

POLITICAL IMPORTANCE OF GHADR PARTY AND ITS PRESENT DAY

(Prof. Malwinder Jit Singh Waraich¹)

“These days I sweep the village school and spend life.”

— Baba Hari Singh Usman – in his autobiography

“We have been in various political parties for long but always missed the *Ghadr* Party.”

— Baba Sohan Singh Bhakna

“Dear ones! Be affectionate among yourselves and carry along the people too with affection.”

— Baba Karam Singh Cheema on 13 Sept. 1967,
DESH BHAGAT YADGAR HALL Scenario: heated
exchanges between the moderates and radicals).

“Young men! Be of high character! Serve your village folks. Only then they will join you.”

— Baba Gurmukh Singh Lalton – Naujwan Sabha
Convention, Narangwal – 19 November 1967).

More on this:

Naujwan Sabha Ludhiana has organised its annual session on 18-19 November 1967 at Vil. Narangwal (A big poster was brought out, a copy of which is still with me). On 19th November 1967 forenoon, a youth convention was to be held under the presidentship of Baba Gurmukh Singh Ji. Comrade Mal Singh Ram Puri was to present the theme paper on “The present epoch and youth” which was to be followed by a discussion. As it turned out to be, we 4 or 5 ‘Yuvak Kendrites’ represented the moderate line and around 10 young men were on the radical ‘Naxalite’ wavelength. Thus it was a scenario-much of ‘heat’ and little of ‘light’. Ultimately Baba Ji was asked to bestow his presidential observations.

‘We’ had interpreted Baba Ji being at the helm as a deliberate step by our radical friends to browbeat us into acquiescence to their line which was infact not a far fetched presumption. But for us all there was a being surprise in store. Baba Ji got up and spoke on the lines quoted above. We were all left wonderstruck. Literally none among the listeners could believe his ears!

Right till now I have not been able to fully understand this stance of the great Baba who has always been so closely associated with most radical shade of revolutionary stream of politics. Yet within the limits of my long contact with *Ghadrites*. I venture to state that Baba ji being on the native soil was just, echoing the ‘culture’ of *Ghadr* Movement, whose roots remained deeply embedded among the rural folk, notwithstanding its cosmopolitan orientation.

It was precisely this firm grasp of the ground realities of life that place “character” on such a lofty pedestal, despite its being a forbidden commodity in the cosmos of political pundits. Although today political activists, writes

¹ V.P.O. Saketri, Distt. Panchkula 134109; Phone: 0172-2556314;
Email: mjswaraich29@gmail.com

and intellectuals would not touch, it with a pair of tongs, it plays a key role on every front of life on every crucial stage. If mentioned, it invites a stereotyped remark: "It is purely one's private matter." Much to the dismay of this tribe the *Babas* did not maintain (two) separate account books of life, one "personal" and the other political or social. No Lachhman Rekha to bifurcate the two was recognised as such by them despite some random aberration in actual life.

Closely related to the above is the issue of material gains. According to Baba Sohan Singh Bhakna, in order to evaluate the true worth of a political/social activist, the best test shall be a comparison of his material assets when he entered public life and of the same at present. In this regard Baba Gurmukh Singh was a class by himself he did not care even to get married. It shall truly be a rewarding inquiry to identify and count from the flock of political fellow travellers of the Baba, those who endeavour to emulate his style of personal life. Otherwise, stated, there are many to praise him but rare is he who adopts his way of life. This is what is rightly called Unity or otherwise of deeds and words!

Ghadr Party was a party of patriots, that is, of Desh Bhagats Bhagti stands for merging one's identity in the object of worship and thereby become indistinguishable. But here a subtle distinction needs to be made. Within the religious frame of reference, the Ultimate entity (God) may be perceived in its abstract of '*Nirgun*' form and/or in its concrete material, i.e., '*Sargun*' form. For *Ghadrites*, country and the people existed in the latter form, extending from the proximate neighbours to the international horizon. This stands in sharp contrast to a majority of political activists who talk and talk about 'people' without ever bothering for the 'pedestrians' around them.

