

The revolutionary legacy of Bhagat Singh: the 'Che Guevara' of South Asia

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September 28, 2012, marked the 105th anniversary of the birth of South Asian revolutionary Bhagat Singh. Revolutionaries across India and Pakistan marked this occasion with meetings and ceremonies. Below, Chaman Lal introduces readers of Links International Journal of Socialist Renewal to the life and work of Bhagat Singh. This article first appeared in the India-based Economic and Political Weekly to mark Singh's 100th birthday. It is posted at *Links International Journal of Socialist Renewal* with Chaman Lal's permission.

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Bhagat Singh's life (September 28, 1907–March 23, 1931), work and thought were marked by an uncompromising struggle against colonialism and imperialism, together with radical opposition to capitalism, communalism and the caste system. This article is a spirited account of his life, his revolutionary activity, his ideals, his opinions and his legacy.

The threat of US neo-imperialism is looming large, not only over India, but over the whole world, particularly the nations of Asia, Africa, the Arab countries and Latin America. In Iraq, Lebanon and Palestine, this threat has taken the form of direct military intervention (by the US and Israel). Iran and North Korea face all sorts of bullying, whereas Cuba and Venezuela have to fight conspiracies all the time. India and some other countries are faced with pressures that threaten their independence in the conduct of foreign policy as well as framing their own domestic policies according to the needs of their own people.

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In these difficult times we are reminded of Bhagat Singh and Che Guevara, both of whom fought against all forms of imperialism and colonialism. While the story of Che Guevara is known the world over, the story of Bhagat Singh's fight against British imperialism needs to be retold; it has the potential of inspiring struggling people everywhere, just as Che's saga does.

It was on April 8, 1929, that Bhagat Singh and B.K. Dutt threw harmless bombs with a view "to make the deaf hear" in the central assembly, called Parliament today. It was on this occasion that two slogans caught the imagination of the Indian people - "Inquilab Zindabad" and "Down with Imperialism". In fact these two slogans arose out of a qualitative change in the perception of the Indian revolutionary movement at that point of time. These two slogans replaced the earlier popular slogan of revolutionaries - "Bande Mataram".

It was not just a change at the linguistic level, from Sanskrit to a blend of Hindustani and English, but a sign of the growth of consciousness to a higher level in revolutionary movement of the country. And the catalyst of this change was none other than Bhagat Singh, who by now, through his experience of the revolutionary movement and from a systematic study of the revolutionary movement the world over, particularly from his study of the Soviet experience, had reached the conclusion that it is not just enough to "free the mother India from the chains of foreign slavery", it was much more important to understand the whole system of enslaving and exploiting other nations, i.e., the system of imperialism and then to understand the mechanism of smashing it.

It is quite interesting to know that Bhagat Singh had embarked on this study from as early an age as 14 or 15. At no other point in the life of India since 1947 has the reference to these two slogans of Bhagat Singh been more important than today in the wake of a more vicious and dangerous form of imperialism than in the past.

Early influences

Bhagat Singh was born on September 28, 1907, at Lyallpur Banga, now in Pakistan, on a day that brought the good news of the release of his father Kishan Singh and two uncles, the revolutionary Ajit Singh and young Swarn Singh, from British prisons. Swarn Singh who contracted tuberculosis while in jail died, shortly after his release, at the young age of around 24 years. And his revolutionary uncle Ajit Singh, the founder of Bharat Mata Society, along with Lala Lajpat Rai, was forced to leave the country in 1909, when Bhagat Singh was just two years old, to return only when India was at the verge of independence and die on the very day of independence (August 15, 1947) at Dalhousie.

At the age of 12 Bhagat Singh visited Jallianwala Bagh in Amritsar in April 1919, after the massacre, and brought home "bloodsoaked sand". At the age of 14, while reading in school in Lahore, he informed his grandfather about the preparations being made by railway workers to go on strike in 1921. Bhagat Singh had joined the National College, Lahore, at an age of 15. Prior to that he had welcomed the protesting Akali workers in his village, following the incident of February 4, 1921, when Mahant Narain Dass, in collaboration with the British authorities, killed 140 devout Sikhs at Gurdwara Nankana Sahib.

Worried at the revolutionary traits of Bhagat Singh's growing personality, the family, particularly his father, thought of "controlling him through marriage"! There were already two young women in the

house - the widow of Bhagat Singh's younger uncle Swarn Singh and Bibi Harnam Kaur, wife of his exiled revolutionary uncle, Ajit Singh. If marriage could not "control" Ajit Singh, how could it "control" Bhagat Singh? He was sensitive to the sufferings of both his aunts, and was particularly attached to his aunt Harnam Kaur, wife of Ajit Singh. According to an account of one of his close schoolmates, Jaidev Gupta, Bhagat Singh was given to Harnam Kaur as her "son" while her husband Ajit Singh lived in exile for an uncertain period. Bhagat Singh, in any case, was like the political son of Ajit Singh, with whom he shared a close bond despite the latter's absence.

At the level of ideas, Ajit Singh was more advanced than the Indian Nation Congress leadership in the Punjab, especially in terms of his perception of what the freedom of India meant. He was also much more revolutionary in thought than the Congress leadership as he wanted to awaken and organise the peasantry on the basis of their economic exploitation at the hands of the big feudal landlords and the colonial system. Bhagat Singh went beyond this advanced thinking of his uncle and reached the logical end of adopting the Marxist vision of liberation.

At the age of 15, Bhagat Singh was questioning his father about the withdrawal of the non-cooperation movement by Mahatma Gandhi on the pretext of the Chauri Chaura incident. In fact, the withdrawal of the non-cooperation movement after Chauri Chaura in 1922 had disillusioned youth and revolutionaries all over India. Chandra Shekhar Azad, who was flogged for shouting "Mahatma Gandhi Ki Jai", was one among those youth, who were very bitter at this development, and later, in the course of his revolutionary activities, could never trust Gandhi. They associated with C.R. Dass, Jawaharlal Nehru, Subhash Chandra Bose, Lala Lajpat Rai and Madan Mohan Malviya, but not with Gandhi, though correspondence with the latter had taken place, with Gandhi's reply to Sukhdev's letter appearing in Young India only after the latter's execution. To be fair, Gandhi received the letter, though written earlier, only after Sukhdev's execution along with Bhagat Singh and Raj Guru.

