An Anarchist Critique of Bhagat Singh's Marxist-Leninism and Theory of the State

AnarchoGuac

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Introduction

Bhagat Singh was an anti-colonial revolutionary born in the Punjab region of modern-day Pakistan in 1907. He became a household name upon taking part in many pivotal events preceding the eventual independence, and separation, of the Indian and Pakistan states from British control. Singh, with others, assassinated a British officer named John Saunders in 1928, believing him to be senior ranking James Scott in Lahore who had played a hand in the death of another Indian revolutionary. After evading arrest, Singh and Hindustani Socialist Republican Association (HSRA) member Batukeshwar Dutt detonated two non-fatal bombs during a meeting of the central legislative assembly in New Delhi's parliament in 1929. While imprisoned, he participated in a hunger strike protesting discrimination between the treatment of Indian prisoners compared to the British. After a long and dramatic trial that drew widespread public attention and debate, Singh and accomplices Shivaram Rajguru and Sukhdev Thapar were executed by hanging in 1931.

After the New Delhi bombing, Bhagat Singh was in prison for just under two years at the age of 21. During this time, and until his execution at the age of 23, he kept a detailed notebook outlining and taking notes on his reading material. As stated in Bhagat Singh: The Jail Notebook and Other Writings, compiled by Chaman Lal, "[Singh's notebook] helps us understand the roots and trajectory of his political and philosophical growth and development" (Lal, 23)[1]. Lal, along with many other scholars studying South Asian revolutionary figures, have noted that Singh was a staunch Marxist. Although he could broadly be described as so, he took a more deeper interest into the life and work of Russian revolutionary Vladimir Lenin, who had passed away just a few years prior to Singh's incarceration. There is great literature written about the influence of Lenin's ideas on India, and Singh himself was reading Reminiscences of Lenin by Clara Zetkin the day he was hanged. What is the influence of Lenin's connection to that of Singh, and why does his Leninism matter at all? Marxist-Leninism is a political ideology and framework fusing Lenin's ideas of how communism can be achieved with Karl Marx's observations of industrial capitalism. Marxism as a political project posits that the workers, known as the proletariat, would rise and seize state power as they continue to abolish private property and suppress counterrevolution, ultimately forming a stateless, classless, and moneyless society. Leninism introduced the concept of democratic centralism and the vanguard to Marxism, which he described to be an elite group of the most conscious and disciplined workers.

Singh wrote roughly fifteen essays during his time in prison, however, a recent interest of mine has been his unfinished and proposed piece roughly titled "The Science of the State." As Chaman Lal honorifically notes, "had he got the time to write this book, it would perhaps have been a significant contribution to Marxist analysis of the state."[2] Bhagat Singh's Marxist and Leninist perspectives of society come from the literature he engaged in both during and before his time in prison. In fact, both his dad and his uncle were deeply involved with revolutionary activities within their home region. However, Singh's Marxist-Leninist perspectives of the state conflict with anarchist critiques of authority, hierarchy, and transitional power. While he never finished "The Science of the State," we as readers more than a hundred years later can appropriately piece together what his topics, beliefs, and theoretical commitments would have been by reading his jail notebook. However, it is precisely here that I must express that an anarchist critique of Singh's Marxist-Leninism, and his unfinished piece, is not irrelevant. Singh's revolutionary praxis, particularly the assassination of a British colonial officer along with the deliberate use of bombing, aligns more closely with insurrectionary anarchist traditions rather than with Leninist strategies of mass party organization, the vanguard, and centralized authority. Upon reading his notes, we can see that Singh was not adjacent to anarchist ideas by sheer coincidence, but was rather remarkably familiar with anarchist figures of his time and throughout history. He did not

[1] Bhagat Singh, *The Jail Notebook and Other Writings* , ed. Chaman Lal and annotated by Bhupender Hooja (New Delhi: LeftWord Books, 2007), p.23.

