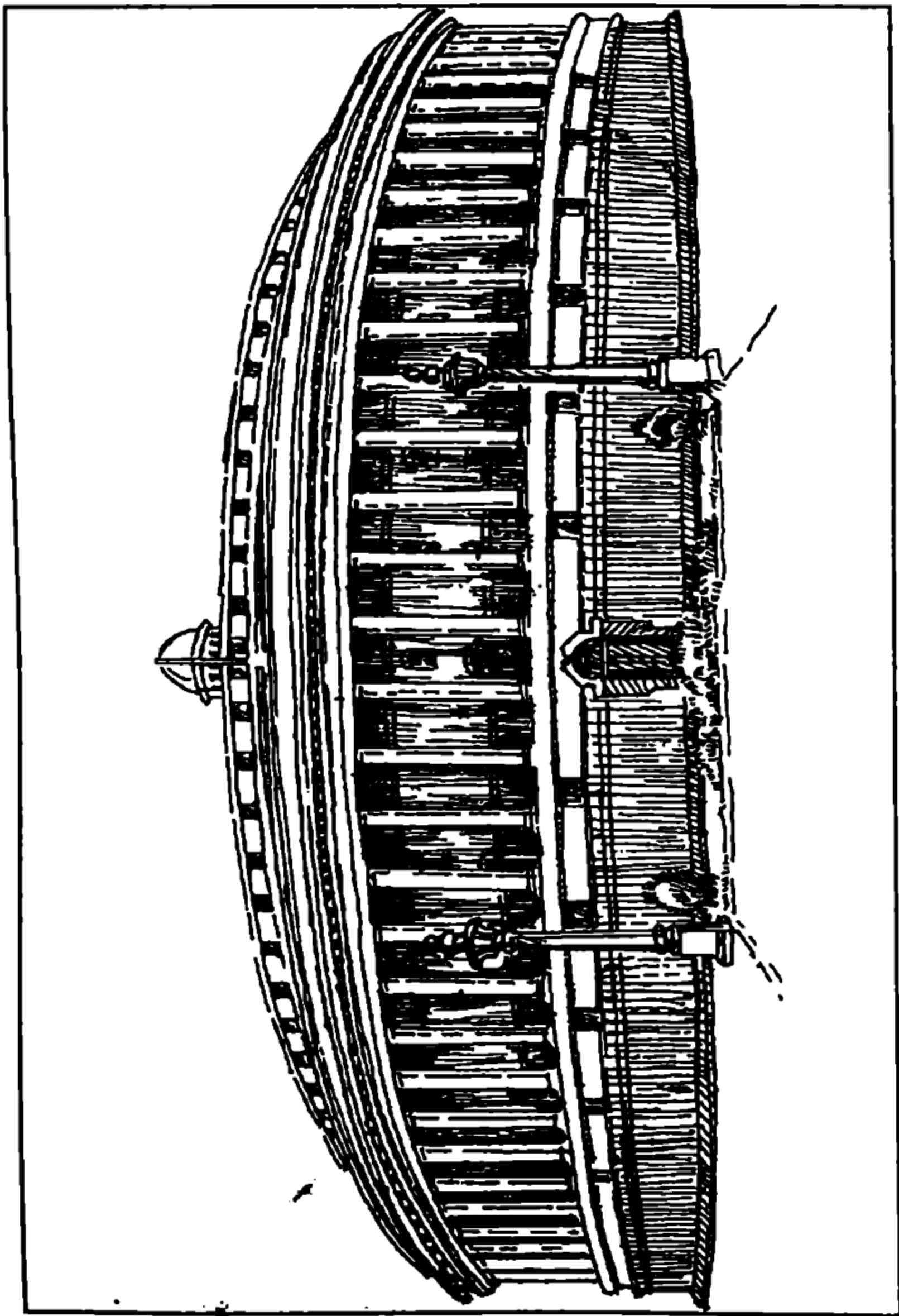


The latest available photograph of Bhagat Singh, dated 3rd April 1929, when he was twenty one and a half.



The District Police Office (Lahore) where Saunders was shot dead  
by Bhagat Singh & Rajguru on December 17, 1928.





Bhagat Singh and B.K. Dutt threw two bombs & the copies of a leaflet in the Central Legislative Assembly (New Delhi) on April 8, 1929.

The Assembly is now called the Lok Sabha or the lower house of Indian Parliament.

## EARLY LIFE

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The couple—Sardar Kishan Singh and Smt. Vidyawati—was blessed with six sons and three daughters in following order : Jagat Singh, Bhagat Singh, Bibi Amar Kaur, Kulbir Singh, Kultar Singh, Bibi Sumitra (Prakash Kaur), Bibi Shakuntla, Ranbir Singh and Rajendra Singh. According to family sources, Bhagat Singh was born on Saturday the 28th September 1907 at 9.00 a.m.<sup>1</sup> He was born at Banga village (also called Chak No.105,GB), Jaranwala tehsil, Lyallpur district (now Faisalabad, Pakistan). It is 250 kms. away from Lahore. However, the family belonged to Khatkar Kalan village (now in Nawanshahr district, Punjab). They had later shifted to Banga, because they were often in search of new ways and means of earning livelihood.

At the time of Bhagat Singh's birth, his father Sardar Kishan Singh and both uncles—Sardar Ajit Singh and Sardar Swaran Singh—were in jail due to their anti-British activities. It is a matter of chance that all the three patriotic brothers came out of British jails on or around Bhagat Singh's birth. For example, Kishan Singh and his youngest brother Swaran Singh were released on bail. Both the brothers reached home one or two days after the birth of Bhagat Singh. Almost at the same time, a telegram regarding the release of Ajit Singh, due to public pressure, was also received by the family from the Mandalay Jail. However, he was released on 11 November 1907. On the occasion of the release of her patriotic sons, the mother Sardarani Jai Kaur was delighted and befittingly uttered, "*Yah beta bhagon wala hai* or the new born is a lucky one." The first name or the nickname of the new born baby was thus '*Bhagonwala*', named by his grandmother Sardarni Jai Kaur. After sometime, the same '*Bhagonwala*' was formally named '*Bhagat Singh*', which means 'great devotee'.

In this family, the principles of both Sikhism and Arya Samaj



were observed respectfully. To cite an instance, being an Arya Samajist, the grandfather of Bhagat Singh—Sardar Arjun Singh—arranged a function where his two grandsons—Jagat Singh and Bhagat Singh—were to be decorated with *yajyopaveet* (sacred thread ceremony). On this occasion, the grandfather also declared that his grandsons were henceforth meant for the service of the country. When the '*mundan*' ceremony was to be performed, the barber was asked to clean their heads. But the grandmother Sardarani Jai Kaur, being a staunch devotee of Sikhism, asked her husband, "*Chaahe jo karo, par kesh mut katvao.*" And the grandfather of Bhagat Singh readily agreed.

Bhagat Singh was an average child. **During nights, he hardly ever came out of his house alone. He was afraid of darkness. Confirming this fact, his sister Bibi Amar Kaur states :** "*Main aur Bhagat Singh, donon hi bachpan mein, raat ke samay baahar jaane se darte the.*"<sup>2</sup>

If the father and uncles of Bhagat Singh were well-educated, how could he be uneducated? At the age of five, the child was enrolled in the District Board Primary School, Banga village, in 1913, and passed his fourth standard examination in 1917. Recollecting his school days at Banga village, the mother of Bhagat Singh—Smt. Vidyawati—said on 23 December 1966 in an interview to Prof. G.S. Deol :

At school, Bhagat Singh was a very lovable child. He was very quick in making friends. Being very popular in the school, his friends of the senior classes used to lift him on their shoulders and drop him at his residence.

Recalling the early days of Bhagat Singh when he had just joined the primary school, the mother further said the following words in an interview to another biographer of Bhagat Singh, Prof. M.J.S. Waraich :

On returning from the school, Bhagat Singh would ask his *chachi* (Harnam Kaur, w/o Ajit Singh), "Any letter from *Chacha ji*?" Observing the dejected expression on the face of his *chachi*, he would proclaim that upon growing up, he would make the English leave the country, and *chachaji* would be back.

Some of Bhagat Singh's schoolmates are still alive. During



the birth-centenary celebrations of Bhagat Singh, one of his great admirers Dr. S. Tarsem of Malerkotla paid his visit to the birth place of Bhagat Singh i.e. Banga village on 2 September 2007. In the words of Dr. Tarsem, "We met there a grand old man of 95 years, named Abdul Haq who had been the schoolmate of Bhagat Singh in 1916-17. Mian Haq was then in 1st standard and Bhagat Singh in IV standard."<sup>3</sup>

Before completing his village-schooling, Bhagat Singh's father Sardar Kishan Singh moved to Lahore for better prospects, and started living in Nawankot locality. Having passed IV standard examination from his village school, Bhagat Singh now shifted to the D.A.V. High School, Lahore in 1917. Coming over to Lahore as a student was indeed a turning point in the life of Bhagat Singh. He was the first Sikh lad of Punjab who got himself enrolled in a D.A.V. School, instead of Khalsa School. It all happened because in those days, the Khalsa schools used to perform prayers praising British empire.

During his schooling, Bhagat Singh was an average student. It is evident from a letter written by him to his grandfather on 22 July 1918, stating the result of only two subjects of the V class: "I have secured 110 and 68 marks in Sanskrit and English respectively out of 150 in each subject."<sup>4</sup> It means, he secured 74% marks in Sanskrit and only 45% in English. Secondly, he was not fond of sports. However, he used to participate in *Hawan* regularly. He was then a regular reciter of the *Gayatri Mantra*.

Sardar Kishan Singh got his son Bhagat Singh admitted to the National College, Lahore, in 1921. From here Bhagat Singh passed the F.A. or Intermediate examination in 1923 and got himself enrolled in the B.A. Part-I. Somehow, he could not become a graduate. During his college days, Bhagat Singh was not fond of sports, but of dramas and plays. He was a good actor. He was a prominent member of the College Dramatic Club. He had gained prominence amongst the students and the teachers, not only of his own college, but other local colleges too. He was quite impressive, because of his youthful physique and commanding voice. Besides, he was fond of singing and boating too.

Though Bhagat Singh had handsome physique and was blessed with numerous qualities, yet he totally lacked the dress-



sense. Confirming this fact, one of his close associates and classmates, Yashpal, writes :

Bhagat Singh often entered the class-room, having his hair loosely tied; wearing turban, hanging on both sides; putting on *khaddar* clothes, unclean and disproportionate to his body. He often attended the college with *lungi*, instead of *payjama*. Keeping his tall figure in view, one of our classmates, Sardar Jhanda Singh (later known as Sardar Jaswant Singh), used to compare him with '*bautta*', meaning camel!<sup>5</sup>

Recalling his first meeting with Bhagat Singh, his another friend Comrade Ajoy Ghosh expresses similar view in the following words :

I believe it was sometime in 1923 that I met Bhagat Singh. He was introduced to me by B.K. Dutt in Kanpur. Tall and thin, rather shabbily dressed, very quiet, he seemed a typical village-lad, lacking smartness and self-confidence. I did not think very highly of him and told Dutt so when he was alone.<sup>6</sup>

In the end, we may quote one more example. In an interview to some author, a few years before her death, Durga Bhabhi, who had closely watched Bhagat Singh's activities, recalls :

*Bhagat Singh ke kapre—maile aur phate, aur joote bhi jeern—sheern haute the. Sochati hoon ki yah vahee Bhagat tha, jisne ek baar to British samrajyawaad ki jare hila di thi.*<sup>7</sup>

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One may ask here how could a simple boy of rural background have become one of the best visionaries and revolutionaries of the country? If we look into the details of his life, we shall find different causes and factors responsible for it. Let us now elaborate them one by one at some length.

It is well-known that 'the family is the primary school of a child'. And Bhagat Singh's family was evidently the family of social workers and freedom fighters. The family-house was indeed a publishing-cum-distribution centre of patriotic literature. The entire atmosphere in the house resonated by the frequent visits of great leaders and thought-provoking discussions among the radical nationalists. It was quite probable that Bhagat Singh's role-model Shaheed Kartar Singh Sarabha (1896-1916), a young hero of the *Ghadar* Party, too could have paid a visit here. According to the judgement of the Special Tribunal, which tried the *Ghadarites* in 1915-16, "Bhagat Singh's father Sardar Kishan Singh contributed Rs. 1,000 to the *Ghadar* Party." It was then a princely sum by all accounts.

Shaping the future course of child Bhagat Singh's life was also due to the efforts of his grandfather Sardar Arjun Singh who was a man of many parts. Acknowledging this fact, Bhagat Singh's mother Smt. Vidyawati once remarked :

I fondly remember the attachment, love and care of my father-in-law (Sardar Arjun Singh) towards his grandchildren, especially Bhagat Singh, which resulted in all round development of their personality.<sup>1</sup>

It is true that the uncles of Bhagat Singh—Sardar Ajit Singh and Sardar Swaran Singh—could hardly spare any time, due to their national activities, to look after the child Bhagat Singh. But one thing is quite obvious that the child Bhagat Singh grew up on



the stories of exploits of his uncles.

Besides, the pitiable condition of his aunts—Harnam Kaur and Hukam Kaur—also left an indelible imprint on the tender mind of Bhagat Singh. Due to the atrocities of the British rule, one of his aunts became 'vidhwa' (widow) and another was neither *vidhwa* nor *sadhwa*. The child Bhagat Singh often saw both of his aunts weeping, and always tried to console them.

Briefly speaking, Bhagat Singh's father Kishan Singh and his uncles Ajit Singh and Swaran Singh were all freedom-fighters of national repute. His was in fact a patriotic family. Particularly, Sardar Ajit Singh's anti-British activities and sacrifices moved and inspired Bhagat Singh tremendously. In the eyes of Bhagat Singh, his uncle was a great rebel who left his country to fight for its freedom from outside. He praised his courage, self-sacrifice and dedication to freedom and held him in great esteem. According to Com. Sohan Singh Josh, a close associate of Bhagat Singh : "He talked about Ajit Singh to me several times, admitting his patriotic impact on him from teenage onwards."<sup>2</sup>

## II

Apart from the family atmosphere, there were many other factors which greatly influenced Bhagat Singh's future course of life. For example, the *Ghadar* movement left a deep imprint on his mind. When Bhagat Singh was merely nine years old, Sardar Kartar Singh Sarabha—a young hero of the *Ghadar* Party—was hanged on 16th November 1916 in the Lahore Central Jail, after the conviction in the First Lahore Conspiracy Case. *Shaheed* Sarabha was then hardly 20. Subsequently, the young *Shaheed* Sarabha became the forerunner of Bhagat Singh. Throwing some light on this aspect, a well-known biographer of Bhagat Singh, writes :

Kartar Singh Sarabha's ascending the gallows as a result of the judgement in the First Lahore Conspiracy Case in 1916...a supreme sacrifice for India's freedom by a lad of about 20 years...left yet another deep impression on Bhagat Singh's mind. He was only nine years old, and that impression changed his way of thinking and outlook towards life.

The impact of Shaheed Kartar Singh Sarabha's heroism and sacrifice on Bhagat Singh can also be judged from the fact, that when the latter was arrested (1927), a photograph of Shaheed Kartar Singh was recovered from him. He always carried Sarabha's photo in his pocket and derived great inspiration from it. Moreover, he used to show that photograph to his mother and say, "Dear mother, this is my hero, friend and companion."<sup>3</sup>

Bhagat Singh often recited the following poem which was always remembered by Sarabha :

*Seva desh di, jindariye bari aukhi;  
galan karnian dher sukhalian ne;  
jinhan desh-seva vich pair paya;  
unhan lukh musibtan jhallian ne.*

(It is very easy to talk, but to serve one's motherland in the real sense, is extremely difficult, O my little soul! Those, who took upon themselves the task of serving their motherland, had to undergo lacs of life's pangs and agonies).

Following the footsteps of his forerunner, Bhagat Singh was also hanged in the same Lahore Central Jail on 23 March 1931 after the conviction of Second Lahore Conspiracy Case. Like his hero, Bhagat Singh also kissed the gallows heroically at the very young age of 23.

To what extent Bhagat Singh was influenced by Sarabha has rightly been illustrated by a great Ghadarite and a seasoned freedom fighter of the country—*Baba Sohan Singh Bhakna*. Being a co-prisoner of Bhagat Singh in the Lahore Central Jail, the *Baba* recalls :

Somehow myself and Bhagat Singh met often and held discussions. Once, in a lighter vein, I asked Bhagat Singh, "You are so young, educated and from a rich family, and your age is of fun and frolic; then how come you got entangled in all this?" "To which Bhagat Singh replied with a mischievous smile, "In fact the blame for this lies on you and your comrades." "How?" said I. He replied, "Had the ones like Kartar Singh and his associates not faced the gallows with a smile and



others like you had not been confined in the veritable hell, the Cellular Jail, may be I would not have been here." Whenever I met him, I always saw in him the same traits as Sarabha had in him. Just another Sarabha!<sup>4</sup>

### III

One of the most important factors which changed the history of India's struggle for freedom was the Jallianwala Bagh (Amritsar) Tragedy of 13 April 1919. As a result of the atrocities committed by General R.E.H. Dyer, nearly 1,200 innocent people were killed and 2,000 were injured. Commenting on the heinous crime done by the Raj, Gandhi once rightly said, "It was Plassey which laid the foundation of the British rule in India, and it is the Jallianwala Bagh which has shaken it."

Like many of his fellow-countrymen, Bhagat Singh was also shocked to know of it. He was then hardly 12. How did this horrible incident stir the mind, body and soul of the boy, has nicely been mentioned in the following words by Prof. M.J.S. Waraich—a close associate of Bhagat Singh's family, apart from being his biographer :

On the very day of 13th April, Bhagat Singh heard about the horrifying massacre. Hundred of Lahorites who were in Amritsar on the fateful day came back with bone-chilling accounts of the massacre. That night he could not sleep. On the morning of 14th April, Bhagat Singh left his home near Lahore (since 1917, Kishan Singh had shifted to village 'Khasarian' on the outskirts of Lahore and set up a farm and dairy there) for school. But he headed for the railway station, and boarded the first train to Amritsar.

The young Sikh boy, stopped at the stinking, blood soaked open space with tell-tale signs of inhuman massacre that had taken place there just the previous day. From the pocket of his *pyjama*, he took out a glass bottle which he had brought to carry the blood-soaked soil back with him. He tried digging, but the soil had hardened. He picked up a sharp-edged brick

and dug out the soil. Having filled the bottle, he stared at it. His eyes welled up with unshed tears. With unsure steps, he left the spot. What drove him to carry the glass container to bring back the blood soaked soil, is difficult to guess. Perhaps, he needed the soil as a painful reminder of the killing of innocent people—the pain that had to be avenged! On reaching home, he plucked some flowers and placed them reverentially around the container. This ritual continued for many days.<sup>5</sup>

During his trial, Bhagat Singh emphatically said that Gen. Dyer had killed hundreds of innocent persons, but was never put on trial; he was, on the contrary, given lacs of rupees as a reward by his countrymen. Historically speaking, apart from many unknown persons, there were two well-known promising boys of the day—Udham Singh and Bhagat Singh—who took a silent vow to avenge the heinous crime committed by the British, and what they pledged that they did!

#### IV

The impact of National College (Lahore) on the personality of Bhagat Singh was special one. He joined it in 1921, and discontinued his regular studies in 1924. However, he used to visit it off and on till 1927. Bhagat Singh's well-known contemporaries—Sukhdev, Bhagwati Charan Vohra, Yash Pal, Jai Dev Gupta and Ram Krishan—were his fellow-students in the National College. The time spent in the National College, was probably the most significant time of Bhagat Singh's formative period.

The National College, also known as the *Tilak School of Politics*, was started in Lahore in 1921. It was established as a follow up of the Non-cooperation Movement launched by Mahatma Gandhi in the wake of its call to students to boycott and leave the schools and colleges which were being run under the direct or indirect control of the British Government. The National College was affiliated to the *Punjab Qaumi Vidyapeeth*, founded by the nationalists like Lala Lajpat Rai and Bhai Parmanand. Its founder-Principal was a great patriot of the day, Acharya Jugal Kishore,



who had just returned from England after completing his studies. He remained its Principal from 1921 to 1925. Later on, he became the Vice-Chancellor of Lucknow University.

The college functioned in the Bradlaugh Hall\*, the headquarters of the Punjab Provincial Congress Committee. The number of enrolled students was around two hundred. In the beginning, Lala Lajpat Rai himself had taught the students. Though Bhagat Singh was impressed by all the faculty members, yet the following three need special mention.

#### I. BHAI PARMANAND (1874-1947)

In 1912, Bhai Parmanand was deputed by the *Arya Samaj* to go abroad to spread Vedic religion. During the visit, he came in contact with the *Ghadarites*. He also wrote a book on the history of India which became undigestible to the Government of India. When he returned to India, the government proscribed his book. The Governor of Punjab got him implicated in the First Lahore Conspiracy Case, and he was awarded 'capital punishment' in 1915. Somehow, it was converted to life sentence and he was sent to Andamans from where he was released after five years i.e. in 1920. When the National College, affiliated to the *Punjab Quami Vidyapeeth*, was founded in 1921 Bhai Parmanand, M.A., was appointed its Chancellor. He also taught the history of Europe and India at the National College where Bhagat Singh and other youngmen were the students. The history of Europe that Bhai Parmanand used to teach was nothing but the history of wars, revolutions and bloodshed. Virtually speaking, Bhai Parmanand was not only a teacher of history, but a history in himself, too.

All the students of the National Colleges were young men who had left their government-aided schools/colleges with a smile on the appeal of Mahatma Gandhi. When these students learnt about the events of European history, as taught by Bhai Parmanand,

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\*The hall was named after a great English friend of India—Charles Bradlaugh who died on January 30, 1891. Indians in London gratefully attended his funeral, and young Gandhi was one of them. The foundation-stone of the Hall was laid by Surendranath Banerjea on 30 October 1900.

they used to grow sceptical how Gandhi could claim that he would secure India's independence through peaceful and non-violent means when other countries of the world had to resort to arms and violence to shake off the bridle of slavery. The students—particularly Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev, Yashpal, etc.—often asked themselves the question, was not Gandhi building castles in the air?

## II. PRINCIPAL CHHABIL DAS (1900-1988)

A well-known educationist and great nationalist of the day, Lala Chhabil Das first joined the *Lok Sewak Mandal* of Lala Lajpat Rai, then the National College in 1924 as a teacher of English. Next year, on the retirement of Principal Acharya Jugal Kishore, he was elevated to the post of Principal. He was a rare faculty-member of the college who wrote a number of inspiring pamphlets and booklets. One of his writings titled '*Chingarian*' was so popular that it continued to be published right till 1947 and even afterwards. His autobiography, entitled *Meri Inquilabi Yatra*, is still quite popular.

Bhagat Singh was closely associated with Principal Chhabil Das. He was a rare teacher of the college with whom Bhagat Singh frankly shared his personal views. Bhagat Singh was greatly influenced by the writings and lectures of Principal Chhabil Das.

## III. PROF. JAICHANDRA VIDYALANKAR

Prof. Jaichandra Vidyalkar played a vital role in making Bhagat Singh, a revolutionary nationalist. It was he who became a link among the old revolutionaries and the students of National College like Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev and others. It was at his residence in Lahore where Bhagat Singh happened to meet for the first time in 1922 a pioneer leader of the revolutionary movement i.e. Sachindra Nath Sanyal. It was indeed a memorable day in the formative period of Bhagat Singh's life.

Prof. Jaichandra Vidyalkar was a graduate of *Gurukul Kangri*. He was associated with the National College since its inception. He used to teach ancient and modern history of India. He had also written two books on Indian history, based on his research work.



The curriculum included the Rowlatt Committee Report and the Non-cooperation movement. Whenever, the details of the Rowlatt Committee Report were discussed by Prof. Jaichandra Vidyalankar in the classroom, the blood of the students started boiling, and they were compelled to imbibe in them a feeling of hatred for the foreign rule. Secondly, Prof. Jaichandra Vidyalankar would analyse the Non-cooperation movement in the light of the repressive policy of the British. As a result, it used to become patently clear that the philosophy of peaceful *satyagraha* was anti-revolutionary which taught the people not to hate but to bear repression by the enemy without retaliating. This kind of hypothesis also helped his students—like Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev and others—to become the revolutionary nationalists.

## (b)

The National College, Lahore, was that kind of educational institution which generally produced patriots, especially the revolutionary nationalists like Shaheed-e-Azam Bhagat Singh, Shaheed Sukhdev, Shaheed Bhagwati Charan Vohra, Yash Pal and many more. Probably, there was hardly any college in the country which could boast of producing such a good number of *shaheeds* or martyrs. It was indeed the 'nursery of revolutionaries'. Now the question arises, what were those causes which led the college to be so?

First of all, the college was blessed with fiery faculty-members, including the names of Acharya Jugal Kishore, Bhai Parmanand, Jaichandra Vidyalankar, Lala Chhabil Das, Udai Shanker Bhatt (a renowned Hindi scholar), etc. They were not only masters of their subjects, but also the true lovers of their beloved country. **They always inspired their students to serve the country rather than hankering after government jobs.** The exposure of the students to the lectures of their learned professors gave them a first-hand feel of the challenges before the country. Furthermore, the teachers created curiosity among them and infused among their pupils the art to judge everything on the basis of logic, rather than accepting it with blind faith.

Regular 'debate' was also a special feature of the college.

Throwing some light on this important aspect of the National College, its Principal—Lala Chhabil Das—writes:

Education at the National College was quite different from that of other colleges. History, Economics and Politics were the subjects taught there. Although education was imparted through the medium of Hindi or Hindustani, students were also taught English because all the books were available only in English. With a view to equipping the students with practical knowledge, debates had been made a regular feature from the beginning. Although there was adequate arrangement for teaching in the various branches of humanities i.e. History, Economics and Political Science along with Natural Sciences; yet, it was History which gripped the atmosphere of the college and it was the main subject of discussion.<sup>6</sup>

Besides, the details of subjects, books, syllabi, etc. were framed in such a way so that it would help the students to identify themselves with the current national issues. Particularly, while teaching History, special emphasis was made on the socio-cultural changes and the liberation movements having taken place in different countries of the world. What efforts had been made so far for attaining India's freedom, were also deliberately highlighted. Here, the students were basically prepared not to pass some formal exams, but to be the true servants of the country.

In a nutshell, the history of India's struggle for freedom, without due mention of the National College (Lahore), is incomplete. Acknowledging it as a great centre of revolutionary movement, a prominent revolutionary of the day, Durga Bhabhi, proudly remarks :

The National College was indeed a nursery of revolutionary nationalists. Regrettably, five members of our revolutionary party (Hindustan Socialist Republican Association) turned to be 'approvers' during the Second Lahore Conspiracy Case. But, none of the five had ever been a student of the National College!<sup>7</sup>

Keeping in view the historical significance of the National College and its relevance in the present context of the country,



which is even today in the grip of poverty and exploitation, we can thus wish that India still needs a good number of such colleges throughout the country! *Kaash ki aaj bhi Bharat mein aise college hote!*

## V

A close associate of Rash Bihari Bose, a leading member of the *Anushilan Samiti* and the founder member of the Hindustan Revolutionary Association—Sachindra Nath Sanyal (1893-1943)—was confined in Andamans from 1915 to 1919. He was one of those who influenced the future course of Bhagat Singh's life greatly. Mr. Sanyal first came into contact with Prof. Jaichandra Vidyalankar, then with Bhagat Singh and other youngmen of Punjab. Apprising us with this fact, Mr. Sanyal writes in his autobiography :

I had gone to Fategarh with Shri Chhedilal in connection with organisational work. Suddently, I saw a young man sitting and reading a book in a room with open doors. We learnt from him that his sister Shrimati Parwati Devi was serving a two year sentence in the Fategarh jail for making a seditious speech during the Non-cooperation movement. We also learnt that he was a teacher in the prestigious National College of Lala Lajpat Rai at Lahore, that his name was Jaichandra Vidyalankar. We also had a long discussion about violence and non-violence, Mahatma Gandhi's policy and the revolutionary movement.

When Jaichandra came to know that I had been confined in the Andamans jail for four years, he felt very much attracted to me. In this way Jaichandraji joined our party. He invited us to Lahore where we stayed as guests in his house. In Lahore I became acquainted with some young men. Among them, one name was of Bhagat Singh. All of them were students of the Tilak School of Politics of Lala Lajpat Rai. I had long talks with these young men separately. I particularly emphasised before them that India could not become independent except through armed struggle and that armed struggle

was definitely possible and I also narrated to them the history of the bygone revolutionary era and, thereafter, I initiated them in the revolutionary path.<sup>8</sup>

Henceforth, Sachindranath Sanyal started meeting Bhagat Singh during his visits of Punjab, especially Lahore. How much the young boy was impressed by the seasoned revolutionary, is obvious from the words of Sanyal himself :

As and when I went to Lahore, I used to stay with Prof. Jaichandra Vidyalkar. During one of my visits, I came to know that Sardar Gurmukh Singh (*Ghadri Baba*, and hero of Komagata Maru Incident, 1914-15), alongwith his Sikh friends, was trying to form a separate revolutionary party. One of its aims was to check the Sikh youths from becoming the members of any non-Sikh revolutionary party. So, he also tried to get our true companion Bhagat Singh dissociated from our party. He wanted to make Bhagat Singh a member of his party. He always tried to convince Bhagat Singh, asking : *Tum Bengalion ke pher mein mut paro, inke pher mein paroge to 'Phansi' par lataq jayoge, aur qaam kuchh bhi nahin kar payoge.*

What-so-ever Gurmukh Singhji asked Bhagat Singh that was conveyed to us by himself. In spite of the best efforts of Gurmukh Singh, Bhagat Singh never dissociated himself from us.<sup>9</sup>

Sachindranath Sanyal thus could also be called the political guru of Bhagat Singh. In making Bhagat Singh a staunch revolutionary, Mr. Sanyal had played his own role. Though Sanyal was himself married, yet he convinced Bhagat Singh not to get married.

## VI

There was only one Indian woman who, keeping herself abroad especially in France, fought against British Imperialism, adopting revolutionary methods. Her name was Madame Bhikai Cama (1861-1936), and she was popularly known the 'Mother of Revolution'. How the young Bhagat Singh was impressed by her deeds, has also been observed by one of the biographers of Bhagat Singh—Omesh Saigal—in the following words :



Madame Cama tremendously influenced the mind of Bhagat Singh. A great orator, she roared like a lioness and shouted away the British CID officials who were literally petrified at the mere mention of her name. Popularly known as 'Mother of Revolution', she asked her countrymen to overthrow the foreign rule: "Learn to shoot straight, because the day is not far when you will be called upon to shoot the English out of the land which we love so passionately." This is exactly what Bhagat Singh did when he grew up.<sup>10</sup>

## VII

Bhagat Singh was influenced not only by the Indian revolutionaries, but of the world, too. Among them, the most important name seems to be of a French anarchist—Edouard Marie Vaillant. He was hanged in 1894 at Paris. The martyr Vaillant was the first man in the world history who dropped a bomb in the Paris Chamber of Deputies, to make the deaf hear.

Numerous mercy appeals were submitted to the Jury President Mr. Quarnett, but in vain. Subsequently, the President was assassinated by an Italian youth with the help of a dagger. Surprisingly, the wooden-grip of the assassin's dagger bore the very name of the martyr Vaillant.

One of the close associates of Bhagat Singh—Raja Ram Shastri, the librarian of Dwarka Das Library, Lahore—also confirms the impact of Vaillant on Bhagat Singh, stating: "Bhagat Singh was always influenced by those patriots of the world who propagated their views by their martyrdom." Mr. Shastri further states :

When Bhagat Singh read the statement of Vaillant given in the French Parliament, for the first time in a book, he got extremely delighted. He borrowed the book repeatedly. He noted it down in his notebook. He learnt it by heart.<sup>11</sup>

To make the deaf hear, what Vaillant did in 1894 in French Parliament that was repeated by Bhagat Singh on 8 April 1929 in Indian Parliament. Bhagat Singh and B.K. Dutt, following the dropping of two bombs, threw leaflets in the Hall of the

Central Legislative Assembly in order to acquaint the members directly and the people indirectly of their mission. The leaflet also contained the words, "It takes a loud voice to make the deaf hear, with these immortal words uttered on a similar occasion by Vaillant, a French anarchist martyr, do we strongly justify this action of ours."

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## 'NO' TO MARRIAGE

It is evident from the world history that most of the revolutionaries could not have many years of life at their disposal. Similarly, Bhagat Singh was just 23 at the time of his martyrdom on 23 March 1931 and the period of his active life was merely seven years i.e. from 1924 to 1931\*.

By the age of 16, Bhagat Singh had taken a vow to live, to work and to die for the cause of his beloved nation. He also knew it well that his days were numbered. To achieve his mission speedily, he first decided not to get married. As his family had already two aunts as virtual widows, he was determined not to add another widow to his family.

However, the boy Bhagat Singh was pressurised for marriage by the elders of his family, particularly the grandmother Sardarni Jai Kaur and the father Sardar Kishan Singh. 'How did Bhagat Singh resist the pressure?, and what were his views about the question of marriage'—is an interesting chapter of his biography.

Bhagat Singh's stay in the National College (Lahore) was cut short abruptly as he left for Kanpur in 1923. Having passed the Intermediate, he was then the student of B.A.-I. As his elder brother Jagat Singh had died untimely, this was in the wake of family's eagerness to get him married, being the eldest son of Sardar Kishan Singh. A seasoned revolutionary of the day Sachindra Nath Sanyal had written in his autobiography—the *Bandi Jeevan*—that he was in close contact with Bhagat Singh those days in connection with raising of a new revolutionary party, which later materialised in the shape of *Hindustan Republican Association* (H.R.A.). Not only that, he was banking upon Bhagat Singh as his

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\*For details of Bhagat Singh's life-journey, please see Appendix-II, entitled 'Chronology'.

associate while recruiting youngmen from the Punjab for the H.R.A. Mr. Sanyal also narrates his version of Bhagat Singh's leaving his family in the *Bandi Jeevan*:

While talking to Bhagat Singh I learnt that his father Sardar Kishan Singh was preparing to get him married. I felt, that since I had committed a blunder by getting married, I must tell Bhagat Singh that if he gets married he will not be able to participate in the revolutionary activities with all his heart and soul. Bhagat Singh himself didn't want to get married. It was also my principle to make sure the extent to which every member could go when it came to sacrificing. We regarded only that person suitable for the party who was ever ready to leave his home and to jump into his field of work. With the same purpose in mind, I asked Bhagat Singh, "Are you ready to quit home? In case you get married, you would not be expected to work at a higher level in future. And in case you stay at home, your family will get you married. I don't want that you should get married. That is why I desire that you should leave home and stay where I advise you to stay." Bhagat Singh agreed to do so. Following my talks, Bhagat Singh went to Uttar Pradesh, initially he stayed with Mani Lal Avasthi at Kanpur.<sup>1</sup>

On being asked why he did not want to get married, Bhagat Singh told Jaidev Gupta, his classmate and friend, that he had chosen a path which was full of many possibilities. His two uncles had gone that way and they had left two widows. Should he also leave another widow?

