What is Anarchism?

Bhagat Singh

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This essay is originally in three parts. We have added a fourth part, which is Bhagat Singh's article on Nihilism, focusing on Russian Nihilists. Lenin's older brother, Aleksandr Ulyanov, was part of the Nihilist movement in Russia. He was hanged in 1887 at the age of twenty-one for plotting to kill Czar Alexander III.

Bhagat Singh, like the Ghadarites, was influenced by European and Russian anarchist thought, such as that of Peter Kropotkin. He was not an anarchist, though the term, anarchocommunist, would not be an unreasonable description of his political philosophy. That is, he was a communist in arguing for the abolition of private ownership of the means of production and the establishment of full collective provision of goods and services. However, he was justifiably suspicious of the state, irrespective of who wielded political power. Socialism from the ground up would indeed have been his ideal had he lived longer.

In part II of this essay, note the reference to the U.S. anarchists Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti, executed by the state of Massachusetts in 1927. The words of Bhagat Singh just before death, given in the introduction, are comparable to those of Bartolomeo Vanzetti to Judge Thayer, who ordered their deaths: 'If it had not been for these things, I might have lived out my life talking at street corners to scorning men. I might have died, unmarked, unknown, a failure. Now we are not a failure. This our career and our triumph. Never in our full life could we hope to do such work for tolerance, for justice, for man's understanding of man as now we do by accident. Our words – our lives – our pain – nothing! The taking of our lives – lives of a good shoemaker and a poor fish peddler – all! That last moment belongs to us – that agony is our triumph.'

Part I

Today, there is a lot of unrest in the world. Well-known scholars are engaged in establishing peace in the world; however, the peace that is sought to be established is not a temporary one, but something that can be everlasting. Several great souls have sacrificed their lives to achieve it, and people continue to do so. But today, we are slaves. Our eyesight is weak; our brains are dull. Our heart is weak and weeping over its weakness. How can we worry about world peace when we are not able to do anything for our own country? We can only call it our misfortune. We are being ruined by our own conservative ideas. We are trapped in the illusion of finding God and heaven and seek redemption for our souls. We don't take more than an instant to refer to Europe as materialistic. We pay no attention to their great ideas. Because we are more inclined towards spiritual thought! Because we believe in renunciation! We should not even speak of this material world! We have come to such a pass that one wants to weep at the condition of the world, but the situation is improving in the twentieth century. European thought is beginning to make an impact on the youth's thinking. And the youth that wants to progress in the world should study the great and noble ideas of the modern age.

A person's knowledge is incomplete without understanding fully what voices are being raised in society today against oppression, or the ideas are being born for the establishment of permanent peace in the world. Today we are listening to summarized versions of a lot many ideas of communism and socialism etc. Anarchism is thought to be the highest ideal among all these. This essay is being written regarding anarchism.

The people fear the word 'anarchist'. When a person rises to fight for his freedom, armed with a pistol or a bomb, then all the 'bureaucrats' and their underlings scream 'Anarchist-Anarchist!' and try to frighten the world. An anarchist is considered to be a very terrible person, who has no mercy in his heart, who sucks blood, who is delirious with joy at destruction and ruin. The word 'anarchist' has been given such a bad name that even the revolutionaries of India are referred to as anarchists to make people hate them.

Dr Bhupindra Nath Dutt has mentioned this in the first part of his Bengali book, *Unpublished Political History*, saying that even if the government called them 'anarchist' to defame them, in truth they were a group of people who sought to usher in a new order. And anarchism is a very noble ideal. How was it possible for our common people to think of such a noble ideal, because they could not think of being revolutionaries[1] of ushering in a new age. These people were merely rebels. Anyway![2]

As we mentioned earlier, the word 'anarchist' was given a bad name. This word was slandered in the same way that selfish capitalists slandered words like 'Bolshevik', 'socialist', etc. Yet anarchists are the most sensitive and ardent well-wishers of the entire world. Even if we disagree with their views, sobriety, love for the people, spirit of sacrifice and genuineness cannot be doubted. The word 'anarchist', for which the Hindi word araajk is used, is derived from a Greek word which means (an = not, arche = rule), that is, no government of any kind (negation of government).[3] Human beings have always had the desire to be as free as possible, and from time to time, the idea of complete freedom, which is the

[1] Insert: beyond rebelling

[2] The Punjabi words *Raj-paltau* and *jug-paltau* can both be translated as 'revolutionary', but there is an important distinction between them. *Jugpaltau*, composed of '*jug*' meaning 'world' and '*paltau*' meaning 'complete change', connotes people who have the ideal of societal/system revolution. *Raj-paltau* ('*raj*' meaning government or state) are people who wish to overthrow the government/state only.

