

Bhagat Singh's Role Model — KARTAR SINGH SARABHA

Malwinder Jit Singh Waraich*

Remembers Bhagat Singh's Mother

On Bhagat Singh's arrest a photograph of Shaheed (Martyr) Kartar Singh Sarabha was recovered from him. He always carried this photo in his pocket. Very often Bhagat Singh would show me that photograph and say, "Dear mother, this is my Hero, Friend and Companion." Shahid Kartar Singh was one of the youngest martyrs of 1914-15 Ghadr Movement. While at home Bhagat Singh used to hum this Punjabi couplet:

*Sewa desh di jindriye bari aukhi,
galan karnian dher sukhalian ne.
Jinhan desh sewa wich pair paya,
unhan lakh Musibtan jhalian ne.*

[Hard is the path of patriotism, easy enough uttering of speeches.

Those who follow the path of service of Motherland, have to bear countless torments.]

Then he would tell that these were the favourite lines of Kartar Singh Sarabha.¹

Wrote Bhagat Singh²

A staunch devotee of *Ran Chandi* the goddess of war, rebel Kartar Singh was not even 20 years of age when he had laid down his life at the altar of liberation. He appeared on the scene like a tornado, attempted to stir the sleeping goddess of wars, ignited the revolt, and finally offered his life to the very same fire. Who was he? Where did he descend from? And wherefore did he vanish? We are unable to fathom it all. One marvels at how someone has been able to accomplish such gigantic deeds at such a raw age. Such audacity, self-confidence, sense of sacrifice, intensity, and dedication is rare indeed. There are very few who could be termed as real revolutionaries in India. Sh. Kartar Singh heads the list of these few true revolutionaries. Rebellion ran through his veins and his singular ideal, desire, and hope was this rebellion. He lived and died for the same.

Tribunal's Judgement

Kartar Singh, son of Mangal Singh Jat, of Saraba, Police Station Rai Kot, District Ludhiana. (D.o.B. 24.05.1896)

This accused, who pleaded "Not guilty" to the charges framed against him (page 545), has given his age as 18.5 years; but he is certainly older than that and probably over 20 years age. In spite of his age, he is one of the most important of these 61 accused; and has the largest dossier of them all. (Underlined by Shahid Bhagat Singh, in the original documents) There is practically no department of his conspiracy in America, on the voyage, and in India in which this accused has not played his part. Throughout the trial he declined to have questions put by counsel; or (with the exception of one or two questions) to cross-examine himself; though he made two lengthy statements (pages 443 and 480). He admitted having taken part in the Sahnewal dacoity of January 23rd (in the course of which Khushi Ram was murdered); and freely admitted his association with Har Dyal in America and his position on the "Ghadar Press" at San Francisco.³

He was born at village Saraba (District Ludhiana) in 1896 (on 24th May — Ed.). The only son of his parents; he was brought up with immense love and care. Having lost his father at a very tender age, his grandfather brought him up with best efforts. His father's name was Sardar Mangal Singh; one of his uncles was a police sub-inspector in the United Province and another uncle was a high official in the forest department in Orissa. After his initial education at the village school, Kartar Singh took admission in Khalsa High School, Ludhiana. Academically he was an average

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student. Mighty mischievous, he would play pranks on others and was termed as 'Aflatoon' (plato) by his classmates. He was loved by everyone, had a separate group at school and was a leading sportsperson. He possessed all the qualities of a leader. After studying up to class 9th, he left for Orissa to be with his uncle. Having passed his matriculation examination there and joined college. It was the year 1910-11. He got a chance to expand his horizons by reading books much beyond the squeezed school curriculum. Those were the days of the freedom movement and that atmosphere further intensified his sentiments of patriotism and freedom.

During that period (since 1908) whenever any Indian landed in America, the Immigration Department officer confronted him with numerous complex and puzzling questions which were deliberately devised to justify his rejection, thereby causing such a person a loss of thousands of rupees (each) forcing them to return frustrated, humiliated. They were unable to go back to their homes fearing loss of face, and having disposed of their ancestral properties. Most of them being from farming community, the lacked any other skill either.