Surprisingly, Bhagat Singh was a rare student of the day who persuaded even his teachers not to get married. For instance, Principal Chhabil Das of National College (Lahore) has left for us an account of how when he was to get married, Bhagat Singh came and reproached him on getting married:

Besides being my student, I had good personal relations with him. When Bhagat Singh heard that I was going to be married, he insisted that I should not marry. I said, if I could get a really good life companion, who,



instead of retarding my activities, would invigorate them, what would be your view? In the same breath I quoted three concrete examples of the wives of Sun Yat Sen, Lenin and Karl Marx. At this Bhagat Singh replied, *Guriji* who can vanquish you in any argument.<sup>2</sup>

One of his close associates Raja Ram Shastri once asked Bhagat Singh, "Would you ever be busy in revolutionary activities or spare your moments to think over marriage?" Bhagat Singh said: "One can enjoy the true married life, only in the atmosphere of freedom." He further remarked, "*...main bhi naujawan hoon. Meri ragon mein bhi garm khoon bahta hai. Mere mun mein bhi prem ki bhavnayen zor mara karati hain. Par ve itani bahwati nahin ki mujhe kartavya-vimukh kar sake.*"<sup>3</sup>

One of his batch-mates of National College, Yashpal, claims that Bhagat Singh loved a girl of some other college of Lahore.<sup>4</sup> But it does not seem to be true. To counter the said claim of Yashpal, we may cite here the following incident:

In the words of Raja Ram Shastri, the librarian of Dwarka Das Library, "There was a very attractive photo of some lover and beloved in some magazine. It was somehow torn out by Bhagat Singh concealingly." When I caught the thief (Bhagat Singh), I asked him tauntingly, "You never fell in love, even then you have been attracted by the photo to such an extent that you got it separated from the magazine. How is it so? What Bhagat Singh then said, is, "*Bhai, kisi ke 'prem-jaal' mein phansna ek baat hai, aur kalakaar ki kala ko pasand karna doosari baat hai.*"<sup>5</sup>

To what extent Bhagat Singh was determined not to get married, may also be endorsed by one more example. In the words of Ms. Virendra Sindhu, the niece of Bhagat Singh :

Once, the mother of Bhagat Singh—Smt. Vidyawati—fell seriously ill, and her chances of survival were at stake. Bhagat Singh then asked his sister Bibi Amar Kaur, "If the mother dies, I won't get married, but the father may be re-married!"<sup>6</sup>

Ironically speaking, the bride of Bhagat Singh could not be any beautiful girl of the day, but the 'death' in itself which he

often conveyed to his nears and dears, especially the mother. Once, Chandra Shekhar Azad and Bhagat Singh were taking a stroll in the university campus of Lahore. As soon as they came across some beautiful girl-students of the campus, Azad, holding Bhagat Singh's hand, whispered :

“What a handsome my young Ranjit (Bhagat Singh) is! Is there any ‘*veerputri*’ who is ready to marry him?” Thereupon, Bhagat Singh said, “*Panditji*, it can only be solmenised by you!” Here the metaphorical meaning of ‘marriage’ was embracing the death as bride!<sup>7</sup>

Bhagat Singh was a rare youth of the day, who, being fully aware of the beauty of love in one's life, had to choose the path of death at the prime of his age. Endorsing this fact, his fast friend—Bejoy Kumar Sinha—recalls an incident of 1 April 1929 which took place only a week before the dropping of bombs in the Assembly :

I and Bhagat Singh were watching a group of young boys and girls playing happily in a park of Delhi. Bhagat Singh then pensively remarked, “What a tragedy that we the youngmen, who are so conscious of the beauty of human life, have to choose to die than to live, because of the prevailing unjust socio-political system!”<sup>8</sup>

In a nutshell, Bhagat Singh concluded that he, being married, could not serve his beloved country wholeheartedly. When he failed to convince his father of his determination not to marry, he left his home. While leaving, probably in August 1923, he had left behind the following letter in his father's office drawer at Lahore:

Respected Father, my life has been committed to a noble cause—the cause of the freedom of India. For that reason, **comforts and worldly desires have no attraction in my life.**

You might remember at the time of my sacred thread ceremony, when I was quite young, *Bapu ji* (grandfather) had declared that I was being pledged for the service of the country. I am, therefore, honouring the pledge of that time. I hope you will excuse me.<sup>9</sup>



Just see the Irony, though Bhagat Singh was unmarried, yet he had to project himself as a 'married person' twice in his life. Firstly, he escaped from Lahore to Calcutta on 21 December 1928, following the Saunders' murder, in the guise of a married person, accompanied by Durga Bhabhi and the child Shachindra (the wife and son of Bhagwati Charan Vohara), posing to be his wife and son. How Durga Bhabhi said 'yes' to this unexpected proposal has been duly mentioned in the *The Tribune*, dated 17 December 1995, based on the discussion between Prof. Hazara Singh and Durga Bhabhi herself:

Sukhdev visited Durga Bhabhi on 19 December 1928 to ascertain if she could travel with a member of the H.S.R.A., not known to her. When she agreed readily, Sukhdev elaborated his query in a hesitating tone 'posing to be his wife'. He was doubtful whether a Hindu woman, who looked upon her husband as her 'god', would accept the suggestion. She said that she was prepared to discard all traditional beliefs for the sake of the party and the motherland.

There was one more occasion when Bhagat Singh was introduced as a married person by his associate to a landlady while renting a house in Delhi. To implement the plan of dropping bombs in the Central Assembly, a house was required for the party members. How Bhagat Singh was shown as a married person to the landlady, has been nicely elaborated by Jai Dev Kapoor as under :

I was assigned the duty of arranging a house at Delhi. As it is very common for the house-owners to insist upon their tenant being married, I had to tell the landlady (Mrs. Mukandi) that Bhagat Singh was my elder brother, had just got married and within a few days would bring *bhabhi*.

After the explosion of bombs in the Assembly by Bhagat Singh on 8 April 1929, I was lying dejected on the bed that night, the old landlady then asked me, "Where is your brother?" Thereupon, I said, "He has gone to fetch his wife!"<sup>10</sup>

In a way, Jai Dev Kapoor rightly said to the landlady that

'Bhagat Singh had gone to fetch his wife!' Bhagat Singh often innocently told his revered mother Smt. Vidyawati, "Mother, you kindly wait for some time, I shall bring one day an excellent 'bahu' for you", by which probably he meant—'Azaadi'.

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## EARLY ACTIVITIES

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It is true that the question of Bhagat Singh's marriage was decided for good by 1924 as the family elders had yielded before his determination. But the more important question is, what were his actions and activities which led him to be known as a great revolutionary of the country? Let us now, first of all, elaborate his early activities. However, his later actions like the murder of Saunders and the dropping of bombs in the Assembly shall be discussed in separate chapters.

### I

While at school, Bhagat Singh started taking keen interest in national affairs. The first such example seems to be of the Jallianwala Bagh Tragedy which occurred on the *Baisakhi* festival, 13 April 1919. Another important incident happened in 1920-21 when Mahatma Gandhi launched the Non-cooperation Movement. Bhagat Singh was then studying in 9th standard in the D.A.V. School of Lahore.

Gradually, the movement started blooming and so opened the petals of Bhagat Singh's mind. Boys and girls were asked to boycott the government and government-aided schools and colleges. He was glad to leave the school. He joined processions, that were a part of the movement. He collected foreign clothes and made a bonfire of them. The slogans of the movement—like *Hindu-Muslim Ekta Zindabad*, *Gandhi Ki Jai*, etc.—also excited him.<sup>1</sup>

### II

In the annals of the history of India's struggle for freedom, Sikhs' struggle for democratic control of historic shrines i.e. *gurdwaras* became a part of the national movement. It acquired

this complexion, primarily because the government backed the corrupt and debauch priests, known as *mahants*, to the hilt, whom the Sikh community considered as impostors.

There were different phases of the reform movement stretching from 1921 to 1925. The first one related to the birth place of Guru Nanak Dev at Nankana Sahib, District Sheikhpura (now in Pakistan). The ghastly killings perpetrated on peaceful pilgrims by the *mahants* while they entered the *Gurdwara* peacefully and unarmed to pay obeisance at the shrine on 20 February 1921, shook the conscience of the nation. More than one hundred pilgrims were killed and their chopped bodies were burnt by sprinkling kerosine over them. This heinous act was committed by hiring ruthless professional criminals.

The fourteen year old Bhagat Singh visited the site on the way to his village and attended a conference there on 5<sup>th</sup> March 1921. He also took along the calendar, then published under much religious fervour. Many people among Sikhs in Punjab took to black turbans as a mark of protest. Bhagat Singh too was not to be left behind, and he also did likewise.<sup>2</sup> Bhagat Singh perceived an identity between the massacre of Jallianwala Bagh and Nankana Sahib, despite their distinct historical background.

Nabha was the only State which officially joined the rest of Sikh community to observe Nankana Sahib firing day as 'Black Day'. The conduct of Maharaja of Nabha, Ripudaman Singh, who, in sharp contrast to the spineless fraternity of the Indian princes, had dared to act firmly and boldly in public interest more than once. During his two year's stint in the Legislative Council as Crown Prince, Ripudaman Singh had done enough to earn the wrath of the alien rulers.

Hence the alien rulers were waiting for an excuse to oust him. The excuse was provided by the inter-dynastical clash of Patiala and Nabha States. To cap it all, the British troops took control of the palace of Nabha on 8 June 1923. And the Maharaja was deposed and exiled from his state.

Since the Maharaja was popular both among his people as well as among the freedom lovers, it was bound to evoke protest. On 5 August 1923, *Shromani Gurdwara Committee*, the leading Sikh body, in its meeting passed a resolution calling upon the Sikh



community to observe 9<sup>th</sup> September as 'Nabha Day' by holding congregations, continuous recitations of the Holy *Granth Sahib* and by passing protest resolutions. The final catalyst came on 14 September when obeying the order of the State Administrator William Johnston, armed police forced their entry into the historic Gurdawa at Jaito (now in Faridkot District) to disrupt the continuous recitation, '*Akhand Path*' of the Holy Granth, and from among the congregation arrested one and all. Even the person actually performing the recitation ritual was not spared. This was deemed as the most gross insult to the Sikh traditions and values. Thus a purely political issue acquired religious complexion, which is historically known as *Jaito Morcha*. It was also marked by the arrest of Pt. Jawahar Lal Nehru from 19 September to 6 October 1923.

The agitation was centrally controlled from the holy shrine *Akal Takht* of the Golden Temple, Amritsar. Batches of unarmed and peaceful agitators were directed to reach the *Jaito Gurdwara* and to resume religious recitation. They were fired at, beaten up and lathi charged. Sikhs from all over the country, and also from abroad participated. Each *jatha* (batch) consisted of 500 volunteers.

One such *Shaheedi Jatha* had to pass through Kishan Singh's village Banga in the second week of April 1924. Jathedar Kartar Singh and Jwala Singh had come to Kishan Singh at Lahore and requested him to arrange a welcome to the *jatha*. Although Kishan Singh was not an Akali himself, yet he had sympathy for the Akali movement, and he had also influence in his village. But he had to visit Bombay for insurance work. So he entrusted the work of welcoming the *jatha* to his son Bhagat Singh.

But on the other hand, the *Jagirdar* of that area, *Sardar Bahadur Dilbagh Singh* was pro-government. In addition to holding the title of *Sardar Bahadur*, he was also a first class honorary magistrate. He decreed by drum beat that no one should welcome the *jatha*, nor should any one offer anything to the *jatha*. He also ordered the removal of buckets from wells in order to prevent the members of *jatha* from drawing water from wells to drink. It is perhaps relevant to mention here that *Sardar Bahadur Dilbagh Singh* was a close relative of Bhagat Singh. He was the son



of Sardar Surjan Singh, the elder brother of Bhagat Singh's grandfather Sardar Arjun Singh. It means, Dilbag Singh was the 'uncle' of Bhagat Singh.

Surjan Singh and Arjun Singh had both participated as delegates in the Congress session held in Lahore in 1893 under the presidentship of Dadabhai Naoroji. Subsequently, Surjan Singh had become pro-government and his son Dilbag Singh was decorated with the title of *Sardar Bahadur* and was made a first class magistrate as a reward. The police was at his disposal. As such, the entire village of Banga was in fear of him. It was a very crucial confrontation. The villagers did not know Bhagat Singh much as he had been out of the village most of the time. Yet he was determined to discharge the responsibility that he was entrusted by his revered father Sardar Kishan Singh.

Now Bhagat Singh reached the village with some of his friends. By then he had some experience of carrying out public work. Gradually, he dispelled the fear of the people of his native village and made arrangements for the supply of milk, bread, vegetables, etc. to the *jatha*. *Sardar Bahadur* Dilbag Singh was relaxing in belief that he had set the police to do their job. He and the police did not come to know of all the secret arrangements made by Bhagat Singh and his party. On the appointed day, the *jatha* arrived and halted at a place outside the village—close to a sugarcane field. Bhagat Singh and his comrades were hiding in sugarcane fields. Milk, vegetables and bread had already been transported to sugarcane fields at night, and were duly served to the members of *jatha*. The peasants of a nearby Roda village had also given a helping hand in this operation. Thereupon, Bhagat Singh and his comrades set up fireworks to mark the welcome given to the *jatha*. The fireworks attracted the people who gathered there in good numbers. Bhagat Singh then delivered a speech which moved the audience greatly. The focus of his speech was on the sacrifices made by a Bengali revolutionary Shaheed Gopinath Saha\*. One of the *mirasis* of Banga village later related how he had wept after listening to the moving speech of Bhagat Singh.

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\*He fired at a notorious police inspector. He was badly tortured in jail, and went to the gallows on 1 March 1924 in the Alipur Jail with a smile on his face.



The *jatha* was indeed given a memorable farewell, and those in the *jatha* went away singing, "*Laaj rakh lee, laaj rake lee; Bhagat Singh pyare ne laaj rahe lee* (Our darling Bhagat Singh has saved our honour)."<sup>3</sup>

It was a big shock for the sycophant—Sardar Bahadur Dilbagh Singh. What he could do was to get a 'warrant of arrest' issued against Bhagat Singh. Just see the irony, Bhagat Singh and Dilbag Singh were the members of same lineage of great soul Sardar Fateh Singh. One was fighting against the enemy of the country, but the other was against the lover of the country!

Sardar Kishan Singh had his own sources of information in the intelligence department. The information about the issuance of the warrant was somehow leaked out. So, Kishan Singh himself sent Bhagat Singh to Kanpur to stay there until the limit of warrant expired after six months. In this way, Bhagat Singh got a providential opportunity to renew his contacts with his revolutionary comrades and to learn from their experience.

Throwing some light on Bhagat Singh's involvement in the said *morcha*, some official record states:

A *jatha* was scheduled to be at village Banga at the time of lunch. It left Lyallpur city on 12 April 1924 and was expected to reach Amritsar, the controlling centre of the agitation, on 26 April. ....in 1924, he (Bhagat Singh) went to Chak No. 105, GB, where his father's land was situated. While being there, he took care of the *Lyallpur Shaheedi* (martyrs) *Jatha*. Consequently he was booked under Criminal Law Amendment Act, section 17 (1) whereupon he absconded. During that period, he was in UP. It is reported that having gone to UP, he stayed for a month at Kanpur. While there, he remained in the company of Hasrat Mohani. He was stated to have gone to Aligarh from Kanpur and worked for 3 months as the headmaster of National Muslim University School. The UP police could not ascertain the veracity of this information.<sup>4</sup>

### III

**Mahatma Gandhi called off the Non-cooperation Movement**



in February 1922 because of violence having been committed in Chauri-Chaura. In this way, he extinguished the fires of revolution. As a result, the widespread anger found expression in counter-revolution which gave ample opportunity to the British Government to incite communal riots in 1922-24. But the revolutionaries were now mainly engaged in trying to prevent these riots and redirect people's anger against the British. A great nationalist of the day, Ganesh Shanker Vidyarthi's *Pratap Press* at Kanpur was playing a significant role in this regard. Therefore, the first task that was assigned to Bhagat Singh (who was then in Kanpur) was to go to Delhi and give an authentic report about the 'Daryaganj communal riots' to make the people alert and vigilant.

Secondly, the revolutionary literature printed at the Pratap Press was distributed among the people in privy. Bhagat Singh also drafted certain papers and pamphlets which were distributed at fairs and other such occasions in the same way as was done by the *Bharat Mata Society* in the beginning of twentieth century. The 'Pratapgarh fair' was one of the well-known fairs of Uttar Pradesh held at *Dussehra*. It was attended by thousands of people from villages and towns. Bhagat Singh and his comrades went there to distribute a Hindi pamphlet in 1924, entitled '*Jago mere desh ke loggon*' (Awake my countrymen). The constables of the intelligence department were also posted in the fair in plain clothes. As soon as the companions of Bhagat Singh started distributing the copies of the pamphlet, the constables pounced upon them and arrested the two.

Bhagat Singh now brewed a plan to free his comrades from the clutches of police. He quietly threw to one side all pamphlets that he had with him. People ran to pick them up. Thereupon, Bhagat Singh approached the policemen and started shouting, 'Look, the Congressmen are distributing pamphlets there'. Leaving behind two of their companions, the policemen ran in that direction and were lost in the crowd. This was an opportunity that Bhagat Singh and his comrades were looking for. They overpowered the two policemen and got their comrades free. Thereafter, all five of them made a quick get-away from the fair. The police, and some from among the crowd, chased them. Bhagat Singh fired two or



three shots in the air from his pistol, whereupon, the pursuers gave up the chase.<sup>5</sup>

As per some official report, Bhagat Singh, during his period of abscondence (from April 1924 to the end of 1925), was suspected of being involved in the distribution of revolutionary leaflets in Lahore in February 1925. Secondly, he was reported to have taken part in a political drama staged at Gujranwala in October 1925. Thirdly, he got involved in an agitation against the enhancement of canal water rates, led by the *Zamindar Sabha*.<sup>6</sup>

Bhagat Singh, while at Kanpur, came to know of the havoc caused by floods near Kanpur. There was heavy rain which resulted in inundating the *Ganges*, *Yamuna* and *Ram Ganga*. Many villages of the U.P. were flooded. The foreign government hardly provided any help. Emulating his elders, Bhagat Singh put his body and soul, day and night in relief and rescue work. His dedication and sense of service were appreciated all around. This showed another facet of Bhagat Singh's personality—the spontaneous urge to serve the suffering fellow-beings in every possible manner!<sup>7</sup> The approximate dates of the flood in the *Ganges*, due to torrential rains in the region, were between 26 and 29 September 1924.

#### IV

His association with Hindustan Republican Association is inseparable. There is no trace of doubt about Bhagat Singh's active association with the H.R.A. The C.I.D. was actively shadowing him, and his name figured among 35 persons, in Punjab, whose mail was being censored in 1926. Bhagat Singh was listed at serial No. 16. According to the report, "Bhagat Singh originally of Jullundur District, now of Khasarian, P.S. Mozang, Lahore."<sup>8</sup>

The biggest action taken by the H.R.A. was the Kakori Train Dacoity (9 August 1925). Though Bhagat Singh was not involved in the action, yet he actively remained in touch with its developments.

Another important incident, connected with Bhagat Singh's public life, is the *Dussera Explosion Case*. In October 1926, a moron Channan Din threw a bomb at the *Dussera* festival

procession of Hindus in Lahore. This was known to the police. In reality, they had themselves engineered it to make the Hindus and Muslims fly at one another's throat. Fortunately, this time they failed, because of the efforts made by the members of *Naujawan Bharat Sabha*.

When the police failed to spark off a riot, they wanted to make the explosion a handle to pounce upon the revolutionaries. As a result, Bhagat Singh was arrested on 29 May 1927 at Lahore, and was followed by a prolonged interrogation. He was, however, released on 4 July 1927 on a heavy bail amount of Rs. 60,000 offered by Dunichand and Daulatram. Dunichand was a nationalist, and Daulatram a philanthropist. It was perhaps the biggest amount of a bail in the legal history of the country. This bail acted as fetters on Bhagat Singh. He could neither jump bail nor could he withdraw from work. Fortunately, Dr. Gopichand Bhargava, a member of the Punjab Assembly, was prevailed upon to table a question on the affair. This expedited the enquiry, and as there was no *prima facie* case against Bhagat Singh, he was freed from bail, probably, in December 1927.

Bhagat Singh was arrested under Section 302 IPC, and was detained in the police custody for five weeks.<sup>9</sup> Bhagat Singh's photograph, on a *charpae* (cot) fastened with iron-chains, belongs to this arrest, when he was kept first in Lahore Fort and then in the Lahore Borstal Jail.

The founding of the *Naujawan Bharat Sabha* in 1926 is another important aspect of Bhagat Singh's public life. It played a vital role in creating the atmosphere of communal harmony in the country and strengthening the revolutionary activities. Even the government report reveals :

The activities of the *Naujawan Bharat Sabha* founded by Bhagat Singh were mainly confined to the students in colleges. It was a semi-secret organisation with open and secret programmes for enlisting recruits from among the students for revolutionary purposes. The British intelligence hounds came to know about its real activities. The principals of colleges in Lahore were summoned by the hon'ble member of finance, Vice-Chancellor of the University, and he explained to them



'the real motives' of the Sabha and the Sabha was excluded from the use of their college and hostel halls. The British Vice-Chancellor ordered that no college staff member was to lecture for the Sabha on social topics, civics, etc.<sup>10</sup>

## V

Bhagat Singh was an effective strategist and organiser too. One of the greatest contributions made by Bhagat Singh in promoting the cause of revolutionary movement in India was that he intelligently unified the revolutionaries of different parts of the country. Throwing some fresh light on this important aspect of Bhagat Singh's public life, some authorities on the subject write :<sup>11</sup>

- Before the efforts made by Bhagat Singh, virtually speaking, there was no common platform of the revolutionaries covering the whole nation. For example, there were *Anushilan* and *Yugantar* organisations in Bengal; the *Ghadar Party* in Punjab; and the *Hindustan Republican Association* in the U.P. and Bihar.
- Regrettably, most of the revolutionaries of the country had no co-ordination among themselves.
- Having visited different parts of the country, Bhagat Singh arranged a meeting of the revolutionaries at Ferozeshah Kotla Fort (Delhi) on 8-9 September 1928.
- It was attended by the revolutionaries, hailing from the U.P., Bihar, Punjab and Rajasthan. Whereas Bengal was concerned, most of its revolutionaries were in jail, and the remaining ones refused to agree on Socialist views.
- In the deliberations of Delhi meeting, the leading role was played by Bhagat Singh wherein the following decisions were taken:
  - (i) On his suggestion, the 'Socialism' was adopted as the motto of the party.
  - (ii) The Hindustan Republican Association (H.R.A.) was revived with a new and highly significant name—the Hindustan Socialist Republican Association (H.S.R.A.).
  - (iii) Bhagat Singh disapproved the idea of centralisation of powers

- in single hand. On his insistence, a central committee of seven members with supreme power was constituted.
- (iv) Moreover, Chandra Shekhar Azad was elected the Commander-in-Chief of the Hindustan Socialist Republican Army in absentia.
  - (v) To take active part in boycotting the Simon Commission, and to throw a bomb on the train carrying its members.
  - (vi) To open bomb-factories at Saharanpur, Agra, Lahore, etc. and arrange a good instructor for giving training to its members in preparing bombs.
  - (vii) To murder the informers of the 'Kakori Dacoity Case', and to free Jogesh Chandra Chatterjee from jail.
  - (viii) For raising funds, to loot govt. treasuries rather than individuals.
  - (ix) During the meeting, a question on Bhagat Singh's identity was also raised. Since he was designated 'all-India Coordinator of the party' and everyone was concerned at his Sikh appearance which was recognizable. The party thus decided that he should cut off his hair so that he could move around the whole country without being recognised.

It was probably on 15th September 1928, following the decision of the Delhi meeting that Bhagat Singh shaved off his hair to change his look at Ferozepur. Dr. Gaya Prasad, a member of the H.S.R.A. from U.P., used to do practice at Ferozepur under the assumed name of Dr. B.S.Nigam. Dr. Gaya Prasad said that it was he who cut the hair of Bhagat Singh at his shop to keep the disguise a guarded secret, it was not advisable to engage a barber.<sup>12</sup> To set his hair right, the barber was, however, engaged later on.

From the time of the Delhi meeting, Bhagat Singh was selected as a link between the various provinces and in this capacity he was constantly travelling from place to place between the Punjab and Calcutta. As a key-member of the Central Committee, he had to take leading part in all the important deliberations and plans of the party. He was generally found in the forefront while executing the decisions of the party. Yet his involvement in the two following actions of the party, can never be separated from the history of the revolutionary movement in



India: He was a protagonist in the murder of Mr. J.P. Saunders on 17 December 1928 at Lahore, and the Assembly Bomb-Explosion on 8 April 1929 (New Delhi).

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## SAUNDERS' MURDER

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The arrival of the Simon Commission was a turning-point in the history of India's struggle for freedom. The imposition of all-white Simon Commission on India stirred the whole country and united all the live forces and parties. Wherever the members of the commission went to record evidence, the slogan 'Go Back, Simons!' greeted them. The Simon Commission was to reach Lahore on 30 October 1928. Before the arrival of the Commission, the Congress, the *Naujawan Bharat Sabha*, the Students' Union and the *Hindustani Sewa Dal* held meetings in Lahore to boycott it. On 29 October, i.e. one day earlier, the Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP), Lahore, Mr. J.A. Scott issued orders 'directing the public to abstain from organising or joining the procession'.<sup>1</sup> In spite of the order of the SSP, a public meeting was held in the evening on the same day denouncing the order and calling upon the people to defy it. As a result on 30 October, thousands of people joined the procession. It was led by Lala Lajpat Rai. The procession was peaceful and orderly. To oppose the Commission, a huge procession was effectively organised by different groups, especially the members of *Naujawan Bharat Sabha*. Bhagat Singh was one of the prime organisers of the procession, yet he could not be present in it.

When the procession reached the barriers, a deliberate and unprovoked attack was made by the police. As Lala Lajpat Rai was in the front ranks, he received the heaviest lathi-blows. Reproducing the horrible scene, a well-known journalist of the country—Kuldip Nayar—writes:

The Superintendent of Police J.A. Scott ordered a lathi-charge. The crowd ran helter-skelter. Some fell by the roadside, and some braved the lathi-charge. Still many stood their ground. Lajpat Rai exhorted them to hold



to their position like true *satyagrahis*. However, Mr. Scott spotted Lajpat Rai from a distance and went for him. He used his baton to beat the Indian leader mercilessly and did not stop even when blood began spurting from Lajpat Rai's chest. Scott did not stop till Lalaji fell down. It looked as if Scott was releasing his pent-up anger against all those who defied the British. He looked like an Englishman who wanted to teach a lesson to the crowd, to let it know the fate of those who challenged the authority of the British. Only nine years earlier, General R.E.H. Dyer, an Irishman born in Shimla, had wreaked his vengeance upon the people at Jallianwala Bagh of Amritsar for heckling a British woman in one of the city's bazars. He too was motivated by the sentiment to set an example, and to let the natives realise what the *Raj* would do to make them fall in line.<sup>2</sup>

As a result of the lathi-blows hurled by Mr. Scott, who was also accompanied by the Assistant Superintendent of Police (ASP) Mr. J.P. Saunders, Lala Lajpat Rai died on 17 November 1928. Consequently, the whole country was shocked. And the 29th November 1928 was observed throughout the country as the 'Lajpat Rai Day'.

## II

It is a well known fact of the history of the revolutionary movement in India that Bhagat Singh and his comrades took a vow to assassinate the police official Mr. J.A. Scott, the SSP of Lahore, who was chiefly responsible for the death of Lala Lajpat Rai in a humiliating way. Yet we discuss some more details which compelled Bhagat Singh and his group to take such major step.

First of all, Lajpat Rai's death and the brutality perpetrated on peaceful demonstrators throughout India, infuriated the whole nation, more particularly the younger element of the country. To Bhagat Singh and his comrades, all that happened, was a national insult, not to be allowed to go unavenged. They, therefore, adopted the slogan 'Blood for blood'.

Secondly, it was on everybody's lips that the police had killed

Lala Lajpat Rai. Yet the most hated police officer was Mr. Scott. He used to flay political suspects inside the Lahore Fort, torturing them in unheard of ways, using third-degree methods to extract information about the secret activities of the youth. The death of Lala Lajpat Rai sharpened this hatred against Mr. Scott. Bhagat Singh's group thus began to make plans to do something drastic about him.

Thirdly, though Bhagat Singh had differences with Lala Lajpat Rai, because it was Lalaji who had authored the idea that India should be divided into two countries—Hindu India and Muslim India.<sup>3</sup> Yet Bhagat Singh had deep respect for Lajpat Rai, because his life-long fight against the British was a sterling example before the country.

Fourthly, in the eyes of Bhagat Singh, Mr. Scott was as inhuman as Gen. Dyer was! Nine years ago, Bhagat Singh had visited the hallowed place (Jallianwala Bagh) to pay his homage to those who had been killed by Gen. Dyer. Somehow, the killer Gen. Dyer got away with his barbarous deed, but Mr. Scott must not. Bhagat Singh was now determined that Mr. Scott should be made to pay for the insult he had heaped on innocent Indians, particularly Lala Lajpat Rai.

Furthermore, the insulting replies given in the House of Commons, three days after Lalaji's death, by the Under-Secretary of State for India, Lord Winterton, to questions put by Labour MPs, added fuel to the fire.

Lastly, while paying her tribute to Lalaji in a condolence meeting held at Calcutta on 29 November 1928, Smt. Basanti Devi, widow of a celebrated nationalist of the country C.R. Das, cried in anguish, "I quake with shame and disgrace. Does the youth and manhood of the country still exist? Does it feel the burning shame and disgrace of it? A woman of the land demands a clear answer to it."<sup>4</sup>

### III

Yes, Bhagat Singh and his comrades were ready with the answer. They decided to avenge Lalaji's death by killing Scott. December 17, 1928 was fixed as the date for Mr. Scott's assassination. On December 15, the four men of the H.S.R.A.—



Bhagat Singh, Chandra Shekhar Azad, Rajguru and Jai Gopal—met to rehearse their assignments. On December 17, Mr. Scott did not come to the District Police Office, as he had gone to Kasur on some official tour. However, the Assistant Superintendent of Police (ASP), Mr. J.P.Saunders, became the missed target of the revolutionaries. Throwing some light on the scene of Saunders' murder, an official report of the State government speaks adequately. The Government of India at Delhi was informed telegraphically the same evening. The Punjab Police Report on the assassination of Mr. John Poyantz Saunders was forwarded to the Home Department Delhi on January 14, 1929 vide Punjab Government's secret letter No. 1696 II/Police (available in the National Archives of India). It read as under :

At 4.20 p.m. on December 17th, Mr. Saunders left the District Police Office on his motor cycle. He had reached the gate leading into the road in front of the office when he was stopped by his Reader, Head Constable Chanan Singh, who ran after him with his keys which he had left behind. Mr. Saunders took the keys and rode out of the gate on to the road. Soon after reaching the road, shots were fired at him by two men who had been waiting there. Mr. Saunders was hit and fell with his motor cycle. Meanwhile, the assassin made off, pursued by Head Constable Chanan Singh. They turned into the gate of the DAV College which is opposite the District Police Office. One man turned round there and mortally wounded Head Constable Chanan Singh.

Some more light has been shed on the historic murder of Mr. Saunders by a scholar—Mr. R.K.Kaushik—in his article entitled 'Missed Target of Bhagat Singh', published in *The Tribune*, dated 18 September 2002 :

The provocation for a chain of events in Indian history came from Scott who on October 30, 1928, beat up Lala Lajpat Rai personally when Lalaji was protesting against the visit of the Simon Commission to Lahore. Lala Lajpat Rai died because of grave injuries received in brutal lathi charge. Bhagat Singh and his comrades—

Raj Guru, Sukhdev and Chandrashekhar Azad—and others decided to take revenge and teach a lesson to SSP Scott. They started watching his movements and decided to kill him on December 17, 1928. It was a big mistake on the part of Jai Gopal that Rajguru fired at an IP officer, ASP (Lahore) J.P. Saunders. Later, Bhagat Singh pumped five or six bullets on him killing him instantly before he could be taken to Mayo Hospital. They soon realised their inadvertent mistake that they had shot ASP Saunders instead of their main target, the SSP of Lahore, Scott. They ran forwards DAV College, while they were chased by the Traffic Inspector Mr. Fearn and the Head Constable Chanan Singh. Chanan Singh was shot and killed by Azad.

On the time of Saunders' murder, all the four revolutionaries, apart from being fully equipped with arms and ammunitions, were well-dressed. According to one of the participants, Mr. Jai Gopal :

Bhagat Singh wore a coloured felt cap, warm coat, *khaki* nickers, stockings and a pair of black shoes. Azad wore a *kullah* and *pagri* of almond colour, a *salwar*, warm coat and a pair of fleet foot shoes; Rajguru had a folding felt cap like that of Bhagat Singh, cotton coat, *pyjamas* and a pair of fleet foot shoes. I (Jai Gopal) had a turban (*lungi*), warm coat, a pair of black shoes and *pyjamas*.<sup>5</sup>

Soon after the deed was done, Bhagat Singh realised that it was not Scott but his junior whom he and his colleague Rajguru had killed. The posters were immediately corrected to substitute Saunders' name for Scott's. The posters, entitled 'Saunders is dead, Lalaji is avenged', were surprisingly made public on December 18. A brief account of the poster is as under :

Really it is horrible to imagine that so lowly and violent hand of an ordinary police official, J.P. Saunders, could ever dare to touch in such an insulting way the body of one so old, so revered and so loved by 300 millions of people of Hindustan and thus caused his death. The youth and manhood of India was challenged by blows hurled down on the head of India's nationhood. And



let the world know that India still lives; that the blood of youths has not been totally cooled down, and that they can still risk their lives, if the honour of their nation is at stake.

Sorry for the death of a man. But in this man had died the representative of an institution which is so cruel, lowly and so base that it must be abolished. In this man has died an agent of the British authority of India—the most tyrannical of Government of Governments in the world.<sup>6</sup>

Just two weeks after the murder of Saunders i.e. on 1st January 1929, Sukh Dev, Kishori Lal and Jai Gopal went to the canal bridge on Ferozepur Road, Lahore. At that time the motor car No. PB-6728—carrying Scott, his wife, a driver and an orderly—passed that way. Jai Gopal suggested to Sukh Dev that Scott could now be fired at. Sukh Dev replied that it was no use shooting him, as luck had saved him once.<sup>7</sup>

Saunders' murder was indeed a great shock for the British. That a British police official was murdered in front of the police headquarters in a broad day-light, while policemen witnessed and the assailants escaped, was a great humiliation on the whole system.