[3] Sentence originally in English.

principle of anarchism, has been mooted. For example, a long time ago, a Greek philosopher said, 'We wish neither to belong to the governing class nor to the governed'.[4]

I consider that the feeling of world fraternity in India and the Sanskrit phrase *Vasudhev Kutumbkam* conveys the same sense. Even if we cannot reach any conclusive proposition based on our ancient beliefs, we still have to believe that these thoughts were placed before and openly propagated in the world at the beginning of the nineteenth century by the French philosopher Proudhon. That is why he is called the father of anarchism. He began to propagate anarchism, and later one brave Russian man Bakunin, did a lot of work to make it successful. Later several anarchists like Johann Most and Prince Kropotkin were born. These days, Mrs Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman propagate this in America. About anarchism, Mrs Goldman writes:

> Anarchism: The philosophy of a new social order based on liberty unrestricted by man-made law. The theory that all forms of Government rest on violence, and are therefore wrong and harmful, as well as unnecessary.[5]

This tells us that anarchists do not wish for any kind of government, and this is true. But such a thought scares us. Several bogies are raised in our minds. We should remain fearful of the ghosts of the preceding English rule even after setting up our government and keep on trembling in fear – this is the policy of our rulers. 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.

The ideal freedom that is imagined in anarchism is a complete liberation, according to which neither God nor religion should oppress our minds, nor should the temptation of money or material world overtake us, or the body could be shackled or controlled by any kind of governmental structure. This means that broadly, they wished to eradicate three things from this world completely:

1. The Church, God (and religion)
2. The State (Government)
3. Private Property

This subject is very interesting and vast, and much can be written about it, but we cannot stretch this essay too much due to the paucity of space. So we shall discuss the issues only broadly.

God and Religion

Let us first consider God and religion. Now even in Hindustan, voices are being raised against both these demons, but in Europe, a revolution had risen in the last century itself. They begin with reference to the age when people were ignorant; in those times, they were afraid of everything, especially supernatural powers. They completely lacked self-confidence and called themselves 'puppets of dust'. They say that religion, the supernatural and God are the result of the same ignorance, and that is why the illusion of their entity must be eliminated. Also that from their very childhood, children are taught that – God is everything, man is nothing.[6] Man is merely a statue of clay. Such thoughts crowding a person's mind erode his self-confidence. He begins to feel that he is very feeble. In this way, he is always fearful. Till the time this fear remains, complete happiness and peace cannot be attained.

In Hindustan, it was Gautam Buddha who first denied the existence of God. He had no belief in God. Even now there are a few ascetics who do not believe in the existence of God. Sohom Swami of Bengal is

[4] Quotation originally in English.
[5] Quotation originally in English.
[6] Originally in English.

one such example. These days is Niralamba Swami. Recently, a book by Sohom Swami called Common Sense has been published in English. He has written robustly against the existence of God, trying to prove his proposition, but he does not become an anarchist. He does not wander about aimlessly using 'renunciation' and 'yoga' as pretexts. In this manner, the existence of God is being brought to an end in this scientific age, which will eradicate the very name of religion. In fact, the leader of the anarchists, Bakunin, has thoroughly insulted God in his book, God and the State. He placed the Biblical story and said that God made the world and man in his own image. Thank you very much! But he also warned against tasting the fruit of the forbidden tree of knowledge. Actually, God did create Adam and Eve for his own amusement, but he wanted them to remain his slaves forever and to never raise their head before him. So he gave them the gifts of the entire world but no intelligence. This state of affairs encouraged Satan to move forward – 'but here steps in Satan, the eternal rebel, the first free thinker and the emancipator of the world'.[7] He stepped forward, taught man to rebel and offered the fruit of the forbidden tree of knowledge. And that was enough for the omnipotent, omniscient God to lose his temper with a lowclass, mean-minded mentality and he began to curse the world he himself had created. Wonderful!

The question that arises is why God made a world full of such sorrow. To enjoy the spectacle? In that case, he is crueler than the Roman tyrant, Nero. Is that his miracle? What is the need for such a miraculous God? The debate is growing. So we'll conclude it right here by stating that religion has always been used by the selfish, the capitalists for their personal good. History bears witness to that. 'Have patience!', 'Look at your own deeds!' The havoc that such a philosophy has brought to mankind is evident for all to see.

People ask what would happen if we deny the existence of God? Sin would grow in the world. Chaos would reign. But the anarchists say that man would then grow to such a stature that without the greed of heaven and the fear of hell, he would shun bad deeds and begin to do good things. In actual fact, the reality is that in Hindustan, in the *Gita*, a world-famous book, Shri Krishna, even while inspiring Arjuna to work selflessly without expectation of fruit lures him with visions of heaven after death and the crown of a king after victory in the battle. But today when we look at the sacrifices made by the anarchists, one wishes to kiss their feet. Sacco and Vanzetti's stories have been read by our readers. There is neither any desire to flatter God nor any avariciousness to enjoy the pleasures of heaven, nor any expectation of the bliss of reincarnation. To sacrifice one's life for the people and for truth with a smile on one's face is no small thing. The anarchists say that once people become completely liberated, their character will become very noble. Anyway, there can be long debates on each and every question, but we do not have enough space.