[2] Prof. Chaman.JNU, author page, Bhagat Singh: The Socialist Revolutionary, WordPress blog, https://bhagatsinghthesocialistrevolutionary.wordpress.com/author/professorchamanjnu/page/8/

discredit anarchist thought nor traditions, wrote about his influences from anarchism, and arguably, would have undergone further identity development and political exploration had he not been executed at the young age of 23. This tension between his theoretical commitment to a transitional socialist state, along with his deeper fascination with anarchism, suggests a contradiction in his politics, one that remained unresolved with his hanging. His interests make an anarchist criticism of his Marxist-Leninism and "The Science of the State" not only legitimate, but analytically necessary for understanding his revolutionary vision. By piecing together Bhagat Singh's "The Science of the State," investigating his Marxist-Leninist beliefs, and understanding his anarchist inclinations, we can see that his belief in transitional politics is inconsistent with his own actions and analysis of the state as inherently coercive. This essay reconstructs Singh's understanding of the state using his own writings, and argues that his actions ultimately undermined his Marxist-Leninist viewpoints. By doing so, we can get a better understanding of who Bhagat Singh was, and more importantly, who he likely would have been.

Chapter 1: The State

Marxist-Leninism, anarchism, communism, and socialism are very heavy terms. They each carry baggage and multitudes of interpretations that oftentimes contradict one another. At its core, Marxist-Leninism and anarchism are fundamentally at odds with how they each view control. Marxist-Leninism strongly believes in and justifies the necessity of seizing state power to later eventually dismantle it. Along with its critiques of industrial capitalism, it often reduces its discourse down to economics, labor exploitation, and class. Anarchism, on the other hand, spawns movements and frameworks that all are anti-hierarchical. This is especially key, as hierarchies are not only found in economics, but can be found in race, religion, culture, gender, and more. As a whole, it refuses to take control of the state, for it is the state that has the largest concentration of hierarchies, violence, and inequality. While Marxist-Leninists have a state-centered vision of power, it is the anarchists who largely believe in dual power, a concept supporting the creation of alternative structures that people can rely on without engaging in the state or creating another. This makes the state the center of debate within Marxist-Leninism and anarchism.

> "He [Marx] loves government to such a degree that he even wanted to institute one in the International Workingmen's Association; and he worships power so much that he wanted to impose and still means today to impose his dictatorship on us" - Mikhail Bakunin (Marxism, Freedom and the State, Freedom Press, 1950).[3]

Now let us investigate the way in which Bhagat Singh interpreted the state.

> "The state, the government machinery is just a weapon in the hands of the ruling class to further and safeguard its interest. We want to snatch and handle it to utilize it for the consummation of our ideal, that is, social reconstruction on a new, that is, Marxist, basis. For this purpose, we are fighting to handle the government machinery. All along we have to educate the masses and to create a favourable atmosphere for our social program. In the struggles we can best train and educate them." - Bhagat Singh ("To Young Political Workers," *The Political Writings of Bhagat Singh*).[4]

[3] Mikhail Bakunin, Marxism, Freedom and the State, trans. K. J. Kenafick (London: Freedom Press, 1950), p.37.

[4] Bhagat Singh, "To Young Political Workers," February 2, 1931, in *The Political Writings of Bhagat Singh* , ed. Michael Yates and Chaman Lal (New Delhi: LeftWord Books, 2007), p.149.

This quote shows Bhagat Singh's commitment to Marxist-Leninism. Anarchists wholly agree that the "government machinery" Singh is referring to are weapons in the hands of the ruling class. However, Mikhail Bakunin and Italian anarchist Errico Malatesta have written heavily on this topic, summarizing that the state's structures are not neutral. The concepts that make up the state, such as centralized authority, the monopoly on force, and hierarchical command, are oppressive by themselves regardless of which class controls it. If they were not oppressive, Marxist-Leninists would not theorize the necessity of capturing it to begin with in an effort to suppress counterrevolutions. The very concept of suppressing the bourgeoisie's counterrevolutions by utilizing the state's power is proof they know it is a weapon and not something neutral. The state itself was created with the bourgeoisie on top and the proletariat on bottom. Switching the roles is fundamentally impossible, for the state was solely created to dismember and suppress worker uprisings. That aside, the very structures that allow people to get on top of, or underneath, is a hierarchical structure by itself, one that needs dismantling through the anarchist perspective. The very essence of Marxist-Leninism is to situate the workers higher than their oppressors, which as Bakunin writes, simply creates a new ruling class. Singh's line "we want to snatch it and handle it for the consummation of our ideal" assumes that oppressive structures can be repurposed without reproducing their logic. This inherently makes the Marxist-Leninist standpoint potentially reformist, for they believe that the very structures that oppressed workers, upon seizure and change, can now lead them to revolution. This is not a new critique, for Indian anarcho-syndicalist M.P.T Acharya has made this same claim.

