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Editor-in-Chief: Prem Kumar Chumber

Contact: 001-916-947-8920

Fax: 916-238-1393

E-mail: chumbermedia@yahoo.com, editor@ambedkartimes.com

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Invited Editorial Article

Shaheed Bhagat Singh: A Great Revolutionary and an Erudite Philosopher

Shaheed Bhagat Singh occupies central place in the Indian freedom movement. His name reached every nook and corner of the country after he and his associates, all young revolutionaries of the Hindustan Socialist Revolutionary Association (HSRA), avenged the death of Lala Lajpat Rai by murdering JP Saunders, ASP Lahore, on December 17, 1928. This dare devil act of killing an IP British officer of the rank of ASP, threw a daunting challenge before them. The spontaneously emerged circumstances forced them to choose between two possible options: to turn underground or oppose the British administration in a direct and open revolt. After deep thoughts, HSRA decided to adopt the latter. The strategy was prepared to give actual shape to direct and open fight by making use of British jails, police stations and courts as revolutionary platforms to widely disseminate the message of peace, freedom, and egalitarian social and political order, chiselled during long discussion among the members of the HSRA. And for this herculean task, it was decided – though with initial reservations on the part of Chandra Shekhar Azad and of course with heavy heart – that Bhagat Singh, one of the most intelligent young revolutionaries of HSRA, will lead the fight.

The decision to launch an open and direct front could partly be due to the thoughts related with the long self-exile of Sardar Ajit Singh for his involvement in 1907 'Pagri Sambhal Jatta' movement and partly for the longer ramifications of the adoption of violent methods for building an egalitarian social set-up and democratic governing order. Bhagat Singh and his associates might have decided to opt for the open fight after their action on December 17, 1928, to further shun violence on the one hand, and to minimize the implied losses of the struggle to keep oneself away from one's own people during the underground period or in exile as was in the case of his revolutionary uncle Sardar Ajit Singh. It was well thought-out strategy which speaks volumes of the political maturity of the young revolutionaries, their deep intellect and love for non-violent democratic means. It was in this context that Bhagat Singh, Rajguru and Sukhdev in their martyrdom defeated the so-called British administration that used to boast of its passion for liberal values and natural justice.

The direct fight began on April 8, 1928. The beginning was made by dropping of two mild bombs in the Central Legislative Assembly Hall at Delhi 'to make the deaf hear'

of the staggered sufferings of the subjugated. It was well-planned and deeply thought about non-violent action of its kind under the British rule in India. After the blast, Bhagat Singh and Batukeshwar Dutt did not leave the hall as decided beforehand. They kept on raising slogans: 'Inquilab Zindabad' and 'Down with Imperialism'. These two slogans, as cogently argued by Chaman Lal, represented the immanent change in the Indian revolutionary thought appeared as 'a sign of the growth of consciousness to a higher level in revolutionary movement of the country ("Revolutionary Legacy of Bhagat Singh, *Economic & Political Weekly*, September 15, 2017, 3712). He continued, '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 world 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." (Lal 2017: 3712).

Bhagat Singh started reading and critically analysing national and international unfolding of economic and political events at the very young

age of under 15; and the period of about four months from December 17, 1928 (murder of JP Saunders) to April 8, 1929 (dropping of bombs at Central Legislative Assembly) constitutes the most fertile phase in his revolutionary voyage. He also wrote extensively during this period under pseudonym Vidrohi in *Kirti* and *Balwant* in *Pratap* published from Kanpur. 'Achhut da Sawal', 'Mazhab atey Sadi Azadi de Jang', 'Dharm-Var Fassad atey Uhhna de Ellajh', 'Anarchism ke hai' and 'History of Anarchism' are among his various thought provoking articles carried in *Kirti*. These seminal articles clearly establish him not only as an accomplished scholar of great insights but also an erudite philosopher who cap-

tured the complex nature of British imperialism and the insidious role played by the entrenched social and religious structures of communalism and untouchability at grassroots of Indian society.

The city of Kanpur played a major role in shaping the revolutionary as well as intellectual life of Bhagat Singh. It was there, he came in contact with Batukeshwar Dutt, Ajay Ghosh, Bejoy Kumar Sinha, Shiv Verma and Jaidev Kapoor. He was introduced in Kanpur to the then emerging centre of revolutionaries within whose intellectual company and passion for the liberation of Bharat Mata, Bhagat Singh took refuge to save himself from the filial responsibility towards his family and to prepare for

the large responsibility of liberating India from the clutches of the British Empire as well as to establish people's democracy where women, Dalits, workers and peasant would have

equal rights. He was introduced to the Kanpur circle by his teacher, Jai Chander Vidyalkar of National College of Lahore. It was at Kanpur that he also joined the underground revolutionary organisation, Hindustan Republican Association founded by Sachinder Nath Sanyal who he earlier met at Lahore. Lahore, like Calcutta and Kanpur, was also an equally well-known centre of political thinking and revolutionary activities. Bhagat Singh home at Lahore was frequently visited by the revolutionaries of the Ghadar movement. Before the annexation of Punjab in 1849, Lahore was the capital of Sikh Kingdom of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. And before that it remained a seat of various vassals/subedars of the Delhi Sultanate and Moghul Darbar for a long time. It also provided fertile socio-political space to sow the seeds of Brahma Samaj and Arya Samaj. During his early years of life, Bhagat Singh came under the influence of religious practices of Arya Samaj as were observed in his family. It was at Lahore that Giani Ditt Singh of Singh Sabha used to engage Swami Dayanad Saraswati, founder of the Arya Samaj movement, in scriptural debates about complex issues of spiritual philosophy. Bhagat Singh developed companionship with Sukhdev and Bhagwati Charan Vohra at Lahore. Bhagwati Charan Vohra sacrificed his life on the banks of Ravi in Lahore while preparing bombs for the release of Bhagat Singh and his associates from the jail. Thus Lahore and Kanpur contain vital clues to understand Bhagat Singh, his revolutionary activities and intellectual growth.

Yet another equally significant, rather more strenuous, phase during which Shaheed Bhagat Singh established himself as an incisive philosopher and became a household name falls between April 8, 1929 and March 23, 1931. After the pronouncement of life imprisonment in the Delhi bomb case, which began on May 7, 1929 and ended on June 12, (Contd. on page 4)



Ronki Ram

Shaheed Bhagat Singh Chair Professor of Political Science
Panjab University, Chandigarh
ronkiram@yahoo.co.in
Visiting Professor, Centre for Sikh and Panjabi Studies,
University of Wolverhampton, UK

"Ambedkar Times" and "Desh Doaba" forum pay its floral tribute on the martyrdom day of our great revolutionaries – Shaheed-E-Azam Bhagat Singh, Rajguru and Sukhdev - who sacrificed their precious lives for the liberation of our mother land on March 23, 1931. Let us come together to follow their philosophy of nonviolence, egalitarianism and communal brotherhood in letter and spirit.