[7] Quotation originally in English.

Part II

The next thing they wish is to do away with the government. If we look for the roots of political power, we arrive at two conclusions. Some people believe that the caveman's intelligence evolved gradually, and people began to live together in groups. Political power was born in this way. This is called the theory of evolution. The other theory is that people needed to get together and to organize in order to fight off wild animals and to fulfill other needs. Then these groups began to fight with each other and each one of them was afraid of the more powerful enemy. So people cooperated to establish a political order. This is called Utilitarianism. We may pick both. The evolutionists can be asked why only now evolution has come to an end. Panchayati Raj is followed by anarchism, and the answer to the others is that now there is no need for any government. This debate has taken place earlier. Even if we pay little attention to this or other such things, we shall have to agree that the people had agreed to a contract, which the famous French thinker, Rousseau, called a Social Contract. According to the contract, a person would surrender a part of his freedom, a part of his income, in return for which he would be provided with security and peace.

After all this, what is worth considering is whether this contract was fulfilled. After establishing the government, the State and the Church hatched a conspiracy. People were told that these persons, the rulers, had been sent by God.[1] People were afraid of God, and the king was able to carry out willful oppression. The Tsar in Russia and Louis in France are good examples to reveal the truth of this matter, because this conspiracy could not be carried out for too long; Pope Gregory and King Henry fell out with each other. The Pope incited the people against King Henry's rule, and Henry shattered the bogey of religion. The meaning is that selfish people fought, and these misconceptions were destroyed. Anyway, people rose in rebellion again and killed the cruel Louis. The entire world was in a state of chaos. Democratic governments were established, but complete freedom was still not won. On one side, when the Austrian minister, Metternich, was oppressing people and thus disillusioning them through autocratic royal rule, on the other side in America, the poor slaves were in a miserable condition in democracy. The French masses were struggling time and again to raise themselves from the morass of poverty. Even today France has democracy but people do not have complete freedom. That is the reason the anarchists say that no government is required. In every other thing, they are similar to the communists, but one or two things differ. The eminent communist, Karl Marx's wellknown friend, Friedrich Engels, has written about his own and Marx's communism; and it is our ideal as well: 'Communism also looks forward to a period in the evolution of the society when the State will become superfluous and having no longer any function to perform, will die away'.[2]

This means that political power should disappear and people should have a sense of fraternity. Italy's famous political thinker, Machiavelli, believed that some form of rule should always prevail, whether it is a democracy or a monarchy. He believed in strong rule; like an iron fist. But the anarchists ask what is soft or hard. They want neither a soft nor a strong government. They say: 'Undermine the whole conception of a State and then and then only we have Liberty worth having'.[3]

People would say that that is absurd; if there is no government, there would be no law, no police to enforce the law, and this would lead to chaos. But they say this view is also wrong. The famous

[1] Theory of divine right of kings.
[2] Quotation originally in English.
[3] Quotation originally in English.

political philosopher, David Thoreau, said, 'Law never made a man whit more just, and by means of their respect for it even the well disposed are daily made gents of injustice'.[4]

There doesn't seem to be any untruth in this. We can see that as law becomes more rigid, corruption also increases. It is an ordinary complaint that earlier without any written agreement, thousands of rupees would be exchanged and no one would cheat. Now agreements have signatures, thumb impressions, witnesses and are registered. But fraud is on the rise. Then the solution they suggest is that the needs of every person should be met, everything should go according to his wish, and there would be no sin or crime.

'Crime is naught but misdirected energy. So long as every institution of today, economic, political, social and moral conspires to misdirect human energy into wrong channels, so long as most people are out of place doing the things they loathe to do, living a life they hate to live, crime will be inevitable and all the laws on the statutes can only increase but never do away with crime'.[5] (Originally in English)

If a person has complete freedom, then he would be able to do things according to his own will. There would be no injustice. If the exploitation by the capitalists does not end, even the most stringent of laws would not help. People say that human nature is such that it cannot survive without some government. Human beings can cause a great deal of harm if they are not kept on a leash. Commenting on human nature in his book, *The Principles of Politics*, the author, Lord says that ants can live in a group; animals can live in a group, but not human beings.[6] Man is greedy, inhuman and idle by nature. Hearing such talk, Emma Goldman lost her temper and in *Anarchism and Other Essays*, she wrote, 'Every fool from king to policeman, from a flat-headed person to the visionless dabbler in science presumes to speak authoritatively of human nature'.[7] She says that the bigger a fool a person is, the more stridently his opinion in this matter is expressed. Have human beings ever been tested by giving them complete freedom, that one is forever crying over their flaws? She feels that small elected bodies should be made and the work be carried out freely.