In fact this was one of the issues which provoked Indians there to organise themselves for revolt.⁴

He desired to go to the USA. The family was supportive of his desire and sent him there. In 1912, after landing at the San Francisco port, the immigration authorities quarantined him for special questioning. On being questioned by the officer he replied, "I have come here for studies."

Officer said, "Didn't you find any place to study in India."

He answered, "I have come for higher studies and intend to take admission in the University of California for that purpose."

"And if you are denied permission to land?"

To this Kartar Singh replied instantly saying, "I would consider that a grave injustice. If hurdles are created in the path of students, the progress of the world would stop. Who knows the education here might empower me to accomplish some great deed for the good of the world. In case I am disallowed to disembark, won't the world suffer due to the lack of that great deed?"

Impressed with this answer, the officer allowed him to disembark.

Actual Account of the Interview

Department of Commerce and Labor IMMIGRATION SERVICE SAN FRANCISCO, CAL.

No. 22.

A meeting of a
BOARD OF SPECIAL INQUIRY
ANGEL ISLAND STATION
composed of
July 31, 1912

In the matter of
the application of
Kartar Singh, (Hindoo).
L.P.C.

Ex. S.S. Siberia, July 28, 1912.
For admission to the
UNITED STATES

Inspector W.N. Swasey, Chrm.
Inspector A.B. Morgan.
Inspector J.A. Robinson.
Stenographer E.A. Carroll.
Interpreter Hari Singh.

Medical certificate none.
Held for SPECIAL INQUIRY by Inspector Swasey as L.P.C.
Alien swrn. By Chrm:

Data from manifest: by alien: My name is Kartar Siggh, age 17; single; occupation, farmer; can read and write English; subject of England, East Indian race; last permanent residence, Saraba, Punjab District, India; nearest relative in India, is my grandfather, Badaran Singh, living at Pakhall, Ludhiana Dist.; destination, San Francisco.

- Q. Who paid your passage? A. My grandfather.
Q. How much money have you? A. Nearly \$ 100.
Q. Were you ever in U.S. before? A. No.
Q. Have you any relatives or friends here? A. No.
Q. What do you expect to do here? A. I will study here.
Q. Where will you study here? A. At the Berkeley University.
Q. How will you be supported while in U.S.
A. By my grandfather; he will send me the money.
Q. What is his business? A. He is a farmer; he has 300 acres of land.

Q. Have you any brothers? A. No; I am the only child.
 Q. How long have you lived with your grandfather? A. My father has been dead 11 years ago; my mother died nearly four years ago.
 Q. Where did you learn to talk English? A. In the mission high school in Ludiana district.
 Q. How long did you go to school there? A. Nearly four years and I was five years in my village school.
 Inspr. Robinson: Q. Do you intend to do anything but study? A. No; my grandfather will send me money every month.
 Q. In what amount? A. Nearly \$ 40. a month.
 Q. What will be your address in Berkeley? A. I can't tell yet.
 Inspr. Morgan: Q. Will you work in this country? A. No.
 Q. How long will you remain in U.S.? A. Nearly five years.
 Q. What course will you pursue in the university?
 A. Electrical engineering.
 Q. \$ 40. is but a small amount of money a month to live on, is it not?
 A. I can get more than \$ 40.
 Q. Will he send you more money if you need it? A. Yes.
 Chairman: It is the unanimous opinion of the board that the alien be admitted.
 I certify that the foregoing is a true transcript of the case.

Sd/-
 Stenographer.⁵

His sensitive soul suffered deep wounds at each and every step after his landing in a free nation. He was maddened at hearing phrases like “damn hindoo” and “black coolie” from the haughty white-Americans. The lack of respect for his nation by the Americans disturbed him a great deal. On reaching his abode, the images of an enslaved, shackled, insulted, helpless, impotent India would flash before his eyes. That sensitive in him began to harden, and the resolve to dedicate his life for the freedom of the nation got stronger all this while. How could we comprehend the state of his heart? Now, it was impossible for him to sit still; that won't do anymore. How would the country gain independence — this was the main challenge before him. And, before giving much thought, he started organizing Indian workers there instilling love for freedom in them. He would spend hours with each individual, impressing upon them the sentiment that death is many a time preferable to the humiliating life of a slave. After the commencement of this task, many others joined him and in May 1912, a meeting was organised by these six persons who pledged to sacrifice their body and soul for securing freedom for the nation. In the meanwhile, Gyani Bhagwan Singh, an exiled patriot from Punjab too reached there. Meetings were being held at a hectic pace, where ideas were being disseminated, and groundwork prepared.