It is in this perspective, that the 'broom' of Baba Usman becomes his tool of worship in the temple of learning for his co-villagers, particularly the new generation. No form of service is viewed as trivial. What an agony that so many of teachers committed to radical ideologies literally pride themselves in shirking sincere teaching in these very schools from which they are not so poorly PAID! So in the present political 'culture'. Such like stance of the *Babas* would be dubbed as 'reformist, idealist or sentimentalist'. This would come from the lips of those who literally beg borrow and steal for the worldly advancement of their own kith and kin. This is one of those ugly inconvenient facts which are swept under the carpet under the 'gentlemen' agreement. And to smoke screen the same with flowery words mind-boggling paradigms are brought in.

In sum *Babas* 'fans' are aplenty, but as for the 'customers', it is better not to venture into this forbidden realm. I had the privilege, since 1966 to remain in touch with the surviving *Babas* with plenty of opportunities for heart to heart exchange of thoughts, observations and sentiments. Incidentally most of my visits in this series used to be on cycle for which I was inspired by the legendary Baba Karm Singh Ji Cheema.

The spell of these contacts had been and continues to captivate me> I have been and am still spell bound by their sublime personalities. In return I had only rare occasion to play host to them. It is they who have played host to me. The flavour of their hospitality still haunted me in particular the 'special' tea prepared by the stalwart Baba Usman a 'FAQIR', with a ferocious appearance, sometime with delicious '*parathas*' cooked by him on his pressure stove.

I feel greatly honoured while enumerating the *Babas* with whom I had considerable amount of contact:

1. Baba Sohan Singh Bhakna
2. Baba Hari Singh Usman
3. Baba (Giani) Harbhajan Singh Chaminda
4. Baba (Giani) Sajjan Singh Narrangwal
5. Baba Bagh Singh Canadian
6. Baba Munsha Singh 'Dukhi'
7. Baba Hazara Singh Dadehar
8. Baba Pala Singh Dhudike
9. Baba Kirpa Singh Long Majari
10. Baba Harnam Singh Kala Sanghian
11. Baba Sunder Singh Ghali
12. Baba Gopal Singh Sohian
13. Baba Baghei Singh Burchand
14. Baba Arjan Singh Jagraon
15. Baba Lal Singh Narangwal
16. Baba Gujjar Singh Bhakna

Another dimension of the political culture of the *Ghadr* Party ought not to be missed namely the question of leadership during, 1914-15 most of *Ghadrite* leadership had been arrested instantly on their arrival in India. To fill this void Shri Rash Bihari Bose was contacted and ultimately entrusted with the command of the planned uprising. From among the *Ghadrites*, Shahid Kartar Singh Sarabha who was only a lad of 18 was foremost in the whole operation. What words may be chosen to compliment the fraternity of *Ghadrites* who never hesitated to follow an 'outsider' or the young lad – just 'Kartar' for them. It is almost an acknowledged fact that today's making and breaking of political groups and factions has little to do with ideological scruples, which are just used as a smoke screen for personal advancement in relentless pursuit of personal power. Every old/established leader assumes that 'after me the deluge'!

While concluding I can't help recalling my 'tryst' with Baba Karam Singh Cheema in the light of his words cited in the opening lines.

It was the polling day in February 1967 of Punjab Vidhan Sabha elections when I ventured into his village for the purpose of meeting him (for the first time). Accompanied by a student of mine from his village, I was guided to locate him in the voters' queue. Weather being too chilly and wet, Baba ji was sporting Khaki Over Coat. He had his stocking drawn over his Pyjama Approaching him right there my student Joginder mentioned to him "Baba ji he has come to meet you." I can recall the resultant glow of youth on Baba ji's face and ecstatic pleasure on hearing it and hugged me in a tight embrace. Even at this moment I 'feel' his hands classing my back – may be with a mark too!

I am irresistibly reminded of the words of Arab poet Kahmi Gibran:-

"Give them you love,
But not your thoughts."