Private Property

The third most important thing is Private Property. In fact, it is the question of filling one's belly that makes the world goes round. It is for this that sermons preaching patience, contentment, etc. are crafted. Till now everything in life was done for the sake of property; now the anarchists, communists, socialists are all against property. They say, ''Property is robbery'[8] . . . 'but without risk or danger to the robber'.[9]

The notion of amassing property makes a person greedy. Then he becomes increasingly more stone-hearted. Mercy and humanity begin to fade from his heart. A government is required for the security of property. This again leads to an escalation of greed and the ultimate end of that is – first, imperialism, and then war. Bloodshed and a lot of destruction. There would be no greed if everything becomes common property. Everyone would work together. There would be no fear of theft or robbery. There would be no need for the police, jail, court, or army. And those with fat bellies and the parasites would also work. Production will be more even with fewer hours of work. People can have good education as well. There would be spontaneous peace, and prosperity would increase. That is, they emphasize how very important it is to eradicate ignorance from the world.

In fact, property is the most important issue; that is why another essay is required to debate this issue. The real issue arises from bread; Karl Manning averred clearly, 'Ask for work and if they don't

[4] Quotation originally in English.
[5] Quotation originally in English.
[6] The author is Arthur Ritchie Lord.
[7] Quotation originally in English.
[8] Proudhon.
[9] Emma Goldman. Quotation originally in English.

give you work, ask for bread and if they do not give you work or bread, then take bread'.[10] Meaning that if one doesn't get either work or food, then steal food. What right does one have to gorge on cakes when others may not even get dry crumbs of bread? He also asked why a person born in a destitute household should be forced to scrimp and save, whereas a person born in a prosperous household should grow fat on idleness. The precept 'Let riches add to riches' should be stopped. It is for these reasons that they shattered the illusion of the sanctity of private property for the sake of the principle of equal opportunity. They say that property is attached to corruption, and law is needed to protect it which in turn requires government. In fact, this is at the root of all evil. As soon as this is removed, everything will be all right. What do they really want; how will it really work? This is a vast question.

It has been stated above that anarchists are anti-God and religion because these cause mental slavery. Secondly, they are against the government, because this is physical slavery. They say that it is wrong to inspire human beings to do good by the lure of heaven or fear of hell, or by wielding the stick of law. And it is an insult to the nobility of man. One should attain knowledge freely and then work according to one's will and spend one's life happily. People say that this would mean that we wish to keep mankind in a state of wildness; as we were at the beginning. This is a false interpretation; in olden days, due to ignorance, people could not go far away. But now with full awareness, establishing mutual relations in the world, man should live free. There should be no greed for money. And the issue of money should be eradicated.

In the next essay, we shall write about some other things regarding this philosophy, different viewpoints, history and the reasons for its unpopularity, and the reason for the inclusion of violence in this.

[10] Quotation originally in English.

Part III

In the previous two essays, we have presented the popular notions regarding anarchy. The curiosity of the public cannot be assuaged merely with these two essays about such an important topic that has recently emerged before the world as a reaction to the world's trite thoughts and traditions. Several doubts raise their heads. Even so, we are placing the broad principles before the readers so that they may understand the main ideas. Now, similarly, we shall write about the ideology of Communism, Socialism and Nihilism so that Hindustan becomes familiar with the ideologies currently prevalent in the world. But before writing about any other topic, the intention is to write down several important and interesting facts about Anarchism, which also touches upon the history of Nihilism; that is, what have the Anarchists done so far? How did they acquire such an unsavoury reputation?

We have presented their thoughts above. Now we want to discuss what they did to give a practical shape to their ideas and how they confronted very powerful governments with the use of force and even staked their lives in that conflict.

The fact is that when oppression and exploitation cross a certain limit, when peaceful and free movement is crushed, then those who are always doers begin their work secretly and are ready to fight oppression as soon as they see it. When the poor working class was being exploited appallingly in Europe, all their efforts were crushed or were being crushed, at that time, Mikhail Bakunin, who belonged to a prosperous family in Russia and was a top officer in an arms factory, was sent to Poland to deal with the revolt. There the manner in which the rebels were being brutally crushed brought about a change in his mindset, and he became a revolutionary. Ultimately, his thoughts turned towards anarchism. He resigned from his job in 1834. Subsequently, he reached Paris through Berlin and Switzerland. Those days, most of the governments were against him due to his views. Till 1864, he evolved his beliefs and propagated them among the working class.

