

MARTYR MADAN LAL DHINGRA

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(For Bhagat Singh, Madan Lal Dhingra was the first rebel from Punjab. He paid his tributes to this pioneer rebel in his own inimitable style in an article commemorating his supreme act of sacrifice, in this article in Punjabi which was published in *Kirti* issue of March 1928 : Ed.).

“...that Punjab had made sacrifices for the freedom of the Motherland most of all. In the opening decade of the twentieth century, the entire country was seething with discontent, manifested in the form of *Swadeshi* movement, specifically in protest against the infamous Bengal Partition of 1905. Then too, it was only Punjab which could vie with Bengal in this regard. Witnessing the agony of the tightening noose of slavery, countless youngmen driven by their passionate love for the nation, and not content with mere lecturing and pamphleteering jumped spontaneously into revolutionary mode of politics. This new movement went a large way towards drawing such youngmen into its sweep, who, staking their lives at the altar of the goddess of liberty, revived the glory of sacrifices of our forefathers by embracing death with a stoic fortitude.

What stuff thee rebels are made of, had been well portrayed by famous Bengali poet Qazi Nazrul Islam in his poem *The Rebel*: ‘Acting while clasping the hands of death (these) protectors of the oppressed, foes of slavery, staunch opponents of the heartless, despotic, and self-willed rulers’, their yearnings, mindset, temperament had been beautifully depicted in this poem, which begins thus like –

*Bol o’ veer,
chir unnat mum sir,
sir nihar amar,
nat sir o’ shikhar himadrir.*

Its English version:

‘Proclaim o’ brother (rebel),
(Say) that I have been standing with my head erect.
(Upon) seeing my head,
(even) Himalaya had bowed its head (in shame).’

His (rebel’s) grit and sensibility are both remarkable: Somewhere he fondles death, and elsewhere he ventures to destroy

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everything around him at one go. He thunders like the lightening (cloud) and is melodious like a symphony. He can't help crying while (he is) in the company of a widow, a slave, the oppressed, poor, hungry, or a sufferer. The poet in his writing, while dwelling on the charismatic figure of a rebel, concludes by articulating his (rebel's) sentiments:

Its English version:

'Me the rebel feels war weary, I shall rest,
When no cry of the suffering beings rends the sky.
None shall whine in agony and the bloodthirsty dagger of cruel
oppressors,
Shall cease to pierce the innocent;
Nay, would vanish.
Then and then only I shall rest in peace.'

Such unrivalled souls who dare challenging the entire world, venture into the infernal fire, forget all the hankering after ease and comfort, embellish life in its beauty and grace and it is only by virtue of them that mankind moves ahead. Such heroes appear in every country at any time. In India too such celestial beings have been there, are there and shall continue to be there. Punjab has been in the foremost in our country in this regard. In the twentieth century, Dhingra blazed this trail.

(Yet) since he was not a *Neta* whose biography may have been published and sold like hot cakes. Nor was he an *Avatar* descending on this earth, around whom the soothsayers and the devotees could weave supernatural tales as if he was born *different*. Nor are we aware of any rare feats of Dhingra's infancy or childhood on the basis of which we could have remarked: 'All this foreshadowed greatness'.

He was a hapless and forlorn rebel. His own father had disowned him. Even the 'nationalist' leaders like Bipin Chandra Pal, known for then radical views, not to mention the psychopants and the press, all joined in the chorus of abuses to Dhingra.

What would then be the fate of these efforts to patch together the vignettes of his life, twenty years after his Martyrdom, can better be felt than described in words.

Under these constraints we/I have undertaken the job of writing his life profile, lest we forget even his name with flux of time. Under this persuasion, whatever bits of information are available, this write up is being penned to be shared with the readers (of *Kirti*).

He belonged to Amritsar perhaps. He came from a well-off family. After graduation he went to England. It is said that he got into

a life of luxury and indulgence (there). But this cannot be taken for certain, though not deniable either. By temperament he was wayward and whimsical. This is also implicit in the report of a secret intelligence service/Scotland yard agent E.T. Woodhall, who had been deputed to watch Dhingra. He recorded his impressions of Dhingra which he got published in an article by him in this regard in 'Union Jack' in March 1925: 'Dhingra was an extraordinary man. His passion for flowers was remarkable. He used to sit in a beautiful corner (of a park) and for hours at a stretch keep on staring at flowers like a poet in trance and occasionally his eyes seemed to be emitting a kind of flash.' Commenting on 'flash', he had observed (then in 1909):

'There is a man to keep an eye on. He will do something desperate some day.'

As hinted above, Dhingra may have taken to fun and frolic for a while (in England). All the same the historic events in India, like the *Swadeshi* movement of Bengal also impacted Indian immigrants in England. Veer Savarkar had started organising them with 'India House' as the centre, and Dhingra did not lag behind to be one of them.