In a way, the withdrawal of the non-cooperation movement in 1922 gave an impetus to the revolutionary movement throughout the country, units of which already existed in Bengal in the form of Ahushilan and Yugantar, the Hindustan Republican Association (HRA) in the United Provinces, etc. Bhagat Singh reached Kanpur in 1923, after informing his father in a letter that he had dedicated his life to the nation and hence he could not think of marrying. His teacher at the National College, Jai Chander Vidyalankar, had written a letter introducing Bhagat Singh to Ganesh Shankar Vidyarthi, editor of Pratap, Kanpur, and Congress leader of the United Provinces.

Bhagat Singh not only worked for Pratap, he also joined the underground revolutionary organisation, Hindustan Republican Association, organised by Sachinder Nath Sanyal, the author of Bandi Jivan, who had already gone through one round of incarceration in the Andamans. Bhagat Singh had met him at Lahore. It was at Kanpur that Bhagat Singh met Bejoy Kumar Sinha, Shiv Verma, Jaider Kapoor, B.K. Dutt and Ajay Ghosh. Sukhdev and Bhagwati Charn Vohra were his comrades in Lahore. After spending about six months, writing under the pen name of Balwant in Pratap, working part time in flood relief and also performing the duties of headmaster in a national school around Aligarh, Bhagat Singh returned to Lahore upon hearing the news of his grandmother's illness and getting an assurance that none in the household would talk about his marriage anymore.

By the age of 17 Bhagat Singh had intellectually matured to such an extent that he wrote a prize-winning essay in Hindi on the language issue of Punjab. In 1924 and 1925, he wrote "Vishv Prem" ("In love with the world") and "Yuvak", which were published in Matwala, both under the assumed name of Balwant Singh. His article on the execution of the six Babbar Akali revolutionaries in 1926 entitled "Holi ke din rakat ke chinte" ("Blood drops on Holi Day") was published under the byline of "one Punjabi youth". And, in "Why I am an Atheist", written in 1930, Bhagat Singh referred to his acceptance of the logic of atheism by the end of 1926, when he was not yet 19 years of age.

Adoption of socialist agenda

This was in the backdrop of a lot of Marxist literature reaching Dwarka Dass Library in Lahore, where Bhagat Singh had become a voracious reader from around 1924. He did not stop at just being an atheist, searching as he was for radical ideas of human liberation. He had almost become a committed Marxist through his contacts with the Kirti group of Ghadrite revolutionaries of Punjab. He had regularly contributed articles in Kirti on various issues like "communalism and its solution", the "problem of untouchability", "religion and our freedom struggle", etc. If he had any differences with the Ghadrite revolutionaries, these were only about the program of the revolutionary party. Bhagat Singh and his comrades were convinced that to awaken the country from its slumber, the youth needed to perform some daring revolutionary nationalist actions and make sacrifices to advance the anti-colonial movement.

By 1928 not only Bhagat Singh, even Sukhdev and Bhagwati Charan Vohra in Punjab, and Bejoy Kumar Sinha, Shiv Verma and Jaidev Kapoor in UP were convinced about the need of a socialist agenda for their revolutionary party. They gave practical shape to it by calling an urgent meeting of the central committee of HRA on September 8 and 9, 1928, at the Ferozeshah Kotla in Delhi, where after long deliberations and at the suggestion of Bhagat Singh, supported by Sukhdev, Bejoy Kumar Sinha, Shiv Verma and Jaidev Kapoor, the HRA was rechristened as the Hindustan Socialist Republican Association (HSRA). The addition of the word socialist was not just ornamental as was done by Indira Gandhi during the Emergency by adding socialist to the preamble of Indian constitution. It was a well-thought out qualitative change of perception about the goal of the Indian revolution, which had the sanction of Chandra Shekhar Azad as well, who was not that well read but reposed his full trust in Bhagat Singh.

Prior to the formation of the HSRA, Bhagat Singh trained himself in mass organisational work. On the pattern of a youth organisation in Italy inspired by Mazzini and Garibaldi, the Naujawan Bharat Sabha (NBS) was formed in 1926. Bhagat Singh was its general secretary and Bhagwati Charan Vohra was propaganda secretary. Among other activities, NBS worked to organise lantern shows of patriot's pictures. They were particularly inspired by the sacrifice of Kartar Singh Sarabha, as he was executed at the young age of 19 years in 1915 at Lahore and whose photograph Bhagat Singh always kept in his pocket. At all their public meetings they used to garland Sarabha's picture put on the dais. During this period, Ghadrite revolutionaries returned from Moscow, trained in communist theory, and had formed the Kirti group. Santokh Singh had started Kirti, a journal in Punjabi with which Bhagat Singh was associated as a writer. After Sohan Singh Josh became its editor following the untimely passing away of Santokh Singh, Bhagat Singh worked on the staff of Kirti for a while, as he was in touch with Sohan Singh Josh in connection with the activities of the NBS.

Even prior to forming NBS in Lahore, Bhagat Singh was in touch with the earliest communists of the country in Kanpur, then a working-class city. He was in contact with communists such as Satyabhakat, Radha Mohan Gokulji and Shaukat Usmani. In practical terms, Bhagat Singh was part of communist movement in India since its very inception, his later activities testifying to this fact. Of course, he was not formally a member of the Communist Party as it was then still in its formative period. But he had met Muzzafar Ahmad, one of the founders of the communist movement, who had come to Lahore after his release from jail in the Kanpur conspiracy case in 1924.

While Bhagat Singh had no reservations about joining the Communist Party, he and his close comrades were at the time trying to shape their own revolutionary organisation, the HSRA. Bhagat Singh was also clear that ultimately the HSRA had to en masse organise workers, peasants, students and other potentially revolutionary sections of society. Whereas he and his group was of the view that, given the as yet undeveloped political consciousness of the Indian masses, some spectacular

revolutionary actions, along with some exemplary deeds on the part of the young revolutionaries were required to awaken the masses from their slumber and initiate a mass upsurge against British colonialism.

Sohan Singh Josh had aptly articulated what needed to be done in his four meetings with Bhagat Singh. But following the formation of the HSRA in September 1928, some political developments took place, which did not allow HSRA the time to transform itself as the nucleus of a set of mass organisations. However, apart from the NBS, mass organisations such as the Lahore Students' Union, Bal Students' Union and Bal Bharat Sabha were formed.