Another blow to the foreign rulers was the escape of Bhagat Singh from Lahore to Calcutta. It was meticulously planned and dramatically carried out by Sukhdev. After 10 p.m., Sukhdev came to Durga Bhabhi on 20th December 1928 with two other visitors—a tall youngman dressed in a Western style and a servant humbly-dressed. Both were strangers for Durga Bhabhi. After a few minutes Sukhdev, unable to control himself any further, burst out that 'the wheat-complexioned sahib was the rustic Jat, Bhagat Singh. The identity of the other visitor (Rajguru) was neither disclosed nor enquired about. All felt assured that if Durga Bhabhi could not recognise Bhagat Singh, he could even travel out of Lahore without being detected by the police. Bhagat Singh, Durga Bhabhi and her 2½ years old son Shachindra left for Calcutta on the morning of 21st December.

Meanwhile, a telegram was given to Sushila *Didi*, another active member of the H.S.R.A. She was working as a tutor for the children of Seth Chhaju Ram at Calcutta. Seth Chhaju Ram

was a renowned philanthropist of the country, hailing from a remote village of Haryana—Alakhpura, now in Bhiwani district. Having reached Calcutta, Bhagat Singh stayed with Sushila *Didi* in the house of Seth Chhaju Ram till Jatin Das made another arrangement in a hostel. During Bhagat Singh's stay with Jatin Das in his hostel at Calcutta, a worth-mentioning incident happened. It was later published in *The Tribune*, dated 17 December 1995:

Kiron Chander Das (younger brother of Shahid Jatin Das) disclosed that Bhagat Singh was fond of taking unboiled fresh milk. While standing in the hostel verandah one day, he noticed a Bihari '*gwala*' milking a buffalo in the open space on the other side of the road. Impulsively he ran to the *gwala* and asked as to what he would charge for the bucket of milk, he was holding. The latter, taking him nonseriously, asked for a rupee. Bhagat Singh seized the bucket, drank the milk in a single stretch, placed a rupee coin on the extended palm of the astonished *gwala* and ran back to hostel. After his arrest on 8 April 1929, the same Bihari *gwala* saw the photo of Bhagat Singh in a newspaper at Calcutta and recognised his unusual customer. He sought to know the published account about him and knocked at the door of Jatin Das in his hostel. He, handing back the rupee coin to Jatin, requested him to return the milk price to his guest, because he felt amply rewarded that his lips had touched his bucket. When Bhagat Singh was informed about that transformation of the *gwala*, he exclaimed that the war cry of their struggle against imperialism had been communicated effectively to the common people. The designs of imperialism would not now be able to keep India enslaved for long—he was convinced.

It was the same Durga Bhabhi who had to make the journey from Lahore to Calcutta by train while accompanying the two heroes of the revolutionary movement—one was Bhagat Singh and other Jatin Das. It was the same train which she boarded at Lahore on September 14, 1929. Then she travelled as Durga Devi Vohra with Kiron Chander Das, who carried the dead body of his



elder brother Shahid Jatin Das to Calcutta. As we know Jatin passed away in the Lahore Borstal Jail on September 13, 1929 after a historic hunger strike of 63 days. In a nutshell, each time she escorted a hero!

#### IV

It is obvious that the death of *Punjab Kesari* Lala Lajpat Rai was reacted to sharply by Indians, especially the youth. And it was countered by the assassination of a British police official, namely J.P.Saunders. Now the question arises, how was the incident of Saunders' murder, viewed by the Indians?

Following the Saunder's murder, the reaction of the people, including some Congressmen, was quite positive. Sharing his views on this aspect, a close associate of Bhagat Singh—Shiv Verma—writes :

As a result of this incident, the people had a great relief. Secondly, though the Congressites generally did not agree with our views, yet they started worrying about our security and offering us the financial assistance in their own way.<sup>8</sup>

While making his comments on the incident, another associate of Bhagat Singh, Com. Ajoy Ghosh mentions : "Well-timed and daringly executed, it was an action that was acclaimed by the public with joy. The first of the blows, by means of which we expected to stir the country, had been struck."<sup>9</sup>

One may be quite eager to know the reaction of the most important leader of the country—Mahatma Gandhi. Being a staunch advocate of the Non-violence, he criticised the act through his paper, the *Young India*, dated 27 December 1928, in the following words:

The assassination of the Assistant Superintendent of Police Mr. Saunders of Lahore was a dastardly act. The provocation was great and it became doubly great by the death of Lala Lajpat Rai. I wish however that it was possible to convince the hot youth of the utter futility of such revenge. Whatever the Assistant Superintendent did was in obedience to instructions. No one person can be held wholly responsible for the

assault (on Lalaji) and the aftermath. The fault is that of the system of government. What requires mending, is not men but the system.

If we may regard the assassination of Mr. Saunders as a heroic deed, the British people would be able to answer this one, I hope, solitary act of so-called heroism with countless such acts enough to fill a volume.

Let the youth of India realise that the death of Lalaji can only be avenged by regaining her freedom. The freedom of a country cannot be won by solitary acts of heroism. The temple of freedom requires the patient, intelligent and constructive efforts of tens of thousands of men and women, young and old.

It is true that Saunders' murder was a major action of Bhagat Singh's life. It has been viewed by different leaders in different ways. What Bhagat Singh himself felt about it, is now to be discussed in the words of Comrade Sohan Singh Josh as follows:

(On the night of 18 December 1928) a little after 11 p.m., somebody knocked at my door. I opened the door and to my utter surprise I found Bhagat Singh and Sukh Dev standing outside.

Bhagat Singh was wearing a felt hat and an English style suit. He was quite unrecognisable in those clothes. Sukh Dev was wearing an English hat and suit. Bhagat Singh took off his hat and placed it on a table nearby. He hung his pistol on a peg above the cot. Then after finishing the meagre meal, the first question he shot at me was, "What is the reaction in general to Saunders' murder?" Now I came to know that it was Saunders who was murdered.

"The youth are happy", I replied. "But they would have been much happier if Scott had been killed."

"We had gone there only for him (Scott), but the other devil (Saunders) came out", he said, "and we could not go back empty-handed after all the pains taken for the preparation" and then he added, "Anyway, some beginning has been made."



"There is another opinion also about this murder." I put in, "that of Gandhi's followers."

"We knew it beforehand", he said. "We discussed this before deciding upon this action."

"But leave that aside," he continued. "Do you know what has been the effect of Saunders' murder on the British rulers?"

"I do not know, it is too early yet to know that."

"There is a great panic amongst them, he said."

"Some of them have already booked their wives and children's passages for England. They are terribly frightened."

"But this panic is temporary." I gave my opinion. "It will wear off soon."

"What do you think of this action?"

"My views, you know. We have talked about this matter several times. Our *Naujwan Bharat Sabha* workers will be arrested. There will be greater repression and the movement will suffer, will be retarded."

"I don't agree," he said. "This action will rouse the masses and strengthen the movement."<sup>10</sup>

## V

Before closing the present chapter, a debatable question may be posed here—Whether the murder of Saunders by Bhagat Singh was a right or a wrong step? It is true that Bhagat Singh was not in favour of blood-shed. He had no personal grudge against Mr. Saunders. After killing him, according to Shiv Verma, "Bhagat Singh remained upset for some days."<sup>11</sup>

But Mr. Saunders was a part and parcel of the machinery of British Imperialism which was responsible for the killing of Punjab Kesari Lala Lajpat Rai. And it is also true that Lalaji was a symbol of Indian nationalism. Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru seems to be right when he writes :

Bhagat Singh did not become popular because of his act of terrorism, but because he seemed to vindicate, for the moment, the honour of Lala Lajpat Rai; and through him of the nation. Within a few months, each

town and village of the Punjab and to a lesser extent in the rest of northern India, resounded with Bhagat Singh's name. Innumerable songs grew up about him, and the popularity that the man (Bhagat Singh) achieved, was something amazing.<sup>12</sup>

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## THE ASSEMBLY BOMB-EXPLOSION

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The two most daring actions of Bhagat Singh were the murder of a police official Mr. J.P. Saunders at Lahore on 17 December 1928 and the throwing of two bombs in the Central Legislative Assembly Hall (New Delhi) on 8 April 1929. Both the actions are regarded in the history of India's struggle for freedom as an open challenge to the British imperialism.

The details of Saunders' murder have already been discussed in the previous chapter. So, let us now throw some light on the historic incident of bomb-explosion in the Assembly. First of all, we shall make our efforts to know the circumstances which led the revolutionaries to drop bombs in the Assembly Hall, where today sit the members of our Lok Sabha.

Bhagat Singh was a keen observer of the economic and political developments in the country. He had been closely studying the country-wide strikes of workers in 1927-28; threats by Indian Government to suppress the labour agitation with all its might; presentation of the 'Trade Dispute Bill' and the 'Public Safety Bill' in the Assembly with this purpose; and opposition to both the bills by public and all political parties with one voice. Bhagat Singh thus felt that an unprecedented awareness of the Indian working class had signified a new turn in the political life of the country.

Like a hawk, Bhagat Singh kept a careful watch over the Indian scene. He noticed that the labour movement was taking big strides. Bhagat Singh, Bejoy Kumar Sinha and the party intellectuals thought that the different agitations should converge on one point. The revolutionaries were aware of the fact that the government, unhappy at the phenomenal growth of the labour movement, was poised to strike at it with all its might. The Trade Dispute Bill, now in the Central Assembly, had been sponsored to deliver a fatal blow at the movement. There was full throated opposition to

the bill throughout the country. But the government as usual ignored it. In the meantime, the Viceroy Lord Irwin hinted that if the Assembly did not pass both the Bills, he would use his special powers and get the Bills promulgated through Ordinance. As soon as this statement was published in newspapers, Bhagat Singh called the members of the Central Committee of the H.S.R.A. While addressing them, Bhagat Singh said:

The British Government wants the Bills to be passed by the Assembly to show to the world that these (repressive) laws are made by the representatives of the people. In this way, if these laws are to be implemented, let them be promulgated under the special powers of the Viceroy. The Government has become deaf. It does not hear the voice raised against these laws all over the country. We shall have to make our voice heard.<sup>1</sup>

Bhagat Singh was in a mood to strike at this very psychological moment. Now, another opportunity was in the offing. The new stance of the revolutionary party demanded that it should identify itself with the labour movement. Due to Bhagat Singh's insistence, a meeting of the Central Committee of the H.S.R.A. was convened at Agra in March 1929 wherein the following decisions were taken:

- The two non-fatal bombs as well as pamphlets would be thrown by the party-members in the Assembly, just after the announcement of the voting result of the Trade Dispute Bill.
- Following the bomb-throwing action, the members would not escape from the scene, but surrender.
- The arrested members would expose the government through their court statements, using the court as a platform.

In the same meeting, Bhagat Singh insisted that he should form a member of the action-group. But other members of the Central Committee did not see eye to eye with him, because it was well-known that the Punjab police was after him, and arrest in his case meant nothing short of hanging. So, the Central Committee unanimously resolved that not Bhagat Singh, but two other young men should lead the move. The names of Bejoy Kumar Sinha and Batukeshwar Dutt were thus finalised.



## II

It is true that the two names—B.K.Sinha and B.K.Dutt—were decided by the Central Committee to execute the proposed plan of throwing bombs in the Assembly, but the name of Mr. Sinha was replaced by Bhagat Singh at the eleventh hour. Now the reader may ask, how did it happen? Let us have its answer in the words of Bhagat Singh's close associates including Dr. Bhagwan Das Mahore, Sukhdeoraj (not to be confused with Sukhdev), Shiv Verma, Jai Dev Kapoor, etc.<sup>2</sup>

## I. DR. BHAGWAN DAS MAHORE WRITES

- Sukhdev was not present in the meeting of the Central Committee in which the Assembly Bomb Explosion scheme was approved. When Sukhdev returned and was told about the scheme, he opposed it. His stand was that after arrest only Bhagat Singh could successfully pilot the scheme of advocating the new ideology of the party in the courtroom. He had already talked to Bhagat Singh on this aspect long before the Central Committee decision. When Sukhdev failed to convince the other members of the Central Committee, he took Bhagat Singh aside for a *tete a tete*.
- Sukhdev was in a frenzy. He spoke in short bursts to Bhagat Singh, "You have become an egoist, you think that you are indispensable to the party. You have started fearing death, you are a coward." The burden of Sukhdev's fulminations was : 'When you knew that you were the only person, who could do justice to the party's new stand, why did you suffer the Central Committee to take the decision that somebody else might be sent to drop the bomb?' Sukhdev also recalled the words of some Judge of Lahore High Court on Bhai Parmanand, "Although the brain and the spirit behind the party, he was a coward at heart, he sent others to the stake, himself managing to remain in the background." Staring at Bhagat Singh, he said: "Someday a judge would write the same about you."
- Bhagat Singh refuted these charges, but his arguments added fuel to the flame of Sukhdev's fury. At last Bhagat Singh said, "You are just insulting me." To this Sukhdev stoically

said, "I am just doing my duty towards my friend?" Thereupon, Bhagat Singh left him saying. "In future, please never talk to me."

At the instance of Bhagat Singh, a meeting of the Central Committee was now convened and the question of throwing bombs in the Assembly was reopened. Sukhdev did not speak a word. The Committee had to bow before Bhagat Singh's will and had to change its decision. Sukhdev, without informing anybody, went away to Lahore, reaching there the next day with his eyes heavy and red. He was then very much disturbed internally, because he had sacrificed the dearest thing for the cause.

## II. SUKHDEORAJ'S VERSION

- An event that really unbalanced Bhagat Singh and Bhagawati Charan Vohra was that Diwan Chamanlal, in whose favour they had worked in an election of 1926 against Lala Lajpat Rai and had distributed that leaflet *Lost Leader*, had publicly branded the killer of Saunders as an assassin. Diwan Chamanlal had said, "That an assassin killed Saunders, makes me bow my head with shame." Naturally, the papers had given this utterance good publicity.
- Obviously, Diwan Chamanlal did not know that Bhagat Singh and Rajguru were involved in Saunders' murder, but he certainly was aware that it was the work of some revolutionaries. Under the circumstances, the statement was inappropriate, unexpected and almost a stab in the back of the revolutionaries. It had to be refuted, but how? Only one method was open to the revolutionaries and that was to get oneself arrested and then give a bold statement in the courtroom.
- On the one hand, Bhagat Singh was very much hurt that Sukhdev was at the campaign of character assassination, on the other, he was very much pained at the mindless statement of Diwan Chamanlal. When all this debate was going on, the Public Safety Bill and Trade Dispute Bill were turned down by a majority vote in the Central Assembly. The only course that was open for the Viceroy was to make use of his special powers and sanction the bills. At last



Bhagat Singh and Bhagawati Charan returned to Lahore with a heavy heart. All this pinched the former on to the desperate remedy of getting himself arrested and then issuing a bold statement exposing the mindless intellectuals like Diwan Chamanlal.

— There was one more shock which Bhagat Singh had to suffer. Bhagat Singh heard that his stay with Durga Devi Vohra had been misconstrued, and this got on his nerves. Furthermore, he received a letter from Sukhdev, mentioning, "You are now in the grip of a woman, you can now do nothing worthwhile." This letter completely unsettled him. It was like Brutus aiming a dagger at Julius Caesar. He took the letter and went straight to Bhagawati Charan's house. At the time, Bhagawati Charan was sleeping, so Bhagat Singh was able to catch Durga alone. Later on, sister Durga related this most crucial interview—"When Bhagat Singh came, he was ready to burst into tears." When I asked him, "What is wrong?" He could not answer immediately. He handed over Sukhdev's letter to me and said in his broken voice—"Just see, sister, what nonsense they are saying about our relationship." Bhagat Singh sat near Bhagawati Charan's feet and continued, "On the one hand, we have these people (Sukhdev, etc.), who are flinging mud at my character for nothing, on the other, here is divine Bhagawati Charan who turns a deaf ear to all this idle gossip. It is better to die than to lead such a life." Bhagat Singh had gone to talk over this matter with Bhagawati Charan, but he abruptly left the place weeping.

— Bhagat Singh now decided to go himself to the Central Assembly, drop the bombs and manifesto and court arrest. He wanted to vindicate his own character, and at the same time, he wanted to make the stand of the party clear. Thus it was a political decision, muddled very badly with a personal situation. The mechanics of history does not over rule such intermixture of motives. Out of this complicated web of psychic jumble, the pure honesty of Bhagat Singh emerges and emanates with irrefutable clarity. He was an honest and dedicated revolutionary. May be he was spurred on to action by the calumny circulated by Sukhdev, may be he was not.

It would not be honest to blame Sukhdev as an unmitigated villain, until it is proved that he had some sordid motive. His only motive was to compel Bhagat Singh in such a manner as to make it impossible for him to evade the work which he wanted to do. Was Sukhdev jealous because he had no charisma and had no success with women, although he was almost a top intellectual of the Party? We have no evidence on these matters. On the other hand, we have evidence that after that initial burst of weakness, Sukhdev behaved as one of the most audacious revolutionaries throughout, and went to the gallows as bravely as any other comrade in a similar situation.

### III. SHIV VERMA'S WORDS

Sukhdev was stubborn in his behaviour, he said some harsh things to Bhagat Singh: "You have become arrogant. You have started thinking that the party depends only on you. You have begun to fear death. You are a coward." The more Bhagat Singh refuted the allegations of Sukhdev, harsher he became. On the request of Bhagat Singh, the meeting of the Central Committee was called again. The Committee had to revise its previous decision on the persistence of Bhagat Singh.

### IV. ACCORDING TO JAI DEV KAPOOR

Bhagat Singh had pleaded before the Central Committee to permit him to go for action; otherwise either he would go mad or commit suicide, and thus would not be of any use to the Party.

### III

The Central Committee of the Hindustan Socialist Republican Association had ultimately to bow before Bhagat Singh's will. It was now decided that the action plan would be executed by Bhagat Singh and B.K.Dutt. Though the decision of throwing bombs in the Central Assembly had been taken, yet it was not an easy task to translate it into action successfully. Its spade work was done very carefully by the revolutionaries, especially Jai Dev Kapoor. On 1-2 October 1969, Jai Dev Kapoor, accompanied by Shiv Verma, stayed with Prof. M.J.S. Waraich at Ludhiana. Jai Dev, when requested by Prof. Waraich to recall the details of



the aforesaid operation, narrated the course of events. In the words of Jai Dev Kapoor<sup>3</sup>:

- I was assigned the duty of arranging a house at Delhi and obtaining the Assembly passes for Bhagat Singh and B.K.Dutt. As it was very common for the house-owners to insist upon their tenant being a family man (married), I had to tell the landlady (Mrs. Mukandi) that (Bhagat Singh) my elder brother, had just got married and within a few days would bring his wife.
- I, posing as a third year student (B.A.I Hons. in Pol. Sc.), made acquaintance with some of the members of the Assembly to obtain entry passes and also kept on visiting the Assembly to monitor the scenario and the proceedings. On 6 April 1929, we got a hint about the possibility of voting on the controversial Bills. So, we went prepared for 'action' on that day. I was sitting inside behind Bhagat Singh. Dr. Saifuddin Kitchlew, a famous Congress leader of Punjab, was seated behind us. I did not recognise him, but Bhagat Singh and Dr. Kitchlew did know each other. Dr. Kitchlew said to me in whispers, "Ask your friend as to where is he? Does he want to see me? On Bhagat Singh giving a nod, he asked me to meet him outside the Chamber, whereupon he gave us some money. Since no voting took place that day, we came back.
- Then on the fateful day (8 April 1929), I came out of the Chamber after collecting the passes from Bhagat Singh and B.K.Dutt. I was standing before a roadside vender. On hearing the explosion, I burnt the passes. After a while, Bhagat Singh and Dutt were brought out under police escort. They signalled me to push off and so I did.
- That night I was lying dejected on the bed. Then the old landlady Mrs. Mukandi asked me, "Where is your brother?" I said, "He has gone to fetch *Bhabhi*." We left the house next day.

The 'action plan' was no doubt devised with meticulous precision. As for the dress, Bhagat Singh was to wear a hat to enable him to escape being identified by virtue of his outstanding height and physique. The hat was of English make purchased

from a shop at Lahore. The shopkeeper Jagan Nath testified this fact during the trial but declined to identify the purchaser (Sukhdev). Its colour was between green and fawn. Bhagat Singh's dress, as per the recovery memo dated 19.4.1929 in the Civil Lines police station (Delhi), was as under :

1. A shirt of khaki drill with pointed collars.
2. A half-pant of khaki drill having two pockets of white long cloth.
3. A coat of dove colour having three outer pockets and one inner pocket.
4. A pair of long woolen stockings dove coloured with garters.

B.K. Dutt was wearing khaki shorts and shirt, and a pale blue coloured coat.<sup>4</sup>

Bhagat Singh and Dutt had, as a prelude to the media publicity, thought it fit to be photographed that too in the attire to be worn on the fateful day to lend it a touch of authenticity. For this purpose, they went to the shop of Ram Nath photographer, Kashmiri Gate, Delhi on 3 April 1929, which they visited again on 6th April to collect the photographs.

On the fateful day—8 April 1929—when Bhagat Singh and Dutt were just to depart from their house, Jai Dev's worn out shoes caught the sharp eye of Bhagat Singh. He at once proposed the exchange of pair of shoes with him since his pair of shoes were of high quality and in very good condition. This pair of shoes was bought by him when he was to go out of Lahore after the murder of Saunders in the guise of an army officer. Bhagat Singh also handed over to Jai Dev a 'pocket-watch', which had a historic significance. According to Jai Dev, "This watch was bought by the *Ghadar* Party in 1915 to mark the time for the start of revolt in India in February 1915. After the failure of the heroic effort, Rash Bihari Bose presented this watch to Sachindra Nath Sanyal, the famous author of '*Bandi Jeevan*'. Sanyal presented the watch to Bhagat Singh."<sup>5</sup> It is a matter of pride that Jai Dev Kapoor religiously preserved the aforesaid two mementos in the *Shahid Samarak Bhawan*, Hardoi (U.P.). This *Bhawan* was raised by Jai Dev Kapoor in the sweet memory of the late revolutionaries of the country.



During their stay at Delhi, the experiment of bomb-explosion was made by Bhagat Singh and Bhagwati Charan Vohra near the old monuments of Tuglaqabad. The pamphlets, which were thrown in the Assembly on 8 April 1929, were drafted as well as typed by Bhagat Singh.

#### IV

The climax of the chapter is the throwing of bombs and pamphlets in the Central Legislative Assembly on 8 April 1929 (Monday) by Bhagat Singh and B.K.Dutt. They got into the public gallery unnoticed a few minutes before the session began at 11.00 a.m. An Indian member of the Assembly gave them passes at the entrance and then disappeared. Let us now throw some light on the historic scene of the Assembly bomb-explosion. Covering the details of the scene, *The Tribune*, dated 9 April 1929, writes :

When Mr. Vithalbai Patel (elder brother of Sardar Patel) got up to give his ruling (at about 12:30 p.m.) on the Public Safety Bill, two bombs fell from a gallery near the seat of Sir George Schuster. The whole House dispersed at once in panic. Sir George Schuster and Sir B. Dalal were slightly injured while some other members also received minor injuries. Two men have been arrested with pistols and revolvers.

Ten minutes later the Assembly reassembled. The Chamber presented awful scene as it was choked with bomb smoke. Mr. Patel adjourned the House till Thursday next. A red pamphlet 'Hindustan Socialist Republican Army' signed by Bal Raj, Hony. Chief, was also thrown along with the bombs.

The police immediately locked the Council House and prevented the movement of the visitors' crowd. Sir John Simon (the Chairman of the Simon Commission) was in the President's Gallery when the bomb fell. Sir G. Schuster, Sir B. Dalal, Mr. Raghavendra Rao and Mr. Shanker Rao were among those injured.

The names of the arrested persons are Mr. Butukeswara Datta from Bengal, domiciled in Cawnpore, and Mr. Bhagat Singh from the Punjab.

One more version of the scene is relevant to be mentioned here. According to an eye-witness, Mr. Asaf Ali :

The gallery was full to its capacity when I arrived there. There was no seat available and therefore I went and stood in the part of the gallery where Bhagat Singh happened to be seated right in front of me. Just as the Speaker of the House, V.J. Patel, was about to rise to deliver his ruling, Pandit Brijlal Nehru remarked, "And now Mr. Patel is going to throw his bomb shell", when suddenly a loud noise was heard. When I went down, the second bomb exploded and some shots were fired. The gallery emptied in a few moments and people ran as if for their lives, breaking the panes of doors, leaving their shoes and other belongings behind. When I returned to the men's gallery, found Bhagat Singh and B.K. Dutt under arrest. I knew the European inspector, one Mr. Johnson, and asked him whether they were connected with the offence. B.K. Dutt's face was perfectly calm, ...Bhagat Singh was telling Johnson, "Don't worry, we shall tell the whole world that we did it." Some leaflets were also thrown into the chamber by B.K. Dutt and two loud shouts went up—'Down, Down with Imperialism' and 'Long Live the Revolution'.<sup>6</sup>

Evidently, it was the first chance in the history of India's struggle for freedom when the slogans—'Long Live the Revolution', 'Down with Imperialism' raised by Bhagat Singh and B.K. Dutt—were heard by the countrymen. The slogans, first echoed on the floor of the Assembly Chamber, soon became the universal cry of the youths of India.

Bhagat Singh and Dutt could have easily escaped from the place of their action when it was full of fumes and chaos prevailed, but it was not a part of their plan. So, they stood at their respective places and continued shouting slogans. When the smoke subsided, both of them courted arrest willingly and cheerfully. The police official—Sergeant Terry—had only to walk up to them to put them under arrest. Later, he was joined by the Police Inspector—Johnson. On arrest, Bhagat Singh and B.K. Dutt were taken in the



police van to the Kotwali, Chandni Chowk. While their van was going towards the Kotwali, it passed a *tonga* carrying Bhagwati Charan, his wife, Durga Devi, and the little Shachindra. The boy caught a glimpse of Bhagat Singh and shouted with joy '*Lambe chacha*' (tall uncle). The mother acted promptly and stopped the child from calling out and thus saved the situation.<sup>7</sup>

## V

The throwing of bombs in the Assembly was a rare incident of the world history. The first such incident was initiated by Mr. E.M. Vaillant in the French capital Paris in 1894. Repeating it, Bhagat Singh and B.K. Dutt also threw a leaflet in the Assembly, briefly stating :

"It takes a loud voice to make the deaf hear", with these immortal words uttered on a similar occasion by Vaillant, a French anarchist martyr, do we strongly justify this action of ours. And let the Government know that while protesting against the Public Safety and Trade Disputes Bills and the callous murder of Lala Lajpat Rai, on behalf of the helpless Indian masses, we want to emphasize the lesson often repeated by history, that it is easy to kill individuals but you cannot kill the ideas. Great empires crumbled while the ideas survived.<sup>8</sup>

## VI

It was crystal clear to each and every member of the Hindustan Socialist Republican Association that the throwing of bombs in the Assembly would be the last action of Bhagat Singh, and his execution inevitable. So, his courting arrest was naturally a great shock for all the party-members, especially Chandra Shekhar Azad. When the blueprint of the Central Assembly bomb affair had gone through all the stages except the ultimate, all revolutionaries, who had not been assigned any role in the affair, left Delhi. So, Azad went away to Jhansi, where he had a few hide-outs. He knew it well that he was going to lose Bhagat Singh for ever, because he was certain that Bhagat Singh would be tried for the murder of Saunders. Theirs was not a casual companionship,

but was a deeply emotional relationship. The imminent separation cast a spell of gloom over Azad's mind. For years, they had nourished their dreams together. They had needed each other, they had supplemented each other. And now the day had come to part, part for ever. Duty had called them together, and now the duty was forcing them to part. A few hours before their final departure, Azad and Bhagat Singh talked and talked through the night till the cock's shrill clarion woke them up. When Azad had said the last good-bye, he confided to Shiv Verma, "In a few days, history will claim them (Bhagat Singh and Dutt) and only a legend would survive through the corridors of time."<sup>9</sup>

With each passing day after their arrest on 8 April 1929, the affection and regard for Bhagat Singh and B.K.Dutt, and for their comrades in general, went on escalating. In the end we may agree with the remarkable words of Chandra Shekhar Azad which he spontaneously uttered, when the feet of one of his comrades suddenly trod on the photograph of Bhagat Singh and Dutt published in some newspaper, "*Ye log ub desh ki sampatti hai. Inke chitron par pair rakhna, desh ki atma ko raundane ke baraabar hai.*"<sup>10</sup>

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## THE ASSEMBLY BOMB CASE

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The Assembly Bomb Case is one of the most important chapters of the legal history of British India. On 8 April 1929, Bhagat Singh and B.K. Dutt threw two non-fatal bombs and leaflets in the Central Legislative Assembly, New Delhi. Thereupon, they courted arrest. A day or two after Bhagat Singh's arrest, a leading lawyer of the country and a prominent member of the Indian National Congress—Mr. Asaf Ali, Bar-at-Law—was approached by his father Sardar Kishan Singh, who had been sent for by his friends, to accept Bhagat Singh's brief. Being directly associated with the trial, Mr. Asaf Ali recalls:

It was an incident of such grave consequences that normally lawyers were not prepared to come forward to defend the accused. In the very first interview, Bhagat Singh made it quite clear to me that he was not going to plead 'Not guilty'. His father and others insisted that his defence should be conducted and it was a problem for me as how to manage the show. However, Bhagat Singh made it possible for me to conduct his defence. Here I might mention that the trial was held in the office of the Delhi Jail, and visitors were restricted. The moment the prisoners were brought in, B.K.Dutt shouted 'Down, down with imperialism' in stentorian tones, and Bhagat Singh rounded up by 'Long live the revolution'. Their voice nearly brought down the low roof, and the committing magistrate, who was very favourably inclined before, suddenly grew red in the face and snapped out 'put handcuffs on them'.<sup>1</sup>

It was 7th May 1929 when the trial of the Assembly Bomb Case started. Asaf Ali appeared for the defence, while the Public Prosecutor, Rai Bahadur Suraj Narain, represented the Crown.

The trial magistrate, Mr. F.B. Pool, arrived at 9:50 a.m. and the court room was also full by that time. Besides the counsel and the press representatives, Mrs. Asaf Ali, Kishan Singh, his mother (Sardarani Jai Kaur) and the wife of Ajit Singh (Harnam Kaur) and two magistrates under training were also present. That day before the court rose for lunch, Kishan Singh, along with his mother and the wife of Ajit Singh, was allowed to have an interview with Bhagat Singh in the presence of police officials.<sup>2</sup>

How much both the accused were emotionally attached to each other, is obvious from the following words of their legal adviser Mr. Asaf Ali:

A very few people indeed know that B.K.Dutt never threw a bomb but when it came to making a statement, he insisted on confessing that he had thrown one of the bombs. When I tried to dissuade him from making this false confession, he said in all seriousness, "I and Bhagat Singh have been together for a long time, and now I am sure he is going to be sentenced to a long term of imprisonment in spite of your defence. Supposing they let me off, what shall I do without him. I must keep his company of course." It was his statement and I had no business to interfere with it. I did my duty in warning him against making such a confession, but he would not listen to me.<sup>3</sup>

The Delhi Assembly Bomb Outrage was indeed an important chapter of the legal history of India, yet it was tried just in two months. However, the most important day of the trial was 6th June 1929 when Bhagat Singh and B.K.Dutt made their historic court-statement. It was chiefly drafted by Bhagat Singh, and read by Mr. Asaf Ali on their behalf. The gist of the statement is as under<sup>4</sup>:

- Lord Irwin (the Viceroy) in his address to the joint session of the two houses described the event (bomb-explosion) as 'an attack directed against no individual but an institution itself', we readily recognized that the true significance of the incident had been correctly appreciated.
- We dropped the bombs on the floor of the Assembly Chamber to register our protest on behalf of those who had no other



means left to give expression to their heart-rending agony. Our sole purpose was 'to make the deaf hear'.

- Revolution is an inalienable right of mankind; Freedom is an imperishable birth-right of all; Labour is the real sustainer of society; the Sovereignty of the people is the ultimate destiny of the workers. For these ideals, we shall welcome any suffering to which we may be condemned. **At the altar of the revolution, we have brought our youth as an incense, for no sacrifice is too great.**

The court statement of Bhagat Singh and B.K.Dutt was then the most important news of the country. There was a competition among the leading newspapers of the day to publish it at the earliest. To cite an instance, Yashpal, an associate of Bhagat Singh, narrates the following relevant anecdote :

Those days, Lala Durga Das was the correspondent of *The Statesman* at Delhi. He wanted to send this news to his Calcutta headquarters, but all the telephone lines had been got exclusively reserved for official use. Lala Durga Das displayed the rare ingenuity of a journalist by sending this report to the paper's London office from where it was sent by wireless to its Calcutta headquarters for publication on the next day. Consequently, by the time the rest of the papers of Calcutta got the news report from their news agency the 'Associated Press of India', the special edition of *The Statesman* carrying the news of explosion in the Assembly was already available to readers.<sup>5</sup>

Secondly, the members of the Hindustan Socialist Republican Association made full use of the Press from the day onwards as they had started making news. According to one of its members, Jitendra Nath Sanyal, "The copies of the statement, which Bhagat Singh and Dutt later made before the Court, had already been smuggled out from the jail and it was ensured that they reached the newspapers before the statement's submission before the Court." The idea was to pre-empt any possibility of the vital portions of the statement being expunged and thereby not being taken on record. This is precisely what was done by the Court. They, thus, ensured an unexpunged version of the statement

receiving full publicity. Not only in India, the copies of the statement had also been sent to foreign press like certain newspapers of Ireland, the '*La Humaniste*' of Paris and the '*Pravada*' of Moscow, being among those.<sup>6</sup> Thus, the historic statement made by Bhagat Singh and B.K.Dutt in the Delhi Sessions Court on 6th June 1929 got international coverage. In these endeavours, the brain of B.K.Sinha seemed to be working, who was not only a fearless revolutionary but also an accomplished journalist.

Within a week of the statement made by Bhagat Singh and B.K.Dutt, the judgement of the Assembly Bomb-Explosion Case, containing 41 pages, was announced by the Delhi Sessions Judge, Leonard Middleton, on 12th June 1929. Charging the accused under section 307 Indian Penal Code and 3 of the Explosive Substances Act, 1908, the Judge made the following judgement :

I find it proved that Bhagat Singh threw the first bomb with the intention of causing death or bodily injury. These facts constitute an offence punishable under section 307 IPC. The same acts include the causing of an explosion of a nature likely to endanger life, which constitutes an offence punishable under section 3 of the Explosive Substances Act of 1908.

I find it proved that B.K.Dutt threw the second bomb with similar intention. He too committed both the offences punishable under the same sections.