Prem Kumar Chumber

Editor-in-Chief: Ambedkar Times & Desh Doaba

Bhagat Singh: The Execution and Rewards

Even nine decades after he was hanged, Bhagat Singh remains the most iconic - and beloved - martyr in the collective consciousness of India. What has, however, remained camouflaged all these years, is the exact sequence of events and the identity of officials involved in the defining execution in Lahore central jail on March 23, 1931. The British government had somewhat kept its officers' names under wraps fearing retribution. There had been two assassination bids - on the then Punjab governor SIR Geoffrey Montmorency I.C.S (1899 batch) on 23rd December, 1930 and superintendent of police Khan Bahadur Sheikh Abdul Aziz, the investigating officer against Bhagat Singh, in the month before the hanging.

There was a meeting to discuss the law-and-order situation in Punjab and it was held at noon on March 16, 1931 at the Governor's House in Lahore. It was presided over by the Punjab Governor SIR Geoffrey Montmorency I.C.S.(1899 batch) still in pain from the bullet wounds he suffered after being shot by freedom fighter Hari Kishan Talwar at the convocation of Punjab University in Lahore on 23rd December 1930. Apart from the governor, the then chief secretary of Punjab DJ Boyd, home secretary CMG Ogilvie, inspector general of police Charles Stead, inspector general of prisons Lt.Col FA Barker, Deputy Commissioner of Lahore AA Lane Roberts and senior superintendent of police GTH Hamilton Hardinge I.P.(1915) were among those who attended the meeting. The meeting, however, digressed into preparations for the impending proposed executions of Bhagat Singh, Rajguru and Sukhdev fixed for the morning of March 24. The governor reviewed the arrangements and expressed satisfaction at the law-and-order situation in the state along with a decision to hang them on 23rd March 1931. The Home Secretary Punjab CMG Ogilvie informed Home Secretary of the Government of India Herbert William Emerson through a secret telegram on 17th March 1931

Bhagat Singh was Defiant till the end. The weather was tempestuous and dust storms swept Lahore on the night of March 22, 1931 Justice MV Bhide, ICS,(1904) of the Lahore High Court, had earlier rejected the petitions challenging the powers of a special tribunal to issue the death warrants. Thus, the executions became inevitable. By the time dawn broke on March 23, the storm had settled. Jail officials in the central jail spoke in hushed tones in the room of jail superintendent Major PD Chopra. The Punjab government allowed the last meeting with Bhagat Singh at 10am. PranNath Mehta, his lawyer, met him. The moment Mehta left, after receiving four handwritten bunches of papers surreptitiously from Bhagat Singh, a team of officers led by Stead, Barker, Roberts, Hardinge and Chopra met Bhagat Singh. Their unsolicited advice to seek a pardon from the British government was contemptuously re-

jected by Bhagat Singh. The executions had been advanced by a day and were to take place in the evening of March 23.

The information to Bhagat Singh, Rajguru and Sukhdev was conveyed by senior jail warden Chhattar Singh. A disturbed and grief-stricken Chhattar Singh suggested to Bhagat Singh that he recite the name of god. But Bhagat Singh was busy reading a book on Russian revolutionary Vladimir Ilyich Lenin. In fact Bhagat Singh had asked a Muslim sweeper, Bebe, to bring food for him in the evening before his execution. Bebe readily accepted the request and promised to bring home-cooked food for him. But because of the security clampdown, Bebe was unable to enter the jail that evening. There was a flurry of activity inside the Lahore jail and outside because authorities feared unrest. As noon passed and the clock inched towards evening, the district civil and police officers camped outside the jail. They were led by Sheikh Abdul Hamid, additional district magistrate, Lahore; Rai Sahib Lala Nathu Ram, city magistrate; Sudarshan Singh, Deputy Superintendent of police, Kasur; Amar Singh, Deputy Superintendent of police (city), Lahore; JW Morris, Deputy Superintendent of Police, headquarters, Lahore; and hundreds of armed policemen. With the shooting of the governor fresh in their minds, the officers and policemen were anxious about their own security. The investigating officer in the case Khan Bahadur Sheikh Abdul Aziz, SP, special investigation, had been shot and injured a few weeks earlier but had survived. Stead, Barker, Roberts, Hardinge, Chopra and Deputy Jail Superintendent Khan Sahib Mohammad Akbar were present inside the jail. The hangman, called Massih from Shahadara, near Lahore, was also ready. The moment the three revolutionaries were taken out of their cells, they shouted inquilabzindabad (long live the revolution). Pindi Dass Sodhi, secretary, district Congress, Lahore lived near the central jail. The slogans were clearly heard at his house. After hearing the shouts of the three men walking to their deaths, the other prisoners joined them in the sloganeering. The Deputy commissioner AA Lane Roberts was a loquacious officer of the 1909 batch of ICS. When the three young men reached the hanging site, he spoke to Bhagat Singh. Singh confidently said that people would soon see and remember how Indian freedom fighters bravely kiss death. They refused to wear masks over their necks. In fact, Bhagat Singh threw the mask at the district magistrate. Singh and his companions hugged each other for the last time, and shouted "down with the British empire". Massih pulled the lever. Bhagat Singh was the first to hang. He was followed by Rajguru and Sukhdev.

Lt Col JJ Harper Nelson, principal of King Edward's Medical College, Lahore and Lt Col NS Sodhi, civil surgeon, Lahore, were inside the jail

at the time of the executions but did not witness the hangings. After the hangings, the three were confirmed dead by the civil surgeon. A huge crowd had gathered outside the jail, but two vehicles led by Deputy superintendent of police Kasur Sudarshan Singh, Deputy superintendent of police (city) Amar Singh and Deputy Superintendent of Police J.W. Morris accompanied by three trucks of soldiers of 'Black watch' regiment took the bodies and left for the cremation at 10 pm. Sudarshan picked up a granthi Natha Singh and a priest named Jagdish Acharaj from Kasur and set the bodies on fire outside Ganda Singh Wala village in the night. The bodies were still burning when people from different areas, including Ferozepur, reached there and a ruckus followed. The bodies were later thrown in river Satluj.