School students' role

It is interesting to know that the NBS had helped form the Bal Bharat Sabha, an organisation of school students between the age of 12 and 16. No historian as yet seems to have paid attention to this interesting aspect of the freedom struggle. The president of Bal Bharat Sabha in Amritsar, Kahan Chand, aged just 11 years, was subjected to three months of rigorous imprisonment. And Yash, then only 10 years of age, who was to later become the renowned editor of the Urdu daily, Milap, was secretary of Bal Bharat Sabha. He was prosecuted on three counts, including assisting the Lahore city Congress and the NBS. In those days, 1192 juveniles under the age of 15 years were convicted for their political activities. Apart from the Bal Bharat Sabha, the Bal Students' Union was also active in those days. At the time, Bhagat Singh not merely drew Punjabi youth to join these organisations, even the Lahore city Congress was affected by his magnetic personality. Lala Lajpat Rai's grandson, Baldev Raj, was secretary of the Bal Students' Union and Dyanat Rai its president. Such was the spread of patriotic fervour generated by Bhagat Singh and his comrades in those days.

Provoked by colonial repression

Alarmed by his impact on youth, Bhagat Singh was arrested by the Lahore police in May 1927 on the pretext of his involvement in the October 1926 Dussehra bomb case. He was kept in jail for about six weeks. It was during this period that Bhagat Singh planned mass activities in Punjab, but before such activities could acquire a momentum, the Simon Commission came to India. In spite of differences with Lala Lajpat Rai due to his association with communal elements, he was requested to lead a demonstration organised by the NBS against the Simon Commission on October 30, 1928. Bhagat Singh himself was not present at this demonstration, but NBS activists were providing cover to Lalaji when a clash with the British police took place. The superintendent of police of Lahore city, Scott ordered a lathi [baton] charge and his deputy, Saunders, personally unleashed blows upon Lalaji, resulting in the latter's death on November 17.

In response, Basanti Devi, the widow of the late C.R. Dass, exhorted the country's youth to avenge the insult heaped upon the nation. Bhagat Singh could not miss the occasion; the HSRA decided to do away with Scott, who was responsible for ordering the attack on Lalaji. Bhagat Singh and Rajguru were chosen to shoot Scott. Jai Gopal was to identify him and Chandra Shekhar Azad was to provide cover to the whole team. Bhagat Singh was supposed to shoot first, but at the signal given by Jai Gopal, identifying the British officer, Rajguru immediately shot at him, while Bhagat Singh tried to call Azad by saying "Panditji, he is not Scott" ("Proceedings of the Lahore Conspiracy Case", Sukhdev's notes). But before Bhagat Singh could complete this sentence, Saunders was already shot by Rajguru, who always wished to be in the forefront of every action. Bhagat Singh had no option but to pump three or four more bullets into Saunders' body in order to ensure that he did not survive.

Posters appeared in Lahore the next morning wherein the revolutionaries owned up to the act of the killing of Saunders, who was equally responsible for Lalaji's death and was as much a symbol of colonial power as was Scott. The act sealed the fate of Bhagat Singh, who was absolutely clear in his own mind that he was going to be executed in this case, following his arrest and trial. So Bhagat Singh decided to perform as many spectacular revolutionary acts as possible in the short duration of his remaining lifetime.

Many comrades of the HSRA were underground for their involvement in the Kakori rail dacoity case, particularly Chandra Shekhar Azad. After the Saunders' murder, Bhagat Singh, Rajguru, Sukhdev and others were also driven underground. Bhagat Singh escaped to Calcutta along with Durga Bhabhi from where he remained in touch with some Bengali revolutionaries, out of whom Jatinder Nath agreed to come to Lahore to train other comrades in the techniques of bomb making. At this point, the HSRA was in a fix: having adopted a socialist perspective of Indian liberation, they wanted to focus upon organising workers, peasants, students and youth, but the Saunders' murder and some earlier cases against them did not allow them to work openly. Neither could they take the cover of the Congress party for open political work, as they had serious and fundamental differences with that party.

In such a binding situation, the only option Bhagat Singh could visualise for himself and the HSRA was to awaken the people by engagement in revolutionary activities, but with a minimum loss of life, and then sacrifice their own lives in such a manner that the whole country becomes aware of their goals and ideas. Bhagat Singh also wanted to remove the "terrorist" tag from the organisation, as well as from their individual selves. For this they wished to utilise platforms from where their voice could reach millions of people. Bhagat Singh could visualise what they would achieve by sacrificing their lives in the prime of their youth, but in a manner in which their sacrifices would inspire large numbers. By shooting Saunders in daylight, the HSRA took to this path in right earnestness, for the incident had inspired millions of their countrymen. Bhagat Singh however made it absolutely clear in one of his court statements that they bore no personal grudge or malice against anyone.

Making the deaf hear

Jatin Das came to Lahore and bombs were fabricated in some rented houses. To stabilise the people's enthusiastic response to Saunders' assassination, Bhagat Singh wanted another equally spectacular action. The British colonial government was then bent upon notifying the Public Safety Bill and Trade Disputes Bill as law, in spite of stiff opposition from the masses and from the members of the central assembly. Bhagat Singh and his comrades decided to throw harmless bombs intended only to cause a loud noise in the central assembly.

The issue was discussed in the central committee of the HSRA in the absence of Sukhdev. Bhagat Singh's proposal to depute the latter for the action was rejected as he was bound to be trapped in the Saunders' murder case and the party did not want to lose a leader of his stature at such a crucial time. When Sukhdev came to know of the decision, though a close friend of Bhagat Singh, he was upset and taunted him for "trying to save his life", knowing full well that he was the best person for the job as no one else could project the party's view as effectively as he could. The central committee met again and Bhagat Singh insisted that he would be part of the team, and that they would get themselves arrested after the act. The party however wanted them to escape after the act, but reluctantly agreed to Bhagat Singh's proposals.

The action was inspired by a similar act of a revolutionary in the French parliament to focus attention on the poverty of the people, which had the famous one liner, "it needs an explosion to

make the deaf hear". This was the first sentence of the pamphlets strewn by Bhagat Singh and B.K. Dutt in the central assembly after they had thrown two harmless bombs over the empty benches of the central assembly. But the explosion did create a commotion in the assembly and only a few members, like Pandit Motilal Nehru, Madan Mohan Malviya and Jinnah, could keep their calm by remaining standing on their seats. Most of the others, including the home secretary, ran helter skelter, some even hiding under the benches. And here the two historic slogans came into existence – *Inquilab Zindabad* (Long live revolution) and *Samrajyavad Ka Nash Ho* (Down with imperialism); in the course of time, these slogans particularly *Inquilab Zindabad* became part of not only revolutionary groups, but of all other organisations, including the Congress. Of course, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), the Hindu Mahasabha and other communal organisations would never have anything to do with this slogan.