Thereafter, the need for a paper for propaganda purposes was felt. A newspaper named “Ghdar” was launched. The first edition was published in November 1913, and our hero Kartar Singh was a member of the editorial board. He would write fervently and print it himself on the hand-press. Kartar Singh was a zealously rebellious young man. When exhausted by his work at the hand-press, he would sing this Punjabi song:

*Sewa desh di jindriye bari aukhi,
 galan karnian dher sukhalian ne.
 Jinhan desh sewa wich pair paya,
 unhan lakh Musibtan jhalian ne.*

[Hard is the path of patriotism, easy enough uttering of speeches.

Those who follow the path of service of Motherland, have to bear countless torments.]

Kartar Singh's style of hard work was infectious. Despite that he would always have a cheerful disposition which motivated others manifold.

Our hero had well considered how freedom would be secured for India, even if no one else had given it much thought. In September 1914, when Komagata Maru ship had to turn back after undergoing indescribable suffering at the hands of brutal white bureaucracy, our hero, along with another revolutionary, Mr. Gupta had flown to Japan. There, they discussed the future strategy at length with Baba Gurdit Singh ji in the city of Kobe.

Baba Sohan Singh Bhakna's Account

“Eventually, by the time Canadian Government’s discriminatory conduct left no option for Komagata Maru to sail back to India on 23rd July 1914, the Ghadr Party leadership had made up its mind to tie up with its leadership, and I (Sohan Singh Bhakna) was tasked this assignment. As per the decision of the party besides a consignment of party publications, we should also provide the ship passengers, arms and ammunition; so 200 pistols and 2000 bullets also were packed. Kartar Singh Sarabha and Bhai Bhagwan Singh were entrusted this job: Ensuring foolproof secrecy they managed to reserve a room in the ship where the consignment was smuggled just one hour before the ship’s departure. I cautiously left party office (hiring a second car after covering some distance) and boarded the ship just 15 minutes before its departure and signalled Kartar Singh to leave.”⁶

At the *Ghadr* press at the Yugantar Ashram, San Francisco, many publications such as *Ghadr* and *Ghadr di Goonj* were printed and distributed. Propaganda was in full swing, and so was enthusiasm. In February 1914 itself, the tricoloured party flag was hoisted at a public meeting in Stockton and pledges were taken in the name of freedom, equality, and fraternity. Amongst the many effective orators in that meeting included young Kartar as well, all the speakers had declared their commitment to hard work and investing every single penny earned by the sweat of their brow towards securing liberation for the country. Soon, the World War broke out. This generated endless happiness and enthusiasm, and they all sang — “Let’s proceed to our country to launch our war/ this is our ultimate compact and command.”

Rebel Kartar vastly publicised the idea of return to India in America and then left USA for India by ‘Nippon Maru’ ship. The ship reached Colombo on Sept. 15-16, 1914. Those days most of the Indians used to get arrested on their return from overseas under Foreigners’ Ingress Ordinance. Only a few could manage to reach home as free men. Kartar Singh was one of them. The work started with tremendous gusto. There was lack of organisation but somehow they managed to overcome it. The Maratha hero Pingle too arrived in December 1914. It was with great efforts that the leaders of Banaras conspiracy Sh. Shachindra Nath Sanyal and Ras Bihari too came down to Punjab. The work began to get fully organised.

Kartar Singh was present everywhere at all times; be it the secret society meeting at Moga; propaganda among students in Lahore colleges; weapons for dacoity; establishing a support base within the sepoy of the Ferozepur cantonment; or carrying weapons to Calcutta (The judges held him and him alone out of hundreds of Ghadrites as ubiquitous⁷ and the same expression was used about his Bhagat, that too for him alone⁸. — Ed.) On learning about the paucity of resources, some of the Ghadrites proposed resorting to dacoities. Many of the revolutionaries were stunned to hear about the dacoity, but he exclaimed that Bhai Parmanand has consented to dacoity and there was no reason to fear. He was entrusted the responsibility of seeking his approval. The next day, without meeting Bhai Parmanand and seeking his specific approval, he informed, “I have asked him. He has consented.”