After the execution, the British government honoured several persons. Hans Raj Vohra, Jai Gopal, Phonindra Nath Ghosh and Manmohan Bannerji had all become government approvers and gave statements against them in the case. They were among the 457 witnesses produced by the Punjab Police in this case. After the executions, all four were rewarded. Vohra refused to take monetary benefits. But he was sponsored by the Punjab government to study in the prestigious London School of Economics. After a Masters in political science, Vohra got a degree in journalism from London University and was the correspondent of the Civil and Military Gazette of Lahore till 1948. He later shifted to Washington and in the 1950s and 1960s was the Washington correspondent of a leading Indian daily. He died in July 1995, in Washington. Jai Gopal got an award of Rs 20,000. Phonindra Nath Ghosh and Manmohan Bannerji got 50 acres of land each in Champaran district of Bihar (their home district) in lieu of their services and loyalty to the British government. The then jail superintendent, Major PD Chopra, was promoted as DIG, prisons, Punjab, two days after the hangings. The Deputy Jail Superintendent, Khan Sahib Mohammad Akbar Khan, who had started weeping after the execution of Bhagat Singh and his two companions, was suspended but later taken back as Assistant Jail Superintendent. His title of Khan Sahib was, however, withdrawn on March 7, 1931. The IG, Prisons, Punjab, Lt Col FA Barker, was honoured with the Knighthood of Sir and sanctioned ex-India leave before retirement.

The DIG Prisons Punjab, Lt. Col. NR Puri, was promoted as IG Prisons Punjab after a few days of the execution. The Investigating Officer of the Lahore conspiracy case, Khan Bahadur Sheikh Abdul Aziz, SP, was given an out-of-turn promotion as selection grade SP, leading to his promotion as DIG three years later. His was the only example in 200 years of British rule in India, where a person who had joined as Head Constable retired as DIG (in July, 1937). Khan Bahadur Abdul Aziz's eldest son, Masood Aziz, was appointed as

Deputy Superintendent of Police by nomination in November, 1931 in the Punjab Police. Khan Bahadur was also given 50 acres of land in Lyallpur. Sudarshan Singh, DSP,

who disposed of the bodies of Bhagat Singh, Rajguru and Sukhdev, was promoted as Additional Superintendent of Police, Kasur. He later retired as SP of Punjab Police in September, 1942.

Rai Sahib Pandit Sri Krishan, PCS, a Kashmiri from Lahore was the SDM, Kasur, at the time of the executions. He was a trial magistrate in this case earlier. He was given an "appreciation letter" by the Governor and later promoted as ADM, out of turn. Batala-born Sheikh Abdul Hamid, PCS, Additional District Magistrate of Lahore and Attock-born Rai Sahib Lala Nathu Ram, PCS, City Magistrate, Lahore were also given appreciation in person by the Governor of Punjab, FW DeMont'morency ICS (1899 batch). GT Hamilton Hardinge, SSP Lahore; Amar Singh, DSP; and JW Morris, DSP were given the King's Police Medal. DSPs Amar Singh and Morris had accompanied DSP Sudharshan Singh of Kasur for the cremation of the three martyrs.

Appreciation letters were given to all constables and head constables, who accompanied the Police Officers by IG C Stead. The four articles written by Bhagat Singh, smuggled out of jail on the day of his execution by advocate PranNath Mehta, were later handed over to Bhagat Singh's companion Bijoy Kumar Sinha, who was sentenced to transportation for life and had concealed these papers at a friend's house in Jalandhar. The friend expected a police raid during the Quit India Movement days in July 1942 and burnt all of them in panic. So, four bunches of papers, written by Bhagat Singh and handed over secretly on the last day of his life, and read by PranNath Mehta and Bijoy Kumar Sinha, were lost forever. Bijoy died in Patna on July 16, 1992. He disclosed in a seminar in the late 1980s that Bhagat Singh on the last day of his life had predicted that the Britishers would leave India in 14-15 years and India would get its own exploiters. Prophetic words indeed!

The executioner Kala Masih's son Tara Masih hanged Pakistan's Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto on April 4, 1979. During the British period, jail superintendents and senior officers in the Jail Department used to be from the Indian Medical Services and had to serve in the Indian Army before their posting in the Jail Department.



R. K. Kaushik
Senior I.A.S. Officer
of the Punjab Cadre
kaushikspunjab@gmail.com
+91-9878401262

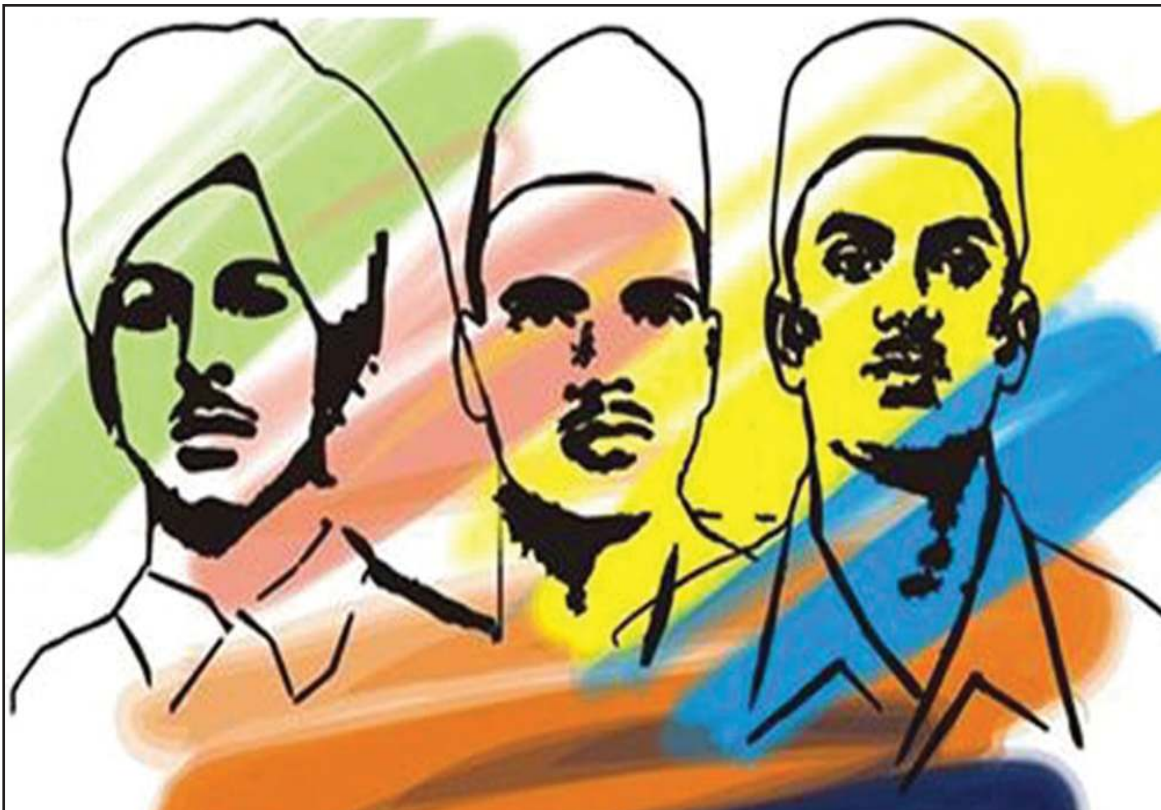
90 Years after Martyrdom-Bhagat Singh, Rajguru and Sukhdev- Reliving in Farmers Movement!