In fact, *Inquilab Zindabad* is a translation of an international slogan of the working-class movement. It was earlier translated in Hindi as – *Kranti Chirjivi Ho*, but did not catch the imagination of the people. *Inquilab Zindabad* not only caught the imagination of the Hindi-speaking people of India, it spread from Agartala to Chennai, and from Srinagar to Mumbai. It became quite popular in the Indian subcontinent and in some other countries as well. Bhagat Singh in fact felt rightly proud that "in his small life, he has made this slogan reach crores of Indians". *Inquilab Zindabad*, finally replaced *Bande Mataram*, which was the most popular slogan of the nationalist movement from 1905 to April 8, 1929, prior to Bhagat Singh and Dutt raising it in central assembly. In any objective analysis of Bhagat Singh's contribution to the national movement, the initial spread of this most popular slogan would be attributed to him.

In the courts and in jail

The action (explosion in the assembly) was planned in a very meticulous manner. Photographs of Bhagat Singh and Dutt were taken prior to the action, copies of the statement issued on the occasion were made in plenty and the press got these in time, on the very same day, April 8, 1929. British police officers were scared even to arrest them as both of them were holding live pistols in their hands, but while shouting the slogans, they put their pistols on the table, indicating to the police that they were ready to be arrested. Police officers moved towards arresting them only after they had kept their pistols aside. In the meantime, Jaidev Kapoor had already gone out of the assembly hall. The immediate aim of the revolutionary group had been achieved and now the next task was to spread the message of revolution among their countrymen. Bhagat Singh had again a well thought out plan. They would not defend themselves in the courts, rather they would use the British courts as platforms to spread their message by making political statements there. They did not hire any lawyer for their defence, but accepted the advice of advocates. The services of the nationalist advocate Asaf.

It was Asaf Ali who read Bhagat Singh and B.K. Dutt's historic statement in the sessions court on June 6, 1929, where they were being tried in the Delhi Bomb Case. This statement is a policy document that explains the aims and objectives of the revolutionary movement in lucid terms (Shiv Verma (ed), *The Selected Writings of Shaheed Bhagat Singh*, National Book Centre, New Delhi, 1986, p. 71):

"We humbly claim to be no more than serious students of the history and the conditions of our country and her aspirations. We despise hypocrisy. Our practical protest was against the institution, which since its birth has eminently helped to display not only its worthlessness, but its far-reaching power for injustice. The more we have pondered, the more deeply we have been convinced that it exists only to demonstrate to (the) world India's humiliation and helplessness and it symbolises the

overriding domination of an irresistible and autocratic rule. XXX Solemn resolutions passed by the house have been contemptuously trampled underfoot on the floor of (the) so-called Indian Parliament"

Bhagat Singh and Dutt further clarified their aim:

"we deliberately offered ourselves to bear the penalty for what we had done and to let the imperialist exploiters know that by crushing individuals, they cannot kill ideas. By crushing two insignificant units a nation cannot be crushed" (ibid, p. 73).

And they dared the colonialist power by posing the question:

"Can ordinances and safety bills snuff out the flames of freedom in India? Conspiracy cases, trumped up or discovered and the incarceration of all young men who cherish the vision of a great ideal cannot check the march of a revolution. But a timely warning, if not unheeded, can help to prevent loss of life and general sufferings. We took it upon ourselves to provide this warning and our duty is done" (ibid, pp. 73-74).

Bhagat Singh and Dutt in their statement had explained how thoughtfully they had thrown the harmless bombs in "vacant spaces", in order not to harm any one, and the only damage was to the empty bench and slight abrasions in less than half a dozen cases. And since they were asked in the lower court what they meant by the word revolution, in his statement in the session court he explains the concept of revolution (almost) in Marxist terminology. They speak of capitalism and the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat for the consummation of the ideal of revolution. And yet, they also tell the British colonial power of the Marxist epithet that "peaceful transition is also possible if timely warning is heeded by the power(s) that be". The statement concludes again with the slogan "Long live revolution".

In fact the concept of revolution had become so all engrossing for Bhagat Singh that all his attention and energy was focused upon clarifying it to himself as well as to his comrades and countrymen and the imperialist power. When Ramanand Chatterjee, the editor of Modern Review ridiculed the slogan "Long live revolution", Bhagat Singh and Dutt rebutted him with a letter, which was published in *The Tribune* (December 24, 1929):

Revolution did not necessarily involve sanguinary strife. It was not a cult of bomb and pistol. They may sometimes be mere means for its achievement... A rebellion is not a revolution. It may ultimately lead to that end (Shiv Verma (ed.), p. 81).

Bhagat Singh defines revolution as "spirit of longing for change for the better" and they wish that the "spirit of revolution would always permeate the soul of humanity, so that the reactionary forces may not accumulate strength to check its eternal onward march".

There were two aims of the intended actions of Bhagat Singh and his comrades in the courts and in jail:

- (i) To expose British colonialism through the courts, using them as a platform to spread their ideas;
- (ii) To expose the brutalities of British colonialism in jail by resorting to hunger strikes there and thereby drawing public attention. The British authorities were not unaware of these plans, but they were just put in the dock by self-sacrificing spirit of Bhagat Singh and his comrades. The third intention of Bhagat Singh was his own ideological development. It is amazing to see a man, about to go to the gallows, deeply immersing himself in a serious study of world revolutionary history, and this, in trying circumstances. In the course of preparing court statements, his serious self- study of

Marxism definitely helped. He organised hunger strikes for months together; even as he was brutally beaten by police and nursed his wounds in jail, he studied, wrote and took copious notes from the books he read.

Manuscripts written in jail

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. According to Shiv Verma these manuscripts were smuggled out of jail through Kumari Lajjawati of Jalandhar, who handed them over to Bejoy Kumar Sinha in 1938, after his release from Andaman jail. Sinha passed these on to a friend for safe custody, but the latter destroyed the manuscripts, fearing a police raid at some stage.

The manuscript Jail Notebook was however collected by Kulbir Singh or some other member of Bhagat Singh's family. 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, she recalled that she had brought some papers given by Bhagat Singh, which she showed to Feroze Chand, editor of 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 People, ironically marking Bhagat Singh's first birthday after his execution on March 23 of that year. Prior to that, in its issue of March 29, just after Bhagat Singh's execution, People published extracts from the now famous Letter to Young Political Workers.

It seems that Feroze Chand had also selected, what had been mentioned by Shiv Verma as At the Doorsteps of Death and some other papers, including Bhagat Singh's letter on the death sentence, given to the young revolutionary Harikishan, which were also published in People. The strange part of this whole saga of indifference 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 himself, took the trouble to seriously look into those papers and note their contents. How Shiv Verma had come upon the contents of those papers is also shrouded in mystery. He might have come across them in jail from Bhagat Singh himself, but whether those were really manuscripts in proper form or just notes like the Jail Notebook, cannot be said with certainty. It does not seem that this mystery would get resolved. 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 documents, which are quite substantial.