I find both the accused guilty of both the offences with which they are charged and convict them accordingly.

The accused appear to have been completely callous as to who might suffer, their acts might have resulted in the death of not only one but several persons. The accused have alleged that they hold human life sacred. Their allegation is negatived by their acts. What they have done once, they may attempt to do again. From the preventive point of view, their offences merit severe punishment. **I sentence Bhagat Singh and B.K.Dutt to transportation for life.**<sup>7</sup>

Bhagat Singh and Dutt challenged the judgement before the



Punjab High Court, Lahore. Justice Sir Cecil Forde and Justice James Addison heard the appeal. While arguing his own case in the court, Bhagat Singh demolished the basis of the judgement and emphasised the 'importance of motive' through his following brilliant statement :

The point to be considered is that the two bombs we threw in the Assembly did not harm anybody physically. As such, the punishment awarded to us is not only very harsh but revergeful also. Moreover, the motive of the offence of an accused cannot be found out without knowing his psychology. And no one can do justice to anybody without taking his motive into consideration. If we ignore the motive, the biggest generals of the world will appear like ordinary murderers; revenue officers will look like thieves and cheats. Even judges will be accused of murder. If we set aside the motive, then Jesus Christ will appear to be a man responsible for creating disturbances, breaking peace and preaching revolt, and will be considered to be a 'dangerous personality' in the language of the law.

We are not afraid of punishment. But we do not want that we should be wrongly understood. My Lords, we have come here to clarify our position. We want that no unjust opinion be pronounced about us. The question of punishment is of secondary importance before us.<sup>8</sup>

Surprisingly, the Assembly Bomb Case attracted the attention of the bench and the bar alike. According to an eye-witness of the scene, "When the case went up in appeal to the High Court, it attracted the entire Bar, and some of the wives of the judges of the High Court also came to hear it."<sup>9</sup> This scene was particularly repeated when Bhagat Singh made his historic statement in the courtroom.<sup>10</sup>

It is true that Bhagat Singh presented his logic effectively in the court, but his advocate Mr. Asaf Ali was doubtful about it earlier. How his apprehension proved untrue, has been mentioned somewhere in his own following words :

I argued the appeal for two and a half days. My learned friend, the public prosecutor, replied during the remaining half of the third day. But in between Bhagat Singh insisted on pleading on his own behalf, in spite of my caution. I requested him not to do so, because after all the technical knowledge of law and a general knowledge of human psychology, particularly a correct assessment of the working of the judge's mind, required long experience, and laymen with the best of eloquent speeches can only spoil their cases. Bhagat Singh, not concerned with results, was bent on making an impression from his own point of view. He did not possess a carrying voice but had somewhat small and unimpressive voice and delivery. He was naturally handicapped by want of experience. It is no reflection on him that, coming as he did after two and half days of my argument, the impression which he had hoped to make fell rather flat.<sup>11</sup>

As expected, the Appeal was dismissed by the High Court, Lahore, on 13th January 1930. While dismissing the Appeal, Justice Forde writes the following words :

It is true that the penalty is the maximum under the respective sections under which they have been convicted, but it was only by sheer good fortune that nobody was killed by the explosions.

I am unable to hold that the sentences imposed by the learned Sessions Judge is, under the circumstances, excessive, and I would accordingly dismiss the appeal of both appellants.<sup>12</sup>

So far, as Bhagat Singh and Dutt were concerned, the trial was just a part of revolutionary struggle 'by other means' which consisted primarily of propagation of their ideology and programme among the widest possible sections of Indian society. Since they never denied throwing of the bombs in the Chamber, the only issue left was regarding their motive in doing so. Their measure of success in this regard can be gauged in the following remarks of the High Court Judge—Justice Forde—about Bhagat Singh, "**Bhagat Singh is a sincere revolutionary, I have no doubt,**



that is to say, he is sincere in the illusion that the world can be improved by destroying the social structure as it now stands by substituting for the rule of law, the unrestrained will of the individual."<sup>13</sup>

By then, the revolutionaries of India had been the 'soft targets' or the 'whipping boys' for critics of all hues. They were made the scapegoats for anything that went wrong in the national polity. It was vehemently and consistently argued that the revolutionaries, dubbed as terrorists, were proving to be the major hurdle in India's smooth progress towards 'freedom'. Furthermore, since they, by their actions, 'compelled' the Government to 'go slow' in the matter of progress towards 'self-rule'. Regrettably, they were projected as villains.

With the wide reach of their message, Bhagat Singh and B.K.Dutt now started attracting the centre-stage of India's political scenario. Media, the standard bearer of public opinion, became their mouthpiece. Various newspapers vied with each other to be the first to publish the news and present the most authentic version of what they did and said as indicated by the *modus operandi* adopted by Lala Durga Das. The impact of the proceedings of the whole Assembly Bomb Case Trial on the public opinion was not confined only to India, public opinion in England too was shaken out of their complacency that all was well in India and that the people were happy with the British rule.

Throwing some more light on the results of the proceedings of the Assembly Bomb Case Trial, especially the statement made by Bhagat Singh and B.K.Dutt, one of their close companions—Jitendra Nath Sanyal—befittingly writes:

The effect of their court-statement on the youth and the public was electrical. The very public leaders who had condemned the outrage before, now began to modify their views about the revolutionaries. The historic statement, alongwith the familiar picture of Bhagat Singh and Dutt, was now printed in hundreds of thousands. It was distributed throughout the country by the members of *Naujawan Bharat Sabha*. Moreover, the press coverage became wider. In short, as a result of the Assembly action, the revolutionaries came into prominence.<sup>14</sup>

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## LAHORE CONSPIRACY CASE

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The Assembly Bomb Case Trial ended with the conviction announced on 12 June 1929 by the Delhi Sessions Court and finally upheld by the High Court (Lahore) on 13 January 1930. However, the Lahore Conspiracy Case started on 10 July 1929 with the trial of Saunders' murder and other offences committed by the revolutionaries, especially the members of the Hindustan Socialist Republican Association (H.S.R.A.). It opened in the Special Magistrate's Court held in the Lahore Central Jail, and completed with the judgement made by the Special Tribunal on 7 October 1930. This historic Trial is known in India's struggle for freedom as the Second Lahore Conspiracy Case. The First Lahore Conspiracy Case (1915-16) was tried against the *Ghadarites*, including Sardar Kartar Singh Sarabha.

The Second Lahore Conspiracy Case, a wide-spread conspiracy, comprised various acts of big proportion. Among the crimes, alleged to have been included in the Conspiracy, were the bomb outrage in the Assembly; the manufacture of bombs at Lahore, Saharanpur, Calcutta and Agra; a dacoity for political purposes in Bihar and Orissa; a plot to rob the Punjab National Bank at Lahore; and the murder of Mr. J.P.Saunders, the Assistant Superintendent of Police, and Chanan Singh, the Head Constable at Lahore on 17th December 1928.

Surprisingly, within a short span of time after the arrest of Bhagat Singh and B.K.Dutt (8 April 1929), most of the accused, involved in the Second Lahore Conspiracy Case, were rounded up by the police. Naturally, the British Government rejoiced over its success in rounding up the revolutionaries. But the Trial was not going to be as simple as that of the Assembly Bomb Outrage. Bhagat Singh and B.K.Dutt had used only leaflets, slogans, and statements for the propagation of revolutionary ideas in the

Assembly Bomb Outrage. However, they now planned to face the trial in some more effective way so that they could expose the sham justice of the British Government and display the unconquerable will of the revolutionaries. Their tactics varied in response to the exigencies of the situations which confronted them with the authorities. Their main tactics of continuing the struggle in jail and court were as follows:

- Bhagat Singh, B.K.Dutt, Jatin Das and other Lahore Conspiracy Case convicts resorted to hunger-strike in order to get better living conditions in jails and to establish their identity as political prisoners.
- With a view to creating a psychological climate and atmosphere conducive to the success of revolution, they obstructed and delayed the proceedings of the court.
- The undertrial revolutionaries rent the air with slogans, sang patriotic songs, staged hand to hand fights with the police, defied courts, issued statements, wrote letters, and humiliated approvers in various ways.

In a nutshell, the history of the present trial is the history of the tussle between the revolutionary accused and the reactionary authorities. So, let us now elaborate some important events and incidents having taken place during this historic trial, 1929-30.

## I

During the British rule the European or pseudo-European criminals were, as a rule, treated better than Indian criminals. This was totally a racist policy. So, the Kakori prisoners (1925-27) went on hunger strike, which they broke at the insistence of a renowned journalist and prominent Congressite—Ganesh Shanker Vidyarthi, who had been duly assured by the Government that special treatment would be given to them. But the Government did not keep this promise. Thus the position in Indian jails had gone back to square one as in 1925. Hence, Bhagat Singh and Dutt picked up the fight from where it had been left by their predecessors.

On 12 June 1929 Bhagat Singh and Dutt were sentenced to transportation for life by the Delhi Sessions Court. Immediately Bhagat Singh was transferred to Mianwali District Jail and Dutt to Lahore Central Jail. Both of them went on hunger strike



from 15 June 1929 in their respective jails. The first thing Bhagat Singh did when he arrived at the jail was to get hold of a list of the amenities provided to prisoners, both Indian and European. He found that the Europeans got better accommodation, food and daily use items. Bhagat Singh found the members of the *Babbar Akali*, although they were detained for political reasons, being treated as criminals. Even bare necessities were denied to them; often bread was thrown at them in the way it was flung at animals in cages; and the authorities were also abusive in their language. Bhagat Singh thus wrote the following letter to the Inspector-General, Punjab Jails, Lahore through the Superintendent, Mianwali District Jail, on 17 June 1929 :

We, as political prisoners, should be given better diet and the standard of our diet should at least be the same as that of European prisoners. We should not be forced to do any hard and undignified labour at all. All books, other than those proscribed, along with writing materials, should be allowed to us without any restriction. At least one standard daily paper should be supplied to every political prisoner. Political prisoners should have a special ward of their own in every jail provided with the necessities as those of the Europeans and all the political prisoners in one jail must be kept together in that ward. Better clothing and toilet necessities should also be supplied.<sup>1</sup>

After a few days (around 25 June 1929), Bhagat Singh was shifted to Lahore Central Jail, where the hunger-striker B.K.Dutt had also sent an identical representation to jail authorities. In the meanwhile, other undertrials in the Lahore Conspiracy Case were brought to be lodged in the Lahore Borstal Jail. On coming to know about the hunger strike of Bhagat Singh and Dutt, they followed suit in July 1929. Recalling the days of hunger-strike, one of the hunger-strikers, Shiv Verma, writes :

When on 10th July 1929, the hearing of our case started, Bhagat Singh was on hunger strike. He had been sentenced to life in the Assembly Bomb Case, and now he was to be tried again for treason along with us.

He had stopped eating since 15th June, but still he came to the Court. When he was brought in the Court on a stretcher, all of us were moved to tears. He was not the same Bhagat Singh, whose sturdy physique was always a topic of discussion among us all. The 'Bhagat Singh' we met now was merely a shadow of his former self, pale and weak. The torture of prison and hunger strike had reduced him to skeleton.

The hunger strike lasted 63 days, Bhagat Singh continued with his reading, writing, washing, attending the Court, drafting documents, making statements, joking and laughing, humming and singing songs, as usual. During the trial, Bhagat Singh and Dutt had been kept in Central Jail while rest of us were confined in Borstal jail. Bhagat Singh, despite being on hunger strike, had come to Borstal jail a number of times.<sup>2</sup>

Indeed, the transfer of Bhagat Singh to Lahore Central Jail gave a turning-point to the move of hunger-strike. When the Lahore Conspiracy Case undertrials met Bhagat Singh on 10 July 1929, Jatin Das was at first averse to hunger-strike, because he regarded it as a dangerous game to play. The enthusiasm of the rest forced him to join the strike, but before doing so he warned that he would not compromise until their demands were fully satisfied. Hence, from 13 July 1929, when the undertrials, especially Jatin Das, confirmed their resolve to plunge into the fight, the struggle began to assume a grim aspect.

Hence began a race between the hunger-strikers and the authorities to outwit each other. The hunger-strikers offered violent resistance and adopted defiant attitude to forcible feeding. The struggle reached a crucial point when the condition of Jatin Das took a serious turn. His condition kept on deteriorating, and on 13 September 1929 he died the death of a martyr at 1:05 p.m. The Martyrdom of Jatin Das created an unprecedented stir and acted as a profound inspiration to the youth of India. Especially, the student organisations began to grow up all over India.

By the end of August 1929, the hunger-strike was at its peak. Forced by public protests and mounting worry over the



deteriorating condition of hunger-strikers, the Government then promised to establish an Enquiry Committee. And it was appointed on 2 September 1929, which submitted its recommendations almost in a month. The prospects now seemed hopeful and the Government posed to be indulgent to the revolutionaries. Hence on 5 October 1929, Bhagat Singh and his comrades ended their hunger-strike. But they lost their patience with the dilly-dallying tactics of the British Government. Bhagat Singh thus submitted a petition to the Home Member of Government of India on 28th January 1930, but it failed to evoke a favourable response. At this decisive stage of the struggle, resumption of hunger-strike on 4 February 1930 by Bhagat Singh and others created tremendous stir and excitement throughout the country. This was a signal for other political prisoners of the country to join Bhagat Singh and his comrades in order to secure the rights and demands of their fellow-prisoners.

Thereupon, the Government of India issued a communique on the subject of jail reforms on 19th February 1930. By which, the Government of India proposed that the prisoners in future be put into either of three classes A, B and C or I, II and III, respectively. Bhagat Singh and other Lahore Conspiracy Case prisoners called off their strike on 20th February 1930 when they were shown the communique. It was a tragic irony that the Lahore Conspiracy Case prisoners were not put in a better class till the very end, yet they were able to secure special facilities for the undertrials and uplift the status of political prisoners.

(b)

Throwing some more light on the details of the hunger-strike observed by the undertrials of the Lahore Conspiracy Case, one of the hunger-strikers—Ajoy Ghosh—himself writes<sup>3</sup> :

— In July 1929, thirteen of us were produced in the court and there we met Bhagat Singh and Dutt again. No longer was he the Bhagat Singh of the magnificent physique whose strength had been a byword in our party. A shadow of his former self, weak and emaciated, he was carried into the court on a stretcher. For months, he and Dutt had been tortured by the police and now they were on hunger strike

demanding human treatment for all political prisoners. Our eyes filled with tears as we greeted them.

- After ten days of the hunger-strike, the forcible feeding was started. We were all in separate cells at that time. Accompanied by a number of tough and strong *nambardars*, the doctors came to each cell, the hunger striker was thrown on a mattress, a rubber tube was forcibly pushed into his nostril and the milk poured into it.
- In the meantime, sympathetic hunger strikes were taking place wherever there were political prisoners. A powerful mass movement had grown to back our demands. Mass meetings and demonstrations were taking place in every part of the country. The news was flashed across the seas. It created a stir in England. World attention was now focussed on the conditions in Indian prisons.
- Several times during the hunger strike, Bhagat Singh came to our jail (Borstal Jail) on the plea of consultation, but really to meet us and know how we were faring. Though himself weak and emaciated, he would sit by the side of Jatin Das and other comrades and cheer them up. His very presence infused new life in us and we looked forward eagerly to these visits.
- As Jatin Das passed away on 13 September 1929, I saw tears even in the eyes of hardened jail officials. His body was borne out of the jail gate, to be handed over to the huge crowd that was waiting outside. Hamilton Hardinge—the Superintendent of Police, Lahore—bared his head, bowing in reverence before the man whom all the might of the British empire had failed to defeat.
- One event during the hunger strike moved us deeply. Baba Sohan Singh Bhakna, the founder of the *Ghadar Party* and a hero of the First Lahore Conspiracy Case (1915-16), who was then in the Lahore Central Jail, joined the strike. He had already served 14 years in Andamans and other prisons, and was about to be released. We were informed by the Jail Superintendent that if he persisted, he would lose his remissions and would have to remain in prison much longer. Moreover, *Babaji* was old and in ill health, 14 years of hell



had shattered his body and the hunger strike might end disastrously for him. In vain, however, Bhagat Singh saw *Babaji* and pleaded with him. Bhagat Singh was in tears when he reported the interview to us—to desist. *Babaji* continued the strike as long as we did. He lost a good part of his remissions, and had to remain in jail for a year more.

## (c)

Bhagat Singh went on hunger strike for 126 days, from 15 June to 5 October 1929 (with two day's break) and 4 to 20 February 1930. Apprising us with the first phase of their hunger-strike, B.K.Dutt recalled in an interview on 9 September 1963 at Khatkar Kalan, "We started our hunger-strike on 15th June 1929 which lasted till the first week of October 1929."<sup>4</sup> When Bhagat Singh was in Delhi Jail, he was treated at par with European prisoners, but not in Mianwali and Lahore jails. It is an open secret that Bhagat Singh knew it well that he had to kiss the gallows soon. So, the question arises, why did he then suffer a lot to get the jail-conditions improved? The answer is quite obvious that he wanted to get the jails worth-living for the political prisoners who were committed to get their beloved country freed from the clutches of foreign yoke. If the jails today are much better than the past, its credit must also go to Bhagat Singh and other under-trials of the Lahore Conspiracy Case, especially Shahid Jatin Das who even went to the extent of sacrificing his life at a young age.

Moreover, the hunger-strike became a powerful instrument of challenging the British Government, exposing it, and paralysing the judicial proceedings. Various episodes during their spell of hunger-strike compelled the Magistrate to adjourn the Case from 26th July to September 24, 1929. The hunger-strikers were justified in the All-India Congress Committee (AICC) meeting held on 26th July 1929, wherein the Congress President Pt. Moti Lal Nehru condemned deliberate indifference, obstinacy and callousness on the part of the British Government. Moreover, the Indian members of the Central Legislative Assembly, especially Mr. M.A. Jinnah of the Muslim League made no secret of his sympathies with the hunger-strikers, though their politics and his own were poles apart. On 12 September 1929, Mr. Jinnah said in the Assembly :



The hunger strike is the declaration of war. You know that these people are determined to sacrifice their lives. Everyone cannot begin a fast unto death. Such an individual can neither be an ordinary human being nor an accused of a cruel murder. The people oppose this abhorrent governing system and remind that there are thousands of youth outside.<sup>5</sup>

## II

The Lahore Conspiracy Case undertrials kept on devising ever new forms of display which could bring them into confrontation with the authorities in full view of the audience. The celebration of different 'days' was another irritant for the authorities. To cite certain instances, on 19 December 1929, Bhagat Singh sought permission to sing a song in memory of *the Kakori Martyrs*. On 24 January 1930 most of the accused came to the court wearing red scarves in order to celebrate the '*Lenin Day*' in a befitting manner. The accused talked and after every few minutes raised usual revolutionary slogans. Bhagat Singh demanded that a telegram of congratulations should be despatched to the President, *Third International Moscow*, but even this small demand was not conceded. On 5 April 1930, a message of condolence on the sad demise of Shyamji Krishan Verma in Germany was wired to the *Hindustan Association of Central Europe*, Berlin. Similarly, the *May Day* was celebrated on 1st May 1930. However, the defence lawyers of the accused put their foot down against celebrations of Lenin day, Kakori day, May day and other such days, because in their legalist eyes this constituted an indirect corroboration of the charges levelled against them, but the revolutionaries ignored such warnings.

In addition to it, as soon as Bhagat Singh and his comrades entered the court, they raised the slogans of '*Inquilab Zindabad*' and 'Down with Imperialism'. It was followed by the singing of '*Bande Matram*'. Being an eye-witness to such scene, Mrs. Subhadra Joshi remarked about the electrifying effect of these national songs and slogans that the judge as well as the audience seemed to be in a trance, and the atmosphere seemed to be inebriated with the spirit of sacrifice.



Creation of uproar in the court by raising slogans, singing songs and seeking permission of the court to celebrate certain days was one of the tactics of provoking the authorities, obstructing proceedings in the court and of publicising their ideals.

Besides, an unforgettable incident of the trial occurred on 19 October 1929, when Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose visited the court. As soon as Netaji entered the court-room, the accused stood up in the dock and greeted him with loud shouts of 'Long Live Revolution', 'Long Live Proletariat' and 'Down, down with Imperialism'. Netaji acknowledged the greetings with folded hands. He was given a seat in the press enclosure. The accused asked the court to allow them an interview with Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, but in vain. Netaji watched the proceedings for about three hours along with Baba Gurdit Singh of the Komagata Maru fame. The accused raised slogans when Netaji left the courtroom at about 2:00 p.m.<sup>6</sup>

The Lahore Conspiracy Case undertrials used various methods of obstruction, display and propaganda for delaying the course of the trial. It is evident from the fact that only 230 witnesses, out of a total of 607, had been examined after a prolonged enquiry for almost a year. The officials thus now felt that it was impossible for them to bring the trial to a conclusion within any calculable period.

### III

Hence, the British Government used its trump card. On 1st May 1930, Lord Irwin, being the Viceroy and Governor General of British India, issued an ordinance which entrusted the trial of this case to a special tribunal to be constituted by the Chief Justice of High Court of Judicature at Lahore, consisting of three judges of the High Court. The Tribunal was invested with powers to deal with wilful obstruction. An under-trial of the Case, Comrade Ajoy Ghosh, had analysed the real nature of the Lahore Conspiracy Case Ordinance in an incisive manner as under:

A special ordinance was promulgated by the Viceroy to try us, known as 'Lahore Conspiracy Case Ordinance of 1930'. Its provisions were of an unheard character—we were to be tried before a Special Tribunal that could,

if it deemed necessary, proceed without our presence. There need be no lawyers, no defence witness, no accused in the court. Any sentence, including the sentence of death, could be passed by the Tribunal. And to crown it all, against its judgement, there was no right to appeal.

Another thing, it seemed, was worrying them—Mr. Fearn, the only police official present at the spot when Assistant Superintendent of Police Mr. Saunders was killed, had failed to identify Bhagat Singh. Due to the tremendous popular enthusiasm that the case had evoked, a number of key witnesses had turned hostile, more were likely to follow suit and two of the approvers had retracted their confessions. **The whole case was in danger of ending in a fiasco, if ordinary legal procedure was followed and ordinary legal facilities allowed us.**<sup>7</sup>

Moreover, the Punjab High Court Bar Association found that no emergency whatsoever had been established to justify the promulgation of Lahore Conspiracy Case Ordinance. It was dubbed by them as 'ultra-vires' and 'ill-advised'. Condemning the formation of the Special Tribunal, a noted lawyer of the Supreme Court—Mr. A.G. Noorani—also aptly writes:

Its judgment would be 'final and conclusive'. There would be no appeal from any order or sentence of the Tribunal. The High Court's jurisdiction was completely excluded. That included the jurisdiction to issue a writ of habeas corpus. Under the ordinary law of the land, a death sentence pronounced by a Sessions Judge was subject to confirmation by the High Court. Not so, in this case. **A murder had been arranged by the State through the instrumentality of courts of law. It was a massacre of justice. It was a classic case of abuse of the judicial process for political ends.**<sup>8</sup>

#### IV

However, the Lahore Conspiracy Case was now transferred from the Special Magistrate's Court of Rai Saheb Pandit Sri Krishan



to the newly established Tribunal w.e.f. 5th May 1930. The Tribunal had three judges of the High Court—namely J. Coldstream, Syed Agha Haider and G.C. Hilton. Before the trial had proceeded in the court of the special tribunal for a fortnight, the expected clash between the accused and the authorities came. Orders were now passed by the president of the tribunal—Justice Coldstream—to handcuff the accused for raising slogans when entering the court. On their pointing out that this had never been objected to in the magistrate's court or even in the High Court where they had been taken once, the police were ordered to use force. There, in the presence of lawyers and visitors, scores of policemen armed with lathis and batons pounced upon them. This was the order they had been waiting for. The accused fought back with bare fists but the odds against them were kicked and beaten with lathis. They were removed from the court by force, blood stained and severely injured. Their injuries were heavy and they were so serious that most of them could not move for days together.

In other words, Bhagat Singh and his comrades decided that come what may, they would in no case attend the court unless the order of handcuffing was withdrawn. However, the accused agreed to come to the court in handcuffs, provided their handcuffs were removed while they were in the court. Yet this too was not done. So, they thought of a plan. At lunch-time, they demanded while they took food, their handcuffs should be taken off. Somehow, it was done. What followed, is probably the most crucial incident in the history of trial before the Tribunal. Apprising us with this touching scene of 12th May 1930, an accused Jitendra Nath Sanyal himself recalls :

After the lunch was over, policemen advanced towards us i.e. the accused for handcuffing. The accused refused point blank to allow this. A scuffle ensued thereafter between the police and the accused. But the police failed to subdue the accused. Thereupon '*Pathan*' policemen were summoned who beat the accused mercilessly. This beating was specially cruel for Bhagat Singh, he being their pet target. **Eight ferocious *Pathans* fell on Bhagat Singh with lathis and kicks with heavy uniform shoes.** This episode took place in

full public view of the visitors, which included some ladies too.

Not satisfied with the beating of accused in the Court, one day, the police resorted to the same barbaric conduct after the Court proceedings had been adjourned for the day. In the jail premises, a most merciless assault was launched on Bhagat Singh. However, these sufferings had an unintended fall out. The Police and the Jail authorities, both, admitted in their reports submitted on the matter, in no ambiguous terms that **though it was within their power to beat the accused to the maximum possible extent, even to the extent of beating them dead, but it was well nigh impossible for them to bring the accused to the Court.**<sup>9</sup>

In a nutshell, the undertrials were given an inhuman beating. Bhagat Singh, addressing the Tribunal, said: "You are cowards and mercenaries." The accused vehemently protested against what they called the high-handedness of the police to the Judges and called upon the Indian Judge to resign. Justice Agha Haider, though he continued sitting during this episode, yet he refused to be a part to this high-handedness, perpetrated by the police on the orders of Justice Coldstream. The hearing was adjourned till the next day. When the proceedings were resumed on 13 May 1930, Justice Agha Haider boldly made the following statement at the very outset:

I was not a party to the order of the removal of the accused from the Court to the Jail and I was not responsible for it in any way. I dissociate myself from all that took place on 12th May 1930 in consequence of that order.<sup>10</sup>

Subsequently, his name was withdrawn from the Tribunal, and replaced by Justice Abdul Qadir. However, Justice Coldstream was also replaced by Justice J.K. Tapp.

The story of this gruesome assault was printed in papers with banner lines and was condemned by everybody. A highly attended protest meeting was held in Lahore where the atrocious conduct of the police was severely condemned. Consequently,



the court had to eat a humble pie by withdrawing its draconian order.

## V

As the formation of the Tribunal was a farcical act, the accused, led by Bhagat Singh, boycotted it. Assailing the attitude of the court, Bhagat Singh courageously remarks:

The proceedings are entirely high-handed; and the prosecution, the Government and the court are not giving us opportunity for defence. This is negation of justice. This high-handedness does not mean anything else, except that we should be hanged. If that is the desire of the Government, we are prepared for it. If the country has any spirit, it will see to it. If we are going to be deprived of all facilities for defence, and if we are to be treated in this manner, we don't want to produce any defence. Whatever is happening in this court, is nothing but a farce. Let the British Government be proud of this 'justice'. We have nothing to do with this case. I declare on behalf of the accused in the court that they withdraw their representation. Let the civilized world know what this Government is doing. We are prepared to be hanged.<sup>11</sup>

Commenting on the boycott of the court by the accused of the Lahore Conspiracy Case, a popular newspaper of the day befittingly writes:

The refusal of the accused persons in the Lahore Conspiracy case to attend the proceedings before the Tribunal reduced the trial to a farce. The trial was held in the absence of the accused and their counsel; while the Government Advocate, assisted by two special public prosecutors, was throughout appearing for the Crown. The prosecution was, therefore, able to have its own way; and there was no one to take objection to any portion of the evidence led before the Tribunal. The trial merely amounted to transference of the statements which the approvers and other prosecution witnesses had made to the police or Magistrates to the

file of the Tribunal. In addition, there were a large number of exhibits, which the police had collected during the investigation of the case.<sup>12</sup>

So, the prosecutor abruptly closed his case before the Tribunal on 26 August 1930 after 457 prosecution-witnesses\* had been examined in order to conclude the case before the Ordinance expired on 31 October 1930.

## VI

After the farcical trial lasting five months, ultimately, the judgement was announced on 7 October 1930 by the Tribunal comprising three judges, namely G.C. Hilton, Abdul Qadir and J.K.Tapp. The 'judgement of capital punishment' thus runs as under<sup>13</sup>:

- Bhagat Singh is convicted under section 121 and 302 of the Indian Penal Code and also under section 4 (b) of the Explosive Substance Act having regard to the deliberate and cowardly murder of Mr. J.P. Saunders in which he took part and to his position as a leading member of the conspiracy, **he is sentenced to be hanged by the neck till he is dead.**
- Shivram Rajguru is convicted under section 121 and 302 of the IPC. In view of his participation in the murder of Mr. Saunders, he is sentenced to be hanged by the neck till he is dead.
- Sukhdev is convicted under section 109, 120-B, 121 and 302 of the IPC. He was privy to the plan to murder Mr. Scott which resulted in the murder of Mr. Saunders as well as taking a leading part in the manufacture of bombs and in the recruiting of new members of the party. His guilt is no less than that of Bhagat Singh. Sukhdev is also sentenced to be hanged by the neck till he is dead.

Out of the remaining accused, the three—Des Raj, Ajoy Ghosh and Jitendra Nath Sanyal—were acquitted; the five approvers—Jai Gopal, Phonindra Nath Ghosh, Man Mohan Bannerjee, Hans Raj Vohra and Lalit Kumar Mukherjee—were discharged from custody; the seven—Kishori Lal, Mahabir Singh, B.K. Sinha,

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\* For the complete list of prosecution-witnesses, please see the Appendix-III.



Shiv Verma, Gaya Parsad, Jai Dev Kapoor and Kanwal Nath Tiwari—were sentenced to transportation for life; and the last four—Kundan Lal, Prem Dutt Verma, Ram Saran Dass and Brahm Dutt—were sentenced to lesser periods.

## VII

In spite of its being a farcical trial, the Second Lahore Conspiracy Case is in itself one of the most important chapters of the history of Revolutionary Movement in India. Commenting on the repercussions of the high-handedness adopted by the British authorities throughout the trial, one of the accused—Comrade Ajoy Ghosh—objectively observes :

Throughout the trial we strove to carry out the policy we had chalked out in the very beginning, the policy of propaganda by action. The success of that policy and the tremendous publicity that our case received made the government furious. Every opportunity was seized to break us. We were equally determined never to give in to humiliating orders, never to bow before the court and the police. And the result was frequent struggles, physical clashes with the police, prolonged adjournments. The effect of each of these was better exposure of the government, more publicity and more popular sympathy for us.<sup>14</sup>

Apprising us with some more facts of the Trial, another co-accused of Bhagat Singh—Jitendra Nath Sanyal—tells us as follows :

The Lahore Conspiracy Case gained unprecedented publicity throughout India, and even beyond India. Subscriptions began to flow in from distant parts of the world. A lady from Poland sent a remittance with a request that detailed proceedings of the case might be sent to her regularly. Donations came from Japan, Canada and even distant South America. The 'Bhagat Singh day (30 June 1929)' was celebrated in different parts of the country, and his portraits were widely used in calendars.

In the Magistrate's court (10 July 1929 to 5 May 1930),

many distinguished public leaders paid their visits to the under-trials, notable among them being Subhas Chandra Bose, Baba Gurdit Singh, K.F. Nariman, the Raja of Kalakankar (Raja Rampal Singh), R.A. Kidwai, Mohan Lal Saxena, and lastly, our great revered leader, Pandit Motilal Nehru. Motilal came to see us twice, the second time he entered the dock of the accused and remained closeted with us for about an hour.<sup>15</sup>

Besides, an authority on the revolutionaries of India, Dr. Kamiesh Mohan, considers the 'Second Lahore Conspiracy Case Trial' as a remarkable incident of the freedom struggle. Throwing some light on its historical significance, she makes her scholarly remarks :

It was breath-taking to watch these intrepid youth indulge in fun and frolic in the court when the judges were bent upon sending them to gallows.

The Lahore Conspiracy Case Trial fulfilled its essential purpose by creating a petrifying effect on the British Government, which was forced to watch the spectre of its own demise. **It compelled the Foreign Government to realise that India was on the verge of revolution and ready to pay any price for securing emancipation.**

It was this momentous trial that exposed the sham justice and crack in the British Empire. If a band of intrepid youth could paralyse it, then the Indians as a nation could surely eject the British out of India.

The Lahore Conspiracy Case Trial indeed quickened the pace of India's march towards freedom by invoking every Indian to fight the battle to its bitter end.<sup>16</sup>

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## GOES TO GALLOWS

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The 7th October 1930 is an unforgettable date in the history of India's struggle for freedom when one of the most beloved sons of India Sardar Bhagat Singh, along with his two companions Sukhdev and Rajguru, was awarded capital punishment by the Special Tribunal, comprising three judges of the Punjab High Court. As the accused of Second Lahore Conspiracy Case had boycotted the proceedings of the farcical Tribunal, the judgement, containing 228 pages, was conveyed to them by some special messenger. And the date for their execution was fixed, the 27th October 1930. Considering the 'death sentence' as a '*sarvoch puraskaar*' of his services for the nation, Bhagat Singh recited the following couplet of Saint Kabir :

*Jis marne te jug dare, mere mun anand;  
Marne te hi payie puran parmanand!*

It is true that the Judgement was a victory which elevated the British authorities, but the political scene of the nation took a grave turn. First of all, the defence council, which was composed of 14 prominent public figures of the status of Lala Duni Chand, Dr. Gopi Chand Bhargava, Kumari Lajjawati, Pandit K. Santanam, Sardar Kishan Singh, Dr. Saifuddin Kitchlew, etc., decided that a petition for leave to appeal be sent to the Privy Council (London). Bhagat Singh, who preferred glorious death to useless confinement in jail, could only be persuaded by Pandit Moti Lal Nehru and the advocate Pran Nath Mehta to agree to this line of action. He said yes to it only when he realised that appeal to the Privy Council had rich potentialities as a media for propaganda; it would enlighten foreign countries about India's relentless fight for freedom and the role of Revolutionaries in it, and to publicise the cruelties inflicted by the authorities on political prisoners. Bhagat Singh had also an intense desire to transform his death into a source of



strength for his fellow-countrymen. Keeping it all in view, the defence council applied to the Privy Council for leave to appeal with a view to challenging the legality of the 'Lahore Conspiracy Case Ordinance of 1930' in first instance.