23rd March 2021 marks the completion of 90 years of execution of Bhagat Singh, Rajguru and Sukhdev, who by now have got the status of supreme martyrs of Indian freedom struggle and every shade of political opinion, even when not sharing their vision of India, eulogies them for advancing their political interests, as they have, by now, become supreme symbol of nationalism and patriotism! The agitating farmers on Delhi borders and the powers suppressing them, both are marking the event in a big way, though one-the farmers are marking the day with the spirit and vision of the supreme martyrs and the other –the ruling powers incentre, trying to suppress the farmers, are marking the day with big posters, advertisements and somewhat fake photographs and mythical narrations spending money from state treasure of people's paid taxes!

By now, Bhagat Singh has also got the status of one of country's foremost political thinkers, as his writings in last few years have been published in many Indian languages. Out of his 130 writings in total, found so far, many languages-English, Hindi, Marathi, Punjabi and Urdu have the credit of publishing complete writings, while many more like Tamil, Bengali, Telugu, Malayalam, Gujarati, Sindhi, Odia and Assamese have published selected writings, all others languages have at least few writings in print. Why I am an Atheist, his classic political essay has been published even in French! There are more than six hundred books published on Bhagat Singh alone, in at least twenty Indian and foreign languages, some of them from the world renowned prestigious publishers. Out of all freedom fighters, the maximum numbers of books proscribed during British colonial period, in many Indian languages were on Bhagat Singh, as per National archives of India and British records!

So Bhagat Singh does not need much elaboration on such occasions, however Rajguru and Sukhdev find less mention, which needs to be paid attention. Sukhdev, born on 15th May 1907, as per family records and on 18th February 1907, as per his school certificate mentioned date, in Naughara family house in now crowded area of Ludhiana. Although family was living in Lyallpur, where Bhagat Singh family also lived. Since Sukhdev's father died early, he was brought up by his uncle Achint Ram Thapar, a nationalist in his own right of Lyallpur. Two biographies of Sukhdev are authentic-both by his brothers-Jaidev Thapar, which is not available and another by his other brother-Mathura Das Thapar-Mere Bhai Sukhdev in Hindi language, which has got many reprints and continue to be in circulation. Mathura Das Thapar biography of his brother is well documented and carries few writings

of Sukhdev as well. The copy of Lahore conspiracy trial with Sukhdev's notes on sidelines is part of National Archives of India, gifted by Sukhdev family. Sukhdev, along with Bejoy Kumar Sinha and Bhagwati Charan-Vohra was ideological comrade of Bhagat Singh and Mathura Das Thapar in his memoirs of Sukhdev, had mentioned the titles of books which both Bhagat Singh and Sukhdev had read and discussed for hours, sometimes for whole of the nights! In their political organization-Hindustan Socialist Republican Association/Army (HSRA), while Bhagat Singh was coordinator of all states, Sukhdev was convenor of Punjab state. Both Bhagat Singh and Sukhdev were college mates in National College Lahore. Sukhdev's name figures nowhere in Saunders assassination case, known as second Lahore Conspiracy case, the first one being Ghadar Party case, in which Kartar Singh Sarabha and six others were executed. Sukhdev being



trapped in usual police lies based investigation of always saying that other accused have already told the whole story, had made a statement, but still being careful by not mentioning the party shelters. He was neither part of assassination, in which Bhagat Singh, Rajguru and Jai Gopal had taken part and Chandershekhar Azad had overseen the whole operation. Yet he owned every part of assassination plan and preferred to die with his comrades rather than saving his life. The farcical and sham part of trial and colonial justice was death sentence for Sukhdev, which could not have been given in any judicial system, as A G Noorani in his classic book-The Trial of Bhagat Singh had underlined. There are two letters written by Bhagat Singh to Sukhdev, both are published, but Sukhdev letters to Bhagat Singh have not been found. Both letters deal with philosophical themes of Love and Suicide. While Sukhdev's ideas or perception of Love was somewhat traditional and conservative, Bhagat Singh was more liberal and realist in perception about

* Writer is retired Professor from JNU and is Honorary Advisor to Bhagat Singh Archives and Resource Centre, New Delhi. Editor of The Bhagat Singh Reader. Prof.chaman@gmail.com , Mobile/Whatsapp/Signal 91-98687-74820 H. No 2690, Urban Estate, Phase-II, PATIALA (Punjab)-147002



love. He tells Sukhdev in his letter that Love is a feeling which can give a great strength to revolutionaries, by giving an example of Italian revolutionary Mazzini-In the context of discussing someone's character, one thing that is worth thinking about is if love has ever proved to be helpful to any person. Let me answer this today – yes, it did – for Mazzini. You

put an end to one's life, to escape some suffering – that is cowardice. I wish to tell you that it is hardship that make a person complete.

Rajguru born on 24th August 1908 in village Khed, now renamed as Rajguru Nagar near Pune, was jolly fellow and wanted to be ahead of Bhagat Singh in everything. He was angry at not being sent to Central Assembly for throwing bomb. He walked from his village to Benaras where he got admission in Sanskrit school and joined HRA. Bhagat Singh was supposed to shoot Scott in front of SSP office in Lahore, while Jai Gopal was to give signal of SSP coming out of the office. While Jai Gopal made mistake in identifying Scott and gave signal to Saunders as Scott, who was Deputy SP, Rajguru impulsively shot Saunders, while Bhagat Singh could recognise that it was not Scott and shouted to Chandershekhar Azad that-the person was not Scott, but before he could even complete the sentence, Rajguru had shot Saunders, which compelled Bhagat Singh also to shoot further. At the gallows also it was Rajguru, who first of all himself got the rope put into his neck to be hanged.