Later he gained control over the International Workingmen's Association, and from 1860 to 1870, he consolidated his group. On the 4th of September, 1870, an announcement was made to establish the Third Republic in Paris. There was unrest and riots in several places in France against the capitalist government. Bakunin was involved in these. They were the stronger side. But in a few days, they lost and left the place.

In 1873, there was a revolt in Spain. He joined in and fought. For some time the matter was really hot, then it finally ended in a defeat. When they returned from there, a fight was raging in Italy. He went there and took the reins of the battle in his hands. After some initial differences, Garibaldi also joined him. After a few days of opposition, they lost there as well. In this manner, his entire life was spent in waging battles. When he grew old, he wrote a letter to his compatriots saying that he would relinquish the leadership, so that their work did not suffer. Finally, in 1876, he died due to an illness.

Later, four very strong people got ready for this task with great determination. They were Carlo Cafiero, an Italian, belonging to quite a prosperous family. The second was Malatesta; he was a great doctor. But he renounced everything to become a revolutionary. The third was Paul Brousse, who was also a famous doctor. The fourth was Peter Kropotkin. He was from a Russian royal family. It was often said jokingly that he was to become the Tsar. They were all devotees of Bakunin. He said that they had propagated enough with the tongue but it had had no effect. They were tired of hearing about newfangled ideologies. These hadn't had any effect on the public. So now it was time to propagate action. Kropotkin said,

> A single deed makes more propaganda in a few days than a thousand pamphlets. The Government defends itself. It rages pitilessly, but by this, it only caused further deeds to be committed by one or more persons and drives the insurgents to heroism. One deed brings forth another, opponent's join the mutiny, the Government splits into fractions, harshness intensifies the conflict, concessions come too late, the revolution breaks out.[1]

Peter Kropotkin was one of the Russian revolutionaries. After being arrested, Peter was incarcerated in the Peter and Paul Fortress. He escaped from this very strongly guarded prison and began to disseminate his ideas in Europe. These things tell us his state of mind in those days.

First of all, he celebrated the anniversary of the establishment of the rule of the workers in Berne city in France. This was the 18th of March, 1876. He took out a procession of workers on that day and got into a scuffle with the police in the streets. A riot ensued when the policemen tried to uproot their red flag. Several policemen were seriously injured. In the end, all these people were arrested and sentenced for 10 to 40 days in jail.

In the month of April, they incited the peasants of Italy and set off riots in several parts of the country. Even there, their companions were arrested, out of whom several were released. Now their strategy was a kind of publicity. That is why they used to say, 'Neither money nor organizations nor literature was needed any longer [for their propaganda work]. One human being in revolt with torch or dynamite was off to instruct the world'.[2]

From the next year onwards in 1868, such activities were on the rise. An attempt was made to assassinate the Italian emperor Umberto when he was travelling in a motorcar with his daughter. Emperor Wilhelm I of Germany was shot at by an ordinary youth. After three weeks, Dr Karl Nobiling also tried to shoot at the Emperor from a window. In those days in Germany, the movements of the poor working classes were silenced brutally. After that, it was decided in a meeting that the corrupt capitalist class and the government and the police that colluded with it, should be made frightened in whatever way it was possible.

On the 15th of December, 1833, a notorious police officer by the name of Ulubek was killed in Willirid Floridsdorf. On the 23rd of June, 1884, Rouget was hanged for this crime. The very next day, Blatik, a police officer, was killed to avenge the hanging. The Austrian government was enraged, and in Vienna, the police besieged several people and arrested them; and two of them were hanged. There were strikes in Leon. One of the striking men, Fournier, shot his capitalist owner. He was awarded a pistol in a ceremony held to honour him. In 1888, there was a lot of unrest there, and the silk workers were starving. At that time, the capitalist's newspaper-owning friends and other rich friends were busy living it up elsewhere. A bomb was thrown there. The rich were terrified. Sixty anarchists were held. Only 3 were acquitted. But still the search for the actual bomb thrower did not come to an end. He was finally caught and hanged. And in this way, this line of thinking gained momentum. And then, wherever there were strikes, murders would take place. The anarchists were blamed for all this, and as a result, people would shudder at the very mention of them.

A German anarchist, Johann Most, who had worked in an office, went to America in 1882. He also began to place his ideas before the people. He was a very good orator and impressed his audience in America. In 1886, several strikes were called in Chicago and other places. In one paper factory, an anarchist called Spies was giving a speech. The owners of the factory tried to shut the factory. A riot erupted. The police were called in, and they began firing as soon as they came. Six men were killed, and several were injured. Spies was furious. He himself composed a notice and decreed that the workers should unite to avenge the murder of their innocent comrades. The next day, on the 4th of May, 1886, the Haymarket procession was to be taken out. The Mayor of the city had come to watch it. He saw nothing objectionable going on. So he went there. Later the police came and, without any provocation, began to beat up people and asked them to stop the procession. Just then a bomb was thrown at the

[1] Quotation originally in English.
[2] Quotation originally in English.

police and many policemen were killed. Several people were arrested and hanged. As he was leaving, one of them said,

> I repeat, I am a sworn enemy of this present state of affairs. I want this political establishment to be destroyed, and we should be able to wield political power ourselves. You may laugh that I shall no longer be able to throw bombs, but let me tell you that your oppression has forced every worker to handle and throw a bomb. You should know that after I am hanged, another one will be born. I see you with revulsion in my eyes and want to trample your State. Hang me.