On the surface of it, 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. Out of the four titles mentioned, two seem to be interrelated, namely, his autobiography and At the Door of Death. The other two titles, if these were short pamphlets, then he could have completed them, but writing a full-fledged history of the revolutionary movement in India seems far-fetched under the difficult circumstances of the last two years of his life. However, Bhagat Singh did plan to write a full-fledged book, The Science of the State, for which he had taken detailed notes, which are included in his Jail Notebook, 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 perhaps have been

a significant contribution to Marxist analysis of the state, that is, if one were to go by his notes on the subject. The manuscript that survived – first published in 1994, edited by Bhupender Hooja – is a significant document in its own right. It is not a notebook like the prison notebooks of Gramsci or the philosophical notebooks of Lenin, not even like Che Guevara's diaries. It is not a diary at all; this notebook is unique in its own way. It includes notes of the books read by Bhagat Singh in jail, prior to his execution. Apart from being significant in its selections, these notes are an objective indicator of the development of Bhagat Singh's ideas.

The notes are also reflective of his aesthetic sensibilities, as a large number of the quotes are from the classics of world literature. These quotes show that Bhagat Singh was a revolutionary with a rare sensitivity. During and after his student days, his fondness for films had been mentioned by many of his close friends and comrades. He was a fan of Charlie Chaplin's films and also films like *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *The Three Musketeers*. Apart from being a good singer, he acted in college dramatics, which show his interest in literature and other art forms. This was perhaps why the elder revolutionary, Ram Saran Dass asked Bhagat Singh to write an introduction to his collection of poetry (*Dreamland*).

It is also interesting to know that much before Bhagat Singh's Jail Notebook attracted scholarly attention in India, it was discussed in detail by the Soviet indologist, L.V. Mitrokhin in his 1981 book, *Lenin and India*, whose Hindi translation was published in 1990. In this book, an entire chapter is devoted to "The Last Days of Bhagat Singh". In this book, references have been made to earlier studies such as A.V. Raikov's 1971 article entitled "Bhagat Singh and his Ideological Legacy", Mitrokhin's own "The Books Read by Bhagat Singh", included in the 1971 publication, *India on Lenin*. In these Russian publications, an objective assessment of Bhagat Singh's intellectual development has been undertaken and he has been placed in the tradition of Marxist thought.

I had seen the manuscript of Bhagat Singh's Jail Notebook in the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library (NMML) in 1984 and started writing about it in Hindi journals, regretting that it was yet unpublished. The NMML had got a copy from Bhagat Singh's younger brother Kulbir Singh on condition of "not publishing it". It was only in 1992 that the late Bhupender Hooja, chief editor, *Indian Book Chronicle*, Jaipur, started serialising it in his monthly. My letter of appreciation made Hooja feel more confident about its authenticity and so he published it along with his editorial notes in book form in 1994 from Jaipur. Despite some good reviews, and being such a significant historical document, the Notebook did not get the attention it deserved. Ironically, translations of the Notebook appeared in Hindi and other languages without giving any credit to the painstaking work of annotations done by the aged, yet energetic editor of the Notebook, Bhupender Hooja. Hopefully its new edition would bring this historical document into proper focus and would draw the attention of historians, students of the revolutionary wing of India's freedom movement and political activists alike.

This document should be read in relation to Bhagat Singh's other significant documents – *Why I Am an Atheist*, *Court Statements*, *Letter to Young Political Workers*, etc., which have acquired the status of classic documents of the Indian revolutionary movement. [See the Bhagat Singh Internet Archive.] In fact, in the Notebook, the quotes taken from books, other than literary, are a guide to the development of democratic political thought, from the classics of ancient Greece to the best of Marxist writings up to at that point in time. In a way, the Notebook is also reflective of Bhagat Singh's personality, concluding, as it does, with a partially read book of Lenin on the day of his death, March 23, 1931. The Punjabi revolutionary poet Paash has paid an apt tribute to Bhagat Singh of his last moments, by saying that "Indian youth need to read the next page of Lenin's book, folded by Bhagat Singh on the last day of his life".

Political weapon of the hunger strike

The indefinite hunger strikes by Bhagat Singh and his comrades in jail were uncompromising, reflected in their dear comrade Jatin Das laying down his life on September 13, 1929, on the 63rd day of his fast unto death. Forcible feeding of milk had damaged Jatin's lungs and despite appeals by his other colleagues a few days earlier, he refused to give up his fast, with the clear understanding and declaration that he was consciously giving up his life for the cause of India's freedom. Bhagat Singh and Dutt had continued their fast even after Jatin's death, breaking it only in the first week of October, after fasting for 115 days. Bhagat Singh undertook another round of hunger strike against the tribunal hearing on the Saunders' murder case, when they were brutally beaten up at the orders of the presiding judge, from whose order the Indian judge Agha Haider disassociated himself and was removed from the tribunal.

Bhagat Singh and his comrades used the political weapon of the hunger strike in a most effective manner. In fact it needs to be emphasised that moral strength of observing self-sacrificing hunger strike has always been effective in all societies and it still carries that strength. The difference between a suicide bomber and hunger striker is that suicide bomber, while giving his life for the cause, dear to him, takes away the lives of others as well and as such loses the sympathy of people, whereas, a hunger striker, harming only his or her health or even sacrificing his or her life, pricks the conscience of nation. Bhagat Singh and his comrades were aware of this fact and they used it to the hilt, erasing the impression of being killers or terror creators. This also shows political maturity of Bhagat Singh. The weapon of hunger strike is quite effective even today, provided it carries the moral strength of the cause and person undertaking this step.

Trial and execution

Bhagat Singh and his comrades boycotted the trial in the Saunders' murder case. The way in which the tribunal handed over death sentence to Bhagat Singh, Rajguru and Sukhdev is thoroughly exposed in A.G. Noorani's book *The Trial of Bhagat Singh*. The trial and the sentence were akin to sanctioning murder of Indian revolutionaries by British colonialists. Bhagat Singh had befittingly written to the governor of Punjab on March 20, 1931, three days prior to their execution, to treat them as prisoners of war, as they were waging war against British imperialism and as such "they should be shot dead" rather than being hanged. But British imperial power proved to be so cowardly that it could not even maintain the timing of the hanging, 6 to 7 am.