> "The anarchists want the immediate abolition of all classes while the so-called socialists and Marxians believe in gradual abolition of classes during a transition period. There can be no transition between capitalism and socialism, for these are opposites without a bridge between them. The one or the other is the only possibility. Once the owners are expropriated by the society, none is a capitalist or monopolist. The class distinctions are thus at once abolished. The Marxians are reformist capitalists compared to the anarchists." - M.P.T Acharya ("What is Anarchism?", We Are Anarchists: Essays on Anarchism, Pacifism, and the Indian Independence Movements, 1923-1953. p.184).[5]

Anarchist theory is built around the pervasiveness of the state, which is a structure of domination in itself. All anarchists, including those with anti-state beliefs in ancient Greece to contemporary thinkers, have critiqued the state, making anarchism the largest contribution and longest tradition of critiques against the state. From this tradition of anti-statist philosophies, any type of state is subject to criticism due to its centralized command and monopoly on violence. Whether it is Lassalle's night-watchman state, Lenin's semi-state, or Rothbard's bastardized anarcho-capitalist "privatized" state, ultimately, they are all states. This is where the anarchist critique of the Leninist state begins, for even a state run by the workers, known in Marxist theory as a dictatorship of the proletariat, would still result in a domination of the many by the few. The very concept of authority creates hierarchies, which means that authority itself generates separation. As Bakunin writes, the state being inseparable from hierarchies challenges the Marxist-Leninist concept of the dictatorship of the proletariat. The moment any revolutionary class governs as a state, it is denouncing its own revolutionary nature for choosing to uphold and even strengthen the dominating force that once suppressed them.

As mentioned before, Bhagat Singh had more of an anarchistic life compared to a Leninist one. Although he was committed to Marxist-Leninism, his actions reflect direct action far more than party discipline and the centralization of authority. This split between his ideological commitments can be seen in the earlier quote. While his line on educating the masses reflects Leninist vanguardist logic, he

[5] M. P. T. Acharya, "What is Anarchism?," in *We Are Anarchists: Essays on Anarchism, Pacifism, and the Indian Independence Movement, 1923–1953* , ed. Ole Birk Laursen (Oakland: AK Press, 2019), p.184.

follows it by a very anarchistic line. Him stating that people can be best trained and educated in the struggle shows that direct action itself is not only a school, but a school of autonomy. The struggle absolutely educates people, and in anarchism, educates people against authority by empowering them to self-management. Anarchist hallmarks, such as direct action, propaganda of the deed, along with the rejection of Indian parliamentary gradualism and eventually martyrdom, inherently situates him under the anarchist umbrella far more than the Leninist.

Chapter 2: Bhagat Singh's "Science of the State"

Bhagat Singh was outlining a piece titled "The Science of the State" prior to his execution. His notes and ideas throughout his jail notebook are clear, but not properly named. Editor and compiler Chaman Lal writes, "this work was to have traced the growth of the State from primitive communism to modern socialism. We have lost the book that Singh is purported to have written, but we have, in the form of his jail notebook, the notes he used to write the book, and the careful reader of the Notebook will doubtless be able to make out the general trend of his argument" (Lal, 23).[6] For what it is worth, not even Lal himself could be inside the head of Singh. First off, for better or for worse, we must use the jail notebook as an archival substitute for the completed piece. We can theorize what would have made the final draft, yes, but it is limited to Singh's reading notes, citations, outlines, and of course, Chaman Lal's own interpretation. It is through his notes in this purported text do we see the most contradictions between his Marxist viewpoints and his anarchistic behavior. To begin with, Singh does not approach nor discuss the state with outrage. This is reflective of his Marxist-Leninist beliefs, as to them, the state is a tool and not something to be immediately dismantled. Why be angry towards something that is essential to your political project? Due to this, Singh writes about society by citing figures such as Friedrich Engels all the way to King James I and French demonologist Jean Bodin. This shows that he took a deep interest in different philosophers, all of which greatly influenced him, but still somehow turned him into one (a Leninist) that did not see a problem with authority; rather, turned him on to an ideology that desires its own people to be the authority.