Anyway, several such incidents happened. But there are a couple of other famous incidents. The American President, McKinley, was shot at, and then there was a strike in the Carnegie steel company. The workers were being brutalized here. The owner, Henry C. Frick, was injured by an anarchist, Alexander, who was sentenced for life.[3] Anyway, this is how anarchism spread to America and began to be practiced.

In Europe, too, things were bad. The anarchists' feud with the police and the government had intensified. Finally, a youth named Vaillant threw a bomb in the Assembly, but a woman caught his hand and stopped him, as a result of which nothing much happened, except that some Deputies were injured. He offered an explanation in a ringing voice, 'It takes a loud voice to make the deaf hear.[4] Now you will punish me, but I have no fear because I have struck at your hearts. You, who oppress the poor and those who work hard, starve, and you suck their blood and take pleasure in life. I have hurt you. Now it is your turn'.

Several appeals were made on his behalf. Even the most seriously injured member of the Assembly requested the jury to show mercy to him, but the jury, presided over by a person named Carnot, refused to pay any attention and sentenced him to death by hanging. Later an Italian boy stabbed Carnot with a knife with the name Vaillant written on it.

In this manner, unable to endure any more oppression, bombs were set off even in Spain, and finally, an Italian killed a minister. In a similar manner, the Emperor of Greece and the Empress of Austria were also attacked. In 1900, Gaetano Bresci killed the Emperor of Italy, Umberto. In this manner, these people smilingly gave up their lives for the sake of the poor . . . kissed the gallows joyfully. That is why; even those opposed to them could do nothing against them. Their last martyrs, Sacco and Vanzetti, have been hanged only last year. The courage with which these people went to the gallows is known to everyone.

And this is the brief history of anarchism and its activities. Next time we shall write an essay about Communism.

[3] Alexander Berkman.

[4] Quotation originally in English.

Part IV (Russian Nihilists)

Russia has given birth to a very great novelist – Ivan Turgenev. In 1862 he wrote a novel, *Fathers and Sons*. There was a great hue and cry over the publication of this novel because it depicted the modern views of the youth. It was Turgenev who first used the word 'nihilism'. Nihilism means not to believe in anything (nihil – nothing); the literal meaning is one who believes in nothing. Though in reality, these people were the opponents of the traditional rituals and customs and bad practices. These people were fed up with the country's mental slavery, so they protested against it. They not only spoke against it but practiced what they preached. Turgenev says that the hero of his novel is not a fictional character, on the other hand, he was a real person with such ideas, and these ideas had become quite common. He says that the idea of the novel occurred to him one day while he was lazing in the sun. And he wrote the book by expanding the ideas a bit. The hero is Bazarov. He is a kind of atheist; completely opposed to conventional rituals. He does not find verbal sycophancy very attractive. He is blunt. What he says, he does. He says everything to one's face, immediately and clearly, so much so that at times, he appears to be very brash. He is an opponent of poetry. He does not like music. But he is a lover of freedom. He is a big supporter of freedom for the common people. He fights the prevailing mindset of the people.

The picture of a real nihilist is a little different from this because the hero of the novel has some fictional elements along with reality. The true picture of nihilism is delineated in quite another manner. 'The Nihilism of 1861 – a philosophical system especially dealing with what Mr Herbert Spencer would call religious, governmental and social fetishism'.[1]

The Russian revolutionary prince, Kropotkin, uttered these words while referring to nihilism in 1861, which means that nihilism was just one of the philosophies of those times, which was in relation to religious superstition, social injustice, narrow mindedness, and the excesses of the government, and preached against the superstitions created to perpetuate such things. The fact is that the youth had jumped into the fray to protest against the conditions of the times. They believed that it was necessary to destroy every existing thing completely. Even without a complete answer to what would happen later or should happen, they believed that they would be able to build a beautiful world.

'Nihilism was destructive because it wanted a wholesale destruction but with a pleasure of building up'.[2]

Gradually these ideas became more popular and a large number of young people became enamored of them. They wanted 'to liberate the people from the chains of tradition and autocracy of the Tsar'.