Against all international norms, Britain hanged Bhagat Singh, Rajguru and Sukhdev at 7 pm on March 23 itself. A huge rally was held on that day at Lahore, organised by the Naujawan Bharat Sabha, apprehending that execution will take place in the morning on March 24. But, scared of the huge gathering of people at the Lahore central jail, British colonial officials executed them at 7 pm on March 23 itself.

But the news could not be withheld from the people of Lahore. The rally was about to end, when the news of the executions came and people rushed to the gates of the jail. Scared, British officials hacked the bodies of the martyrs into pieces, packed the pieces in sacks, and took these away from the rear gates of the jail towards the bank of the Sutlej river near Ferozepur. The bodies were burnt in kerosene in an alarming hurry in the jungle near Ganda Singhwalla village. But people from Ferozepur and Lahore, angry and anguished, located the place of the (half-done) cremation before the dawn of March 24, collected the unburnt and half-burnt bones, and took these to Lahore, where a proper cremation of the three martyrs was undertaken on the banks of river Ravi.

At that time, the Congress Party in Punjab had formed a fact-finding committee to enquire into the mistreatment to the dead bodies of the martyrs. Newspapers in those days, particularly Bhavishya from Allahabad, had highlighted the committee's hearing, but the report never appeared in the public realm. While the Congress Party's report of the Kanpur riots following the execution of martyrs had drawn national attention, and a reprint has recently been published by the National Book Trust, it is strange that no one ever even refers to the Congress Party's fact-finding report about the disposal of the martyrs' bodies by British colonial authorities. The Kanpur riots, which started after the execution of Bhagat Singh and his comrades, unfortunately took a communal colour and tragically took the life of the Congress leader, nationalist journalist and admirer of Bhagat Singh – Ganesh Shankar Vidyarthi.

Same with the condition of the martyrs' memorial. The fact is that Naujawan Bharat Sabha had formed a memorial committee to build a suitable memorial for the martyrs, which was sabotaged by the Congress Party. That later a memorial near Ferozepur called Hussainiwala was built had no relevance at that time of the national movement. Lahore was the hub of the national movement; it was the place where Bhagat Singh and his comrades had spent their lives in political action; it was there that they were executed, and it was there where they were properly cremated, as was Lala Lajpat Rai. The most logical thing would have been to build a memorial in memory of Lala Lajpat Rai, Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev and Rajguru on the banks of river Ravi, which would have been a source of inspiration for the youth of Punjab.

Looking back more than 80 years now, one can only wonder why no memorial was built to these martyrs in Lahore or at the birth places of Bhagat Singh and Sukhdev in Lyalpur, now Faislabad in Pakistan. Even today it is desirable that the Pakistani and Indian people jointly erect a suitable memorial at Lahore, as well as at Faislabad, in memory of Bhagat Singh. He is perhaps the only symbol of resistance against colonialism and imperialism that evokes respect among the Pakistani people as well. Bhagat Singh is a common thread between the now divided Punjabis, and can serve as a common symbol of resistance against US imperialism as well.

Symbol of revolutionary transformation

There are some other interesting aspects of the saga of Bhagat Singh. He had an excellent rapport with national leaders – Subhash Bose, Jawaharlal Nehru, Lala Lajpat Rai, Madan Mohan Malviya, and others. Despite differences in approach, they remained in contact. Chandra Shekhar Azad's meeting with Nehru at Allahabad, as described by Nehru himself, was not that pleasant. Azad did not impress Nehru, but he did contribute Rs1000 to help the revolutionaries go to Russia, although the trip never materialised due to Azad's death. Both Subhash Bose and Nehru were appreciative of Bhagat Singh, although Congress leaders and revolutionary youth often worked at cross-purposes due to their radically different strategies and tactics in the struggle for freedom.

When Lala Lajpat Rai allied with communal forces, Bhagat Singh and his comrades castigated him openly. Yet they did not break with him; the very same Lala Lajpat Rai's grandson was the secretary of Bal Students' Union, inspired by Bhagat Singh. Moti Lal Nehru, Madan Mohan Malviya and Dewan Chaman Lal condemned the non-lethal bomb throwing by Bhagat Singh in the central assembly in rather strong words. Gandhi declared it "a mad act of two young men". Bhagat Singh described Dewan Chaman Lal as a "psuedo-socialist" in his famous session court statement and Tej Bahadur Sapru, as no different from the Britishers, if the system remained same.

Yet the same Pandit Motilal Nehru, Dewan Chaman Lal, Madan Mohan Malviya, and even Tej Bahadur Sapru, apart from Jawaharlal Nehru, Subhash Bose and Jinnah, stood on the side of these

revolutionary youth in the courts, or when they were observing hunger strikes; they went to every possible extent to save their lives. Advocates like Asif Ali, Kailash Nath Katju, Chander Bhan Gupta and Mohan Lal Saxena stood by these youth. It was the spirit of nationalism that bound the national leaders and revolutionary youth together. They criticised each other bitterly, yet came together at the time of crisis, particularly against British oppression of the Indian people. This is something that needs to be learnt by present-day national leaders and revolutionary youth.

Another aspect of Bhagat Singh and the revolutionary movement was their total opposition to the caste system and communalism. If the dalit movements of today accept any national leader, apart from Ambedkar, as their national hero, as their genuine supporter, it is Bhagat Singh. Bhagat Singh's writings and his conduct earned him the love and support of the dalit masses. In jail, before going to gallows, Bhagat Singh was not only reading Lenin, he asked for food from bebe, as he addressed the dalit jail employee Bogha with affection. Bhagat Singh treated the scavenger of the jail like his mother. Indeed, when Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev and Rajguru were going to the gallows, laughing and singing it was Charat Singh and the other prisoners who were crying and also shouting *Inquilab Zindabad* after Bhagat Singh and his comrades.

It may also be noted that none of the communal organisations, whether of Hindus, Muslims or Sikhs, had spoken a word in favour or defence of these revolutionaries. It needs to be underlined that it is only the left movement that has truly tried to uphold and imbibe the spirit of the revolutionary movement of our country. The left is the true inheritor of the legacy of the revolutionary wing of the freedom struggle.

It was Gandhi and Bhagat Singh who knew that nothing could stop the execution of revolutionaries, Gandhi due to his own convictions, and Bhagat Singh due to his own, equally or perhaps much stronger convictions. The institution of British colonialism of course knew the finale, as it was bent upon killing the young men, particularly Bhagat Singh, in whose personality it was observing the traits of a growing Indian Lenin. The British could afford to deal with the Congress Party, to which it could safely transfer its political power, while protecting its economic interests. It could not afford to have Bhagat Singh alive, for he would have pledged to take part in the complete overthrow of the system of imperialist and capitalist exploitation.