With such tales of bravery the three martyrs have got such status of supreme martyrs and a permanent source of inspiration for the generations to come and presently to the Indian farmers movement, who have got such strength from their sacrifice that they are continuing their movement for their rights even after sacrificing 250+ farmer lives and four months of continuing dharna, with no end in sight in near future. Perhaps Govt. should realise what Bhagat Singh had said-Individuals can be crushed but not the ideas, which have longer life than individuals. Bhagat Singh, Rajguru and Sukhdev had been crushed as individuals by British colonialists, but their ideas find fragrance every now and then, presently in Indian farmer's movement. Whether present Govt. proves stronger than even British colonial Govt. in crushing Bhagat Singh ideas too, that will be known with the fate of farmer's movement. Meanwhile country pays salute to the three supreme martyrs on 91st year of their sacrifice!

must surely have read that he was not able to endure the first unsuccessful rebellion, the grief of a heart-wrenching failure, and the memory of martyred comrades. He could have either gone mad or committed suicide, but with a letter from his beloved, he became not only as strong as the others, but stronger than everybody else. 5th April 1929 letter to Sukhdev. Both friends had changed their opinions in jail times. Sukhdev who despised the idea of Suicide outside, not tolerating sufferings of jail, became votary of suicide in jail, while Bhagat Singh outside jail was more sympathetic to a man who committed suicide due to sufferings in life. In September 1930 letter, few days before the death sentence to all three was announced, inside jail itself, Bhagat Singh rebuked Sukhdev on thinking about suicide- those of us who are certain to get the death sentence should wait patiently for the day when this sentence would be pronounced, after which they will be hanged. Even that death will be beautiful, but to commit suicide, to

Farmers Reliving Bhagat Singh Spirit after 90 years of Martyrdom

Year 1907 was a historic year. It was on 22nd March 1907, that at a huge gathering of farmers in Lyallpur (Now named Faisalabad) Lala Banke Dayal, editor of Jhang Syal recited his classic poem Pagdi Sambhal Jatta in Punjabi, which became synonymous with peasant struggle of that year, which was led by Bharat Mata society or its Urdu synonym Mohabane Watan with its leader Sardar Ajit Singh, uncle of Bhagat Singh, in command. Like 2020 farmers movement, peasant struggle of 1907 was against three anti-farmer black laws enacted by then British colonial government, one of which was new colonization bill. The poem was proscribed and the poet was jailed for writing and reciting the poem! Ajit Singh along with Lala Lajpat Rai was exiled to Mandalay in Burma for six months, which was part of India then. Both were released in November 1907, but before that peasants had won in getting all three laws rescinded from a colonial government. Bhagat Singh was born on 28th September that very year. Ajit Singh was honored by Bal Gangadhar Tilak in 1907 Surat Congress with a Taj as King of peasants. However Ajit Singh got exiled by 1909 from India and could return in very bad health condition, after 38 years, just six months before independence in 1947, with the efforts of then interim Prime Minister Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru. Ajit Singh breathed his last on the dawn of independence around 3.30 pm at Dalhousie, after listening to Prime Minister Nehru speech Trust with Destiny in midnight function at Central Assembly (Now Parliament) New Delhi.

After 114 years the same Pagdi Sambhal Jatta reverberates in much more wider and massive farmer's movement at three borders of Delhi-Tikri, Singhu and Ghazipur since nearly four months now. And along with Ajit Singh, the farmers are now armed with much more advanced thought of Bhagat Singh. It was Bhagat Singh, who carried forward the legacy of his uncle and many other revolutionary movements like Ghadar party movement of 1913-

15 and created much advanced political organizations like Naujwan Bharat Sabha (NBS), Punjab Students Union (PSU) and Hindustan Socialist Republican Association/Army (HSRA). HSRA was an ideologically advanced form of its earlier avatar Hindustan Republican Association/Army (HRA), which was formed by Shachindernath Sanyal by organizing revolutionaries from, all over India. HRA had distributed a leaflet The Revolutionary on 1st January 1925 all over India and had later committed Kakori rail dacoity led by Chander Shekhar Azad on 9th August 1925. Ram Praad Bismil, Ashfaqulla Khan, Roshan Singh and Rajender-Lahiri were executed in this case in December 1927. Bhagat Singh was part of HRA, but with continuous study of revolutionary movement's world over, he reached at the conclusion that dacoities or selective killings of British officials like terrorist actions will lead the revolutionary freedom movement to a dead end. So with his advanced ideological orientation inspired by Soviet Socialist revolution led by Lenin in 1917, he along with his comrades reached at the conclusion that Indian people's liberation from British and Indian exploitative feudal classes lie in building socialism in the country after overthrowing British regime through revolutionary means. But the revolutionary means for Bhagat Singh and his comrades meant in practical terms- organizing youth, students, peasants and workers through mass organizations and building a radical anti-colonial movement.

For this purpose, they held a historic meeting of HRA at Ferozeshah Kotla grounds of Delhi on 8&9th September 1928 and rechristened HRA as HSRA, adding Socialist word as perspective and goal of their revolution. When a British judge presiding over in Assembly bomb case in 1929 had asked Bhagat Singh in a courtroom about the meaning of slogan In-qlab Zindabad, which they shouted so loudly and later when Ramanand-Chatterjee, editor of Modern Review

from Calcutta, made a fun of In-qlab Zindabad slogan in his journal- to both Bhagat Singh responded that By "Revolution", we mean the ultimate establishment of an order of society in which the sovereignty of the proletariat should be recognized and a world Federation should redeem humanity from the bondage of capitalism and misery of imperial wars.

This is our ideal. (The Bhagat Singh Reader, ed. Chaman Lal Page 115). In a message to student conference in Lahore, presided over by Netaji Subhash Bose on 19th October 1929, Bhagat Singh said-The youth will have to spread this revolutionary message to the far corner of the country. They have to awaken crores of slum-dwellers of the industrial areas and villagers living in worn-out cottages, so that we will be independent and the exploitation of man by man will become impossibility.

Later in his 'Letter to young political workers', penned on 2nd February 1931, few weeks before his execution, Bhagat Singh gave a whole programme of Indian revolution, in which he focused on peasants and workers as main driving force of revolution and social change. But he warns political workers organizing them, not to take them lightly or ideally. They are hard realists as Bhagat Singh writes-Anyway, we were discussing the forces on which you can depend for a revolution. But if you say that you will approach the peasants and labourers to enlist their active support, let me tell you that they are not going to be fooled by any sentimental talk.

They ask you quite candidly: what are they going to gain by your revolution for which you demand their sacrifices, what difference does it make to them whether Lord Reading is the head of the Indian government or Sir Purshotamdas Thakordas? What difference for a peasant if Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru replaces Lord Irwin! It is useless to appeal to his national sentiment. You can't "use" him for your purpose; you shall have to mean seri-

ously and to make him understand that the revolution is going to be his and for his good. The revolution of the proletariat and for the proletariat.

This is the spirit, which present farmers movement has imbibed and they are hard realist in their approach in running their movement for months now. They have understood the realistic strategy of conducting absolutely peaceful struggle and they see no difference in British colonial rulers or Indian exploitative rulers, they are concerned about their rights while conducting the negotiations endlessly.