Singh begins by discussing early social organizational models, then on to the rise of property and class divisions, then the origins of the state, early sovereignty vs. political authority, centralization of power (including force vs. consent), the modern state, revolution and transitional state analyses, and lastly and most unfortunately, unfinished ideas on the abolition of power. I will try to discuss these conceptually instead of separately.

Subsection 1: Singh's Origin of the State

In this section of his notebook, Singh talks heavily about pre-state society:

> "Only one thing was missing: an institution that not only secured the newly acquired property of private individuals against the communistic tradition of the gens, that not only declared as sacred the formerly so despised private property and represented the protection of this sacred property as the highest purpose of human society, but that also stamped the gradually developing new forms of acquiring property of constantly increasing wealth with the universal sanction of the society" - Bhagat Singh ("Origin of the State," Bhagat Singh: Jail Diary, p.38).[7]

[6] Bhagat Singh, *The Jail Notebook and Other Writings* , ed. Chaman Lal and annotated by Bhupender Hooja (New Delhi: LeftWord Books, 2007), p.23.

[7] Bhagat Singh, "Origin of the State," in *Bhagat Singh: Jail Diary* , ed. Yadvinder Singh Sandhu (New Delhi: Prabhat Prakashan, 2018), p.38.

The state is born, and Singh knows why! Here, it is clear that the state was not neutrally or consensually created, but one created solely to defend private property. Singh's Leninist beliefs counter this, where he believes that the same institutions can be "snatched," handled, and repurposed for liberation. If the state was historically created against "communistic traditions," then it cannot be reconstituted with any amount of respect towards communism. His description of the pre-state "communistic traditions" paints the incoming state, created to defend private property, as something that had to be overcome in order for the state, and therefore authority, to stabilize. This is possibly one of the most telling quotes within this section, as it states that communal life existed prior to state authority. If communistic traditions existed prior to and without state power, there is no necessity for a state to "bring" its return. However, something Singh uniquely accomplishes here is in the ways he discusses the "communistic" traditions. He does not romanticize this "primitive" society nor does he argue that it was ideal. His usage of the term "tradition of the gens" does a fair bit of work on its own. It implies that kinship-based organization and collective norms existed and that sovereign authority did not. Collectively, this proves that order has existed before state law, regulation as a concept existed much before the state, and that people were inherently coordinated. He describes the state as something that was a traumatic break from prior traditions, not something that "smoothy" came into development.

In societies that were already coordinated, had their own norms, and had an effective form of non-governmental social regulation, for what reason was an authority figure needed? Perhaps this relates more to the Gandhian ideas of enlightenment anarchism, which believes that the state itself is redundant if people are already governing themselves harmoniously. Through this lens, the state itself can be described as something that established itself through violence in an effort to erase societal memories. Even today, people largely do not believe that a society can run without a government but forget that they make informed decisions by themselves every single day. With education, people are more likely to make choices based on their moral and ethical values. These are all things Singh was thinking about while writing down these quotes.