The defence counsel of Bhagat Singh in the Privy Council was Barrister D.N. Pritt (1887-1972), a lawyer of international repute. Dedicated to the cause of Liberty in jeopardy, a brilliant British barrister held out a helping hand offering his abundant forensic talents and skills and abilities. Not surprisingly, the Barrister D.N. Pritt became internationally famous as the defender of lost cases. In his legal career, it was one of the important cases in which the Barrister D.N. Pritt, according to *The Hindu* dated 7 November 2007, "appeared for the iconic revolutionary of the Indian Freedom Movement, Bhagat Singh. However, it was not on the merits, but on a technical matter of legal procedure on which he argued the case. As the dice were loaded heavily against Bhagat Singh, the appeal was dismissed." While dismissing the petition, the Board Members of Privy Council—namely Viscount Dunedin, Lord Thankerton, Lord Russell, George Lowndes and Sir Dinshah Mulla—made the following comments, "It is the Governor-General who is the sole judge to decide whether there exists a state of emergency or not."<sup>1</sup>

On 11 February 1931, the petition was rejected by the Privy Council. However, it could not dampen the enthusiasm of the people and the leaders of India. It rather set in motion a powerful current of agitation, apart from resentment in the form of petitions and memorandums. So, we now throw some light on the details of such developments<sup>2</sup>:

- As soon as the news of the rejection of petition by the Privy Council was made public, a nation-wide agitation took place. The people were demanding the commutation of the death sentences of Bhagat Singh, Rajguru and Sukhdev.
- Youth in the Punjab were greatly agitated over the news. In their opinion, merely petitions could not calm down their fury; it found vehement expression in the form of posters issued by the *Naujawan Bharat Sabha*. One of the posters, entitled the *Punjab Avenging Party shall have blood for*

*blood*, was published at Lahore; and it was circulated extensively in Lahore, Amritsar and Phillaur.

- Moreover, a *Sabha*, under the banner of '*Bhagat Singh Appeal Committee*', started its campaign. It started obtaining signatures on mass level, demanding the withdrawal of death sentences and telling the Government that its conduct in sticking to the execution of the judgement was against the expressed opinion of millions. The *Sabha* also declared that on 17 February 1931, a memorandum would be submitted to the Viceroy and 'Bhagat Singh Day' be observed throughout the province.
- Even some members of the House of Commons urged the Viceroy Lord Irwin for the commutation as is evident from the telegram sent by them from London, received in India on 6 March 1931. This telegram was sent by the M.Ps. like Maxton, Kink, Brockway, Jowett and others. It runs, "House of Commons Independent Labour Party Group earnestly urge you in view of truce (Gandhi-Irwin Pact of 5 March 1931) to pardon Lahore Conspiracy Case prisoners."
- According to some report, a good number of native rulers, especially the Maharaja of Bikaner, submitted their appeal to this effect to the Viceroy Lord Irwin.
- Within a few days, approximately 1½ lac signatures were obtained from the people of India, demanding the withdrawal of death sentences. As per some estimate, the total number of literates in the country was then a few lacs only. Bhagat Singh's niece, Ms. Virendra Sindhu, seems to be right when she writes: "Who will say 'no' to it that, apart from these signatories, there were millions of illiterates who had also their sympathies with Bhagat Singh and his comrades."

Throwing some more light on the scene, following the rejection of petition by Privy Council, one of Bhagat Singh's close associates Jitendra Nath Sanyal aptly remarks :

Never in the history of British India had there been such a widespread and genuine demand for the commutation of sentences. Even in England, the movement was gaining ground. It was stated that even the Viceroy had felt the influence of public opinion in



this matter. This was exactly what Bhagat Singh wished!<sup>3</sup>

Yet the precious lives of Bhagat Singh and his comrades—Rajguru and Sukhdev— could not be saved. Now the question arises, how did Bhagat Singh face the end at the prime of his life? First of all, we shall reproduce here the scene of Bhagat Singh's meeting with his family-members on 3rd March 1931, just 20 days before his execution.

The family was Bhagat Singh's refuge. He had spent only a few early years at home, yet he felt quite close to his family-members. On the aforesaid day, almost all the family-members of Bhagat Singh—including his grandfather, father, mother, aunts, sisters and brothers—had come to the Lahore Central Jail for *mulakaat*. It was, indeed, a memorable '*mulakaat*' in the history of this jail:

- Bhagat Singh was overwhelmed to see his wailing mother, Smt. Vidyawati. She did not stop weeping. Her *duppatta* was wet. She was trying to push back her tears.
- Bhagat Singh found that his revered grandfather, Sardar Arjun Singh, was unusually sad.
- His father Sardar Kishan Singh's long white beard was glistening with tears.
- Kulbir, his younger brother, was wiping his cheeks.
- Kultar, his another brother, 10 years old, was sobbing.
- The two aunts Harnam Kaur and Hukam Kaur and the three sisters—Amar Kaur, Sumitra and Shakuntala—were on the verge of breaking down.<sup>4</sup>

The Deputy Superintendent of Jail—Khan Muhammad Akbar—went on extending the time of their meeting despite contrary instructions from above. Bhagat Singh's family members embraced him one by one to say goodbye. He then touched his mother's feet. It was a gesture of reverence but it brought tears to the eyes of everyone. His sisters sobbed openly. Bhagat Singh was greatly upset. "Stay together" were his last words. He folded his hands as he retraced his steps. On his way back to the cell, he saw Sukhdev and Rajguru still standing behind iron bars, forlorn and lonely. Despite the dutyman's 'no', Bhagat Singh stopped to chat with them. Many prisoners from nearby cells craned their necks

for a glimpse of Bhagat Singh, the person they admired. Having reached his condemned-cell, Bhagat Singh found his shoulders wet. He recalled how his younger brother Kultar wept incessantly. While saying goodbye, Kultar had remarked, "Life will not be worth living without you."<sup>5</sup>

Bhagat Singh had categorically sent a message to his family-members not to bid him a tearful farewell. He wanted his last meeting to be full of happy moments, which he would recall when he walked towards the scaffold. Finding them drowned in sorrow, he got worried. He could understand that they would feel the loss. But they should have known, as Bhagat Singh wished, that an early death was inevitable on the path he had chosen. He implored them 'to stay together and bear the loss bravely'.

A day before the execution, the last *mulakaat* was to be held. So, the families of Bhagat Singh, Rajguru and Sukhdev reached the gate of Lahore Central Jail on the morning of 23rd March 1931. Regrettably, the Jail officials did not allow the grandfather of Bhagat Singh and his *chachis* a meeting, considering them as second and third degree relatives. As a protest, Bhagat Singh's family declined the meeting. On learning about this, Rajguru's mother Smt. Parbati Bai, accompanied by her daughter Godawari, who had come all the way from Pune for the purpose, and Smt. Ralli Devi Thapar, Sukhdev's mother, too refused to meet their sons. Ironically, history has spoken some words about the three sons, but not even a single word about the emotions of their revered mothers who could not have the last glimpse of their beloved sons.

However, one of Bhagat Singh's friends could meet him on this fateful day. He was the advocate, Prannath Mehta. Apprising us with his historic meet with Bhagat Singh, Mr. Mehta recalls :

On that day I was privileged to stay with Sardar Bhagat Singh in his condemned cell for nearly an hour. I had met him many times at the same place. I had witnessed him as a hunger-striker, and had seen him in action in the courts, but I had never felt that he was that courageous and so great. He and I both knew that he was walking through the valley of the shadow of death, the hands of the clock were moving fast towards



the zero hour of hanging, but I found him cheerful. His face glistened as always.

When I approached his cell, he was pacing it like a tiger in a cage. As soon as I stepped inside the cell he asked, "Did you bring the book?" I handed over quietly the book *The Revolutionary Lenin* to him. He was very pleased at the sight of the book, I asked him, "How do you feel today?" He said briefly, "I am feeling fine." He conveyed his thanks to the leaders (like Dr. Gopichand Bhargava, Lala Dunichand, Dr. Saifuddin Kitchlew, etc.), who had taken interest in the case and expressed his good wishes to his friends, specially the absconding ones.

In that atmosphere of death I felt shaken, but he seemed to be entrenched firmly in the faith that looks through death. He seemed to be so much at peace with himself, he was so much free from fear and unattached that he appeared to be divine.<sup>6</sup>

One may be eager to know what Bhagat Singh thought sitting on the dividing line between the life and the death. The question arises, not out of just an idle curiosity, what was Bhagat Singh thinking on life, death, God and allied subjects? Coincidentally, the editor of the *Pratap* Jullundar, Mr. Virendra, was also in that jail and he has recorded a significant event which certainly sheds direct light on the subject:

Just one day before the hanging, the Sikh chief warder Chattar Singh approached Bhagat Singh. Chattar Singh was re-employed in the jail department after retiring as havildar from the British army. Knowing that Bhagat Singh had only a few hours left, as a devout Sikh he thought it his duty to help him prepare properly for the next world. According to his religion, Chattar Singh was doing a very pious work. He went to Bhagat Singh and said, "My son, death, the journey's end, is round the corner. I am just like your father. Listen to me." Bhagat Singh was mildly surprised and asked, "What is the matter?" Chattar Singh said, "I have only one request to make. The end is very near. Now you take

the name *Wahe Guru* and read the *Gurbani (Sikh Gita)*. Here I have brought the *Gutka* (little book) for you." Bhagat Singh let out a guffaw and said, "Old man, I would gladly comply with your request, but now that the journey's end is very near, if now I pray to God, people would say that Bhagat Singh was chicken-hearted. I never prayed and now that I am feeling the icy breath of death on my neck, if I started praying, people would misunderstand me. It would be better to let me go my own way. I might be abused because I am an atheist and do not believe in God, but nobody would say that Bhagat Singh was dishonest and flinched at the sight of death."<sup>7</sup>

When called upon to mount the scaffold, Bhagat Singh was reading a book on Lenin. He continued his reading and said: "Wait a while, a revolutionary is talking to another revolutionary." There was something in his voice which made the executioners pause.<sup>8</sup> As per some report, the eyes of the executioners were then filled with tears, but of Bhagat Singh's with cheers.

On reaching the gallows, Bhagat Singh told the White magistrate with a smile: "You are really fortunate that you are witnessing how the Indian revolutionaries march to their death."<sup>9</sup> It is said that Bhagat Singh sang the following couplet before kissing the gallows :

*Dil se na niklegi markur bhi watan ki ulfat,  
Meri mitti se bhi khushboo-e-watan aegi.*<sup>10</sup>

(Even after death the love of motherland shall linger in my heart. My dead body shall emit the fragrance of my motherland).

Let us now reproduce the touching scene of his final journey to the gallows in the words of some co-prisoner. A member of the revolutionary party, Mr. Dharampal, was then in the Lahore Central Jail. He was detained in a nearby cell of Bhagat Singh's condemned-cell. In the words of Mr. Dharampal:

On 23rd March 1931, I, alongwith other accused, was brought back from the court to jail earlier. Around 3:00 or 4:00 p.m. all the prisoners were sent to their respective cells and barracks. Meanwhile, Bhagat Singh,



loudly speaking from his condemned-cell, asked me, "Dharam, why did you come today so early from the court?" I said, "Some Jail officials are probably coming to inspect the Jail." Pat came the reply, "*Ure bhole logon, hum hi yah inspection karne ja rahe hain.*"

Afterwards, all the three were provided with water to have their final bath. Having come out of their condemned-cells for the last journey, Bhagat Singh addressed his accessible fellow-prisoners, stating : "*Achha bhai, chalte hain.*"

The whole jail then started resounding with the slogan at the peak of the voice, "*Inquilab Zindabad*" which was audible to the nearby residential area of the jail, including the house of Pandit K. Santanam. Thereafter, the cries of slogan stopped, and all of us were silently awaiting the fall of the '*phansi ka taktha*'. As per my watch, the wooden planks, under their feet, were withdrawn at 7:23 p.m. Following it, the whole jail resounded with the slogans—

- *Inquilab Zindabad;*
- *Bhagat Singh Zindabad;*
- *Sukhdev Zindabad;*
- *Rajguru Zindabad*

None of us then could talk to each other atleast for half an hour.<sup>11</sup>

In other words, all the three stood on separate wooden planks, with a deep ditch running below them. Bhagat Singh was in the middle, Sukhdev was on his right and Rajguru on his left.<sup>12</sup> The noose was tightened around each one's neck. Thereafter, they kissed the rope. Their hands and feet were tied. The hangman pulled the rope and removed the rafters from under their feet. As soon as the wooden-planks under their feet were withdrawn, all the three fell in the well with a jerk and joined the galaxy of immortals. The following words of some poet may apply on them:

*"Hum vo hai,  
Jo maut se darte nahin;  
Hum vo hai,  
Jo mur ke bli murte nahin."*

The bodies, limp and drooping, remained hanging from the scaffold for some time. As per some report, one jail officer was so moved by their courage that he defied the order to identify the dead. He was suspended then and there.<sup>13</sup> After executing the death sentence, the Superintendent of the Lahore Central Jail issued the following certificate, pertaining to Shaheed Bhagat Singh :

I hereby certify that the sentence of death passed on Bhagat Singh has been duly executed and that the said Bhagat Singh was accordingly hanged by the neck till he was dead at Lahore Central Jail on Monday, the 23rd day of March 1931, at 7:00 p.m. that the body remained suspended for a full hour, and was not taken down until life was ascertained by a medical officer to be extinct; and that no accident, error or other misadventure occurred.<sup>14</sup>

Chattar Singh, the chief warder of the jail, was an eye-witness to the execution. Afterwards, he burst into tears. In his 30 years of service, he said that he had seen many executions but never had anyone mounted the gallows so courageously and smilingly as the three did.

The British imperial power proved to be so cowardly that they could not even maintain the timing of the hanging i.e. 6 to 7 a.m. Against all international norms, they hanged Bhagat Singh, Rajguru and Sukhdev at 7:00 p.m. Secondly, even worse than that, they, instead of handing over the bodies to their respective families, **hacked the dead-bodies of the martyrs into pieces, packed the pieces in sacks, and took them away in the night from some rear passage of the jail towards the banks of the *Sutlej* river, near Ferozepur (Hussainiwala).**<sup>15</sup> When the bodies were partially burnt, the water was thrown on them. In the light of torches and a lantern, they hurriedly picked up some of the unburnt wood, bones, ashes, etc. and threw them into the river. Thinking that everything had been thrown into the river, they retired.

Regrettably, the bodies were burnt in kerosene in indecent hurry in the jungle near Ganda Singhwala village. Yet the people from Ferozepur and Lahore located the place of the half done cremation before the dawn of 24th March. Led by Bhagat Singh's



sister Bibi Amar Kaur and his friend Jaidev Gupta, the people collected the remaining unburnt and half-burnt bones of the revered martyrs and took them to Lahore where a proper cremation was performed by several thousands men and women on the banks of the *Ravi* river.

However, the sacred soil of Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev and Rajguru has now also been safely preserved in the National Archives of India, New Delhi. How did it reach the Archives, is an inspiring story reported by *The Hindustan Times*, dated 24 April 1997:

The 'sacred soil' from the pyre of Bhagat Singh and his two colleagues, Sukhdev and Rajguru has come to the Capital. The box containing the soil will be kept at the National Archives for generations to keep alive the memory of the fiery freedom fighters. Mrs. Santosh Thapar, sister-in-law of Sukhdev, brought the box to the Archives. She added that the soil was collected by her late mother-in-law, Ralli Thapar, from the banks of the *Sutlej*. Sukhdev's mother, who had collected the soil, preserved it even after she came to India following the Partition in 1947.

"I remember *ma* used to open her trunk and close it the moment I or anybody else entered the room. We always wondered what did she keep in it," said Mrs. Thapar. The secret was finally revealed by the mother herself just before her death in 1948. Asked whether the mother, who had lost her young son at the altar of independence, ever mourned him or cried, Mrs. Thapar proudly claimed that martyr's mothers were stronger than their freedom fighter sons.

Now the question arises, how did the people and the leaders of the country react to the execution of Bhagat Singh, Rajguru and Sukhdev? First of all, we shall discuss what happened inside the Lahore Central Jail. Apprising us with the first-hand information, one of the co-prisoners of Bhagat Singh—Mr. Dharampal—tells us:

On the fateful day, not even a single employee or prisoner of the jail could have his meal. Particularly,

the Indian employees of the jail were very much perturbed. The Jail Daroga—Muhammad Akbar (popularly called *Khan Saheb*)—could not enjoy his meals for days to come. He once said with heavy heart, "*Jab khana samane aata hai, to zahar malum hota hai.*"<sup>16</sup>

Like inside the jail, the outside atmosphere was also full of sorrow. Being an eyewitness to such moving scene, Bhagat Singh's Guru—Principal Chhabil Das—recalls:

The sad news of the execution of Bhagat Singh, Rajguru and Sukhdev was a great shock to me and my fellow-countrymen. As soon the people of Punjab came to know of the news, a wave of sorrow swept across the whole province. On that very day, barring some 'toadies' or sycophants, *kisi ke ghar chula nahi zala tha. Aurten sisaq-sisaq kar ro rahi thi.*<sup>17</sup>

One more reminiscence of another contemporary of Bhagat Singh is worth-mentioning here. A well-known journalist of the country—Mr. Prem Bhatia—was a resident of Lahore when Bhagat Singh and his comrades were executed. Recollecting a memorable scene of Lahore, Mr. Prem Bhatia stated in March 1980:

Several less-than-profound thoughts crossed my mind as we sat through the tributes paid to Bhagat Singh at the commemoration ceremony on 23 March 1980. There was, for instance, the reminder that the distance of time is not related to years between the past and the present, but to the intensity of one's experience. It was already 49 years since the newspaper hawker's wail in Lahore in the early morning of March 25, 1931: "Bhagat Singh has been hanged". Nearly half a century after that day, the bitter memory of the wail persists. The hawker's announcement was more than a professional effort to sell his paper. It was a scream of horror which reflected the man's anxiety to share his terrible knowledge.<sup>18</sup>

Not only the common people, but the great leaders of the day were also shocked to know the martyrdom of Bhagat Singh,



Rajguru and Sukhdev. Throwing some light on this fact, a co-accused of the Second Lahore Conspiracy Case who was acquitted on 7 October 1930—Jitendra Nath Sanyal—writes somewhere:

On 23 March 1931, all important leaders of the Congress had reached the Delhi Railway Station to catch the train for Karachi at 9:30 p.m. All of them were in dejected mood as they had been telephonically informed about the execution of Sardar Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev and Rajguru at 7:00 p.m. in Lahore. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya and Mahatma Gandhi seemed to be grief-stricken. However, the wailing Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru could hardly control himself.<sup>19</sup>

Following the execution of the three patriotic sons of India, the situation in the country as a whole took a grave turn. Throwing some light on this aspect, a well-known biographer of Bhagat Singh—K.K.Khullar—reports<sup>20</sup>:

- 24th of March 1931 was declared as a day of mourning throughout India.
- In Lahore, the authorities warned European women to keep themselves within the European quarters for ten days.
- In Bombay and Madras, there were angry demonstrations.
- The armed flying squads patrolled in Calcutta streets.
- The demonstrators came in clash with the police.
- While crucial discussion on the Finance Bill was in progress, a number of members, including Abdur Rahim and Cowasji Jehangir walked out of the Central Legislative Assembly as a protest against the executions.
- At Banga, Bhagat Singh's birth place, pledges in blood were written and oaths taken to avenge the sacrifice of the martyr.
- Moreover, as per some official records, the information was received by the Punjab Governor, Sir Geoffry de Montmorency ICS, that,
  - (i) At Bahadurgarh on April 6, 1931 a revolutionary named Shiv Kumar said: "We are waiting for a signal from certain persons."
  - (ii) Speaking at Bahu Akbarpur in Rohtak district on

24 April 1931, Bhagwan Das of Kalanaur said: "As we have our Raj in Akbarpur, so we shall have our Raj in the whole of India. O'brother Lambardars, do not collect land revenue from our brothers."

- (iii) In various other places such as Multan and Jhang and Ferozepur the peasants refused to pay the land revenue on the plea that Bhagat Singh's soul had visited them and asked them to stop paying taxes.
- (iv) At Rawalpindi everyday there was a procession, after the executions, where slogans such as '*Beiman Hakumat Ko Tabaah Kar Do* (Annihilate the dishonest Government)' were raised.

Throwing some more light on the reaction of the people, Comrade B.T. Ranadive writes:

The execution of Bhagat Singh and his colleagues led to widespread indignation throughout the country. Meetings, demonstrations and strikes were organised to protest against the execution. The Bombay workers organised a three-day strike for the three revolutionaries. The Kanpur workers and people went in for a huge and unprecedented *hartal* which was converted into a Hindu-Muslim riot by the British government and its communal stooges. Ganesh Shanker Vidyarthi, a Congress leader popular among the people, perished in the riot while pacifying the angry crowds. The riot was the imperialist revenge against the people's sympathy for Bhagat Singh.<sup>21</sup>

Bhagat Singh was martyred at the prime of his youth as well as at the peak of his popularity. With each passing day after 8 April 1929, the affection and regard for Bhagat Singh and Dutt in particular, and for their comrades in general, went on escalating. By the time Rajguru, Sukhdev and Bhagat Singh went to the gallows on 23 March 1931, they had become legends. Their sacrifices were seen as phenomenal by millions of Indians. Dr. Gurdev Singh Sidhu, in his fresh compilation, *The Hanging of Bhagat Singh : The Banned Literature*, has identified at least 153 publications on Bhagat Singh and his comrades, which were proscribed by various provincial governments.



Paying its glowing tributes to the immortal martyrs, an Urdu daily—*Zamindar*—owned by the Muslim aristocracy of Lahore aptly wrote in its issue dated 3rd April 1931:

Bhagat Singh, Rajguru and Sukhdev have been executed. By murdering them, the British Government has challenged the manhood of the whole of India. The martyrs of the country have shown us the way of unparalleled sacrifice and we should follow their lead. The British Government is devoid of the feelings of mercy, humanity and nobility. If the bone of a common Englishman (Mr. Saunders) is so dear to them; does not India hold in esteem the bones of Bhagat Singh, Rajguru and Sukhdev whose every particle was replete with patriotism and holy sacrifice? Give an answer to England with action and not with words. O' Bhagat Singh, Rajguru and Sukhdev, the British are glad that they have murdered you, but they are mistaken. They have not murdered you, but have applied a knife to their own future. You are alive, and shall ever remain alive!

Let us now close this chapter with the following words, published in another contemporary Urdu paper, namely the *Riyasat*, "*Sardar Bhagat Singh ki shahaadat, pralay tuq bhartiya hridayon mein 'ghaav' ban-kar rahegi.*"

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## A UNIQUE BOOK-LOVER

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It has aptly been said by some scholar, 'What you read that you think; what you think that you do; and what you do repeatedly that you are!' It also applies on Bhagat Singh's life. He was different from other revolutionaries because he was not only an individual but an institution in himself; he was not only a man but also a movement in himself; or in other words, he was not only a revolutionary fighter but also a revolutionary thinker.

As we know Bhagat Singh was born and brought up in a patriotic family which might have led him to be a revolutionary. If we have a glimpse at his life till 1923, we shall find that by then he had become a nationalist, but had no clear concept or programme in his mind about the future of India. Surprisingly, the same Bhagat Singh became the brain of the revolutionary party by 1928. Endorsing this fact, a very close associate of Bhagat Singh—Comrade Ajoy Ghosh—writes :

I believe it was sometime in 1923 that I met Bhagat Singh.... He was introduced to me by B.K.Dutt in Cawnpore. Tall and thin, rather shabbily dressed, very quiet, he seemed a typical village lad lacking smartness and self confidence. I did not think very highly of him and told Dutt so when he was alone.

One day in 1928, I was surprised when a young man walked into my room, and greeted me. It was Bhagat Singh but not the Bhagat Singh that I had met... before. Tall and magnificently proportioned, with a keen, intelligent face and gleaming eyes, he looked a different man altogether. And as he talked I realised that he had grown not merely in years.... All those who met Bhagat Singh then and afterwards have testified to his remarkable intelligence and to the powerful impression

he made when talking. Not that he was a brilliant speaker. But he spoke with such force, passion and earnestness that one could not help being impressed. We talked the whole night and as we went out for a stroll... it seemed to me that a new era was dawning for our party. We knew what we wanted and we knew how to reach our goal.<sup>1</sup>

Now the question arises, how did this great change happen? The answer is quite obvious, and it is only in one word i.e. 'Study'. Let us also know its answer in the words of Bhagat Singh himself.

Up to that period (1925) I was a romantic revolutionary. Up till then we were to follow. Now came the time to shoulder the whole responsibility. Due to the inevitable reaction for some time the very existence of the party (Hindustan Republican Association) seemed impossible. Enthusiastic comrades—nay, leaders—began to jeer at us. For some time I was afraid that some day I also might not be convinced of the utility of our programme. That was a turning point in my revolutionary career; 'Study' was the cry that reverberated in the corridors of my mind. Study to enable yourself to face the arguments advanced by opposition. Study to arm yourself with arguments in favour of your cult. I began to study. As there were no important activities in the field of action, I got ample opportunity to study.<sup>2</sup>

It is true that Bhagat Singh studied a lot till his arrest on 8 April 1929, yet his days of imprisonment are not less significant where the question of his study is concerned. Apprising us with this fact, one of his biographers—A.G. Noorani—writes:

In a real sense, Bhagat Singh's intellectual life properly began only when he entered the prison. He had, of course, read avidly before. But the activist had little time for intellectual pursuits.<sup>3</sup>

Throwing some more light on his love for books as a prisoner, one of his co-prisoners of the Lahore Central Jail—Shiv Verma—appraises us with his first-hand information:

We had easy access to books in the jail since day one and the atmosphere was quite congenial for study and



exchange of ideas. We used to discuss ideological and social issues earlier too, but Bhagat Singh's arrival made this much more lively. Seldom a day would pass without having thrashed an issue threadbare. The books which had been read during the week, were on diverse topics as Marxism, progress in Soviet Russia, upsurge in Afghanistan, Sino-Japanese strife, League of Nations' fiasco, the Meerut Conspiracy Case, Labour struggle, role of Indian Capitalist Class, policy of the Congress and possibility of a change in political goal in Lahore Congress session. Though we all had a passion for reading, but Bhagat Singh was a class by himself. Despite his having a soft corner for socialism, he always clung to his passion for reading novels too, particularly with political and economic themes. Dickens, Upton Sinclair, Hall Cane, Victor Hugo, Gorky, Stepnik, Oscar Wilde, Leonard Andrew were among his favourites. He frequently got emotionally involved with some particular characters in the novels, to the extent that he wept and laughed with them. A familiar instance was a character in Leonard Andrew's novel *'The Seven Who were Hanged'*. This character kept on saying, "I shall not be hanged." While he was being actually led to the gallows, he was still saying, "I shall not be hanged." Upon reading this, Bhagat Singh would first laugh heartily, and then be silent and tears would start dropping from his eyes."<sup>4</sup>

Another co-accused of Bhagat Singh in the Second Lahore Conspiracy Case—Jitendra Nath Sanyal—also writes :

Bhagat Singh was extremely well-read man, and his special sphere of study was Socialism. He had deeply studied the history of the Russian Revolution. The economic experiment in Russia under the Bolshevik regime greatly interested him. He read fiction also with interest. But his favourite works of fiction were of a politico-economic nature. He had no interest in novels of high society life, or those fictional works merely confined to love or other human passions. In the jail



he had begun to read the works of Charles Dickens which he liked very much. Some of his favourite works were : '*Boston*', '*Jungle*', by Joseph Conrad; '*Oil*', '*Cry for Justice*' by Upton Sinclair; '*Eternal City*' by Hall Caine, of which many portions of the speech by Romily, Bhagat Singh had crammed by heart; '*Ten Days that shook the world*' by Reed; '*What never happened*' by Ropshin; '*Mother*' by Maxim Gorky; '*Career of a Nihilist*' by Stepnik; '*Nihilists*' by Oscar Wilde; etc. Besides, Kropotkin's *Memoirs* and Michael Bakunin's *God and the State* had great influence on Bhagat Singh.<sup>5</sup>

Not only the present chapter but also the history of India's struggle for freedom itself is incomplete without the mention of the *Dwarka Das Library* of Lahore. It was established by the *Punjab Kesari* Lala Lajpat Rai in the sweet memory of his late friend. The country may forget Lalaji as a freedom fighter, but not as the founder of certain institutions like the *Lok Sewak Mandal*, the National College, the Punjab National Bank and the Dwarka Das Library.

Among the assets of the National College, a related institution—Dwarka Das Library—played a vital role in promoting the noble cause of freedom, especially the Revolutionary Movement. It was surrounded by various colleges of the Punjab University, Lahore which could be called 'the Oxford of North-India'. The library was indeed the nursery of revolutionary thoughts, and was always full of students and young scholars.

The Dwarka Das Library was a rich repository of books for radical-minded youngmen in Lahore. Located around it were a string of colleges. Its reading room was always crowded with students. What made this library, much more than 'just a collection of books', was its librarian Raja Ram Shastri, just 21 years old then, who took over the charge of the library in 1926. Raja Ram, popularly known as '*Mast Ram*' and briefly addressed as 'M.R.', remained in the job till 1930, when he was imprisoned for having delivered an objectionable speech during the Civil Disobedience Movement launched by Mahatma Gandhi. Raja Ram Shastri published his memoirs in 1981, entitled *Amar Shahidon Ke Sansmaran*. Acknowledging the role of the library headed



by Mr. Shastri, Bhagat Singh's close associate Yashpal wrote in 1951:

Raja Ram Shastri—a well known Socialist of Kanpur—was the chief librarian of Dwarka Das Library. Because of his helpful attitude, the library had become our meeting point. As it was surrounded by the hostels of different colleges, numerous students used to visit it. Secondly, Shastriji often informed us about those who used to take keen interest in revolutionary literature.<sup>6</sup>

Throwing some light on his relations with Bhagat Singh, the librarian Raja Ram Shastri writes in his memoirs :

- When I joined the Dwarka Das Library, it then contained all the books of Lala Lajpat Rai's personal library, which was a huge collection of world literature. Besides, I started collecting books, especially on Socialism, from different book-sellers of Lahore, particularly M/s Rama Krishan & Sons, located in Anarkali Bazar. It was expert in smuggling the banned books from England .
- Since the library was visited by a large number of young readers, I always tried to supply them Socialist literature. Meanwhile, I came into contact with some youths including Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev, Yashpal, Bhagwati Charan Vohra, Hansraj Vohra, Dhanwantri, Ram Krishan, Ehsan Ilahi and Durga Das Khanna. Yet, my thickness got increasingly strengthened with Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev, Yashpal and Bhagwati Charan Vohra.
- Bhagat Singh now started visiting my residence, and I got him enrolled as a regular member of the library.
- One day I saw him with a book, *First War of Indian Independence* by Veer Damodar Savarkar. It was a proscribed book. I don't know how it was procured by him. He was greatly impressed by it.
- Most of the books, issued to Bhagat Singh, were first read by me.
- Initially, he was fond of reading the biographies of anarchists of Europe. *My struggle for Irish Freedom* by Den O'Brien was his special favourite.
- An autobiographical writing of Veer Damodar Savarkar was

published in those days. Bhagat Singh was greatly impressed by the following daring step of Savarkar, "In 1910, he was arrested in England, and was extradited to India. From the steamer, he escaped through a port hole and landed on French soil near Marseilles, but was captured by guards from the ship."

- One day I came across a book, its title was probably '*Anarchism and Other Essays*'. One of its chapters was 'Psychology of Violence' which contained the historic statement of the French anarchist Mr. Vaillant—"It takes a loud voice to make the deaf hear." Having read the book, especially the statement of Vaillant, Bhagat Singh embraced me, and said, "Dear Friend, you have given me an excellent piece of literature." The historic statement of Vaillant was repeated by Bhagat Singh and B.K.Dutt, when they threw bombs and pamphlets in the Assembly Hall on 8 April 1929.
- Besides, Bhagat Singh was fond of reading revolutionary novels. I used to collect such novels from different book-sellers. Some of them were—*Mother* by Gorki; *Ninety Three* by Hugo; *The Tale of Two Cities* by Dickens and *Eternal City* by Victor Hugo; *Jungle, Boston* by Conrad, *King Coal* by Sinclair. Bhagat Singh's another favourite book was—*The Heroes and Heroines of Russia*.
- In order to learn the technique of bomb-making, Bhagat Singh even consulted the *Britannica Encyclopedia*.

Apart from his friends, Bhagat Singh himself had apprised us about his favourite authors and subjects. What he could study upto 1928, has been mentioned by himself as under:

As there were no important activities in the field of action, I got ample opportunity to study various idols of world revolution. I studied Bakunin, the anarchist leader, something of Marx, the father of Communism and much of Lenin, Trotsky and others—the men who had successfully carried out a revolution in their country.<sup>7</sup>

Besides, the discovery of his Jail-Notebook maintained during his incarceration throws some fresh light on an important feature of this great revolutionary. On 12 September 1929, Bhagat Singh



received a notebook containing 404 pages. He utilised this notebook to take down extracts from his readings and organised these extracts into a meaningful manual for future references. Some of his extracts are worth-mentioning here:

- People think only of preserving their child's life; this is not enough; he must be taught to preserve his own life when he is a man, to bear the bullets of fortune, to brave wealth and poverty, to live at ease among the snows of Iceland or on the scorching rocks of Malta.
- Teach your child to live, rather than to avoid death.
- Life is not breath, but action.
- Life consists less in length of days than in a keen sense of living. A man may be buried at a hundred but may never have lived at all; he would have fared better had he died young.
- A revolution could be achieved only through sustained striving, suffering and sacrifice.
- They are slaves who fear to speak.

The Jail Notebook was collected either by Bhagat Singh's brother Sardar Kulbir Singh or some family member. It was published in 1994 titled *A Martyr's Notebook* (Indian Book Chronicle, Jaipur). It contains notes and extracts from books read by Bhagat Singh during his prison days (1929-31). It was edited by Bhupendra Hooja. The Jail Notebook establishes Bhagat Singh as a diligent student of various subjects.

Had he come out alive from the jail, he would have been in the front ranks of struggle for a better life for millions of toiling Indians.

## II

One may ask here, how did the read literature influence Bhagat Singh? Let us find its answer in the words of Bhagat Singh himself:

My previous faith and convictions underwent a remarkable modification. The romance of violent methods alone, which was so prominent amongst our predecessors, was replaced by serious ideas. No more mysticism, no more blind faith. Realism became our cult. Use of force justifiable when resorted to as a

**matter of terrible necessity, and non-violence as policy indispensable for all mass movements. So much about methods. The most important thing was the clear conception of ideal for which we were to fight.<sup>8</sup>**

### III

So far we have discussed what type of literature Bhagat Singh used to read. But one more important question is, "What kind of reader he was!" Let us now make our efforts to answer this question.

Whereas the total number of books read by Bhagat Singh, apart from his syllabus, is concerned, it seems to be in some hundreds. As per some estimate, he read nearly fifty books during his schooling (1913-21), about two hundred from his college days to the day of his arrest i.e. 1921 to 1929, and approximately three hundred during his imprisonment comprising 716 days from 8 April 1929 to 23 March 1931. Yes, it may be possible that he had studied the selected chapters of the books of Social Sciences. As we know, he was hardly 23½ at the time of his execution, and by then he had studied hundreds of books. It may thus be a gigantic record in itself in the academic history of the world.