They have understood that they are fighting against an exploitative system, controlled by the corporate masters in neo-liberal regime. And they also know that their struggle is linked to the worldwide movements of exploited people, mostly peasantry at the moment. Bhagat Singh would have been happy in building such a movement of farmers as he outlined in his 2nd February 1931 classic document, which was not allowed to him by British colonial regime, who was far sighted in sensing the danger of his ideas as spelled out and they stopped him by physical eliminating him on 23rd March 1931, along with Sukhdev and Rajguru, in a thoroughly farcical trial.

And yet as Bhagat Singh visualised that fragrance of his ideas will percolate among people and the ideas cannot be crushed, though individuals can be! So with the fragrance and indomitable spirit of Bhagat Singh's ideas, Indian farmers are running one of the world's biggest historic struggles, which morally they have already won by sacrificing more than 250 lives in peaceful self-sacrificing manner and touching the conscience of humanity world over!

* **Writer is retired Professor from JNU and is Honorary Advisor to Bhagat Singh Archives and Resource Centre, New Delhi.**

Editor of The Bhagat Singh Reader.
Prof.chaman@gmail.com
Mobile/Whatsapp/Signal
91-98687-74820
H. No 2690, Urban Estate, Phase-II, PATIALA (Punjab)-147002

Shaheed Bhagat Singh: A Great Revolutionary and an Erudite Philosopher

(Continue from page 1)

1929, Bhagat Singh and Rajguru were shifted to Lahore and Mianwali jails respectively for the trial of Lahore conspiracy case. During his incarceration in Lahore, Bhagat Singh, along with his other jailed revolutionary associates, underwent long hunger strikes for almost five months one after the other. It was also during this slightly less than two years of period of incarceration, Bhagat Singh wrote many letters to his family, friends, and officials of the jail and courts. 'Why I am an Atheist', 'Jail Notebook', 'Letter in the name of Young Activists' were among the few brilliant texts penned by him in the jail at Lahore where he finally embraced martyrdom along with his co-prisoner revolutionaries Rajguru and Sukhdev.

Bhagat Singh, as mentioned above, had already become a house-hold name throughout the country for his leading roles in the Lahore Conspiracy case and later the Central Legislative Assembly Bomb case, and his extraordinary brilliant writings. His popularity can be gauged from two editorial dedi-

cated to his martyrdom by two leading contemporary thinkers: Periyar E.V. Ramasami in his Tamil Weekly *Kudi Arasu* on March 29, 1931 and Dr. B.R. Ambedkar in his *Janata* newspaper on April 13, 1931, entitled "Three Victims". In Punjab the news of the hanging of Bhagat Singh, Rajguru and Sukhdev spread like a wild fire. Despite all the efforts of the British administration, thousands of people, mesmerised by his egalitarian vision for the independent India and the rare courage with which he confronted ruthless oppression during his incarcerations, reached the banks of Sutlej during the night of March 23, 1923 and performed the last rites of the remains of their beloved heroes with soulful gratitude and unspeakable emotions. After his martyrdom, people of Punjab in general and rest of the country in India made Bhagat Singh an integral part of their folk. A large number of prose, poetry, novels and academic research articles and books highlighting varied dimensions of his life, mission and philosophy are a living testimony to his being a great revolutionary and an erudite philosopher. Among

the latest international peer reviewed published research papers mentioned can be made of: Kama Maclean, "The History of a Legend: Accounting for Popular Histories of Revolutionary Nationalism in India," *Modern Asian Studies*, published online by Cambridge University Press, 16 February 2012; and Neeti Nair, "Bhagat Singh as 'Satyagrahi': The Limits to Non-violence in Late Colonial India," *Modern Asian Studies*, published online by Cambridge University Press, 01 May 2009. Chris Moffat's *India's Revolutionary Inheritance: Politics and the Promise of Bhagat Singh*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019 is one of the recently seminal books on Bhagat Singh and his philosophy and praxis.

In 2018, Delhi Government established a Bhagat Singh Archives and Resource Centre. With its rich collection of books, rare documents, journals, and archival material, including the socialist revolutionary jail records, this centre has evolved into the first of its kind Bhagat Singh Archives and Resource Centre in the country. The sole spirit behind

this great endeavour is Chaman Lal, a retired academic from Jawaharlal Nehru University and former member of Senate and Dean (Languages Faculty) of Panjab University, Chandigarh.

He has been continuously researching on the life, struggle and writings of Shaheed Bhagat Singh for the last many decades, and has collected from India, Pakistan and many other countries lots of literature and rare references in that regard. Currently, an advisor at the centre, Chaman Lal is said to have donated 2000 books on Bhagat Singh in various Indian languages (Mohammad Ibrar, "Know All About Bhagat Singh Struggle in His Very Own Corner," Times of India, "March 23, 2021). Such efforts will certainly help us to understand the context and the contributions of our great revolutionaries who sacrificed their precious lives for the freedom of the mother land and left behind a rich treasure of their experiences and meticulously articulated philosophical narratives.

Valuing Water

Water Day is celebrated around the world on March 22 every year when people are made aware of the importance of the water through seminars, print and social media. This day was first formally proposed at the United Nations Conference (Agenda 21) in 1992 on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. In 1993, the first World Water day was observed. Every year since then, the United Nations has chosen a theme related to water for this day. Throughout the year the UN inspired all the countries of the world to achieve that goal. In 1994, the theme was 'Caring for Our Water Resources is Everybody's Business'. This year's theme is 'Valuing Water'. Looking at the themes of World Water Day from the beginning till 2021, the theme was related to serious water problems although how seriously the government of each country works on that theme, we can easily guess from the current problems related to water.

The theme of World Water Day in 2019 was 'Leaving No One Behind' which means that no one in the world should not have access to safe drinking water because still a large portion of the world's population is deprived of the natural gift of clean drinking water. According to a 2018 report of 'NITI Aayog of India' 37.7 million people fall prey to diseases and 1.5 million children die annually from diarrhoea from drinking contaminated water in the country. The main theme of last year (2020) was 'Water and Climate Change'. Later, with the onset of COVID-19 Pandemic, 'Hand Washing and Hygiene' were added. This was a very important theme as per the need of hour as the rapid changes in the weather condition are having a great impact on the climatic cycle of each country of the world. According to NOAA and European Union Agencies, January of 2020 saw a rise in temperature of 3 degree Celsius in the European countries (known for their cold weather) and 6 degree Celsius above the average of 1981-2010 in the belt from Norway to Russia. In India, monsoons arrive untimely sometimes early and sometimes later from their normal dates due to climate change causing floods and droughts in the country. Under the impact of climate change, in 2019 the monsoons arrived in India one week later than the normal date, then it continued to rain for 39 days more than the stipulated period, which was about 10 per cent more than the average of 1961-2010. Rainfall in the North-Eastern states of the country has been below average in recent years. These states were once wettest places in the world.