Subsection 2: Coercion as the Foundation of Political Power

Much of Bhagat Singh's jail notebook are quotes and snippets from various European figures and thinkers, such as King James I, Althusius, Grotius, and more. He does not write too extensively about the quotes, rather he just inserts them, but it shows that he was thinking about sovereignty, liberty, and power. He quotes French jurist and demonologist Jean Bodin from 1586, saying:

> "'Force and not a contract is the origin of a commonwealth.' Primitive patriarchal governments were overthrown by conquest and natural liberty was thus lost" - Jean Bodin (Bhagat Singh: Jail Diary, p.174).[8]

This line sits uneasy with Singh's belief in transitional authority, or even a Leninist belief of any sort. He is acknowledging and preserving this Bodin quote that effectively says state power is inseparable from coercion at its origin. Marxist-Leninism, in turn, becomes an ideology that is not anti-coercion nor anti-authoritarian as it seeks to utilize the state for its own benefit. To anarchists, the Marxist-Leninist desire to end class structure can not represent them as anti-authoritarian as they still wish to seize the state. This is precisely why anarchism as a field strongly critiques power, for it is the very grounds that all other forms of coercion can grow upon. Throughout his writings, Singh writes about the overthrow of existing conditions but does not theorize the abolition of authority. Ultimately, a revolution must not be conceived as a transfer of power. The concentration of power is almost always the reason why a revolution is happening to begin with. It is only through an abolition of power can genuine liberation

[8] Jean Bodin, *Bhagat Singh: Jail Diary* , ed. Yadvinder Singh Sandhu (New Delhi: Prabhat Prakashan, 2018), p.174.

come. Liberation is not a socialist state that distributes resources equally, for even a slavemaster can distribute resources evenly amongst the enslaved. All throughout, Singh explicitly writes that the state arose through force to suppress past traditions. His beliefs in Leninism being a vehicle towards liberation then become contradictory.

That being said, Bhagat Singh did not reject or critique Bodin's quote. This probably means that he knew that sovereignty could not be separated from domination. Transitional authority is not anti-coercion, but it makes itself appear necessary to those who want the oppressors out of the equation as soon as possible. In other words, to anarchists, there is no difference between bourgeois coercion and proletarian coercion, for the coercion itself is the issue. Anarchists obviously do believe in worker power, and many countries' anarchist histories, such as Argentina, are almost entirely based on the usage of labor unions as a tool to reach liberation. As mentioned before, the debate lies at the usage or non-usage of the state itself.

Subsection 3: Singh's Modern Socialist State

For this section, I will use the selected pieces chosen from his jail notebook that make up the end of the book The Political Writings of Bhagat Singh, compiled by Michael D. Yates and Chaman Lal. For this section, titled "Excerpts on Law and the State from the Jail Notebooks of Bhagat Singh," both Yates and Lal included writings from Singh's notebook that relate to both law and state.

> "Let us declare that the state of war does exist and shall exist so long as the Indian toiling masses and the natural resources are being exploited by a handful of parasites. They may be purely British Capitalist or mixed British and Indian, or even purely Indian. They may be carrying on their insidious exploitation through mixed or even on purely Indian bureaucratic apparatus. All these things make no difference." - Bhagat Singh ("No Hanging, Please Shoot Us", The Political Writings of Bhagat Singh, p.232).[9]

Bhagat Singh clearly understands that his oppressors can be British, mixed British and Indian, or "purely Indian." This constant chase to be the authority is what sets Marxist-Leninism apart from libertarian perspectives of the state. The state of war he is referring to, in this context, is about the British government involving themselves in India. In fact, this quote is taken from a letter he wrote to the Governor of Punjab demanding he and his accomplices be executed by firing squad rather than hanged. Since Singh and others viewed themselves as prisoners of a British war against India, they demanded they be treated, and therefore shot, as such. However, this constant "state of war" can also be interpreted as class war. Centering the "natural resources...being exploited" shows a socialist analysis and not just an anti-colonial one. Here, Singh is clearly defining revolution as:

1. The ending of natural resources being exploited by a handful of parasites,

2. The overthrow of existing political and economic arrangements, and immediately after,

3. The systematic restructuring of society

[9] Bhagat Singh, "No Hanging, Please Shoot Us: Last Letter to the British Government in India, March 20, 1931," in *The Political Writings of Bhagat Singh* , comp. and ed. Michael Yates and Chaman Lal (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2016), p.232.