In his heart of hearts could never tolerate the delay in the preparation for the uprising due to a lack of funds. They had gone to a village named ‘Rabbon’, for dacoity. Kartar was the leader, and the dacoity operation was in full swing. There was an extremely beautiful girl in a house. One of the accomplices cast a bad eye at her and held her hand. Seeing that lusty beast, the girl started screaming. Kartar immediately rushed there and aimed his revolver at the miscreant upon which he dropped his gun. A furious Kartar Singh roared, “Villain, your crime is very serious and you should be put to death. However due to special circumstances I am forced to forgive you. Therefore bow your head at this girl’s feet and seek her forgiveness by saying, ‘Sister, please forgive a sinner like me,’ and seek forgiveness of her mother by falling at her feet too. If both of them forgive you, only then I would let you live; otherwise, I am going to shoot you dead here and now.” That villain complied likewise. Both the women had tears in their eyes, and the mother lovingly addressed Kartar Singh, “Son, how come such a righteous and decent young man like you is participating in this evil deed of dacoity?” Kartar Singh with a lump in his throat, said, “Mother, it is not for the greed of money. We have put our lives on the stake for preparing for a revolt against the English government. We need money for buying weapons. Where else can we get the money? Mother, it is for that noble cause that we have been forced to commit this lowly act.”

It was a heart-rending scene: The mother said, “This girl has to be married off, and money is needed. It would be beneficial if you could leave some.” The entire loot was placed before her, and it was said, “Take as much as you wish.” After keeping some amount, the mother gracefully put the rest in Kartar’s lap and blessed him saying, “I wish you success.” This episode illustrates what a sensitive, pure, and noble being Kartar Singh was, even during his participation in a base act like a dacoity.

Before coming into contact with the Bengal group, he had already planned the attack on the magazine of the Lahore cantonment. Once, he met with an army soldier in a train who was in-charge of the magazine and who promised to give him the keys. On November 25th, he reached there along with a few other daring comrades. However, that soldier had been transferred to some other place a day earlier. This led to the collapse of the entire plan. However, to get disheartened or anxious is not in the genes of such revolutionaries.

The revolt was planned for the month of February. He, along with comrades, went to Agra, Kanpur, Allahabad, Benaras, Lucknow, and Meerut; and tied up plans with the army regiments for the revolt.

Finally that day drew near whose very thought evoked thrills, fondness, and awe. 21st February, 1915, was the day fixed for an all-India revolt. All the plans were underway in accordance with that. However, at the very same time, there was a rat biting away the roots of the tree of their aspirations. They were unaware that the hollow trunk would fall down with a single gust of wind. The suspicion arose 4-5 days prior to the set date. Fearing that the operation would fail because of the treachery of Kirpal, Kartar Singh suggested to Ras Bihari Bose to pre-pone the date to the 19th instead of the 21st of February.

A Participant Ghadrite — Baba Harbhajan Singh’s Account:

During Jan.-Feb. 1915, America returned Ghadrites, such as Kartar Singh Sarabha began visiting Bhai Randhir Singh Ji. His adherents like myself (Harbhajan Singh) too used to listen to whatever he shared with Bhai Sahib. We had been of intimated that the revolt shall break out on 21st February. But then Kartar Singh Sarabha contacted Bhai Sahib on 17th February while our *Jatha* was on its way (on foot) from Narangwal (Bhai Sahib’s village) to Dhandari Kalan (on G.T. Road) while we were on the pathway beyond Gill village. (We had to join an Akhand Path recitation at Dhandari Kalan at night). Kartar Singh had come to intimate the pre-poned date of Ghadr; as 19th February Kartar Singh and Bhai Sahib went into *modus operandi* of our joining the proposed assault on Ferozepur Cantonment on the said date. Accordingly 49-50 members’ *jatha* boarded the train to Ferozepur and Mullanpur railway station in the afternoon arriving at Ferozepur in the evening where Kartar Singh was there to receive us. Following him we reached the rendezvous, where all the participants were to assemble, which was situated in the vicinity of the firing range, a zone wild bushes all around.”⁹

Role of Bhai Randhir Singh — according to the Tribunal

We are ready to say what we can in his favour; but it only amounts to this, that the idea of the Ferozepore raid did not originate in his brain. He and his party went there more or less under the orders of Kartar Singh of Soraba; but his readiness to comply with orders from *Ghadr* leaders is shown by the fact that he, a man of 38 years of age, was prepared to accept his instructions from a young man (almost a youth) like Kartar Singh of Soraba.¹⁰ (What happened later is now part of history. — Ed.)