2021's theme is 'Valuing Water'. Water is a precious gift from nature. Water is the second most important abiotic component after air for all types of living being on the earth. No life can be imagined without water. Our forefathers understood the importance of water, that's why they worshipped and respected the natural resources. All of our religious books

also use revered words for natural resources such as 'Pawan Devta', 'Jal Devta', 'Dharti Mata'. Guru Nanak had given these natural resources the status of Guru, Father, Mother in the 15th century, 'Pawan Guru Pani Pita Mata Dharti Mahat'. Explaining the importance of water in Gurbani, it is written that, 'Pehla Pani Jeo Hai Jit Harya Sab Koi' means that water is a life giving natural resource, with which life runs and the life of all living organisms (plants, animals) depends on it. Our great-great grandfathers knew the importance of natural resources. These resources can be saved, not created. Alas! Most of the countries in the world, including India, are in a blind race for economic growth and have forgotten to conserve these natural resources. The theme 'Valuing Water' of the World Water Day of 2021 is very important and meaningful. It can be very useful for us to learn from the rich heritage of our forefathers who have



guided us to lead a healthy life by conserving natural resources wisely.

Every year during the summer months, many Indian cities experience water shortages. In 2019, Chennai was hit hard by water shortage. In 2014, a report released by Boston-based Charitable Environment Organisation of U.S.A., named 20 cities in the world that would suffer from drinking water shortages in the near future. Cape Town of South Africa was on the top of the list in the report, where in April 2018, Zero Day was just around the corner. Out of these 20 cities, 10 were from India. Second only to Cape Town was the Indian city of Bengaluru. In this regard, in 2018 'NITI Aayog' had also forecasted that 21 cities of India would run out of groundwater in 2020 and as a result they will be dependent on sources of other places for drinking water. By 2030, 40 per cent of the Indian population will not have access to drinking water. Around 600 million Indian face high to extreme water stress and about 2 lakh people every year or 548 every day die due to inadequate access to safe water. Doctors are repeatedly advising people to wash their hands to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in 2020, but what about those who do not have access to clean drinking water? What water should they use to wash their hands to prevent the spread of COVID-19!

It is important to know why

there is a shortage of drinking water in India and people are dying of water diseases. Our country lacks water resources and we do not know how to use it wisely. India is home to 18 per cent of the world's population and we have only 4 per cent of the potable water. On an average, 49,481 babies are born and 14,475 die every day in India. This adds up to more than 35,000 new people every day. This shows that our population is growing rapidly, which will require more water in future. In addition to this, other causes of water scarcity in the country include increasing urbanisation, indiscriminate deforestation, dumping of industrial effluent and sewage in the water bodies, encroachment of riverbeds, floodplains, lakes and wetlands, huge number of dams on rivers and wrong cropping patterns in the name of economic growth.

Our urban population has increased from 25.85 million (1901) to

cropping patterns adopted to meet the food shortage are also responsible for the declining groundwater level.

A 2018 'NITI Aayog' report has highlighted a very disturbing fact that 70 per cent of the country's freshwater resources have been polluted. The United Nations has ranked India at 120th amongst 122 countries in the Water Quality Index. The report also revealed that more than 60 per cent of the country's sewage and industrial waste is discharged into rivers and streams without treatment. This is increasingly polluting the country's river water. The Ganges and Yamuna, considered to be the holiest rivers in the country carry polluted sewage infused water to over a hundred cities everyday. Although the Union Government has spent crores of rupees on cleaning of the Ganges, so far there has been no difference in the quality of potable water. The cleansing of the Yamuna river is first and the foremost necessity for the cleaning of the Ganges river because the Yamuna river is the main tributary of the Ganges river. The tragedy of the Yamuna river is that it passes through the country's capital 'Delhi' from where all the drains of the city discharge sewage into it. Its course in Delhi is only 21 kms, which contributes 2 per cent of the total length of the Yamuna river. Delhi's wastewater has turned the Yamuna river into a sewer and thus polluting the Ganges river too. When the river Yamuna enters New Delhi from Wazirabad, it is full of clear water. That is why this water is supplied to one-third of the population of Delhi from Wazirabad.

We pollute the clean water of the rivers not only by discharging the polluted water into them but also by constructing innumerable dams on the rivers to meet the needs of irrigation, electricity and drinking water in which much of the river water is stored. As a result, the river appears to flow through the plains without water or with very little water. It affects the groundwater of riverside villages and towns, causing them to suffer droughts in the summer and floods during the rainy season. To protect these areas from droughts and floods, at least 20 per cent of water should be released in rivers on normal days and 30 per cent on rainy days.

Along with rivers, the area under lakes, ponds and wetlands is also declining. The city of Chennai in Tamil Nadu faced a severe water shortage in 2019 due to unplanned development and encroachment of water bodies. At the beginning of the 20th century there were two rivers, one canal and 60 large lakes/ponds in the city, of which only 26 lakes/ponds remain. An airport has been built on a riverbed and a mass transit has been set up over most of the 6,000 hectares

(Contd. on next page)



Dr. Gurinder Kaur
Professor, Department of Geography,
Punjab University, Patiala.
001-408-493-9776

Facilitating Dalit Enterprises – SCEEF

Some years ago, Dalit business enthusiasts of Punjab with the support and encouragement of RSS, launched a facilitating and advisory outfit named - Scheduled Caste Entrepreneur Empowerment Forum - SCEEF with a motive to initiate SC entrepreneurs to start their own businesses rather than hankering after jobs. The idea was to make them aware of the government plans and schemes to provide finances and necessary technical back up to help dalit business men to start their own businesses both in manufacturing and trading. It was thought that SCEEF would interact with the governmental agencies like NSIC, SC Hub, MSME, various export promotion agencies, agencies dealing with government procurement among others and facilitate 'Start Ups' initiated by SCs. SCEEF, it was a matter of satisfaction, did some good work to begin with but soon developed some lethargy and lost direction. I am was one of the founders of SCEEF and later worked with them as Advisor/Patron. Rajesh Bagha, Former Chairman of Punjab SC Commission and BJP leader, Social Activist Jiwan Singh of LIC, RSS Activists Dr. Varinder Garg and Banbeer Singh among others were instrumental in the exercise to establish SCEEF. I am not formally affiliated either with RSS or BJP. But I try to be open minded to associate and work with anyone for the empowerment of the weaker sections of the society particularly of the dalit communities. Sometimes some of my friends suspect my motivation in this regard but I take this in stride. In the process, of late, I mentioned to Rajesh Bagha that we should energize SCEEF for the benefit of our SC brethren as it would also serve their political agenda by engaging with the SC communities. Their bosses in the BJP and RSS, I

think, are not oblivious of the fact that apolitical people like me are sure to face stiff opposition and criticism in dalit communities owing to historical reasons and ground realities. But as one who believes in 'Samrasta' and cohesiveness in the society, I volunteer to accept the challenge in the larger interests of the community and the society at large.