In all scenarios and ideas, Singh is not theorizing the abolition of authority itself. He views the ruling class as the sole holders of authority, which would not be true even after they have been deposed. Even after recognizing and naming that anyone, including those of his skin color, can be his oppressor, he is still not anti-authoritarian. While this does allow us to understand Singh's socialist politics, to him, revolutions should focus on reorganizing power and not dismantling it. In his perspectives on the vanguard, he is still comfortable with a concentration of power so long as it is in a "conscious minority" group. This is the key distinction between Marxist-Leninists and anarchists, but for us, the fatal error in Singh's Marxist-Leninist viewpoints.

Power does not become liberatory just by changing the hands who wield it, and in the same way, authority will continue to dominate even if it considers itself revolutionary. He is consistently falling short of understanding that justification of authority is what led to the development of the state. This is precisely what Max Weber meant when he wrote that states claim a legitimate monopoly of violence. Violence alone does not make a state, but justified violence does. This forces officials, command structures, and enforcement to come into play. The state and its hierarchies are what oppressed the lower ranks of the hierarchy to begin with. No authority, upon meeting its requirements and having solidified into a state form, can claim to be revolutionary nor transitional. They are quite literally allowed to do whatever they want to do.

> "''Away with the State! I will take part in that revolution. Undermine the whole conception of a state, declare free choice and spiritual kinship to be the only all important conditions of any union, and you will have the commencement of a liberty that is worth something'" - Henrik Ibsen, letter to Georg Brandes."[10] (Written quote by Singh in his jail notebook)

Chapter 3: Anarchist Tendencies and Leninist Commitments

> "Under such circumstances, how can we think even for one moment that such a day will dawn when we can live happily and freely without a government? But this is, in fact, our own weakness. The ideal or the feeling is not to be blamed" - Bhagat Singh ("What is Anarchism?", The Political Writings of Bhagat Singh, p.105).[11]

It would be false to say that Bhagat Singh would not have undergone more political exploration had he not been executed. As Albert Meltzer wrote in M.P.T Acharya's obituary, "whilst nationalists like Har Dayal and Bhagat Singh had a knowledge of anarchist texts, they merely incorporated what they felt to be useful to the struggle against British rule into their thought. Nationalist, and to a lesser extent Communist Party orthodoxy, had too much of a grip on the Indian masses, and unlike elsewhere in Asia, an anarchist movement did not develop." Singh's status as a folk hero or martyr would not change, but historiography does have the ability to situate him under various umbrellas, especially regarding Singh's complex nature. The influence Marxism and Leninism had on him is unmistakable and at no point did he ever explicitly consider himself an anarchist. That being said, Marxist-Leninism's political desires do not fall in line with Singh's actions. Even while running around with the HSRA, he would fall more in line with revolutionary agitation than disciplined Leninist governance models. As time went on, Lenin's concept of vanguardism became the leading rationale for nearly all communist parties. Cuba, China, and

[10] Bhagat Singh, *Bhagat Singh: Jail Diary*, ed. Yadvinder Singh Sandhu (New Delhi: Prabhat Prakashan, 2018), p.56.

[11] Bhagat Singh, *The Political Writings of Bhagat Singh* , comp. and ed. Michael Yates and Chaman Lal (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2016), p.105.

the Soviet Union became authoritarian socialist states which were built by hierarchical dictatorships of the proletariat, governmental centralization, and a suppression of the opposition (anarchists, minorities, opposing parties). The very existence of a state is antithetical to communism's definition of a stateless society, and by this definition, no "communist" countries have ever achieved communism.

Separately, as explored in my previous piece, "The Spiked Ashram: Situating the Indian Anarchist Tradition" (available on The Anarchist Library), not everyone who wanted a free India desired it for the same reason. Explicit Indian anarchists wanted to do away with British colonialism and Indian nation state. Right-wing Hindu nationalists such as Vinayak Damodar Savarkar wanted the British gone so a Hindu-majority state could be established, marginalizing minority religions. The only concept that linked these two opposite groups was their anti-colonialism.