Kirpal Singh got wind of the new plan as well. A single villain’s existence led to such a tragic end to the great plan of a grand revolt — what else but ill luck.

Yet as per the plan, Kartar, along with 50-60 others, reached the Ferozepur cantonment on 19th February. After a few hours, hence Kartar Singh would hoist the tricolour on the soil of India, the battle would ensue. It would be the day when Guru Gobind Singh’s disciple Kartar, and his comrades would be fired by the zeal to do and die.

Kartar Singh entered the cantonment and met with the army havildar who had promised support. They talked about the revolt, but Kirpal had already done the damage and the Indian soldiers were disarmed already. There was a spate of arrests. The havildar flatly declined help

despite Kartar Singh's entreaties. Dejected and disappointed, he and the gathered Ghadrites returned. The entire effort and hard work went waste. There were rampant arrests in Punjab. A number of revolutionaries turned approvers and began to feel disillusioned at their earlier ideals. Someone was getting arrested today, while someone else was spilling the beans on his comrades. In such a disappointing state, Ras Babu and Kartar Singh were thoroughly broken-hearted. It is difficult for us to imagine the extent of their anguish:—

We were destined to rack our brain to improvise,

Alas, the resources to try, luck eluded us.

It was decided to leave Punjab by crossing the western border. The three who crossed the British India border included Sh. Kartar Singh, Sh. Jagat Singh, and Sh. Harnam Singh *Tundilat*. After crossing a desert mountain, they came across a picturesque spot. A beautiful stream was flowing, where they sat at its bank, and started munching roasted gram. After the snacks, Kartar Singh began to sing:

Bani Sir Seran de, ki jala bhaj ke?

[With death staring in their faces, where would the lions run to?]

Sensitive Kartar was a poet too, and had written this poem while in America, which implies, “Why run away, when the challenge is staring us in the face?” He sang this reoccurring in his melodious voice, and then suddenly stopped and asked one of his companions, “What do you think, Jagat Singh, was this poem written for others? Shouldn't we be responsive to it as well, when our comrades are in dire straits?” They looked at each other and decided to come back to India to join their comrades, knowing fully well that death was awaiting them. They intensely wished for the outbreak of a strife where they may be able to sacrifice their lives, fighting away. They went to Chak Number 5, near Sargodha to the lines of a cavalry regiment in which Jagat Singh had once served, but were shortly arrested there and shackled, and put to chains. Fearless, captive rebel Kartar Singh when brought to the Lahore station, said to the police Supdt., “Mr. Tomkin, please get me something to eat.” How light-hearted he was! Seeing his attractive visage, friends and foes alike would get charmed. He was in his natural best at the time of his arrest, and often used to say, “After dying fearlessly, I should be given epithet ‘Rebel’. I should be remembered as Rebel Kartar Singh.”

Version of the Police Inspector concerned

Inspector Ahmed Khan, states that accused was brought to Lahore under arrest on March 4th along with accused Kartar Singh and Jagat Singh; P.Ws 61,62, 63 and 64 give evidence re the arrest of accused (Jagat Singh) at Chak No.5, in the direction of Sargodha, where there is the Horse-Run of the 22nd Cavalry. The first of the witness is a Risaldar, and the next two are men of that regiment; and from them we learn that accused Jagat Singh used formerly to belong to the Regiment, and that on the 10th February 1915 Jagat Singh came to the Chak, and tried to seduce the men of the Regiment (who would have none of him) with all kinds of the revolutionary talk-saying that returning emigrants were going to rise; that funds obtained by dacoits were to be deposited at the Amritsar headquarters, and so on. The Risaldar reported to the Police; and when Jagat Singh returned to the Chak with Kartar Singh and the accused with whom we are concerned, on March 2nd, all 3 of them were arrested. Accused and Kartar Singh were passing under false names at the time. P.W. 64 the Sub-Inspector who arrested them; he has stated that, after their arrest, all three burst in to a revolutionary harangue to those present. Exhibit P.6, copy of the “Ghadr di Gunj,” was found on the persons of accused Jagat Singh.¹¹