Back home in India, in view of the suppression of peaceful agitations, the radicals were left with no choice except to organise secret societies. So much so, the Alipore Conspiracy Case was instituted in 1908; Kanhai and Satyendra Nath were sentenced to death. Dhirendar and Ulaskar Dutt too were awarded capital sentences. These developments became known in England too, which inflamed the passions of the radical youngmen. It is said, during one night, Savarkar and Dhingra confabulated for hours together. Pledging his life to Motherland Dhingra put his hand on the floor while Savarkar thrust a sharp edged poker into his flat hand. But that Punjabi valiant kept his calm. Savarkar (then) took out the poker... Tears fell from the eyes of both. Embracing each other, they both went into a trance. What a sight would that have been! How sublime were those tears! How praiseworthy the unison! He can we, the worldly folks, who shudder even upon the mention of the word 'death' can have any notion of the greatness and nobility of those souls who did not think twice before laying down their lives for the nation, for the Motherland!

After that night, Dingra stopped attending the gatherings at India House and attended instead, the students' body meetings sponsored by a secret British agent namely, Curzon Wylie, A.D.C. to Secretary of State for India to curb the patriotic activities of Indian

youngmen. These actions of Dhingra having been noticed by Indian students at India House, had evoked a hostile reaction, dubbing him a traitor, etc. But Savarkar calmed them all by dwelling upon the tireless efforts made by Madan, which had put their organisation on a firm footing: "We should rather feel grateful to him". Be as it may, a few days passed in this way.

On 1st July 1909, there was a gathering in Jahangir Hall of the Imperial Institute where Sir Curzon Wylie was also present. He was busy talking to someone when suddenly Dhingra took out a pistol and aimed at his face. Curzon reacted with a loud cry but instantly Madan fired two shots at his chest resulting in his death on the spot. He was soon arrested after a scuffle. Behold! A flutter followed here and there. People started showering abuses on him to their fill. His father telegraphed from Punjab refusing to be called the father of a rebel and a murderer like him. Big meetings were held in India. A lot of speeches were delivered. It was then only Savarkar, who openly sided with him. In a meeting held in London on this incident, firstly Sarvarkar raised a legal objection: That since the matter was before the Court, hence *sub judice* and, therefore, he cannot be held as guilty till the court held him to be so. Finally, when the resolution condemning Dhingra was put to vote, and the Chairman Bipin Chandra Pal was in the process of saying that the resolution be deemed as having been passed unanimously, Savarkar stood up voicing his protest. Instantly a Britisher gave a fist blow on his face saying "Look, how straight the English fist goes!" Just when he had finished saying so, an Indian present there gave a club blow on his head saying, "Look, how straight the Indian Club goes!" Disorder and chaos followed, and the meeting remained inconclusive; the 'Resolution' was neither here nor there!

Trial was on. He was calm. Face to face with a certain death, he was smiling. He was fearless. He was a true rebel. The statement which he made at the conclusion of the trial bore full testimony to his noble intentions, patriotism and maturity. It was published in 'Daily News' on 12th August 1909. "I admit, the other day, I attempted to shed English blood as a humble revenge against the inhuman hangings and deportations of patriotic Indian youths. In the attempt I have consulted none but my own conscience. I have conspired with none but my (sense of) duty." 'I believe that a nation held down by foreign baynets is in a perpetual state of war. Since open battle is rendered impossible to disarmed races, I attacked by surprise. Since guns were denied to me, I drew forth my pistol and fired.

"As a Hindoo I felt that wrong to my country is insult to God. Her cause is the cause of Shri Rama, her service is the service of Shri Krishna. Poor in wealth and intellect, a son like myself has nothing else to offer to Mother but his own blood, and so I have sacrificed the same on her altar.

"The only lesson required in India at present is to learn how to die, and the only way to teach it is by dying ourselves. Therefore, I die and I glory in my martyrdom.

"This war will continue so long as the Hindoo and English races last, if this present unnatural relation does not cease.

"My only prayer to God is: 'May I be reborn of the same mother and may I re-die for the same sacred cause, till the cause is successful, and she stands free for the good of humanity and to the glory of God.' *Bande Matram!*"

The day of 16th of August 1909 shall be a landmark in our history. That day an Indian, to sound the bugle of revolution in England, walked nonchalantly to the scaffold and embraced martyrdom. Mrs Egnés Smadely, depicts this scenario in her writings, "He walked to the scaffold with head high and shook off the hands of those who offered to support him, saying that he was not afraid of death."

So much of love for the Mother! While at the scaffold, one is asked if one had anything to say. Pat came the reply "*Bande Matram* Mother O Mother. I bow to thee"!

The valiant went down the scaffold, and his mortal remains were buried inside the jail, denying to his fellow Indians the permission to perform his last rites. Great was that Man! Revered be his memory! Glory to this priceless gem of a complacent country!