One of his intimate comrades, Shiv Verma, states : "Bhagat Singh always moved with a small portable library. I don't remember even a single occasion when Bhagat Singh was not carrying some books. He had always two things with him—*Pistaul* and *Pustak*. I have seen him ill-clad and almost in rags, but even then he carried some book in his pocket."<sup>9</sup> Endorsing this fact, we may mention here the words of Bhagat Singh's revered mother Smt. Vidyawati. Bhagat Singh's mother was also fed up with torn pockets of her son in which books had been thrust. She used to chide him, as mentioned in her 'Message to the Youth' dated 1 November 1966:

Whenever Bhagat Singh came home, he always had his pocket full of books. Often I would mildly pull him up for spoiling his pockets, with these books. 'What is all this?', I used to ask him. He often explained with a smile that the books were about martyrs and patriots.



Some of them were Indians and others hailed from Ireland, Italy and Russia.

My dear children! You, too, should make a deep study of the life and experiences of the patriots. Only then you can find out the correct path of life according to the present circumstances.<sup>10</sup>

Whenever Bhagat Singh visited any of his intellectual friend's residence, he often took some books from him. Citing an instance to this fact, one of his associates Com. Sohan Singh Josh recalls an incident of 19 December 1928 when Bhagat Singh and Sukhdev visited his residence just after the Saunder's murder :

Bhagat Singh and Sukhdev woke up a little before four in the morning to be ready to go. A book, *Liberty and the Great Libertarians* by T. Sprading, was lying on the table. This was a quotation book of bourgeois revolutionaries which helped me a lot to come to the communist movement. I got it while being tried in the Akali leaders' conspiracy case in the Lahore Fort. There was censor's stamp on it with sub-inspector Daryao Singh's signature and my name on it. I was reluctant to part with it. But Bhagat Singh promised to return it after reading and took it away.<sup>11</sup>

According to his friend Yashpal, "As and when Bhagat Singh walked on a lonely road or track, he started reading some book."

Bhagat Singh was also a favourite student of his teachers. To endorse this fact, we may cite here the following example. In the words of Principal Chhabildas:

While Bhagat Singh was a fervent revolutionary, he was also a good student. As his teacher, I can say with confidence that he enjoyed studying. He was greatly fond of reading. Whenever the name of some book was mentioned to him, he wanted to read it at once. Although Bhagat Singh had read numerous books of history. I still remember that the book he liked best was '*Cry for Justice*'. He had marked many portions of this book with red pencil. This shows how strong was his desire to fight against injustice."<sup>12</sup>

Bhagat Singh was not a common book-reader. He never

believed the words of an author blindly. How a book should be read by a scholar, has also been well explained by Bhagat Singh while writing the Introduction to the *Dreamland* (a proposed book of his friend Ramsaran Das), "Please do not read it to follow blindly and take for granted what is written in it. Read it, criticize it, think over it, try to formulate your own ideas with its help."

Throwing some light on Bhagat Singh's thirst for books, the librarian Raja Ram Shastri once told Shiv Verma, "Bhagat Singh literally used to devour books. His thirst for knowledge was ever unquenched. He would read books, make notes, discuss with his friends and critically examine his own understanding in the light of new knowledge, rectifying the mistakes that came to be discovered." The same Shastri apprises us with one more special feature of Bhagat Singh's love for books as follows:

I don't know wherefrom Bhagat Singh collected the proscribed book—*First War of Independence* by Veer Savarkar. As the book was quite impressive, Bhagat Singh got it published secretly. It was in two volumes, each volume costing 8 annas. Its marketing, which was indeed a difficult task, was mainly done by Sukhdev. Its first copy was sold to Rajrshi Purushottam Das Tandon.<sup>13</sup>

Bhagat Singh was arrested on 8 April 1929, sentenced to death on 7 October 1930 and kissed the gallows on 23 March 1931. He was thus in jail for 716 days, out of which 167 days were as a prisoner sentenced to death. During his imprisonment, according to some estimate, he read nearly 300 books. The supply of books by the *Dwarka Das Library* (Lahore) could not keep pace with his speed of reading. He requisitioned books so frequently that it was a problem for the jail authorities to scrutinize them.

Bhagat Singh always moved with a small portable library. According to his nephew, Prof. Jagmohan Singh, "Bhagat Singh established a library of 175 books by around 70 authors at Agra where the Assembly bomb plan was finalised. Bhagat Singh's collection of books, the heritage of our great freedom struggle that was confiscated and used as evidence to award him capital punishment, is still lying in a state of neglect at *Maalkhana* Record in a lower trial court of Lahore."<sup>14</sup>



Let us now cite the most touching example of his great passion for books. Mr. Pran Nath Mehta, Bhagat Singh's lawyer, was allowed to meet him on 23 March 1931 a few hours before the hanging. Bhagat Singh was then pacing up and down in the condemned-cell like a lion in a big cage. He welcomed Mr. Mehta with a broad smile and asked him whether he had brought his book, *The Revolutionary Lenin*. When Mr. Mehta gave the book, he was very happy and began reading it as if he was conscious that he did not have much time left. Soon after Mr. Mehta's departure, the jail authorities told Bhagat Singh that the time of hanging had been advanced by eleven hours. By then, Bhagat Singh had hardly finished a few pages of the book. Throwing some more light on the scene, Manmathnath Gupta, a close associate of Bhagat Singh, writes:

When called upon to mount the scaffold, Bhagat Singh was reading a book by Lenin or on Lenin. He continued his reading and said, "Wait a while. A revolutionary is talking to another revolutionary." There was something in his voice which made the executioners pause. Bhagat Singh continued to read. After a few moments, he flung the book towards ceiling and said, 'Let us go'.<sup>15</sup>

#### IV

Apart from being a unique reader, Bhagat Singh was a prolific writer too. Though it is a difficult task to know the exact number of his writings, yet as per some estimate the number of his letters, articles, biographical-sketches, pamphlets, court statements, etc. seems to be more than a hundred. Being a linguist, he was good at Hindi, Urdu, Punjabi and English alike. He also knew Sanskrit and Bengali. Under various pen-names, his writings were frequently published in different periodicals of the country like the *Kirti* (Amritsar), *Pratap* and *Prabha* (Kanpur), *Arjun* and *Maharathi* (Delhi), *Chand* (Allahabad), etc. Besides, he had certain booklets and manuscripts to his credit.

After passing his Intermediate Examination from the National College in 1923, Bhagat Singh got admitted to the B.A. class. In those days, the language issue was being debated all over Punjab. The



controversy was between Urdu and Hindi. *The Punjab Hindi Sahitya Sammelan* had invited articles on the problem of language and script in Punjab. A reward of Rs. fifty was declared for the best contribution. Bhagat Singh also participated in this contest. His article proved to be one of the best contributions. As such, the general secretary of the *Sammelan*, Bhimsen Vidyalkar, preserved the article and it was later published in the *Hindi Sandesh* of 28th February 1933. This was the first article written by Bhagat Singh.

'*My Fight for Irish Freedom*', an Irish book, on the basis of experiences of the Irish revolutionary Dan Brien was considered the '*Bible*' of North Ireland. It was published in 1924. It inspired Bhagat Singh so much that he made up his mind to jump into the freedom struggle after reading it and even translated it into Hindi and Punjabi. The book was translated first in Hindi and was published in 1925 while Bhagat Singh was in Kanpur and was working with the '*Pratap*' newspaper.

Bhagat Singh drafted four manuscripts while in jail. These were (i) The Ideal of Socialism, (ii) Autobiography, (iii) History of Revolutionary Movements in India, and (iv) At the Door of Death. Kumari Lajjawati, Congress activist and secretary of Bhagat Singh's defence committee, frequently visited Lahore jail to discuss legal aspects of the case. In an interview to the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library's oral history cell (New Delhi), she recalled that she had brought some papers given by Bhagat Singh, which she showed to Feroze Chand, editor of the *People*, Lala Lajpat Rai's paper from Lahore. Feroze Chand was told to select whatever he wanted for publication in the *People*. He selected some papers and returned the remaining ones to Lajjawati, which she handed over to Bejoy Kumar Sinha in 1938. Feroze Chand published 'Why I Am an Atheist' in the September 27, 1931 issue of the *People*. Prior to that, in its issue of March 29, 1931 just after Bhagat Singh's execution, the *People* also published extracts, from the now famous 'Letter to Young Political Workers'.

The strange part of this whole saga of indifference and apathy to the documents, considered so valuable now, is that neither Kumari Lajjawati nor Feroze Chand, nor even Bejoy Kumar Sinha who was given the custodianship of those papers at the instructions of Bhagat Singh, took the trouble to seriously look into those papers



and note their contents. Nevertheless, the essentials of Bhagat Singh's thoughts have come to light and an evaluation of his thought process can be made on the basis of the retrieved material.

On the surface of it, according to Prof. Chamanlal, it is difficult to imagine that Bhagat Singh could write four full-fledged books in such a short time—about two years, April 8, 1929 to March 23, 1931, especially when he was involved in hunger strikes and in court matters. However, Bhagat Singh did plan to write a full-fledged book on 'The Science of the State', for which he had taken detailed notes, which are included in his *Jail Note-book*, the only original part of this manuscript. In this proposed book, Bhagat Singh was trying to trace the historical evolution of the state up to that of the modern socialist state. Had he got the time to write this book, it would certainly have been a significant contribution to our literature.

However, Bhagat Singh's documents like 'Why I am an Atheist', 'Court Statements', 'Letter to Young Political Workers', 'Introduction to Dreamland', etc. have rightly acquired the status of classic writings of the Indian revolutionary movement.

## V

Being a unique reader and prolific writer, Bhagat Singh was an attractive orator and great inspirer, too. During the magic-lantern shows, the speeches made by Bhagat Singh always left an indelible imprint on the audience. In the words of Shiv Verma, who was then the student of D.A.V. College (Kanpur):

As and when Bhagat Singh happened to be at Kanpur, he used to enlighten us by the stories of *Kuka* movement, the role of Ghadar Party, and the sacrifices made by our national heroes like Kartar Singh Sarabha, Sufi Amba Prasad and Babbar Akalis. As he was a magnetic orator, we often listened to him at the cost of our college studies.<sup>16</sup>

## VI

Let us now pose here a very pertinent question, how would our younger generation remember Bhagat Singh as an intellectual, especially as a book-lover? There are reasons to believe that

Bhagat Singh understood the importance of literature even at the age of 16. Written in Hindi in 1923, his article 'The Problem of Punjab's Language and Script' tells us in the following words the importance of literature in a country:

Perhaps Garibaldi could not have succeeded in mobilizing the army with such ease if Mazzini had not invested his thirty years in his mission of cultural and literary renaissance. The revival of Irish language was attempted with the same enthusiasm along with the renaissance in Ireland.... The French Revolution would have been impossible without the literature of Rousseau and Voltaire. Had Tolstoy, Karl Marx and Maxim Gorky not invested years of their lives in the creation of a new literature, Russian Revolution would not have taken place, leave alone the propagation of communism.<sup>17</sup>

Bhagat Singh was not only a martyr of the first rate, but a great ideologue of the day, too. Having gone through the pages of the literature of the East and the West alike, he had developed his own views on different problems of the world, especially India. He was perhaps the only example in the history of the world who critically studied the works of the great thinkers and philosophers till the moment of hanging.

One may ask here, why did he continue his studies till the last moment of his execution? By doing so, Bhagat Singh wanted to give a fool-proof model to his beloved country, rather say to the whole world, so that it could be free from the exploitation of man by man and of nation by nation. Endorsing this fact, his niece Ms. Virendra Sindhu befittingly writes: "*Phansi par jhoolne se pahale, Bhagat Singh samaj ko ek naee vyavastha ka pura chitra pradaan karna chahte the.*"<sup>18</sup>

Though Bhagat Singh was not a meritorious student, yet he had a passion for reading general books since his early days. His friends often asserted that had he not become a revolutionary, he would have become a university professor. It has rightly been suggested by some admirer of Bhagat Singh, 'as and when his statue is raised by any of us, it should be shown with books in his hands'. In the end, we may agree with the remarkable words of Raja Ram Shastri which he said to Bhagat Singh in the Lahore



Central Jail a few days before his execution, "*Jo sahitya tumne para tha, usko jeevan mein utaarkar, Bhagat Singh tumne saarthak kar diya.*"<sup>19</sup>

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## AS A VISIONARY

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Since the Great Revolt of 1857, India had a good number of revolutionaries who defied 'death' and put a strong opposition to the British Imperialism. Among them, Bhagat Singh alone is known—the *Shaheed-e-Azam*. A question thus arises: How could Bhagat Singh be so? If we have a look on the history of Indian revolutionaries till 1925, we shall find that they could hardly attract any attention of the people. The evidence given by common people during the Kakori Conspiracy Case (1925-27), also exposed the fact that the revolutionaries—like Ramprasad Bismil, Ashfaqullah Khan, Rajendra Lahiri, Roshan Singh and others—who were otherwise dedicated and self-sacrificing could identify themselves very little with the masses.

Henceforth, the burden of the revolutionary party known as the Hindustan Republican Association (H.R.A.) fell on the shoulders of those members who were at large, especially Chandra Shekar Azad and Bhagat Singh. Bhagat Singh now wanted to know, "In spite of their supreme sacrifices, why did the revolutionaries fail to attract the attention of the masses?" Probably, Bhagat Singh was the first revolutionary of the country who spared no pains to strengthen the intellectual aspect of the revolutionary movement. Because of his studious character, he became the brain of the party. Apart from being a great freedom fighter, Bhagat Singh was indeed a great visionary of the day, too. Let us now elaborate his views on different questions at some length.

### I

In the history of India's struggle for freedom, the name of Bhagat Singh cannot be separated from the word—Socialism. Though Madame Cama lit the flame of socialism in 1907, M.N.Roy, Birendranath Chattopadhyay and others made the word meaningful



to some intellectuals; yet Bhagat Singh burst like a bomb to make its fame encircle, enrich and fill every aspect of the freedom struggle. In the words of Sachindranath Sanyal, a renowned revolutionary of the day and the founder of the H.R.A., "On my release from Andamans in 1919, I found the word Socialism being discussed by many, but studied by none." Bhagat Singh was probably the first Indian who studied it thoroughly and undertook it critically. No single individual did as much by his words and deeds in the late 1920s to communicate the message of socialism within the national movement as did Bhagat Singh.

It was Bhagat Singh who got the name of H.R.A. changed to H.S.R.A. i.e. Hindustan 'Socialist' Republican Association. The H.S.R.A. made it clear from its very start that Republic without Socialism was not acceptable to them even as a transitional measure. A number of its members, having actually worked among peasants and workers, had felt strongly that a slogan of freedom without equality would not motivate the people at the grassroot level to respond to their clarion call. Thus, unlike the H.R.A., the H.S.R.A. cadres felt that democracy and socialism must go hand in hand. Bhagat Singh, in a message from prison, specified that **the peasants and the labourers had to liberate themselves not only from foreign yoke, but also from the clutches of landlords and capitalists.**

Although an admirer of Mahatma Gandhi for the manner in which he managed to mobilise the masses, Bhagat Singh did not believe that Gandhian philosophy and programme would lead to a fundamental transformation of society. Gandhian philosophy, he observed, would only result in the replacement of one set of exploiters by another. The alternative was thus found by Bhagat Singh only in Socialism, which he incorporated in the ideology and programme of the movements with which he was associated. What distinguished Bhagat Singh from the earlier revolutionaries was thus this ideological factor.

## II

It is true that Socialism was the end, but how could it be achieved? Bhagat Singh had a deep conviction that 'Revolution' was the harbinger of Socialism and progress. Human urge for

change and progress and the need of Revolution could not be strangled by suppression. Historically speaking, Bastille could not prevent the French Revolution (1789); Siberia could not liquidate the Russian Revolution (1917); and the bloody Sunday could not arrest the course of Irish Struggle for Independence. A society which put a stop to Revolution, would stagnate and decay. Hence, a Revolution was needed to throw off the dead weight of obsolete traditions and rejuvenate itself. An extract from the Manifesto of the H.S.R.A. elaborates this idea:

**We believe in violence, not as an end (in) itself but as a means to a noble end, and this noble end was to put an end to the exploitation of man by man and of nation by nation. Upheavals have always been a terror to the holders of power and privilege. Revolution is a vital force which is indicative of eternal conflict between Old and New, between Life and Death, between Light and Darkness. Revolution is a Law; Revolution is an Order; and Revolution is a Truth.**

This extract is an eloquent testimony of Bhagat Singh's faith in the vitality, force and immortality of Revolution.

Bhagat Singh enriched the concept of revolution, widened its scope and added many more dimensions to its definition. Revolution had usually been associated with violence and 'the cult of pistol and bomb'. There might be a phase when such means had to be used. Formerly, Bhagat Singh's predecessors had regarded revolution as political act. He endowed it with social significance, when he observed :

**By revolution we mean that the present order of things, which is based on manifest injustice, must change. By revolution we mean the ultimate establishment of an order of society, which may not be threatened by such breakdowns and in which the sovereignty of the proletariat should be recognised and as a result of which a world federation should redeem humanity from the bondage of capitalism, misery and peril of wars.<sup>1</sup>**

Besides, throwing some light on the features of a true revolutionary, Bhagat Singh once told his friend Raja Ram Shastri:



*Jeb mein pistaul daal kar ghoomana aur yah samjhana ki vah krantikari hai—sarvatha satya nahi hota. Vastuta, dushman ki girpht mein par kar zulm aur jyadati bardaash kar, kranti-path par adig bane rahna hee, sachche krantikari ka lakshan hai.*<sup>2</sup>

### III

The first assault of the Revolution was to be on British imperialism, but the final one on Exploitation, whether of man by man or of one state by another. Now the question arises, who will bring the Revolution. The answer is very simple—the masses. That is why, Bhagat Singh said, ‘we must reach the grassroots in every possible way’. To achieve this mission, the role played by the *Naujawan Bharat Sabha*, founded by Bhagat Singh and his comrades, was second to none in the country.

Bhagat Singh was convinced by the statement of a Russian nationalist Prince Kropotkin, “A single deed makes more propaganda in a few days than a thousand pamphlets.” Apart from his bold deeds, Bhagat Singh missed no opportunity to propagate his revolutionary views. Even after arrest, he utilised the courtroom as a venue for the propagation of revolutionary ideology. Bhagat Singh and B.K. Dutt, from the very first day of their trial, used the courtroom as a launching-pad for their ideological missiles. They utilised every little occasion to issue a statement. Bhagat Singh was thus not only a great freedom fighter, but also an astute propagandist.

Furthermore, about two months before his martyrdom, Bhagat Singh convincingly wrote:

- The real revolutionary armies are in villages and factories, the peasantry and the labourers.
- The struggle in India would continue so long as a handful of exploiters go on exploiting the labour of the common people for their own ends. It matters little whether these exploiters are purely British capitalists, or British and Indians in alliance, or even purely Indians.
- The masses would carry on the battle till the exploitation comes to an end. Unless this is done, all talk of evading war and ushering an era of universal peace is undisguised hypocrisy.<sup>3</sup>

If we want to end the exploitation speedily, Bhagat Singh chiefly relied on the support of the youth. Having great faith in the boundless power of the youth, the Manifesto of the H.S.R.A. speaks: "Sow the seeds of disgust and hatred... in the fertile minds of your fellow youth. And the seed shall sprout, and there shall grow a jungle of sturdy force." Highlighting the wonders of young-age (16 to 25 years), Bhagat Singh published an article entitled '*Matwala*' on 16 May 1925, stating<sup>4</sup> :

- Youth is the 'spring' of human-life, which makes one '*matwala*'.
- A youth can rise to the climax or fall to the lowest. In other words, he can become '*tyagi*' or '*vilasi*'.
- The glorious history of the world is the second name of the great deeds of the youth.
- The youngmen are the seeds that spring and bear fruit.
- If we look into the world history of revolutions and freedom movements, we shall find most of the young patriots were dubbed by the so-called elite as 'the fool or the misguided'.

When some contemporary revolutionaries of Bhagat Singh were dubbed as '*Paagal*' by some sycophants, he came the reply,

*"Inhi bigre dimagon mein ghani khushion ke lachchhe hain;  
Hummen paagal hi rahne do, ki hum paagal hi achchhe hain."*<sup>5</sup>

#### IV

As far as the question of Religion or God is concerned, Bhagat Singh's views were different from most of his fellow-comrades. Though he was born and brought up in a religious atmosphere, yet he, with the passage of time, was getting more and more non-believer in God. It is relevant to mention here the following dialogue between the two co-prisoners of the Lahore Central Jail—Bhai Randhir Singh and Bhagat Singh—having taken place in the beginning of October 1930. Shiv Verma, Bhagat Singh's close associate, provides the following annotation on Bhai Randhir Singh's remark:

Bhai Randhir Singh was a God-fearing religious man. It pained him to learn that Bhagat Singh was a non-



believer. He somehow managed to see Bhagat Singh in the condemned cell and tried to convince him about the existence of God, but failed. The Bhai lost his temper and said tauntingly: You are giddy with fame and have developed an ego which is standing like a black curtain between you and God.<sup>6</sup>

However, Bhagat Singh subsequently clarified his view point in his autobiographical writing—*Why I am an Atheist?*—as follows:

One friend asked me to pray. When informed of my atheism, he said, "During your last days, you will begin to believe." I said, "No, dear Sir, it shall not be, I will think that to be an act of degradation and demoralisation on my part. For selfish motives, I am not going to pray."

Throwing some more light on the question of non-belief, Bhagat Singh further elaborates in the same write-up—*Why I am an Atheist?*—as follows :

- By the end of 1926, I had been convinced as to the baselessness of the theory of existence of an almighty supreme being who created, guided and controlled the universe. I had become a pronounced atheist.
- 'Belief' softens the hardships, even can make them pleasant. In God, a man can find very strong consolation and support. Without Him, man has to depend upon himself. To stand upon one's own legs amid storms and hurricanes, is not a child's play. That very day (when Bhagat Singh was in the custody of Lahore police in 1927), certain police officials began to persuade me to offer my prayers to God regularly twice a day. Now, I was an atheist. I wanted to settle for myself whether it was in the days of peace and enjoyment alone that I could boast of being an atheist or whether during such hard times as well, I could stick to those principles of mine. After great consideration I decided that I could not lead myself to believe in and pray to God.
- I have read of atheists (especially of European countries) facing all troubles quite boldly, so am I trying to stand like a man with an erect head to the last, even on the gallows.
- I know in the present circumstances, my faith in God could

have made my life easier, my burden lighter; and my disbelief in Him has turned all the circumstances too dry and the situation may assume too harsh a shape. A little bit of mysticism can make it poetical (even Gandhi admits, "Had I not placed my worries at the feet of God, I would have gone mad)." But I do not want the help of any intoxication to meet my fate.

Probably in October 1928, Bhagat Singh happened to meet Shiv Verma at Amritsar where Dada Phonindra Nath Ghosh\* was also staying. Here, a discussion on some philosophical questions took place between the *Dada*, who was a staunch believer in God, and Bhagat Singh. How Bhagat Singh tried to counter *Dada's* views, is as follows<sup>7</sup> :

- Those who hold this world to be an illusion, cannot vigorously fight for its betterment.
- The world is a reality, but some vested interests have made it a hell. So, we have to remake it a heaven.
- The theories—about God, religion, other world, heaven and hell, rebirth, etc.—are nothing, but the inventions of the privileged ones who justify their usurped power, riches and superiority by the help of these theories.
- The suffering humanity, is my ideal, is my god. If any one tries to harass them, I have to oppose such element tooth and nail. My only religion is to make the world, worth-living!
- One who believes in the 'concept of destiny', is likely to be the victim of inactivity, cowardice and escapism.

In a nutshell, Bhagat Singh was not a blind follower of any concept of the past. He rather believed that a critical and scientific bent of mind was very much needed to clear the muck accumulated over the ages. He thus often said :

A man who stands for progress has to criticise, disbelieve and challenge every item of the old faith. Item by item, he has to reason out every nook and corner of the prevailing faith. If after considerable reasoning, one is led to believe in any theory or

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\*He was an old revolutionary of Bengal. Though he was a key-member of the H.S.R.A., yet turned to be an approver in the Second Lahore Conspiracy Case.



philosophy, his faith is welcome. His reasoning can be mistaken, wrong, misled, and sometimes fallacious. But he is liable to correction, because reason is the guiding star of his life. But mere faith and blind faith is dangerous—it dulls the brain, and makes a man reactionary. A man who claims to be a realist has to challenge the whole of the ancient faith. If it does not stand the onslaught of reason, it crumbles down.<sup>8</sup>

Religion thus serves to blur one's vision. Referring to various doctrines of the past, including *Charvak*, Bhagat Singh talks of what our 'misfortune' is, "Instead of using the experiments and expressions of the ancient savants and thinkers as a basis for our future struggle against ignorance and try to find out a solution to this mysterious problem, we, lethargical as we have proved to be, raised the hue and cry of faith, unflinching and unwavering faith to their version and thus are guilty of stagnation in human progress."<sup>9</sup>

## V

Bhagat Singh was also of the opinion that in the name of God, the communal harmony of the country was being disturbed by the rulers. In other words, the God's name was the most efficient weapon in the armoury of the British. Whenever they wanted to disturb the communal harmony for their own ends, they would instigate different religious heads against each other and create communal frenzy on large scale. They are thus successful in implementing their policy of 'divide and rule'.

On the other hand, the Manifesto of the *Naujwan Bharat Sabha* seems to be right when it speaks :

We Indians, what are we doing? A branch of *peepal* tree is cut and religious feelings of the Hindus are injured. A corner of a paper idol, *tazia*, of the idol-breaker Mohammedans is broken, and 'Allah' gets enraged, who cannot be satisfied with anything less than the blood of the infidel Hindus. Man ought to be attached more importance than the animals and, yet, here in India, we break each other's heads in the name of 'sacred' animals.

The battle against the communal hatred was thus two-fold because of the internal foe, on the one hand, and a foreign enemy, on the other. According to Bhagat Singh, "Our real battle is against our own disabilities which are exploited by the enemy and some of our own people for their selfish motives." Keeping it in view, Bhagat Singh suggested that in order to remove the physical slavery, we must also do away with the mental slavery. Through his words and deeds, Bhagat Singh tried to replace the concept of God and religion by service to humanity. To achieve this mission, the *Naujawan Bharat Sabha*, founded by Bhagat Singh and other youngmen, started taking following steps:

- It was one of the main planks of the *Naujawan Bharat Sabha* to organise community dinners and lunches, comprising Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs.
- Here, everybody would cook.
- In such feasts, lectures were delivered by individual speakers, and they were allowed to speak only against their own communities.

Regrettably, in the middle of 1920s, India was in the grip of communal riots, and Bhagat Singh was an eyewitness to them. He was shocked to see them. Being a true patriot, he made his following observations<sup>10</sup>:

- The people were killed, not because of their guilt, but of simply being Hindus, Sikhs or Muslims.
- No body can predict at the moment, for how many more years the people of India have to face such riots.
- Apart from the British, the selfish leaders of different communities as well as the sectarian Press of the country are equally responsible for such riots.
- During the Non-cooperation days (1920-22), the authorities were in danger, but now our freedom itself is at stake.
- The 'class-consciousness' seems to be its solution. For instance, the trade-unions of Calcutta, instead of instigating any riot, played a vital role in preventing the communal riots. It was chiefly due to their ~~help~~

Bhagat Singh was indeed of the opinion that the ~~Communist~~ was as dangerous as the Colonialism. He was ~~sent~~ to the ~~cell~~



He even parted with his mentor—Lala Lajpat Rai—when his politics assumed a communal colour.

## VI

Communalism and casteism, as Bhagat Singh has noted, provide handy weapons for the ruling classes to divide the working people and thereby prevent the emergence of any cogent class challenge to their rule. Being a true socialist, Bhagat Singh was deadly against the social evil of Untouchability. In his view, Freedom did not merely mean banishing the British rule, it also meant changing the centuries old caste-system—which had branded a large number of our population as ‘untouchables’. Acknowledging him as a great advocate of the cause of untouchables, an authority on the life and work of Shaheed Bhagat Singh—Prof. Chaman Lal—has even gone to the extent of saying, “*Aaj ka dalit andolan, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar ke baad agar kisi ko naayak ka darza de sakta hai, to vah Bhagat Singh hi hai.*”<sup>11</sup>

Sharing with us his observations about the so-called untouchables, Bhagat Singh penned with heavy heart an article titled ‘*Achhoot ka Sawaal*’ which was published in the *Kirti* in June 1928, stating:

- The country is today facing a very serious problem of the untouchables, numbering 5 crore out of the total population of 30 crore. Regrettably, they are not even allowed to use the wells, temples, etc. of the caste-Hindus.
- Surprisingly, a dog can sit in our lap, that can frequently move in our kitchen, but by a simple touch of a ‘man’ called ‘*achhoot*’ makes us ‘*dharma-bhrishta*’.
- Ironically, we worship certain ‘animals’, but cannot sit with some human-beings.
- We are so thankless that we don’t acknowledge even those who serve us a lot. Their services can even be compared with our revered mothers, yet they are ‘untouchables’. May I ask, “*Kya matayen bachchon ka maila saaf karne se, achhoot ho jaati hain?*”

In the words of Bhagat Singh, our forefathers had done great injustice with our brothers—the *dalits*. They were not even allowed to rebel against the privileged classes for centuries to come. In

order to improve the lot of the *dalits*, the *Naujawan Bharat Sabha*, founded by Bhagat Singh and his comrades, started playing a vital role in ameliorating their condition. The members of *Naujawan Bharat Sabha*, apart from dining with them, started considering them at par, without performing the act of *Shuddhi*, *Amrit-Chhakana* or *Qalma Parana*. Secondly, being a serious student of history, Bhagat Singh found, "If we look into the history of India, the *dalits* were the true strength of the armies of Guru Gobind Singh and Shivaji." Inspiring them to arise, Bhagat Singh once asked :

You should get yourselves organised. You are not supposed to depend upon others' help. You are the true Proletariat or *Sarvahara*. You must rebel against the existing social set-up. Those who would be free, must themselves strike the blow.<sup>12</sup>

Bhagat Singh was probably the only patriot of the country who wished to have his last meal, prepared by a *dalit* employee of the Lahore Central Jail named Bogha, before his execution. Bhagat Singh used to call Mr. 'Boga' as 'Bebe', which means 'mother'. In Bhagat Singh's own words, "*Maan bachche ki gandagi saaf karati hai, aur bara ho jane par yah kaam dalit karta hai, isliye oose 'bebe' kahna oochit hai.*"<sup>13</sup> If Bhagat Singh could regard a 'sweeper' like his own 'mother', we can well imagine how much fellow-feeling he had for the *dalits*.

## VII

There is one more very important aspect of human life i.e. 'love' which was duly covered by Bhagat Singh's writings and actions. Throwing some light on this aspect, he tells us in the following words through a letter, addressed to his close associate Sukhdev, dated 5 April 1929 :

- I am full of ambition and hope and full of charm of life. But I can renounce all at the time of need, and that is the real sacrifice.
- While discussing anybody's character, you asked me one thing, "whether love ever proved helpful to any man." Yes, I answer that question today. To Mazzini, it was. You must have read that after the utter failure and crushing defeat of



his first rising, he could not bear the misery and haunting ideas of his dead comrades. He would have gone mad or committed suicide, but for one letter of a girl he loved made him not as strong as others but stronger than them.

- Man must have the strongest feelings of love, which he may not confine to one individual, and may make it universal.
- Love in itself can never be an animal passion. Love always elevates the character of man. It never lowers him.

Appreciating his spirit of love, one of Bhagat Singh's admirers—Raj Bahadur Yadav of Fatehabad—writes in *The Tribune* on 17 October 2007 :

In fact Bhagat Singh's love extended beyond personal and family ties and embraced millions of our countrymen who were reeling under the yoke of the British Raj. He knew the essence of true love and measured its depth by kissing the gallows for liberating his motherland from the cruel hands of the foreigners.

## VIII

As far as the ideology of Bhagat Singh is concerned, he was certainly influenced by many modern thoughts of the world, but could hardly be smitten by any of them. Bhagat Singh, through his deeds and thoughts, did his best to pull the Indian people out of their backward thinking and showed them the scientific and humanistic way of thinking. He was that kind of revolutionary who could be called not only nationalist but internationalist, too. The Revolutionary Movement was now detached from religion. He directed the revolutionary efforts towards the attainment of nationalistic and socialistic goals. Let us now close this chapter with the words of Bhagat Singh himself :

The day we find a great number of men and women who cannot devote themselves to anything else but the service of mankind and emancipation of the suffering humanity, that day shall inaugurate the era of liberty.<sup>14</sup>

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## AS A MAN

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Bhagat Singh was martyred at the age of 23, an age in which most of us are blissfully unaware of the sufferings and miseries in our society. It is a matter of surprise that Bhagat Singh was executed at such a tender age, yet he was extremely loved by all sections of society. How was it so? Historically speaking, he was a rare personality of the country who, in spite of being quite young in age, was exceedingly matured in actions while serving his fellow-countrymen, especially the poor and the needy. Besides being a great revolutionary, Bhagat Singh was great as a person, too. Since he was blessed with numerous personal qualities, yet we elaborate a few of them.

### I

Firstly, Bhagat Singh was a great theatre artist. Endorsing this fact, his classmate of National College (Lahore), Mr. Yashpal—a noted Hindi writer and a well-known member of the Hindustan Socialist Republican Association (H.S.R.A.)—writes in his autobiography:

For dissemination of our ideas, we, as students of the National College, adopted the medium of theatre. The focus was on making the audience aware of their slavery. A National Dramatic Club was started in the college. Bhagat Singh used to take active part in the dramas. The club once staged the drama '*The Dawn of the Yug of Samrat Chandra Gupta Maurya*'. Bhagat Singh played the role of the hero Shashi Gupta (popularly known as Chanakaya). The drama was a grand success and Bhagat Singh's role was commendable. The audience heartily applauded his role. All his college teachers and fellow students complimented him

on his sterling performance. Giving his blessings to him, our Guru—Bhai Paramnand—remarked, “My Bhagat Singh will really be ‘Shashi Gupta’ of the age in future.”<sup>1</sup>

The club staged various other historical dramas such as ‘*Maharana Partap*’, ‘*Mahabharata*’ etc., in each of which Bhagat Singh played a leading role. The aim of these dramas was to arouse national feelings and exhort the people to rise against their alien masters. Yashpal further remarks :

The play ‘*Mahabharata*’ was available in Urdu. By rewriting its dialogues, we made it serve our purpose. We had re-named it ‘*Krishan Vijay*’. We substituted the English people as *Kaurvas* and our own patriots as *Pandavas*. We modulated some of the songs to word it in Punjabi. The government expectedly banned the recitation of such songs being held seditious. For quite some time, we kept on staging such plays. Once, we also staged a play ‘*Bharat Durdasha*’ on the sidelines of a Congress conference.<sup>2</sup>

A photograph of Bhagat Singh, with turban among a group of dramatic club team, after having staged the play—‘*Bharat Durdasha*’, is quite popular.