His restless heart was still not pacified even after he was behind the bars. One day he managed to obtain tools to cut through the prison bars, and contacted 60-70 under-trial prisoners. It was decided that except for the 4-5 extremely weak and innocent, all else should escape from the prison. The news was received that the in-charge of the Lahore cantonment magazine was ready to assist the prisoners. It was decided that after the jail-break, 50-60 persons would straightaway go to the Lahore cantonment and get equipped with the weaponry from the magazine, and thereafter restart the revolt. It was thought that more prisoners be freed from other prisons so that they all join hands in the revolt. But in those days of dejection and failure, such a ray of hope was nothing

but a mirage. One of the ordinary prisoners got wind of this plan leading to the confinement of everybody in their cells. All were shackled and searched, resulting in recovery of tools from a pit under the water pot. All efforts ended in a naught.

Kartar Singh was only 18 and a half years old when the trial began. He was the youngest of all accused. However, the judge wrote, "He is one of the most important of these 61 accused; and has the largest dossier of them all. There is practically no department of this conspiracy in America, on the voyage, and in India, in which this accused has not played his part."

On the day of the recording of his statement, Kartar Singh admitted everything. Seeing him confess, the judge stopped writing. Throughout the day, Kartar Singh continued his statement. With the pen between his lips, the judge kept staring at Kartar without writing anything. Later, he just said, "Kartar Singh, your statements have not been recorded. Give your statement thoughtfully. You know what would be the consequences these statements of yours." Those who were present in the court scene narrated that after the above-mentioned words of the judge, Kartar Singh nonchalantly said, "You would hang me to death? What else? We are not afraid of that." The court was adjourned that day. The next day, Kartar Singh's statement started again. The judges were under the belief that Kartar Singh had given his earlier statement at the behest of Bhai Parmanand. They, however, could not fathom the profundity of the young heart. Kartar Singh's statement was more forceful, more spirited, and confessional than that of the day before. Finally he said, "For my offence, I would either be given life imprisonment or death by hanging. But I would prefer hanging so that I may be reborn soon and get reborn for India's war of freedom. Till India achieves freedom, I desire to take birth time and again, and go to the gallows. And if I am born as a woman in my next birth, then I shall give birth to such like revolutionaries."

The judges were impressed his audacity, yet they did not have any soft corner for his bravery. Rather, they wrote like a petty minded enemy, "He is a young man, no doubt, but he is certainly one of the worst of these conspirators, and is a thoroughly callous scoundrel, proud of his exploits, to whom no mercy, whatever, can be, or should be shown."

Brave and benevolent enemies do not behave in such a fashion with a defeated soldier, but this is exactly how it happened here. Kartar Singh was not only stigmatised, but also given the death penalty. He was an astute revolutionary who could manage to dupe the police on his trail. Many a time he had drunk water from the very hands of the cops before giving them a slip, but today, he was given the death penalty for revolt and rebellion. Smiling valiantly, he said to the judge, "Thank you!"

Baba Sohan Singh Bhakna's Account

"We 24, who were sentenced to death were confined in *Ahata* No. 121, in 24 cells in the compound for half an hour in the same row. We were permitted to move around in the compound for half an hour in the evenings. One of these evenings I (Sohan Singh Bhakna) casually entered Kartar Singh's cell and I noticed a scribbling with a burnt piece of coal, "Martyrs' blood never goes in vain; whereupon I quipped, "Kartar, over here our bodies are secretly cremated and even the ashes are buried within the jail premises in a remote corner, whereas you have written that "their blood never goes in vain. With a gleaming smile Kartar said, "Yes of course I have stated the truth."