These were the kinds of things being propagated then. Conditions changed. In those days, a large number of slaves had been freed, but most of them had not been given any land to till and earn, or at least, escape starvation. Whatever little land had been allotted to them was taxed so heavily that people starved, and there was a terrible famine in 1867. Those days Government arrangements were unspeakably bad. There was so much oppression that the public could bear it no longer. Harassed by official excesses, even big government officials became revolutionaries. Ossinsky and Kviatkovsky, who were hanged in 1880, had been government servants earlier. Similarly, many other well-known officers, even judges, became revolutionaries.

The oppression on the people became unbearable. Good books were not allowed to be propagated among the youth. There were some associations that would pick up good books from the publishers

[1] Quotation originally in English.
[2] Quotation originally in English.

and distribute them free of cost or at cost price. All these books were censored by the government. But when the government realized that they were being used for propaganda, they decided to destroy all book publishers and distributors and began to repress these people. From 1861 to 1870, every possible and appropriate way to improve the condition of the people and show the right way to the government was tried, but it had no impact.

In such a situation, a lot of people would sit twiddling their thumbs, waiting for times to change by themselves. How they would improve – nobody knew. People remained passive, just placing trust in God. But a fire had been lit in the hearts of the youth. There was no trust in God in their hearts. It had become difficult for them to sit quietly, without doing anything. Prince Kropotkin writes in an essay:

> There are periods when some generations are penetrated with the noblest feelings of altruism and self-sacrifice, when life becomes utterly impossible – morally and physically impossible – for the man and woman who feels that he is not doing duty; and so it was with the youth in Russia.[3]

In 1871, a large number of young men and women ran away to Western Europe. They studied there. Most of them were in Switzerland. They got permission to return to their country. They returned with new ideas of community and unity. They began propaganda immediately upon their return and the Tsar got all of them arrested and they were exiled to Siberia. Their movement then assumed a covert shape.

At that time, three parties were working. Their leaders were Chernyshevsky, Ishutin, and Nechaif. Earlier, the slogan was that they should be with the public, that is, they should sympathize with the public and try to uplift them. But now a new voice was heard that said that they should all become the public, that is, blend with it. As soon as this voice was heard, people were inspired to set such amazing examples of sacrifice that, even today, the world cannot find anything to match them. But first, it is necessary to discuss why this voice rose? Prince Kropotkin writes:

> Until of late – however the Russian peasant has always regarded the man who wears broad cloth and neither ploughs, nor hews, nor hammers, nor digs side by side with him, as an enemy. We wanted faith and love from him; and to obtain them it was necessary to live their life. [Originally in English]

Ah! Today we make exaggerated claims to liberate Hindustan, but how many people are ready to make such sacrifices? How many will leave their cities and be prepared to go to the villages and live in unhygienic conditions like peasants? There a unique situation had been created.

> Young men left their classrooms, their regiments and their desks, learned the smith's trade, or the cobbler's or the ploughman's, and went to work among the villages. Highborn and wealthy ladies betook themselves to factories, worked fifteen or sixteen hours a day at machine, slept in dog holes with peasants, went barefoot as our working women go, bringing water from the river for the house.[4]

Just one passion. One obsession. To make those poor workers aware of their miserable condition and to offer a solution. What a big sacrifice it is! The young women did a marvellous job. Madam Catherine Breshkovsky, the woman known as the grandmother of the Russian Revolution, was a wealthy and beautiful lady. She also joined them. First, she threw acid on herself to destroy her beauty so that it did not hinder her work among the common people. Oh! How many people would have the courage to do that in Hindustan today? In Russia, young men and women run away from home and spend their

[3] Quotation originally in English.
[4] Quotation originally in English.

lives in this kind of work. But how many young people in Hindustan have this yearning to liberate their country? One sees quite intelligent people around, but everyone is concerned only with his or her individual life and happiness. How can we then hope to improve our condition and that of our country? The youth of Russia spent the last part of the previous century in this kind of propaganda work. There are several beautiful anecdotes about women being inspired to come out of their homes.

Sonia was a priest's daughter. Revolutionary women had just joined her school as teachers. Listening to their teachings, Sonia was inspired to do patriotic work. One day she ran away from home. But her father caught her after a few days. Then the party made arrangements to liberate her from home. A young man posed as her boyfriend and went to her house. He convinced her father and married her. The story is very interesting and has been published in *The Heroes and Heroines of Russia*. We shall present the story to our readers if we get a chance. Anyway, readers shall get an idea about the kind of work underfoot in Russia through this brief description.