With this background, Rajesh Bagha and his associates arranged a meeting of SCEEF at Seva Dham in Chandigarh on March 18 and invited me to the meeting. I was reluctant to accept the invitation but Rajesh was keen to see me there and I relented. One of the participants in the meeting from Amritsar, Dr. Jatinder Kumar and his associate Sameer Pandit picked me up on the way from Jalandhar for the meeting in Chandigarh. It was a well attended meeting by about 100 participants from all over Punjab. The exercise turned out to be a good attempt to catch up with the situation and revive the business and economic aspects of the SCEEF with the underlying current of political and social ambitions of Rajesh Bagha and others like Former Chief Parliamentary Secretary Avinash Chander, Paramjit Singh Kainth of National SCs Alliance, Rohit Sonkar of Dalit Helpline, Jai Singh Phillore, inter alia. RSS Activist and OSD to Union Minister of Health, Dr. Varinder Garg, based in Chandigarh, also participated in the meeting.

Rajesh Bagha set the ball in motion by his opening remarks underlying the need to activate the SCEEF and address the issue of Post-Matric Scholarship to SC students. Paramjit Kainth spoke about their struggle for the release of held up degrees and scholarships of SC students and asserted that SCs should stand up and

fight for their due space in the administrative and governance structures. He also added that we should not shy away from RSS,

if they were doing something good for the marginalized segments of the society. Avinash Chander spoke with conviction and focused on the need to attract our youth to join businesses. He fully supported SCEEF's agenda to facilitate sourcing of much needed finances from different government agencies under existing plans. He referred to Guru Ravidass Temple at Tughlakabad in Delhi and demanded BJP and RSS should see to it that a grand temple was built at the historic site to assuage the ruffled feelings of dalit communities. Social Activist Jai Singh Phillaur felt that it was utmost necessary to do our best to bring about cohesiveness in the society by economic and social integration. Dr. Varinder Garg in his brief intervention said that it was time to realize the mission of Guru Ravidass and Babasaheb Ambedkar by empowering the weaker sections of the society.

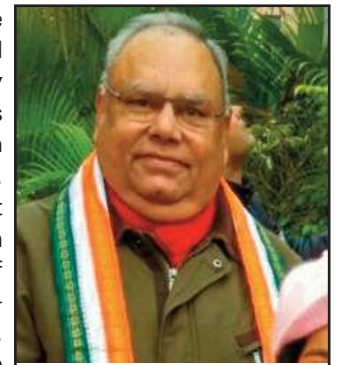
Some of the speakers appreciated the BJP mind to make a dalit CM of Punjab, with almost 40% dalit population, as no other party did it so far. I was asked to close the meeting by summing up the proceedings. I underlined the importance of economic well-being alongside the social empowerment of the community and appreciated the endeavors of SCEEF in this regard. As regards the scholarship issue, I suggested that the blame game between the governments and the colleges for timely release of money may be ended by some sort of arrangements like ESCROW account for timely payments. I also referred to the CM's position in Punjab and added that nobody could make anybody CM. It has

to be earned and grabbed by own one's own strength. We must learn from the saga of Babu Jagjivan Ram. There would, always, be many "Charan Singhs" sitting in

the wings to disturb the applecart. Referring to the role and importance of RSS as one of the biggest organizations of the world in bringing about 'Samrasta' in the society,

I urged the bosses in the RSS to ensure that much needed visibility in their actions and involvement with the matters of empowerment of dalits was introduced to engage with the community to address their fears, doubts and concerns and particularly mentioned the two issues on which positive action would send a right message as a 'symbolic value' – i) Guru Ravidass Temple at Tughlakabad in Delhi which was earlier referred to by Avinash Chander and ii) the proposal on April 14, birth anniversary of Babasaheb Ambedkar, to be declared as International Day of Equality which is resting with the Ministry of External Affairs of India since June, 2015. Concluding the remarks, I added that the catchword for success of dalit communities rested with the dictum: "United we stand and Divided we fall"

तू पहले बात फरि बात का अंदाज़ पैदा कर ;
फरि दुनिया में तुझे कोई नज़र अंदाज़ कर नहीं सकता



Ramesh Chander
Ambassador - I.F.S. (Retired)
91-99885-10940

Valuing Water

(Continue from page 5)

of wetlands. In addition, around 71 per cent of Mumbai's wetlands were depleted between 1970 and 2014. In Srinagar, 88 per cent of Wular Lake and 50 per cent of Dal Lake areas have declined in the last one century.

The theme of this year's world water day is to educate the Centre and State Governments how to take care of all these water resources existing in the country. Cities should not be allowed to discharge their sewage and industrial waste in the rivers. Although in 2017, the Uttarakhand High Court had passed a landmark decision recognis-

ing the Ganges and the Yamuna rivers living entities, whether it has been implemented needs to be seriously considered. The Union Government should not only prohibit the dumping of any kind of waste in any water body but also impose penalties as well as fines. The wastewater discharged into the rivers from big and small cities must be stopped without wasting time and it would be better if it is started from the river Yamuna in Delhi. By doing so, the water of rivers, lakes and the like can be used for drinking as before. With the purification of river water, the groundwater level in the areas around the rivers

will be purified and its level will also increase. Minimum water discharge in the rivers should also be ensured. Construction on areas of lakes, ponds and rivers must be prohibited by law. Cropping patterns should also be decided keeping in view the agro-climatic conditions of different areas of the country. Understanding the importance of water, not a drop of water should be wasted. Efforts should be made at national, state and local levels. The local administration should make major arrangements for the accumulation of rainwater so that the daily water needs of the local population can be easily

met by recharging the groundwater. Valuing water is not the responsibility of governments alone, it is also a matter of responsibility of every individual living in the country. Every human being should realise that one drop of wasted water is an irreparable loss. Every person should make arrangements for storing rainwater in their houses. Efforts should also be made at an international level to reduce the greenhouse gas emissions in order to avoid the onslaught of natural disasters caused by climate change and to overcome problems such as droughts and water shortages.



Dr. Paramjit S Takhar, MD

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