In a way Bhagat Singh had his way vis-à-vis British colonial power. With a group of less than a hundred persons, he could unnerve and rattle the most powerful empire on earth, could chalk out his own path to martyrdom, stir millions of people. It was Pattabhi Sitaramaya, the Congress historian and Gandhi's candidate against Subhash Bose at the Tripuri Congress, who had to admit that Bhagat Singh was no less popular than Mahatma Gandhi. This was not a small achievement for a man less than 24 years of age, with just six to seven years of active political career behind him.

After the pronouncement of the death sentence, Jaidev Kapoor asked Bhagat Singh "if he regretted dying so young"? Bhagat Singh first laughed at the question, then replied seriously:

"Stepping upon the path of revolution, I had thought that if I could spread the slogan of 'Inquilab Zindabad' throughout the country, by giving away my life, I would feel that I have received the full value of my life. Today sitting behind the bars of [the] execution barracks, I hear the sound of [the] slogan from crores of people. I believe that this slogan of mine would attack imperialism as the driving force of [the] freedom struggle till the end. ... What more value can be of such a small life?"

Shiv Verma mentions an incident in July 1930 when Bhagat Singh had come to Lahore Burail Jail from Central Jail to meet them on the excuse of discussing their court case. Jokingly they pronounced judgments on one another, excepting Rajguru and Bhagat Singh, knowing they were the ones who will be hanged. And then Bhagat Singh said that we were afraid to face the reality, as the

sentence would be “to be hanged by the neck till we are dead”. “He was in form that day ... speaking in low pitch ... that was his style. Showing was not his habit, that was perhaps his strength also”. Then he quotes Bhagat Singh’s own words (Shiv Verma (ed.), p. 41), “This is the highest award for patriots and I am proud that I am going to get it... They may kill me, but they cannot kill my ideas. They may crush my body, but they will not be able to crush my spirits. My ideas will haunt the British like a curse till they are forced to run away from here.”

Speaking with full passion, he continued, “Bhagat Singh dead will be more dangerous to the British enslavers than Bhagat Singh alive. After I am hanged the fragrance of my revolutionary ideas will permeate the atmosphere of this beautiful land of ours. It will intoxicate the youth and (prepare them) for freedom and revolution, and that would bring the doom of British imperialists nearer. This is my firm conviction. I am anxiously waiting for the day when I will receive the highest award for my services to the country, my love for my people.” Shiv Verma concludes his introduction to the writings of Bhagat Singh with these words – “Bhagat Singh was correct, the spirit never dies and it did not die then either” (Shiv Verma (ed.), p. 42).

The spirit of Bhagat Singh needs to be lived much more than in 1931. I would recommend the study of Bhagat Singh’s Jail Notebook and other writings with Bhagat Singh’s own words, which he wrote as an introduction to a poetry collection of fellow revolutionary, Ram Saran Dass (Shiv Verma (ed.), p. 123):

“Please do not read it to follow blindly and take for granted what is written in it. Read it, criticise it, think over it [and] try to formulate your own ideas with its help.”

Chaman Lal

Bhagat Singh was a hero of working people

Bhagat Singh’s proper description is as a revolutionary and anti-imperialist, Farooq Tariq, a member of the Labour Party Pakistan, said on Friday.

Tariq was speaking to a gathering of some 100 people in connection with the 105th birth anniversary celebrations of Bhagat Singh at Diyal Singh Mansion. The celebrations had been organised by Bhagat Singh Memorial Society Pakistan and included a documentary screening, speeches on his life and ideology, and cutting of a cake at Shadman Chowk, the place where Bhagat Singh was hanged on March 23, 1930.

Tariq said some people in India spoke of him as a nationalist or Sikh leader but his struggle was against those who usurp the rights of the peasants and workers. Tariq announced that they would collect donations and build a Bhagat Singh Museum at his ancestral village.

Tariq said it was sad that a group of 32 guests from India including writers, intellectuals, social activists and Singh’s nephew did not get visas in time for the birthday celebrations. “They applied for the visa a month ago. Intelligence agencies personnel from kept asking us about them. We provided them their profiles but to no avail,” Tariq said. “It is sad since it was mostly people who oppose fanatics in India and the occupation of Jammu and Kashmir by India,” Tariq added.

Iqbal Virk, who has possession of Singh’s house and lives in Banga village Jaranwala, ancestral

village of Bhagat Singh, was invited as special guest.

Virk said the primary school where legendary Bhagat Singh received his early education was in a dilapidated condition and his class room has just three walls standing.

He said the ground where Bhagat Singh used to play as child has turned into a sewage pond but the people of the village still took pride in Singh's role for independence.

Playwright Shahid Nadeem said, "The story of Bhagat Singh still continues. Nawab Ahmad Khan, the magistrate who signed the death warrant of Bhagat Singh, was from Kasur. The family expelled Bulleh Shah from Kasur. Nawab Ahmad Khan was killed at the place where Bhagat Singh was hanged. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, the then prime minister, was awarded a death sentence in the same case."

Farooq Qaiser, the author of several Punjabi books, said it was wrong to present Bhagat Singh as a "peace commodity." He said he could not be compared to the Taliban either. "The Taliban took up arms to kill innocent people. Singh did not kill a single innocent person. He threw crackers in the assembly to make the deaf hear," he said.

Performers from Ajoka Theatre sang folks songs about Singh's ideology and life between the speeches.

Later, a cake cutting ceremony was arranged at Shadman Chowk. Those gathered to mark his birthday called it Bhagat Singh Chowk.

A message from Indian guests who could not attend the event was read before the audience who termed the celebrations "historic...since Lahore had been the scene of Singh's struggle."

Ali Usman

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Bhagat Singh & His Relevance To Pakistan

Bhagat Singh is considered to be born on September 28, 1907 in Jaranwala Tehsil in the Lyallpur (now Faisalabad), Punjab, British India (now Pakistan). He was born in a family of freedom fighters. His father and uncles were members of the Ghadar Party. Unlike many Sikhs of his age, he did not attend the Khalsa High School in Lahore, because his grandfather did not acclaim the school officials' allegiance to the British authorities. In his childhood, he was deeply influenced by the grave incident at the Jallianwala Bagh. In 1920, his anti-imperialist aspirations forced him to participate in Mohandas Gandhi's Non-Cooperation Movement but followed by Gandhi's perfidiously suspending the movement he gave up Gandhi's political philosophy of non-violence and began advancing the idea of the violent overthrow of the British Imperialism in Indian Subcontinent.