At first, the work was done openly, but then the government cracked down brutally on them, and several thousands of people were sent to Siberia. Thousands were arrested without warrants. They were locked in dark cells for four or five years. Later, cases were filed against about a hundred people. Some were sentenced. One among these thousands of cases became famous by the name of 'the Trial of the Hundred and Ninety-Three'. To be brief, as per the government figures, thousands of people were arrested and kept in dark, dingy cells for four to five years. Three hundred were kept in jail for a very long time out of which 11 died of tuberculosis, four slashed their own throats, and many others also tried to kill themselves like this. Cases were filed against 193 people. An extremely unjust court sentenced them to ten years imprisonment just because they were the propagators, even though there was very little evidence against them. 90 were acquitted and the rest were given rigorous punishment from 7 to 10 years and then exile to Siberia for the rest of their lives. In a related matter, a woman was given 9 to 10 years of rigorous punishment only for giving a communist pamphlet to a worker.

Faced with this level of oppression, the work took a more covert and prudent form. And the feeling of revenge grew. More often than not, some wicked secret service officer would arrest and exile anyone he wished to. He would be given a reward, but this endangered the life of the youth. Harassed by this, these people also thought of eliminating these tyrants.

It is said that on the 16th of April, 1866, when Karakozoff shot at the Tsar, it was the work of nihilists. And the shooting at the Tsar the next year in Paris by a Polish gentleman, Berezovsky, was also a party action. But about the present situation, Kropotkin has written that the Tsar was never more secure as he was in the initial stages of their work. They thought of using force only in the end when they had exhausted other avenues. At first, they always tried to protect the Tsar. Once when some young man reached St Petersburg to kill the Tsar, the members of the party prevented him from doing so.

But later, the work started with gusto. In 1879, one of the arrested persons, who still had not been charge-sheeted formally, was caned because he did not rise and greet the police officer, and the rest of the arrested people who supported him were beaten badly on the orders of General Trepov. At this, a young woman, Vera Zasulich, shot at General Trepov. He did not die, and a case was filed against the young woman. She was acquitted. The police tried to arrest her again, but the public snatched her away.

When the Russian revolutionaries realized that no one helped them and that there was no law to protect them, they began to take care of their own protection. The police would encircle the houses of people early in the morning; they even stripped the women of their clothes to search them. The people were harassed. Murmuring began that this did not happen in other countries. They would also not let it happen. Kovalsky was the first one to do this in Odessa. He confronted the police. The oppression grew more intense. And then, the taking of revenge began. The use of force for self-protection began to be considered appropriate. First, five spies, then three officers were murdered, in return for which seventeen young people were hanged. Then this chain reaction continued – revenge, then gallows, then . . ..

In 1879, the word 'nihilism' came to connote only the bursting of bombs and the shooting of guns. The Tsar also finally lost his patience and decided to teach them a lesson.

And this was the catalyst needed to set all of them to complete this task. On the 14th of April, 1879, Solovioff had shot at the Tsar, but the Tsar escaped. The same year the Winter Palace of the Tsar was bombed with dynamite, but the Tsar still escaped. The next year, when the Tsar was going from St. Petersburg to Moscow, the train on which he was travelling was bombed. Several compartments were destroyed, but the Tsar escaped yet again. On the 13th of March, 1881, when the Tsar was returning with his special squad after inspecting the parade of his horses and platoon, a bomb was hurled at him. The carriage was smashed, and the Tsar got off to take a look at the servant, saying, 'thank God, I'm saved'. But another young man, Grinevizky, moved forward, and said as he hurled another bomb, 'Tsar, it is too early to thank God'. The bomb exploded, and the Tsar was killed. Thousands of people were arrested. Many were sent to the gallows. Five people were hanged publicly. The most famous among them was a woman called Sophia Perovskya.

The party was suppressed at that time. Then several other parties rose. But the history of the Nihilist Party is just this much. The Nihilists were judged unfairly by the people and given a bad name like the anarchists. An English newspaper drew a cartoon in which two nihilists stand with bombs and dynamite amid destruction. One asks, 'Brother, does anything remain?' and the other answers, 'Just the globe of the earth'. The first says, 'Let me put dynamite on that too'. This is complete misrepresentation. Oscar Wilde wrote a play titled *Vera the Nihilist*, which depicted the nihilists in a positive light, but there are several errors. Another book, *The Career of a Nihilist*, was published. This is a readable account. It is an accurate book about nihilists. In Hindi, *Bolshevikon ki Kartoot* (The Action of Bolsheviks) and *Nihilist Rahasya* (Mystery of the Nihilist) have been published. The first has been written by the martyr of Kakori, Shri Ram Prasad Bismil. He has delineated a very pitiful picture of Nihilists. But they have been shown as being only destructive, which is not accurate. They were sincere servants of the people. They were very sacrificing and loved the common people. They were great souls.

South Asian Anarchist Library

Bhagat Singh
What is Anarchism?
1928

The Political Writings of Bhagat Singh - Bhagat Singh, Chaman Lal, Michael Yates (2024)

sa.theanarchistlibrary.org