## II

Bhagat Singh was also fond of singing, especially Punjabi songs. Being a close companion of Bhagat Singh, Vishwanath Vaishampayan, recalls his days spent with his revolutionary friends at Agra:

Bhagai Singh occasionally sang *Mera Rang de Basanti Chola* and the *Heer* (the love legend of Punjab). He had a melodious voice, though not conversant with the finer nuances of music. Among us the only ‘*Aurangzeb*’ (puritan) was Sukhdev, not evincing much interest in songs. Chandrashekhar Azad liked music but he was attracted more by the contents of the songs than by their rendering.<sup>3</sup>

One more example can be cited here. When Bhagat Singh was sentenced to life imprisonment by the Delhi Court on



12 June 1929, the Barrister Asaf Ali, accompanied by his wife Aruna, went to jail to meet Bhagat Singh. As soon as he reached a nearby condemned-cell, he heard some sweet singing. Thereupon, Aruna said, "What a beautiful voice it is." On reaching the cell of Bhagat Singh, the couple was astonished to see, in the words of Ms. Virendra Sindhu: "*Vah gayak aur koyee nahin, swyam Bhagat Singh the, jo apne gane par, apni hi beriyon se taal de rahe the. Kitna divya the vah drishya.*"<sup>4</sup>

### III

Bhagat Singh was a very lively man, fond of different hobbies. Apart from being a good theatre-artist and singer, he was also fond of English movies, especially of *Charlie Chaplin*, playing cards, boating in rivers, sight-seeing, poetry, book-reading, etc. One of his intimate associates throws some light on some of his hobbies in the following words:

While at Agra, our pastime ranged from discussing national issues, reading serious books, playing cards at leisure, and sometimes enjoying the sight of the moonlit Taj. Azad, however, went there only once and used to say, "Some ominous feelings overwhelm the visitors there, to which I feel averse." Bhagat Singh, on the other hand, would get lost in his world of dreams and sit there for hours together in silence. Rajguru once showed his mettle as a 'dead shot lover'. We all were just back from the Taj, he sat down with pencil and paper to compose poetry. He exclaimed after a while "Done! Done! A Couplet!" Without waiting for any one to hear, he recited:

"Till now, knew not what love was,  
A look at the Tomb, made my love riot!"

Everyone laughed on hearing love's rioting, while Bhagat Singh calmly took out his revolver and handing over to Rajguru, said: "Take it and shoot me, or promise never to attempt poetry."<sup>5</sup>

### IV

Being a man of many parts, Bhagat Singh was a good friend,

too. Endorsing this fact, his niece Ms. Virendra Singh writes an example as under:

When Bhagat Singh and B.K. Dutt were in Lahore Central Jail, the mother Smt. Vidyawati often took meals for them, and she used to make them eat herself. On one occasion, she took a piece of *chappati* in her hand and offered it to Dutt. But he asked her to give it to Bhagat Singh, first. When she offered it to Bhagat Singh he did the same. This process was repeated twice or thrice. Ultimately, she took two different pieces in her both hands and started offering each to them simultaneously. Only then, Bhagat Singh and Dutt obliged the mother.<sup>6</sup>

Being a caring friend, Bhagat Singh always took keen interest in Dutt's requirements. To cite an instance, Bhagat Singh writes the following two urgent letters to his personal friend Jaidev Gupta from the Lahore Central Jail on 24 February and 26 May 1930 respectively, which are self-explanatory<sup>7</sup> :

- (i) I hope you would have heard of our abandoning the fast after 16 days, and you can guess how greatly do we feel the necessity of your help at this stage. We received a few oranges yesterday but no interview was held. Our case has been adjourned for a fortnight. Therefore, kindly arrange to send us cigarettes and *ghee* immediately. And a few oranges along with a few *rasgullas* will also be welcomed. Mr. Dutt is facing hard times without cigarettes. Now you can understand the urgent nature of our needs.
- (ii) Today again I am writing this letter to give you some trouble which I hope you will not mind. Please see if you can arrange to send one fleet-foot pair of shoes for me. I think no. 9-10 will do. My *chapli* is too uncomfortable. Also please try to send it through Kulbir when he will be coming for an interview.

Having received a pair of shoes, Bhagat Singh wrote another letter to Jaidev on 3 June 1930 requesting, "How can I alone use



the shoes? Please send the same pair and a white sport-shirt of 34 No. for Dutt too.”

## V

As far as his family-relations were concerned, he was quite respectful and affectionate to all of his family-members, especially the mother. In an interview to Prof. Jagmohan Singh (her maternal grandson), Smt. Vidyawati once said, “All the time Bhagat Singh was joking with us.” She continued this discourse by reiterating her deep conviction that Bhagat Singh always worried and cared for her a lot right from his childhood. Prof. M.J.S. Waraich, rightly or wrongly, claims: “It is contrary to the popular belief that a life of total dedication to the cause of revolution, leaves no space for deep affection and care for one’s near and dear ones.”

Among the members of his family, Bhagat Singh was influenced most by his uncle Sardar Ajit Singh. As and when he was asked about his wish, he often said that he would love to have a glimpse of his uncle. As soon as he came to know that his village friend Amar Chand was in America, he wrote him the following letter in the end of 1927:

From around San Francisco, some clue about Sardar ji (Sardar Ajit Singh) could possibly be found, please do try. At least we may get an assurance about his being alive. For the present I am going to Lahore. Write to me please, if you can. Address—Sutar Mandi, Lahore.<sup>8</sup>

It is true that Bhagat Singh had great respect and regard for his elders. Yet no relation was more dear to him than his ‘ideals’. To cite an instance, when Bhagat Singh was an under-trial in the Second Lahore Conspiracy Case (1929-30), his father Sardar Kishan Singh filed an application on 20 September 1930 in the court on false grounds, stating “on the day of Saunders’ murder (17 December 1928), Bhagat Singh was not in Lahore but Calcutta.” As a result, the son was shocked. What he writes to his father, can hardly be expected from an ordinary son:

In spite of all the sentiments and feelings of a father, I don’t think you were at all entitled to make such a move on my behalf without even consulting me. I have always been of the opinion that all the political workers

should boldly bear the heaviest possible sentences inflicted upon them. My life is not so precious at least to me as you may probably think it to be. It is not at all worth buying at the cost of my principles. I feel as though I have been stabbed in the back. Had any other person done it, I would have considered it to be nothing short of treachery. But, in your case, let me say that it has been a weakness—a weakness of the worst type. This was the time when everybody's mettle was being tested. Let me say, father, you have failed.<sup>9</sup>

## VI

Whereas Bhagat Singh's approach towards life was concerned, it was quite interesting and inspiring. According to one of his close friends, Raja Ram Shastri :

Like many young boys, Bhagat Singh was quite naughty or *nut-khut*. *Vah hanshi-mazaaq khub dil khol kar karte the.*<sup>10</sup>

Bhagat Singh was as free from fear as from hate. On one hand, he wanted to see the end of British imperialism because it represented a system which was plundering and crushing the freedom of the people. On the other hand, he loved the British writers as a part of human society who had equally worked for spreading the message of freedom and liberty. Bhagat Singh's struggle was against the system of imperialism and capitalism, and in this struggle there was no place for individual revenge. It is no astonishment that in east London there stands a street named '*Bhagat Singh Street*' from its earlier name '*Britannia Walk*'. This act of the British people shows their recognition of Bhagat Singh's love of humanism.

Here one more example can be cited. In one of the *mulakaats* with Bhagat Singh, Kumari Lajjawati had the following dialogue which reveals his true personality:

When you were opposed to Lala Lajpat Rai's communal approach and other activities, why did you avenge his death even at the cost of your own life? Pat came the reply, "It is true that I was his opponent, but he was like my father. If in the presence of young sons, some enemy makes fatal attack on their father, how can they be only the silent spectators?"<sup>11</sup>



Bhagat Singh repeated at many places that he was full of desire to live and make life beautiful but at the need of time he could rise above it, and that was, in his opinion, the true sacrifice. A day before his hanging, on the night of the 22nd March 1931, his colleagues in barrack No.14 of the Lahore Central Jail, the political prisoners of 2nd Lahore Conspiracy Case, conveyed a message, "If you still have a desire to live, may it be possible to do some effort to save you." In reply, Bhagat Singh writes the following message which is the testimony of his inner feelings:

I understand that human life is a rare opportunity. The end of this life does make me sad. So to live is the most natural human desire, so I do have, I don't want to hide this fact. But one thought, which always occupies my mind, is that I tried to be of some use for the good of the people but it is only a 1000th part of what I contemplated. If I live might perhaps get a chance to fulfil some of the tasks which we had started. Except this, there is no other greed which makes me think of saving myself from execution.<sup>12</sup>

Whereas his life style was concerned, Bhagat Singh had great love for inner beauty. There was a rare grace in the way he ate, dressed and carried himself. Apart from mere external good looks and neatness, a sense of inner beauty and orderliness was deep rooted in him. He did not eschew external filthiness as much as he disliked inner slime.

One more quality by which Bhagat Singh was blessed was that he happily lived the life of self-imposed poverty. It was a spartan life at Agra. Bhagat Singh and his comrades did not have enough cots to sleep on, not enough utensils to cook and not enough money to buy food. There were days when a few of them would either skip an afternoon meal or dinner in order to manage within their skimpy resources. He knew it well how to live suited-booted, but gladly adopted the dress of a poor man. On several occasions, he was found dressed more or less like a '*faqir*'. His requirements of life were much less than an average Indian of the day. According to some report, he was given just four *annas* a day by Chandrashekhar Azad for his daily meals. Secondly, once he borrowed Rs.10 from his friend Raja Ram Shastri, which he

could not repay till his death. Acknowledging his inability, Bhagat Singh asked Mr. Shastri with apology when the latter came to meet him in jail, "*Bhai Raja Ram, mujhe maaf karna, oos din tumse jo das rupayen liye the, oonhen tumhen vaapis kar hi na saqa.*"<sup>13</sup>

## VII

One may ask here : "What was his approach towards the philosophical questions of life, especially God?" Answering this question, Bhagat Singh wrote a letter to Sukhdev in October 1929, stating:

We do not believe in God, hell and heaven, punishments and rewards, that is, in any Godly accounting of human life. Therefore, we must think of life and death on materialistic lines.<sup>14</sup>

It is true that Bhagat Singh, as the days rolled by, drifted from the faith in God. In the words of his niece, Ms. Virendra Sindhu: "As much as he parted from the concept of God, he accordingly went towards the welfare of suffering-humanity, or in other words, "*Ve Ishwar se door aur door hote chale gaye, aur oosi matra mein manushya ke paas aur paas aate chale gaye.*"<sup>15</sup>

## VIII

We have discussed different aspects of Bhagat Singh's personality as a man. But how he was as a man in totality, has nicely been observed by an intellectual of the country—Mr. Asaf Ali—who, being his wakil, had numerous personal meetings with Bhagat Singh. Apprising us with his observation, Asaf Ali recalls:

After I had accepted the brief, I sought an interview with Bhagat Singh and found him extremely human and gentle, although one would have believed that he would be rather ferocious and hard. I had numerous occasions after that to interview him and I found Bhagat Singh a most lovable person. He was certainly one of the bravest young men I had ever come across. Bhagat Singh was very handsome, and was perhaps one of the gentlest and the most affectionate, in temperament, the very



anti-thesis of a hard and blood-thirsty revolutionary. He showed brilliant intelligence almost beyond his years, and had he been spared he would have been an outstanding personality in any field of life.<sup>16</sup>

What a superb human being he was. Not even once did he falter, not even once did he feel despondent. With the ideals of a great man and blessed with historical force, he left this world in full glory and as an immortal martyr. He was indeed a rare figure of our history who could rightly be called—*Neta, Abhineta* and *Praneta* alike!

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## GANDHI'S ATTITUDE

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It is, perhaps, the most sensitive chapter of the volume. The issue of Mahatma Gandhi's attitude towards Bhagat Singh's death sentence has no doubt sparked much controversy among the scholars of the country. Some of them are of the opinion that 'Gandhi could have saved the precious life of Bhagat Singh; hence, his failure left a black-spot on Gandhi's public image'. On the other hand, there are certain intellectuals who are of the view that 'Gandhi failed not because of his lack of interest in saving Bhagat Singh's life, but the prevalent circumstances which lay beyond his control'. Yet the controversy is hardly expected to be the thing of the past. Even then, we make our humble attempt to evaluate the role played by Gandhi regarding the death sentence of Bhagat Singh and his two comrades—Rajguru and Sukhdev.

### I

The dawn of Gandhi on the political scene of India has been due to the failure of constitutionalism on the one side and the armed revolution on the other. Since the eighties of the 19th century, the best political brains among the Indian people were engaged in a constitutional fight in which the qualities most essential were 'skill in debate' and 'eloquence in speech'. In such an environment, it is unlikely that Gandhi would have attained any eminence. With the dawn of the 20th century, people began to lose faith in constitutional methods. New weapons like *Swadeshi* and Boycott of foreign-goods appeared, and simultaneously the revolutionary movement was born. As the years rolled by, the revolutionary movement began to gain ground in certain parts of the country, especially Maharashtra, Bengal, Bihar, U.P. and Punjab. Moreover, during the first world war (1914-18) there was an attempt at a revolt in the Army by the Ghadarites. The failure of



this attempt at a time when Britain had her hands full and the tragic events of 1919, particularly the Jallianwala Bagh tragedy, convinced the Indian people that 'it was no use trying to resort to the method of physical force'. The superior force of Britain would easily smash any such attempt and in its wake there would come indescribable misery and humiliation.

In 1920, India thus stood at the cross-roads. Constitutiona-  
lism was dead; armed revolution was sheer madness. But the silent acquiescence was impossible. The country was groping for a new method and looking for a new leader. Then there sprang up India's man of destiny—Mahatma Gandhi—who had been biding his time all these years and quietly preparing himself for the great task ahead of him. He knew himself; he knew his country's needs; and he also knew that during the next phase of India's struggle, the crown of leadership would be on his head. No false sense of modesty troubled him; he spoke with a firm voice, and the people obeyed him as their undisputed leader. As a result, the period of 1920-47 is rightly known as the Gandhian Era.

First of all, let us know some of the comparative characteristics of Gandhi and Bhagat Singh, as under:

- In political outlook, the two minds of the time—Gandhi and Bhagat Singh—were like the two banks of a river which meet only when they merge into the ocean. More appropriately, they were like two parallel lines which meet only at infinity.
- In character, courage and fearlessness, both have set standards which are not easy for the mortals to surpass.
- Both of them have left a lingering memory, a deep and a powerful impress on the people's heart who took their deaths as crucifixion.
- Ironically, Bhagat Singh was hanged by the same Viceroy, Lord Irwin, who described Gandhi as one of the noblest specimen of humanity.
- Both believed in inflicting injury on themselves for promoting their cause. Bhagat Singh believed in sacrificing his life, after harming the enemy; but Gandhi believed in bringing about a change of heart in the opponent. However, both failed to convince each other.

- While giving his assessment of Gandhi, Bhagat Singh once told his father: "Gandhiji is a kind-hearted philanthropist; and it is not philanthropy that is needed, but a dynamic and scientific social force that is required to bring social change. The British must fear India. Gandhiji's non-violence is an excuse for inaction. It is a cover for cowardice." Still, Bhagat Singh conceded that they (the revolutionaries) would be ungrateful, if they did not salute Gandhi for the immense awakening that he had generated in the country.<sup>1</sup>
- Both never met each other face to face at any point of time; the former was a matured and seasoned leader of sixty-one years with a huge following of political workers of a well organised body; and the latter was merely twenty-three, having hardly any such advantages.
- One was moving cautiously and slowly towards the goal of *swaraj*, the other was in a haste to achieve his desired mission.
- One was highly-educated, flanked by well-known lawyers, doctors, professors, business-magnates and others; the other had come out of the college, while he was not yet a fullfledged graduate with a following of the type of youths who had left their educational institutions not to return there again.
- The task for one was straight, open and devoid of any kind of secret element in it; the other had a zigzag way to travel in which maintenance of secrecy and hiding one's identity was the predominant principle.
- One had vast experience of continuing non-violent movements for more than two decades feeling the pulse of the masses; but the other had little experience for launching a revolutionary movement at an all-India level.
- Last but not the least, both were killed, one by colonialism and other by communalism; Both belong to the galaxy of immortals; Both the places of their *samadhis*—Hussainiwala (near Ferozpur) and the *Rajghat* (Delhi)—are the *titli-sthal* of national level; and Both are duly acknowledged by their fellow-countrymen, one as the *Shahid-e-Azam* and other the Father of the Nation.

## II

The reader may now be eager to know what efforts were



made by Gandhi to save the precious life of Bhagat Singh and his comrades—Rajguru and Sukhdev—from the gallows. It is, probably, the most important question of the chapter; and it is often asked by the students of History from their teachers.

On 17 February 1931, a week after the rejection of petition by the Privy Council, an important negotiation took place between the Viceroy Lord Irwin and the undisputed leader of the Congress Mahatma Gandhi, following the suspension of Civil Disobedience Movement, 1930-31. Meanwhile, the issue of Bhagat Singh and his comrades' death sentence was also put forth. What exactly transpired between Gandhi and Irwin in the days between February 17, when the talks began, and March 23 when Bhagat Singh and his two comrades were executed? Did Gandhi try strenuously to save Bhagat Singh's life as he publicly claimed? That is now the issue.

The talks began in earnest only in the afternoon of February 18, when Gandhi did raise the question of commutation of the death sentence with the Viceroy. The Viceroy promptly made a detailed note of the entire conversation. Its concluding para reads thus :

In conclusion and not connected with the above (Gandhi-Irwin Pact, also called Delhi Pact), he (Gandhi) mentioned the case of Bhagat Singh. He did not plead for commutation, although he would, being opposed to all taking of life, take that course himself. He also thought it would have an influence for peace. But he did ask for postponement in present circumstances. <sup>2</sup>

Gandhi's following version, available from the manuscript of Mahadev Desai's Diary, does not conflict with that of the Viceroy:

I talked about Bhagat Singh. I told him (Irwin): "This has no connection with our discussion, and it may even be inappropriate on my part to mention it. But if you want to make the present atmosphere more favourable, you should suspend Bhagat Singh's execution." The Viceroy liked this very much. He said, "I am very grateful to you that you have put this thing before me in this manner. Commutation of sentence is

a difficult thing, but suspension is certainly worth considering." I said about Bhagat Singh, "He is undoubtedly a brave man but I would certainly say that he is not in his right mind. However, this is the evil of capital punishment, that it gives no opportunity to such a man to reform himself. I am putting this matter before you as a humanitarian issue and desire the suspension of sentence in order that there may not be unnecessary turmoil in the country. I would not take it ill even if you do not give any reply on this issue."<sup>3</sup>

The matter was raised again a month later and well after the Gandhi-Irwin Pact had been concluded on March 5. It was on March 19. The Congress Session was due to be held in Karachi on March 24. Ratification of the Gandhi-Irwin Pact figured high on its agenda. Gandhi anticipated no great difficulty at Karachi in ratifying the Pact. Bhagat Singh's plight was brought up at the very last, as the Viceroy recorded:

As he (Gandhi) was leaving, he asked if he might mention the case of Bhagat Singh, saying that he had seen in the Press, the intimation of his execution for March 24th. This was an unfortunate day as it coincided with the arrival of the new President of the Congress at Karachi and there would be much popular excitement.

I told him I had considered the case with most anxious care, but could find no grounds on which I could justify to my conscience commuting the sentence. As to the date, I had considered the possibility of postponement till after the Congress, but had deliberately rejected it on various grounds—

- that postponement of execution, merely on political grounds, when orders had been passed, seemed to me improper;
- that postponement was inhuman in that it would suggest to the friends and relatives that I was considering commutation; and
- that Congress would have been able legitimately to complain that they had been tricked by Government.



He (Gandhi) appeared to appreciate the force of these arguments, and said no more.<sup>4</sup>

Subhas Chandra Bose, in his autobiography entitled '*The Indian Struggle, 1920-1942*' has also made reference to Bhagat Singh's case with greater clarity than others. Says Bose:

Pressure was brought to bear on the Mahatma to try to save the lives of the youngmen and it must be admitted, he did try his best. On this occasion he ventured the suggestion that he should, if necessary, break with the Viceroy on the question, because the execution was against the spirit, if not the letter, of the Delhi Pact. I was reminded of a similar incident during the armistice between the Sinn Fein Party (of Ireland) and the British Government, when the strong attitude adopted by the former had secured the release of an Irish political prisoner sentenced to the gallows. But the Mahatma, who did not want to identify himself with the revolutionary prisoners, would not go so far, and it naturally made a great difference when the Viceroy realised that the Mahatma would not break on that question.<sup>5</sup>

In his interview to the press on March 6, Gandhi criticised the 'evil of capital punishment', which disables a person to reform himself. He also assured the public that on the Bhagat Singh case, "I put it (to the Viceroy) as a 'humanitarian issue', and desired the 'suspension (of death sentence)' so that there may not be turmoil in the country." Besides, Gandhi's letter to Irwin on 23 March 1931 is worth-mentioning here:

It seems cruel to inflict this letter on you, but the interest of peace demands a final appeal. Though you were frank enough to tell me that there was little hope of your commuting the sentence of death on Bhagat Singh and two others. If there is any room left for re-consideration, I invite your attention to the following—

Popular opinion rightly or wrongly demands commutation. When there is no principle at stake, it is often a duty to respect it. Seeing that I am able to inform you that the revolutionary party has assured me that, in the

event of these lives being spared, that party will stay its hands, suspension of sentence pending cessation of revolutionary murders becomes in my opinion a peremptory duty.

Political murders have been condoned before now. It is worthwhile saving these lives, if thereby many other innocent lives are likely to be saved and may be even revolutionary crime almost stamped out.<sup>6</sup>

### III

The outcome of the talks between Gandhi and the Viceroy Lord Irwin was a mixed one. First of all, we shall mention here the logics given in support of Gandhi. While supporting Gandhi, a noted scholar Paresh R. Vaidya writes in a magazine of national repute *the Frontline*, dated 14-27 April 2001:

While parading through history, it would be unfair to Gandhiji if one does not record his efforts in this case. He was not a mere politician but a humanist at the core. He got 90,000 political prisoners, other than *satyagrahis*, released under the pretext of 'relieving political tension'. He did plead for the commutation of the death sentence of the three heroes—Bhagat Singh, Rajguru and Sukhdev—also. But he did not succeed because the Viceroy's moves were governed from England and these three were a challenge to the Raj and thus were not thought fit for pardon. In fact, Gandhi wrote a letter to the Viceroy on the day of their execution, pleading fervently for commutation, not knowing that the letter would be too late. Furthermore, it would suffice to note that it was not his creed of *ahimsa* that would turn to violence even 'to punish a dacoit, or a murderer'.

Endorsing the stand taken by Gandhi, a noted historian of the present day—Prof. V.N. Datta—remarks:

It is mentioned by some historians that Gandhi had reached an agreement with the Viceroy on the commutation of Bhagat Singh's death sentence, but this inside information was divulged publicly in a spirit of



bravado by a member of the Congress Working Committee. The disclosure of this secret deal triggered off a strong reaction from the British civil servants who threatened to resign if Bhagat Singh's death sentence was commuted. Under such circumstances, the Viceroy felt helpless, and he declined to commute the death sentence.<sup>7</sup>

Prof. Datta further observes, "Despite his disapproval of Bhagat Singh's action and constrained as he was by his commitment to non-violence, Gandhi did whatever he could to persuade the Viceroy to commute Bhagat Singh's death sentence."

One more version in favour of Gandhi may be quoted here in the words of K.K. Khullar, a well-known biographer of Bhagat Singh :

It must, however, be remembered that Gandhi was not the Viceroy of India. All that he could do was to try. And he pleaded hard. The Viceroy, on the other hand, was answerable to the British Government. He must have acted under directions and he played his role well. Gandhi's role has to be judged, keeping in view the fact that the ultimate goal for which Gandhi worked was the country's independence where not one but many Bhagat Singhs were required to be sacrificed at the altar of freedom.<sup>8</sup>

In favour of Gandhi, one more argument has been presented by another biographer of Bhagat Singh, Omesh Saigal :

One fails to understand the reason as to why Sardar Kishan Singh went to Karachi to attend the Congress session held immediately after the executions. If there had been anything much adverse against Gandhi and the Congress leadership, this kind of action on the part of the father of the martyr is not understandable. Not only that, he eulogised the services of some Congress leaders for saving Bhagat Singh and his comrades, and advocated the youths to work peacefully for winning freedom. He further stated, "You must support your general (Gandhi)."<sup>9</sup>

## IV

Yet, there is another school of scholars which is of the opinion that the 'efforts of Gandhi in saving the lives of Bhagat Singh and his comrades were not upto the mark'. Following the execution of the three, Gandhi was opposed by many, especially the youth. Wherever Gandhi went, youngsters encountered him with questions. For the first time, Gandhi was greeted by black flag demonstrations at all railway stations from Lahore to Karachi. At Karachi Congress session, the youth even shouted: "Gandhi's truce sent Bhagat Singh to the gallows."

Let us now know the comments of the critics of Gandhi. Firstly, a great legal luminary of the country, A.G. Noorani, has critically studied Gandhi's attitude towards Bhagat Singh's death sentence. Quoting from different sources, Mr. Noorani apprises us with his following findings<sup>10</sup> :

- What, precisely, is the issue? Gandhi never for a moment claimed that he had tried to make clemency for Bhagat Singh or his release a condition to the Pact and failed.
- Subhas Chandra Bose, who differed completely from Gandhi on the stand which the Congress should take on Bhagat Singh, acknowledged that Gandhi plainly refused to 'go so far' as to wreck the Pact.
- The official historian of the Congress Dr. B. Pattabhi Sitaramayya wrote : "Any way Lord Irwin was unable to help in the matter, but undertook to secure a postponement of the execution till after the Karachi Congress. The Karachi session was to meet in the last days of March, but Gandhi himself definitely stated to the Viceroy that if the boys should be hanged, they had better be hanged before the Congress than after. The position of affairs in the country would be clear. There would be no false hopes lingering in the breasts of the people. The Gandhi-Irwin Pact would stand or fall on its own merits at the Congress, and on the added fact that the three boys had been executed."<sup>11</sup>
- On the very day of Bhagat Singh's execution, Gandhi wrote a letter to Irwin which, understandably, came as a complete surprise to him in view of the discussions that preceded it, from February 18 till March 19. It was a fervent plea for



commutation of the sentences. Irwin lost no time in rejecting Gandhi's pleas. Had Gandhi taken such a stand on February 18, he might have succeeded in saving Bhagat Singh's life.

- Gandhi alone could have intervened effectively to save Bhagat Singh's life. He did not, till the very last. Later claims such as that 'I brought all the persuasion at my command to bear on him (the Viceroy)', are belied by the record that came to light later. In this tragic episode, Gandhi was not candid either to the nation or even to his closest colleagues about his talks with the Viceroy, Lord Irwin, on saving Bhagat Singh's life.

Besides, there is one more authority i.e. D.P. Das on the present subject. However, he accuses Gandhi of a 'small deception' for a cause which he considered noble and patriotic because he genuinely believed that the Delhi Pact was much more important than the lives of one revolutionary here and another there. Bhagat Singh and his comrades were the tragic cases that arose at the time which almost stood between a settlement with Irwin by Gandhi. Moreover, adds Das, there was no serious reason for him to be particularly concerned with the Lahore Conspiracy Case which was the symbol of the cult of violence, quite inimical to the principle he cherished. Justifying 'small lying' and 'small deception' for the sake of higher and noble objectives and quoting cases of '*Yudhistira versus Dronacharya*', '*Rama versus Bali*', Das concludes thus:

So Gandhi's deception should not make us cynical about him. Nor should the discovery of his deception for a cause considered noble by him be taken as an indication of any absence of nobility in him. He was indeed a great Indian. Let Bhagat Singh episode be just a spot in his career and a condonable spot. Have we not condoned the spot in the Moon, *Yudhistira and Rama*?<sup>12</sup>

Bhagat Singh' devoted biographer, Dr. Gurdev Singh Deol, criticises Gandhi on the following two grounds:

- Gandhi refused to associate himself in the move to raise a memorial to Bhagat Singh and did not conceal his reasons in his letter to the Memorial Committee, dated June 20, 1931:

A memorial erected in honour of anybody undoubtedly means that the memorialists would copy of deeds of those in whose memory they erect the memorial. It is also an invitation to posterity to copy such deeds. I am, therefore, unable to identify myself in any way with the memorial.

- A leader—who could go to the extent of stating to the Viceroy that ‘if the boys should be hanged, they had better be hanged before the Congress (Karachi) Session, than after it’— could hardly be expected to secure the commutation of the death sentences of Bhagat Singh and his comrades.<sup>13</sup>

Another biographer of Bhagat Singh—Dr. S.R. Bakshi—criticises Gandhi, stating:

It appears from the meetings of Gandhi and Irwin as well the sum and substance of their statements that some efforts were made by Gandhi to save the life of Bhagat Singh. But it was not made an important political issue during the negotiations. There was no political pressure on the Viceroy. But for the high political pressure, such a complex problem could never have been resolved in favour of the revolutionary youth.<sup>14</sup>

## V

So far we have discussed the comments, for and against, about Gandhi's attitude towards Bhagat Singh's death sentence. But the reader may ask here, what should he believe? Having heard the news of Bhagat Singh's execution, Gandhi issued a carefully drafted statement for the Press on 24 March 1931 in which he praises Bhagat Singh's patriotic spirit and criticises the Government's action of execution. A brief account of the statement runs:

There never has been, within living memory, so much romance round any life as has surrounded that of Bhagat Singh. Though I must have seen him as a student while at Lahore many times, I cannot recall Bhagat Singh's features. But during the past month, it was a privilege to listen to the story of Bhagat Singh's patriotism, his courage and his deep love for Indian humanity. From all accounts received by me, his daring was unequalled.



That he misused his extraordinary courage, has been forgotten in the midst of his many virtues. The execution of such a youth and his comrades has given them the crown of martyrdom. Thousands feel today personally bereaved by his death. While therefore, I can associate myself with all the tributes that can be paid to the memory of these young patriots. Let us by all means copy their capacity for sacrifice, their industry and their reckless courage.

As for the Government, I cannot help feeling that they have lost a golden opportunity of winning over the Revolutionary Party. It was their clear duty in view of the settlement, at least to suspend indefinitely the execution. By their action they have put a severe strain upon the settlement and once more proved their capacity for flouting public opinion and for exhibition of the immense brute power they possess. This persistence in the exercise of their brute power is perhaps a portent showing that notwithstanding pompous and pious declarations, they do not mean to part with power. In my deliberate opinion, a grave blunder has been committed by the Government and it has increased our power for winning the freedom for which Bhagat Singh and his comrades have died.<sup>15</sup>

In making his efforts to save the life of Bhagat Singh, what Gandhi claims about himself, is worth-mentioning here. When Gandhi addressed the Karachi Congress, he shot a sharp dart in the direction of the critics, stating: "You must know that it is against my creed to punish even a murderer, a thief or a dacoit. There can be therefore no excuse for suspicion that I did not want to save Bhagat Singh." As he was winding up his speech, Gandhi was asked "What did you do to save Bhagat Singh?" He replied:

Well, I was not on my defence, and so I did not bother you with the details of what I did to save Bhagat Singh and his comrades. I pleaded with the Viceroy as best I could. I bought all the persuasion at my command to bear on him. On the day fixed for the final interview

with Bhagat Singh's relations I wrote a personal letter to the Viceroy on the morning of 23rd. I poured my whole soul into it, but to no avail. I had hoped for magnanimity. My hope was not to materialize.<sup>16</sup>

On the basis of the above mentioned versions, we may conclude that Gandhi had all praise for Bhagat Singh's patriotism. And he also made some efforts to save Bhagat Singh's life. Despite this fact, Gandhi's efforts in saving Bhagat Singh's life were not as per the expectations of the country as a whole. In a nutshell, Bhagat Singh, being a youngman of enormous potentialities, was surely a life worth-saving!

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\* \* \*



## CONCLUSION

It is the last but not the least chapter of the volume. Certain questions, evaluating the life and work of Bhagat Singh, are to be discussed hereafter. The first and foremost question seems to be: Among the revolutionaries, why has he alone attracted the maximum attention of his fellow-countrymen, when others had also made supreme sacrifices for the sake of their beloved country? To answer it, an attempt has been made by a revolutionary scholar—Nalini Kishore Guha—who was himself an active member of the *Anushilan Samiti* of Bengal established in 1905. In an interview to Prof. Jagmohan Singh, Shri Guha states:

Bhagat Singh has worked hard to pull the Indian people out of their backward thinking and showed them scientific way of thinking. He emphasized on faults of the system and put forward an alternative model which would change it and will ensure joy in the life of toiling people. He showed the path of rationality and equality. His love for people in general was so great and he was successful in displaying it clearly. Now the Indian people are reciprocating his love for him. He is recognized by them as a symbol of their inner desire for liberation.<sup>1</sup>

In other words, Bhagat Singh gave to the revolutionary tradition a goal beyond the elimination of the British imperialism. A clarity of vision and determination of purpose distinguished him from other leaders of revolutionary movement. He also defined the motive of freedom struggle as the end of exploitation of man by man and of nation by nation.

Secondly, apart from the *Ghadarites*, Bhagat Singh was perhaps the only revolutionary who took initiative to separate their movement from religion. According to a great scholar of modern history, Ms. Kamlesh Mohan :

The Revolutionary Movement which had been following the Hindu line was detached from religion by Bhagat Singh. He directed the revolutionary efforts towards the attainment of nationalistic and socialistic goals. It was through Bhagat Singh that Marx and Lenin gained influence over the Indian national consciousness. Bhagat Singh felt that revolutionary creed should be detached from religion as the religion would cause rift in the whole-hearted devotion of a revolutionary to the creed of revolution.<sup>2</sup>

Thirdly, if Shahid Kartar Singh Sarabha was a role-model for Bhagat Singh, the latter was then the same for Shahid Udham Singh. Endorsing this fact, a renowned bureaucrat cum statesman of India—Dr. Manohar Singh Gill—tells us:

On a mild September day in 1971, I motored to a small fishing village on the east coast of England. I was in search of Shiv Singh Johal, a friend of Udham Singh who was said to have in his possession Udham Singh's last letters from jail. I managed to find him ensconced in a neat flat by the sea with his Norwegian wife. They were both old, though their memories of Udham Singh were young and fresh.<sup>3</sup>

Continuing his words, Dr. Gill states, as we talked, Shiv Singh's face glowed with vivid recollections of the past. He told me:

Udham Singh was determined to take revenge for the Jallianwala Bagh tragedy. His great hero was Bhagat Singh and he would say that he was going to avenge the Amritsar massacre, just as the great Bhagat Singh had avenged the insult to Lala Lajpat Rai. While Udham Singh was in jail after the shooting of Sir Michael O'Dwyer, whenever I met him he worried only about whether his sacrifice would measure upto that of the great Bhagat Singh. He repeatedly asked me if people would remember him as they remember Bhagat Singh.<sup>4</sup>

Udham Singh's obsession with Bhagat Singh was quite evident. In one letter he wrote that he wanted to be hanged on



March 23, 'the day on which his hero had gone to the gallows. In another he wanted to be reassured that he too would be remembered for his sacrifice, as Bhagat Singh is.