Other than politics Bhagat Singh was also well-versed in literature. He was fluent in Punjabi, Urdu, Hindi and English languages. Sir Dr. Muhammad Iqbal is believed to be his favorite poet (We can't ignore the influence of Bhagat Singh's revolutionary movement on Iqbal's poetry-and vice versa-if we read Iqbal's poetry and history of progressive youths' movements in Indian Subcontinent). In

1923, Bhagat Singh joined the National College, Lahore, to continue his studies. The same year, his essay on 'Punjab's Language and Script' won him the essay competition organized by Punjab Hindi Sahitya Sammelan. In the essay he quoted Punjabi literature and showed a profound understanding of the problems of Punjab and also denounced making language a communal question.

Che Guevara once said, "We must struggle every day so that this love for humanity becomes a reality". Bhagat Singh's struggle for freedom was driven by this love for humanity and this love for humanity was so intense that worldly desires lost their appeal before him. In 1924, when his family pressurized him to get married, he left the house leaving behind a letter stating: "My life has been dedicated to the noblest cause, that of the freedom of the country. Therefore, there is no rest or worldly desire that can lure me now..." His jail notebook carries one of his beautiful quotes, "I am a man and all that affects mankind concerns me". He was certainly the Bulleh Shah-in-arms!

Great people leave behind great legacies and the greater is the legacy, the greater are its claimants. Thus Bhagat Singh was no exceptional. Like any other great person of Indian Subcontinent, from Dullah Bhatti to Tipu Sultan and from Muhammad Iqbal to Amrita Pritam, the legacy of Bhagat Singh is equally borderless. Nothing could confine him in this world. Like he writes in his Jail notebook:

*"Every tiny molecule of Ash is in motion with my heat
I am such a Lunatic that I am free even in Jail"*

On 8 April 1929, Bhagat Singh and Batukeshwar Dutt, dropped two bombs in the Central Legislative Assembly and shouted slogans of "Inqalaab Zindabad!" (Long Live the Revolution!) and showered leaflets. The leaflets contain the notice from Hindustan Socialist Republican Army signed by 'Balraj' (Chander Shekhar Azad), Commander-in-chief of the Hindustan Socialist Republican Army. It is widely believed that the notice was primarily written by Bhagat Singh. The notice commenced with the statement, "It takes a loud voice to make the deaf hear, with these immortal words uttered on a similar occasion by Valiant, a French anarchist martyr, do we strongly justify this action of ours." (The message was so profound and influencing that the eminent historian and researcher Irfan Habib authored a book on Bhagat Singh and his comrades with title "To Make The Deaf Hear") Since they didn't escaped from the scene thus were easily captured by the police, as planned.

On 23 March 1931, Bhagat Singh along with his two comrades, Rajguru and Sukhdev, was hanged at the Central Jail of Lahore. He was accused of killing a British Police Official that was in fact the response by the revolutionaries to the brutal beating, followed by death, of a noted leader Lala Lajpat Rai by British Raj Police during a non-violent protest against the Simon Commission.

The trial of Bhagat Singh, as Syed Sharifuddin Pirzada writes, 'was held under the special Law, which permitted the trial in absentia'. Very few Pakistanis knew that "Jinnah made the most forthright statement in his defence of Bhagat Singh from amongst the leading politicians of the time." I. A. Rehman writes, "in his coolly logical and convincing manner he [i.e., Jinnah] played a major role in foiling the attempt to make trial in absentia unlawful". While speaking in the Central Assembly on September 1929, Muhammad Ali Jinnah said:

"I say that no judge who has got an iota of a judicial mind or a sense of justice can ever be a party to a trial of that character and pass sentence of death without a shudder and a pang of conscience. This is the farce which you propose to enact under this procedure. I say this, that if ever there was a conscientious judge and he was strong enough, if he had a judicial mind, and if he had any independence, let me tell you, that in spite of the provision of yours, he would say, "True, the law has to be administered; I am obliged to make the order that the trial shall proceed ex parte; but I realize and I feel that it will be a travesty of justice and I cannot be a party to it; and I shall, therefore,

adjourn this case until further orders. "In 1929, when Bhagat Singh went on his historic hunger strike in the jail for the rights of prisoners, M. A. Jinnah stated in Assembly that "The man who goes on hunger-strike has a soul. He is moved by the soul and he believes in the justice of his cause; he is not an ordinary criminal who is guilty of cold-blooded, sordid, wicked crime...What was he driving at? It is the system, this damnable system of Government, which is resented by the people."

March 23 is a historical day in both India and Pakistan. It was a day when Bhagat Singh was hanged some four decades back in Lahore. The day is celebrated in India for remembering the martyrdom of Bhagat Singh, Rajguru and Sukhdev. Though in Pakistan, the day is officially celebrated as the 'Republic Day' however, the progressive individuals and organizations in Pakistan commemorate the martyrdom of Bhagat Singh and comrades by lighting candles and holding portraits of the martyrs at the Shadman Chowk, Lahore. Quite ironically, 'Shadman' means the adobe of happiness or, one can say, happiness! It's the place where Bhagat Singh and his comrades shed their blood for the freedom of their motherland! Since years progressives of Pakistan are demanding the government rename Shadman Chowk to Bhagat Singh Chowk but their efforts has not bring fruits so far. Kuldeep Nayar, Indian journalist, writes in one of his books on the martyr, "the cells that housed these three martyrs are falling apart. The scaffold on which they were hung is now a traffic roundabout...The road between the mosque and the ruins of the jail leads into the gateway of a mental hospital. It is almost as if the establishment does not want any sign of them to remain". What can be more pathetic that in Pakistan several roads and roundabouts can be found named even after foreign invaders who looted our motherland but when we demand renaming some of our roads and roundabouts over the names of freedom fighters of our soil we only experience silence from the establishment! Certainly, we know promoting anti-Imperialism freedom fighters isn't in the interest of establishment of Pakistan but how long they can repress the wishes of its people?

However, Bhagat Singh is now more relevant to Pakistan, today, despite no text book ever mentioned him not even in the chapter on independence movement. As Younas Chowdhry writes, "Bhagat Singh's legacy of liberty and social justice is being invoked by Pakistani civil society to fight for their rights". Pakistan is currently passing through the hardest times of its history with extremism, intolerance and communal conflicts spreading in the country like forest fire and hyper-inflation and escalating poverty callously annihilating homes of downtrodden masses. Under such conditions Bhagat Singh's political philosophy can not only strengthen us fighting such socio-economical evils but can also help us build strong relations with our neighbors, especially with India, and thus bringing peace and prosperity to home.

Saad Ahmed Javed