> "While many early anti-colonial figures had anarchistic tendencies in their opposition to the British Raj, not all revolutionaries aligned with the principle of anti-hierarchy that today defines anarchism. Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, a central figure in the development of the Hindutva ideology, is where nationalism began to cross with anti-colonialism in India. Savarkar's vision of Indian independence was inseparable from his desire to establish a Hindu-majority state, promoting the idea that Hindu culture and religion were inherently superior to other religions" - Archit's Anarchism ("The Spiked Ashram: Situating the Indian Anarchist Tradition," pg.6).[12]

Ultimately, situating Bhagat Singh under the anarchist umbrella could be possible solely through his actions, but not his reading, writing, nor thoughts. He truly believed in the socialist state, and as Michael D. Yates writes, "socialism from the ground up would indeed have been his ideal had he lived longer" (Yates, The Political Writings of Bhagat Singh, pg.102).[13] However, Yates earlier writes that labeling Singh an anarcho-communist would also not be unreasonable. Although many of these revolutionaries wanted a free India, their reasons differed. Bhagat Singh clearly wanted a free India but never pinpointed authority as the earlier instance where oppression begins. Oppression does not originate with the formal institution of government, but with the earliest moments in which individuals sought to organize society through authority and domination over others. The government itself is the end product of a power grab, not the beginning. To do away with the government is to replace it with a structure created by the masses. Ultimately, while all anti-colonial revolutionaries sought a free India, their revolutionary projects differed in their understandings of authority, power, and the form that true liberation should ultimately take.

Conclusion

Bhagat Singh's political thought does not fail because it lacks clarity, but because it does not follow that clarity to its logical conclusion. Across his writings, thoughts, and integrated quotes, he consistently writes on the state forcing itself upon the people. He appropriately and accurately writes that the state did not come from the masses, but by a controlling opposition who wished to protect private property. Despite recognizing that the state is inseparable from domination, he maintains a commitment to transitional authority, vanguardism, and state power. Any revolution that puts themselves in power is not organizing themselves towards genuine liberation. That being said, it would not be accurate to label Singh as a fully formed anarchist, just as it would be inaccurate to reduce him solely to being a

[12] AnarchoGuac, "The Spiked Ashram: Situating the Indian Anarchist Tradition," The Anarchist Library, https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/archits-anarchism-the-spiked-ashram

[13] Bhagat Singh, *The Political Writings of Bhagat Singh* , comp. and ed. Michael Yates and Chaman Lal (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2016), p.102.

Marxist-Leninist. Despite his theoretical commitment to transitional politics, socialism itself can not be instituted through isolated bombings and assassinations. While these actions are more anarchistic than Marxist-Leninist, it is prioritizing individual instances of violence over collective transformation. In other words, his bombings and assassinations did not change the structures of authority that Singh was clearly skeptical of. Yet again we end up back at the beginning. What is to be done with these contradictions?

One can not truly understand the nature of Bhagat Singh solely through his ideological sidings. However at the same time, only investigating his actions leaves out what he was thinking about. This shows how complex Singh, all revolutionaries, and people as a whole for that matter, truly are. Nearly all revolutionaries he was reading had decades to write, revise, and develop their theories. We must remember that Bhagat Singh was a mere 23 years old by the time he was executed. Nearly all of the thought dealt with this entire essay was written in his final two years, and that is when he was incarcerated. Yes, he had time to intensively study and write down quotes, but he had no time to politically mature through practice or even revision. He clearly inherited a radical gene from his father and uncle, but he was very determined to distinguish himself from the "peaceful" protest tactics they embodied. This can most notably be seen when he openly criticized his father for appealing to the court on his behalf after Singh had already taken responsibility for Saunders' assassination. Perhaps ideological confusion is not the main takeaway, but instead, we can frame him as a young revolutionary who acted according to what he believed was right in the moment instead of aligning his actions with a settled ideology. In an effort to not infantilize him, after all, he was theorizing under the pressure of imminent arrest and death and not from a position of distance or even safety for that matter. These contradictions, present as they still are, are simply traces of a revolutionary consciousness that clearly existed in his mind. Through Bhagat Singh, we can understand that revolutionary theory formed under confinement, urgency, but also youth, will often expose the limits of power more clearly than it resolves them.

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