## II

Though Bhagat Singh lived a life of intensity and was strong in his revolutionary views, still he had love for literature. He was a student of human psychology along with history and scientific temper of enquiry. Any question which would come into his sensitive mind about the existing conditions of his people and any doubts about establishing it, the only way adopted by him was to search answers to these questions by study in depth and strengthening his views.

Bhagat Singh was indeed a giant of an intellectual. A voracious reader, he was one of the most well-read of political leaders of the time. He had devoured books in the Dwarkadas Library at Lahore on socialism, the Soviet Union and revolutionary movements, especially those of France, Italy, Russia and Ireland. At Lahore, he organized study circles with the help of Sukhdev and others and carried on intensive political discussions. When the HSRA office was shifted to Agra, he immediately set up a library and urged members to read and discuss socialism and other revolutionary ideas. His shirt-pockets always bulged with books which he constantly offered to lend to his comrades. After his arrest, according to a noted historian—Prof. Bipin Chandra, 'he virtually transformed the jail into a veritable university'. Emphasizing the role of ideas in the making of revolution, he declared before the Punjab High Court, "The sword of revolution is sharpened on the whetting-stone of ideas."

It is rare to find someone so young thinking, writing and speaking with such clarity and vision. Appreciating his intellectual strength, an authority on the life and work of Bhagat Singh—A.G. Noorani—writes:

What distinguished Bhagat Singh from all others, besides his courage, patriotism and commitment to moral values, was his intellectual strength. A voracious reader, he was also willing to rethink. He had the capacity to brood and to torment his soul over the past. That led

him to renounce terrorism and to advise the young to follow suit; indeed, to counsel moderation and readiness to compromise.<sup>5</sup>

What type of reader, in his own words, he was, is obvious from the following words which he wrote to Sukhdev in October 1929, "The best purpose of self-study is to prepare ourselves for sufferings."

### III

Another important question arises here, "What is the message of Bhagat Singh's life for us, especially the youth?" Today when the youth is at the cross roads of history, Martyr Bhagat Singh's convictions and way of living is like a lighthouse which can lead the way to future. Being a youth himself, Bhagat Singh knew it well that the youth of a country could only initiate the development of a society. The future of a country depends upon the convictions, thinking and directions of action of the youth. It is only these characteristics of the youth which can create possibilities for bringing a social change. Youth is one class which is full of courage and is ready to suffer for their convictions.

Secondly, as a protagonist of social change, Bhagat Singh called upon the youth as follows :

At this time we cannot advise the youth to carry bombs and pistols. You have very important and courageous work to do. You should carry the message of revolution to all corners of the country. You should make this message reach the workers working in industry and to the peasants living in the huts of the village. If these people could be awakened, only then a system could be established which will make it possible to end the exploitation of man by man.<sup>6</sup>

His another recommendation to the youth is to start a war against the internal weaknesses of self and society which are being exploited by the selfish. Continuing his words, Bhagat Singh suggests that the struggle of self-emancipation begins when, "Man tries to stand on his own legs and becomes a realist, the need of the God, this artificial crutch, this imaginary saviour comes to an end."



Bhagat Singh further emphasized that "Any man who stands for progress has to criticize, disbelieve and challenge every item of old faith one by one, he has to reason out every nook and corner of prevailing faith. A man who claims to be realist has to challenge the whole of ancient faith. The first thing for him is to shatter the whole down and clear a space for the erection of a new philosophy." But to achieve that we have to learn from Bhagat Singh that it can only be done with the help of literature and its deep study on one hand then implementing the learnt lessons in every day life. **Learning and practising simultaneously is the way of Bhagat Singh.**

Bhagat Singh clearly tells us, how we can improve the lot of our country. *Why I am an atheist?* which was written to make the records straight about some comments made by Bhai Randhir Singh, a patriot with deep religious tendencies. This was written on 5th-6th October 1930, a day before he was awarded death sentence. He very aptly wrote:

With no selfish motive, or desire to be awarded here or hereafter, quite disinterestedly have I devoted my life to the cause of independence, because I could not do otherwise. The day we find a great number of men and women with this psychology who cannot devote themselves to anything else than service of mankind and emancipation of the suffering humanity, that day shall inaugurate the era of liberty.

Through his jail notebook, Bhagat Singh also conveys to us, "A man should attack those institutions which are hindrances in the development of mankind."

In his another message of 3 March 1931, he declared that the struggle in India would continue so long as "a handful of exploiters go on exploiting the labour of common people for their own ends. It matters little whether these exploiters are purely British capitalists, or British and Indians in alliance, or even purely Indians."

Bhagat Singh's message about the danger of communalism is still applicable in India. In the words of prominent historian—**Dr. Bipin Chandra:**

Bhagat Singh was a great innovator in the area of politics. Being fully and consciously secular, he

understood, more clearly than many of his contemporaries, the danger that communalism posed to the nation. He often told his audience that communalism was as big an enemy as colonialism.<sup>7</sup>

In April 1928, at the conference of youth where *Naujawan Bharat Sabha* was reorganized, Bhagat Singh and his comrades openly opposed the suggestion that youth, belonging to religious-communal organizations, should be permitted to become members of the *Sabha*. Religion was one's private concern and communalism was an enemy to be fought, argued Bhagat Singh. Earlier in 1927, condemning communal killings as barbaric, he had pointed out that communal killers did not kill a person because he was guilty of any particular act but simply because the person happened to be a Hindu, Muslim or Sikh.

Bhagat Singh revered Lala Lajpat Rai as a leader. But he would not spare even Lajpat Rai, when, during the last years of his life, he turned to communal politics. Bhagat Singh then launched a political-ideological campaign against Lalaji. Because Lajpat Rai was a respected leader, he would not publicly use harsh words of criticism against him. Briefly speaking, in his opinion, a new group of youth should come forward who do not recognize any differences based on community, and see a person first as a human being and then as an Indian.

There is an eternal message to those who wish to serve the poor and the needy of their country. In the words of Bhagat Singh:

It requires the life of constant struggle, suffering and sacrifice. Crush your individuality first. Shake off the dreams of personal comfort. Then start to work. Inch by inch, you shall have to proceed. It needs courage, perseverance and very strong determination. No difficulties and no hardships shall discourage you. No failure and betrayals shall dishearten you. Through the ordeals of sufferings and sacrifice, you shall come out victorious.<sup>8</sup>

Bhagat Singh was that kind of man who believed in the concept, 'what he did that he said'. So his glorious life gives us certain messages which can be summarised as under:

- A man should stick to his ideals, even at the cost of his life.
- Nothing great can be achieved without suffering and sacrifice.



- One should continue studies till the end of one's life.
- Be indifferent to yourself, but sensitive to others.
- *Jo bhi saza ho, hanskar jheli jaye.*
- *Ishwar ko matra swartha ke liye, yaad nahin karna chahiye.*

#### IV

Moreover, Bhagat Singh was a mark of new, better and proud India. The deeply moving story of his life and the more inciting story of his death has made him an extraordinary personality of history. At the time of execution, he was a man devoid of power, property or position. Yet, the whole country bowed and acknowledged his selfless sacrifice and paid homage to him as that had hardly paid to any mortal or martyr before or after. He was indeed a champion of the suffering humanity and a symbol of India's solidarity and strength. One of his close associates, Com. Ajoy Ghosh, has once rightly said:

Like a meteor, Bhagat Singh appeared in the political sky for a brief period. Before he passed away, he had become the cynosure of millions of eyes and the symbol of the spirit and aspirations of a new India, dauntless in the face of death, determined to smash imperialist rule and raise on its ruins the edifice of a free people's state in this great land of ours.<sup>9</sup>

Expressing his balanced views on the question of Bhagat Singh's place in history, a renowned historian, Prof. Bipin Chandra, writes:

The politics of the revolutionary movement had severe limitations—above all theirs was not the politics of a mass movement; they failed to politically activate the masses or move them into political actions; they could not even establish contact with the masses. All the same, they made an abiding contribution to the national freedom movement. Their deep patriotism, courage and determination and sense of sacrifice stirred the Indian people. They helped spread nationalist consciousness in the land; and in northern India, the spread of socialist consciousness owed a lot to them.<sup>10</sup>

Paying his glowing tributes to Bhagat Singh, Dr. M.S. Gill states :

There have been youngmen before Bhagat Singh, and there were to be others after him, who gave their lives for country. But no other individual fired the imagination of the Indian people in the manner in which he did. He remains the 'beau ideal' of the Indian people. Bhagat Singh does not need our remembrance. We need his memory more to inspire us in the difficult days ahead.<sup>11</sup>

His intimate friend Raja Ram Shastri also seems to be genuine when he praises Bhagat Singh, stating : "Bhagat Singh shall ever be loved by all those Indians who wish to see the world happier."

Surprisingly, the whole country was clamouring to save Bhagat Singh, but he himself was quite indifferent to it. Generally speaking people cling to life so badly, but here was a man just a little above 23 years, who wanted to ring down the curtain of life, to have a rendezvous with death, for the good of the country. In one of his hearings in the court, the handcuffed Bhagat Singh, while chatting with one of his comrades, started laughing loudly. The duty magistrate took it otherwise, and asked Bhagat Singh: Why are you laughing? Thereupon Bhagat Singh stood ringing his handcuffs, and ironically said : "Dear Magistrate, if you can't tolerate my laughing at the moment, what will happen to you when I will laugh even on the scaffold?"<sup>12</sup> Appreciating his divine courage, a great revolutionary—Durga Bhabhi—remarks: "*Phansi charne ja rahe the, phir bhi kaisi masti, kaisa ulbelapun; jo yogion ko bhi durlabh hai.*"<sup>13</sup>

Bhagat Singh and his comrades were that kind of revolutionaries who wanted to drive out the British rulers and establish socialism in India. The British imperialists, the enemies of Indian freedom, labelled them as 'terrorists' or 'anarchists' in order to defame them in the eye of the Indian people. They were neither terrorists nor anarchists as these terms are known in Europe, but accepted some of their political views. They were indeed the most self-sacrificing youngmen of India, committed to make their country free from all kinds of exploitation.

## V

It is true that Bhagat Singh sacrificed his precious life for the sake of his beloved country at the age of just 23, yet he believed



that 'to live and to work for the country' was a much more difficult task than to face the bullet of enemy or kiss the gallows! Endorsing this fact, we can cite here the following instance of December 1930 in the words of his co-prisoner Shiv Verma:

The Government intended to move us away before our companions were hanged. The Senior Superintendent of jail along with his force marched us (Shiv Verma, Jaidev and others) towards the gate. After walking some distance he asked, "Will you meet your comrades?" We offered our profound thanks. He got the gates of the new premises opened and took us to the cells of Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev and Rajguru. Despondency was writ large on the faces of all of us for the thought that we would never meet these comrades in our lives hence. I (Shiv Verma) was behind all of them. Tears came to my eyes while saying good bye. On seeing tears in my eyes, Bhagat Singh said, "It is no time to be sentimental. I shall be free of all the worries but all of you will have to traverse a long path. I believe you will not feel tired in this long journey despite the heavy weight of responsibilities on you. You will not cower and will not stop halfway accepting defeat." Saying this he put forward his hands through the iron bars and caught hold of my hand. Coming close to us, the Jail Superintendent in a subdued voice said, 'March'. This was our last meeting with Bhagat Singh.<sup>14</sup>

Expressing his views on the subject of greater sacrifice, Bhagat Singh told Shiv Verma on some another occasion :

The sacrifice has its two kinds. One is to die in an encounter or on the gallows, and other is to struggle against odds throughout one's life. Though the former has little pain, yet it gives more popularity. But the latter one is horrible, as well as of much more significance! Gems can enhance the beauty of a building, and dazzle those who behold it by, but they cannot become the foundations of the building and ensure its longevity. To keep burning so that the light of the lamp is not dimmed, is not the sacrifice of such people more as compared to the first?<sup>15</sup>

## VI

In a nutshell, Bhagat Singh was of-course a unique personality of the world history who served his country enormously, inspite of going to the gallows at the age of just 23. In other words: "*Vah kaam bahut bara karna chakta tha, aur adhiq jeena bhi nahin chahta tha.*" Generally speaking, it seems impossible to achieve both these ends. Surprisingly, it was Bhagat Singh who translated this 'impossibility' into 'possibility'. Bhagat Singh was thus an exceptional figure of our country who could have such a unique achievement to his credit.

If we have a look at his past, we shall find that Bhagat Singh was born in a remote village; he, as a boy, was scared even of darkness; he had never been a meritorious student; being a collegiate, he totally lacked the dress-sense; among his friendly circle, he was of teasing nature; he was often beaten by his father; and so on. Even then, he soon became extremely bold, intellectual, visionary, innovator, and above all the *Shaheed-e-Azam*. So, the question arises, "How is it so?" One may perhaps agree with the following answer, "Bhagat Singh could achieve all these heights in his short span of life, chiefly because of—*Gambhir Adhyayan, Nirantar Chintan aur Adubhut Nirnaya-shakti* (deep study of literature, constant reasoning and wonderful ability of judgement). In the end, we may thus ask ourselves: "If a person like Bhagat Singh, with such a poor background, could become a patriot of the first rate, why can't we?"

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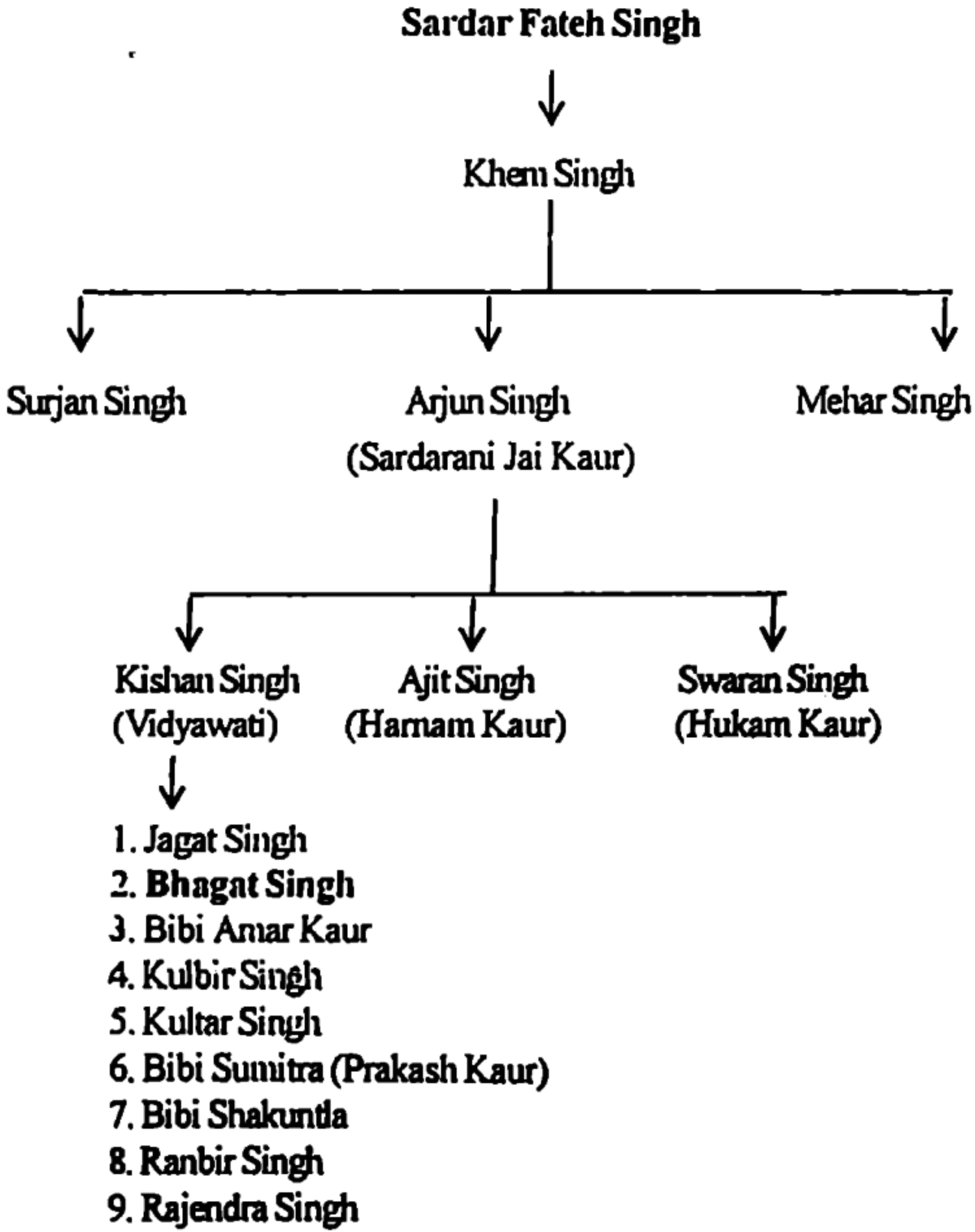
# APPENDICES





# APPENDIX-I

## Family Tree





## APPENDIX-II

### CHRONOLOGY

- 
- |       |              |   |   |
|-------|--------------|---|---|
| 1907, | September 28 | : | Born at village Banga, Chakk No. 105, Tehsil Jaranwala, Distt. Lyallpur (now Faisalabad, Pakistan). It was 9.00 a.m., Saturday. |
| 1911, | September    | : | Admitted to the District Board Primary School, village Banga.   |
| 1917, | May          | : | Joined the D.A.V. High School, Lahore.  |
| 1919, | April 14     | : | Visited the Jallianwallah Bagh, Amritsar, just after a day of the massacre.   |
| 1921, | July         | : | Joined the National College, Lahore.  |
| 1923, | April        | : | Passed the Intermediate examination.  |
|       | August       | : | Was the student of B.A. first year, but left home for Delhi-Kanpur on being pressuried to get married.                          |
| 1924, | February     | : | Returned home after 6 months.   |
|       | April        | : | Warrants of Arrest were issued in connection with organising <i>langar</i> for <i>Jaito Morcha</i> at Banga village.            |
|       | July         | : | Worked as Head-Teacher for some months in a national school at Shadipur in Aligarh distt.                                       |

- |       |               |   |   |
|-------|---------------|---|---|
|       | October       |   | Organised relief-measures during the flood in Uttar Pradesh.  |
| 1925, | December      | : | Warrants withdrawn.   |
| 1926, | March 13      | : | Founded the <i>Naujawan Bharat Sabha</i> at Lahore.   |
| 1927, | May 29        | : | Arrested in <i>Dussehara</i> Bomb Case, Lahore.   |
|       | July 4        | : | Released on bail of Rs.60,000.  |
| 1928, | September 8-9 | : | Organised a historic meeting of the revolutionaries at Ferozeshah Kotla Grounds (Delhi) where the word 'Socialist' was added to the organisation on Bhagat Singh's insistence. It was now known as the Hindustan Socialist Republican Association (HSRA). |
|       | December 17   | : | Along with Chandrashekar Azad, Rajguru and Jaigopal, shot dead a British police official—J.P.Saunders—at Lahore.  |
|       | December 21   | : | Had a dramatic escape from Lahore to Calcutta, accompanied by Durga Bhabhi.   |
|       | December 29   | : | Attended the Calcutta session of Congress, presided over by Pt. Motilal Nehru.  |
| 1929, | April 3       | : | Hat-wearing photograph, taken at Delhi.   |
|       | April 8       | : | Threw two bombs in the Central Legislative Assembly (New Delhi) to make the deaf hear. B.K.Dutt scattered leaflets. Both courted arrest.  |
|       | June 6        | : | Made historic statement in the Delhi Sessions Court.  |



- June 12 Sentenced to transportation for life.
- June 15 Sent to Mianwali Jail. Also started hunger-strike.
- July 10 The trial of Lahore Conspiracy Case commenced in Lahore Central Jail.
- 1930, May 5 Trial before Special Tribunal started.
- October 7 : The Special Tribunal gave its verdict sentencing Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev and Rajguru to death.
- 1931, February 11 A Petition, filed before the Privy Council (London) in October 1930, was dismissed.
- March 23 Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev and Rajguru were executed in the Lahore Central Jail at 7.00 p.m.

\* \* \*

## APPENDIX-III

### LIST OF PROSECUTION WITNESSES

1. Mr. Hamilton Hardinge  
(Cmplainant)
2. Jai Gopal
3. Phonindra Nath Ghosh
4. Man Mohan Bannerji
5. Hans Raj Vohra
6. Lalit Kumar Mukerji
7. Ram Saran Das
8. Bakshi Dina Nath
9. Kwaja Taj Din
10. Pandit Hans Raj
11. Pt. Mukand Kant Shastri
12. Sardar Ganda Singh
13. S. Mohan Singh
14. M.A. Jafarey
15. S. Brahma Singh
16. Balbadar Chaturvedi
17. Raghuni Chamar
18. Mr. H.G. Terry, Seargent
19. Raghbir Singh
20. Hans Raj, S.I.
21. Lala Shankar Lal
22. L. Rameshwar Parshad
23. Khan Saheb Niaz Ahmed Din
24. Rai Saheb Lala Nathu Ram
25. Jit Singh
26. Rai Bahadur J.N. Banerji
27. Jai Nath Sahai
28. Kesho Parshad
29. Ch. Roshan Lal
30. Mr. Jenkin
31. Mr. Robert Churchill
32. Ch. Shahab-ud-Din, S.I.
33. Ch. Mushtaq Ahmed
34. Abdulla
35. Sant Singh
36. Mohammad Ibrahim
37. Haji Ahmed
38. Col. Sivan
39. Dr. Mathews
40. Dr. Loams
41. Major Briggs
42. K.S. Daulat Ali Shah
43. L. Jai Dyal
44. Ram Lal
45. Mr. J.R.Morris
46. Mr. Fearn
47. Sayad Wahid-ud-Din
48. Ata Mohammad
49. Lachhmi Narain
50. Dina Nath
51. Kundan Lal
52. Kishan Singh
53. Mahant Ram
54. Sada Nand
55. Dr. Gian Chand
56. Salig Ram
57. Hans Raj
58. Ram Parshad
59. L. Kanshi Ram



- |                            |                               |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 60. L. Mohan Ram           | 98. Mohd. Hussain             |
| 61. L. Kanhiya Lal         | 99. Bashir Badhsah            |
| 62. L. Ghota Mal           | 100. Ahmed Din                |
| 63. Mohd. Jang             | 101. Ch. Habib Ulla           |
| 64. Hussain Bakhsh         | 102. Ch. Kamal Din            |
| 65. Sundar Das             | 103. Ali Gohar                |
| 66. Mr. Terry, Inspector   | 104. Ghulam Rasul             |
| 67. Mohd. Yaqub            | 105. Jagan Nath               |
| 68. Mian Ditta             | 106. Maghar                   |
| 69. Nawab Din              | 107. Lajpat Rai               |
| 70. Jalal Din              | 108. Sharampat                |
| 71. Sohan Singh            | 109. Mohd. Din                |
| 72. Bura                   | 110. Brahm Dutt               |
| 73. Budhu                  | 111. Ram Rakha                |
| 74. Gaman                  | 112. L. Kundan Lal            |
| 75. Bahadur Ali            | 113. Guran Dhiwya             |
| 76. Rai Sahib Jawahar Lal  | 114. Ram Saran Das            |
| 77. Amar Singh, S.I.       | 115. Hari Chand               |
| 78. R.B.Mani Ram           | 116. Naiz Din                 |
| 79. Taleh Mand             | 117. Tej Singh                |
| 80. Abdul Wahid            | 118. Dara Singh               |
| 81. Khan Sahib Mohd. Sadiq | 119. Mustaq Hussain           |
| 82. Amar Nath              | 120. Mir Zaigham Hussain      |
| 83. Rahmat Khan            | 121. Mohd. Usman              |
| 84. Pishori Lal            | 122. Mohd. Ismail             |
| 85. Zia-ud-Din             | 123. B. Badri Nath            |
| 86. Faqir Chand            | 124. Munshi Ram               |
| 87. Barkat Ali             | 125. Lal Chand                |
| 88. L. Vir Sen             | 126. Siraj Din                |
| 89. L. Guran Ditta Mal     | 127. Feroz Din                |
| 90. L. Mani Ram            | 128. Allah Ditta              |
| 91. L. Tshar Das           | 129. Ghulam Rasul             |
| 92. Gehna Khan             | 130. Mistri Jalal Din         |
| 93. Wazid Ali Shah         | 131. Haji Mohd. Hussain       |
| 94. Bal Raj                | 132. Nur Shah                 |
| 95. Shah Din               | 133. Rai Sahib L. Wazir Chand |
| 96. Budhe Shah             | 134. Gian Chand               |
| 97. Mr. Tryson             | 135. Sita Ram                 |

136. Lala Hari Chand
137. Hari Lal
138. S. Kashmira Singh
139. Kharak Singh
140. Fazal Abbas
141. Gurdial Singh
142. Khan Bahadur Mohd. Afzal  
Maqbool
143. Tulsi Ram
144. Somnath
145. Abnash Chand
146. Balak Ram
147. Asa Singh
148. Icchru Ram
149. Lahori Ram
150. Mohd. Ibrahim
151. Sadiq Ali Shah
152. Ch. Ghulam Rasul
153. Sheikh Bashir Ahmed
154. S. Karam Singh
155. Zawar Hussain
156. S. Karam Shah
157. Karam Chand
158. Allah Bakhsh
159. Ram Rattan
160. Shams-ul-Haq
161. Rammat Din
162. L. Balak Ram
163. Dr. Amar Singh .
164. Ram Ditta Mal
165. Altaz-ud-Din Ahmed
166. Dr. Robson
167. Khan Sahib Mirza Mehdi  
Hussain
168. Abdur Rehman
169. Smt. Mukandi
170. Banwari Lal
171. Harnam Singh
172. Ram Saran Das
173. Jugal Kishore
174. Nur Mohd.
175. Malik Suleiman Khan
176. Bashir Haider
177. Pt. Ram Nath
178. Mr. Peel
179. Harbans Lal
180. Ganda Singh
181. Ajmer Singh
182. B. Ralia Ram
183. Ghulam Mohd.
184. Roru Ram
185. Hamid Hussain
186. Dipak Bhatia
187. Daulat Ram
188. Lt. B.L. Bhandari
189. Ram Saran Das
190. Pt. Gian Chand
191. Abdul Majid
192. Ghulam Qadir
193. L. Feroz Chand
194. Atma Ram
195. Gurdit Singh
196. Mohd. Ramzan
197. Ram Sahai
198. Pt. Hira Lal
199. Kalu Ram
200. Diwan Chand
201. Mehr Chand
202. Ganga Ram
203. Brij Bhushan Lal
204. Rehman Qadri
205. Manna Lal
206. Mohd. Jalil
207. Mohd. Hanif
208. Anwar-ul-Haq
209. Zia-ul-Haq



- |                         |                                |
|-------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 210. Akbar Ali          | 248. Narain Parshad            |
| 211. Rashid Ahmed       | 249. Ram Sarup                 |
| 212. Mohd. Hanif        | 250. Abdul Jabar               |
| 213. Baghirath          | 251. Prithi Singh              |
| 214. Asa Ram            | 252. Abdul Hamid Khan          |
| 215. Piara Lal          | 253. Bashir Ali                |
| 216. Tek Chand          | 254. Amar Nath                 |
| 217. Mohd. Aslub        | 255. Durga Parshad             |
| 218. Phool Chand        | 256. Said Uttah                |
| 219. Bansi Lal          | 257. Brij Bhushan              |
| 220. Abdul Majid Khan   | 258. Dharam Vir                |
| 221. Tufall Ahmed       | 259. Gopal Kishan              |
| 222. Irshad Ahmed       | 260. Rulia Ram                 |
| 223. Ram Chand          | 261. Milkhi                    |
| 224. Pran Nath          | 262. Guru Dutt                 |
| 225. Shabir Hussain     | 263. Davarka Dutt              |
| 226. Bunde Hassan       | 264. Mr. E.S. Lewis            |
| 227. Zaffar Hussain     | 265. Babu                      |
| 228. Sher Ali           | 266. Chakravati                |
| 229. Mohd. Yasin        | 267. Siri Kishan               |
| 230. M.D. Joshi         | 268. Rameshwar Dayal           |
| 231. S. Gopal Singh     | 269. Prabhu Dayal              |
| 232. Aftab Ahmed        | 270. Ram Lal                   |
| 233. Mirza Wall Bakht   | 271. Din Dayal                 |
| 234. Channe Lal         | 272. Parmeshwari Parshad       |
| 235. Ghasi Ram          | 273. Satish Chander Pal        |
| 236. Beni Parshad       | 274. Abdus Salam               |
| 237. Gainda Lal         | 275. Bijoy Singh               |
| 238. Bharosi Lal        | 276. Parshad Sindohan          |
| 239. M. Abdul Aziz      | 277. Gobind Ram                |
| 240. Mohd. Irshad Ali   | 278. Devi Chand                |
| 241. Ali Bakas          | 279. Thakur Suraj Narain Singh |
| 242. Ahmed Hussain Khan | 280. Sham Manohar Lal          |
| 243. Nawab Beg          | 281. Raghbans Misra            |
| 244. Chotte Lal         | 282. Uma Nand                  |
| 245. Jamal-ud-Din       | 283. Siraj Din                 |
| 246. Mukand Singh       | 284. Laxmi Narain              |
| 247. Murid Akbar        | 285. Kalo                      |

286. Deoki
287. Shiv Raj
288. Ram Dulare Sharma
289. Shiv Raj
290. Rama Nand
291. Madan Gopal
292. Tulsi Ram
293. Lekh Raj
294. Sadhu Ram
295. Gajju Ram
296. Mohd. Tuffall
297. Chanda Singh
298. Ram Lal
299. Mukand Lal
300. Miran Baksh
301. Bibi Rani
302. Dr. Dewan Singh
303. Khan Amir Niwaz Khan
304. Dina Nath
305. Roshan Nath
306. Bhag Ram
307. Sri Ram
308. Dula Khan
309. Gopal Krishan
310. Brij Gopal Mitra
311. Devi Chand
312. Manas Khan
313. Charan Singh
314. Mohd. Afzal
315. Bansi Lal
316. Mehnga Ram
317. Mansa Ram
318. Hans Raj
319. Jagan Nath
320. K.B.Dr. Nur Mohd.
321. Mian Jagdish Singh
322. K.S.Syed Budhe Shah
323. Hargurchet Singh
324. Asa Ram
325. Des Raj
326. Fakkar Din
327. Ahmed Bux
328. Hasha Ullah Khan
329. Qabul Chand
330. Hem Chand
331. Gopal Das
332. Ram Chand
333. Hafiz Mohd. Ishaq
334. Omkar Nath
335. Zqinulub Din
336. Nand Kumar Verma
337. Durga Singh
338. Mathra Das
339. Jaggo Ram
340. Gopal Singh
341. Ran Singh
342. Hakim Ahmed Din
343. Narain Singh
344. Ganga Ram
345. Samuel Nasir
346. Azmatulla Khan
347. Jang Bahadur Singh
348. Sohan Lal
349. P.A. Dogra
350. Acharya Chatur Sen  
Shashtri
351. Surindra Nath Mukerji
352. Ragho Nath Mitra
353. Wadhwa Ram
354. Natha Singh
355. M.L.Banerji
356. Guran Ditta Mal
357. Mohd. Attah Ullah
358. Dewan Chand
359. Hans Raj
360. Bhikan Singh



- |                                |   |
|--------------------------------|---|
| 361. Bhawani Shankar           | 400. Muzzafar Hussain                       |
| 362. Bhim Sen                  | 401. Dil Mohd.                              |
| 363. Sobha Ram                 | 402. Mohd. Sultan Mehmood                   |
| 364. Mr. E.J. Speaks           | 403. Rahmat Ullah                           |
| 365. Ram Nandan Singh          | 404. Badri Parshad                          |
| 366. N.N.Bagchi                | 405. Pt.Sri Krishan (Special<br>Magistrate) |
| 367. Feroz Din                 | 406. Thakar Das                             |
| 368. Shiv Dyal                 | 407. Mahraj Sarup                           |
| 369. Mumtaz Hussain            | 408. Ram Saran Das                          |
| 370. Maqsud Ali Khan           | 409. Harnam Das                             |
| 372. Ude Prakash               | 410. Nathu Ram                              |
| 373. Indar Mato                | 411. Syed Ahmed Shah                        |
| 374. Manoranjan Ghosh          | 412. Mr. C.G. Forman                        |
| 375. Kapil Dev Narain          | 413. Mr. E. Mills                           |
| 376. Shambhu Nath              | 414. Mulkh Raj                              |
| 377. Santosh Kumar Mukerji     | 415. Jaswant Rai/Tukaram<br>Sawant          |
| 378. Shanti Sarup              | 416. Datatrya Balwant Karindkar             |
| 379. Suraj Narain              | 417. Ganpat                                 |
| 380. Capt. Helmes              | 418. Abdul Gafoor                           |
| 381. Jamil Ahmed               | 419. Shekhar Beg                            |
| 382. Ram Murti                 | 420. Bara Singh                             |
| 383. Kali Das Ghosh            | 421. Ahmad Yar Khan                         |
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There are certain books on the life and work of *Shaheed-e-Azam* Bhagat Singh (1907-31), but he needs many more. The present volume, comprising 208 pages including six photographs, is a research-oriented biography of Bhagat Singh.

Bhagat Singh kissed the gallows at the young age of just 23, yet became instrumental in eliminating the foreign yoke from the sacred soil of his beloved nation. He is a rare personality of our history who is still relevant to face the challenges, being posed by the enemies of the country and the humanity as well.

The book is of-course informative, interesting and inspiring. It may also encourage its reader to be a friend of the suffering-humanity.

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Born in 1945 at Abohar (Pb.), Dr. Madan Mohan Juneja, M.A. (Pol. Sc. & Hist.) Ph.D., having served for 35 years at Chhaju Ram Memorial Jat P.G. College, Hisar, retired in June 2005 as the Head of History Department. Apart from certain research-papers, he has 16 books, including two on Bhagat Singh, to his credit. He is now preparing a biography of the great revolutionary of the country—Chandra Shekhar Azad (1906-31).

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