'Today (1967) I appreciate his foresight since in spite of the fact that our Ghadr plan was aborted, our sacrifices continued to inspire and motivate martyrs like Bhagat Singh besides countless others like him.¹²

Viceroy Reviews Death Sentence Cases

In the wake of this unprecedented capital sentence on as many as 24 accused out of 61, that too mostly from Panjab, the 'fertile' recruiting field for the Empire struggling for its survival, the Viceroy Lord Irwin was persuaded by intermediaries to have a re-look at the entire matter. So, the latter, taking its *'suo moto'* cognizance, summoned the entire case file of all these accused. Notably, there was no provision of appeal against the Judgement of Special Tribunal and only Governor was vested with power to reduce the sentence on grounds of mercy; Sir Michel O'Dwyer found barely one case fit for commutation of Death sentence to Transportation of life. Sir Ali Iman, the Law

Member was assigned the task who fearlessly chose only 7 to be hanged, out of which again he made Kartar Singh Sarabha an exception on the sole grounds of his youth. The Viceroy on his part, (despite his having been bomb attacked by terrorists in Dec. 1912) agreed with Sir Ali Iman *in toto* even in case of Kartar Singh, while observing that (Ed.):

“As regards Kartar Singh, who appears to be one of the worst of the breed. Sir Ali Imam has recommended him to mercy simply on the plea of his youth. I feel with him a repugnance to the execution of very young people, as I can remember in my own case that at the age of 19 and 20 I had many foolish and unformed views which I would be sorry to hold now. But I do not wish to press my views in this case, and will therefore leave it to be decided by a majority of my colleagues. In case of the opinion of my Colleagues being equally divided, I shall treat my own opinion as a casting vote.

“Please circulate to Hon’ble Members.

“HARDINGE
“23.10.1915.”¹³

However, with the sole exception of Sir Sankaran Nair, the only other Indian Member of the Executive Council (a legal luminary in his own right) none amongst the British members having concurred with the Viceroy, the inevitable happened. — Ed.

Kartar’s grandfather visited him when he was locked in his death cell. He asked, “Kartar, what special event in your life turned you into a worshipper of the goddess of death. Those for whom you are giving away your life call you names. I don’t even see the country gaining anything out of your death.” Kartar Singh politely asked him, “Grandpa, where is that person?

“Died of plague.”

“Where is so and so?”

“Died of cholera.”

“Do you wish that Kartar Singh should be bed-ridden and wailing in pain, die due to some such disease? Isn’t this death better than that sort of death?” The grandfather just became mum.

Today, the question rises again. What was achieved by his death? What did he die for? His ideal was to sacrifice his life for the nation, and did not wish anything else. He wanted to die anonymously. His ideal was to die — unsung, unhonoured, and unwept.

The gardener tends the plants, as this be his labour of love Dew’s generosity is not for show, it bestows pearls upon the plants in nights’ darkness.

It was probably the month of November (16) in 1915 when he was hanged to death. As ever, he was in high morale and had even gained a weight of 5 kilos. Chanting ‘Hail to Mother India’ he embraced the gallows.

‘Balwant’ (Bhagat Singh’s pen/party name. — Ed.)

References:

- 1 *Bhagat Singh — The Eternal Rebel*, Malwinder Jit Singh Waraich, Unistar Books Pvt. Ltd., Chandigarh (2014), p. 31.
- 2 This write up is based on Bhagat Singh’s 10-page article on Kartar Singh Sarabha translated from Hindi monthly published from Allahabad in its Nov. 1928 issue, containing bio-sketches of 66 martyrs of India’s freedom, in its special issue ‘Phansi Ank’; out of these at least 33 were written by Bhagat Singh, 22 on Ghadrists and 11 on Babbar Akalis under different pen names.
- 3 *Ghadr Movements Original Documents (Individual Judgements)*, Vol. IB, Malwinder Jit Singh Waraich, Harinder Singh, Unistar Books Pvt. Ltd., (2014), p.98.
- 4 *Meri Ram Kahani*, Punjabi (An autobiography of Baba Sohan Singh Bhakna (1870-1968) founder president of Ghadr Party) — Ed. Rajwinder Singh Rahi: Sangam Publications, Samana, Patiala: 2012, p. 55.
- 5 Courtesy: Sita Ram Bansal, Yugantar House, 49, Tower Town, P.O. Khurla, Jalandhar 144014.
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