

AUM

THE THREE MARTYRS

By Brigadier Chitranjan Sawant, VSM

Mahatma Gandhi arrived at the Karachi railway station in March 1931 to participate in the annual Congress session. There was a surprise in store for him. He was not a welcome guest to a large section of vocal people assembled there. They waved black flags and shouted slogan "Gandhi Go back". Unbelievable but true. The vociferous youth were members of the Navajawan Sabha, a forum of the Congress party itself. Lo and behold! The restive youth were led by no less a person than Subhash Bose, a giant among men. The sad cause they espoused was: non-intervention of Gandhi Ji in getting the death sentence of Bhagat Singh, Rajguru and Sukhdeo commuted. The three brave young men who challenged the British Raj and fought for the Independence of their motherland, Bharat, were hanged by the neck by the British Indian government on 23rd March 1931 in the Lahore central jail. Against all rules, the hanging was done in the evening at 7.33 P.M. Their bodies were hurriedly disposed off to avoid peoples' ire. The Three young men became Martyrs for the cause of their motherland.

The Indian nation was in a state of shock on their premature hanging, a day before the appointed date, and a slipshod funeral on the banks of the Sutluj river at Hussainiwala near Ferozepore. It was a sacrilege and added insult to injury. Instead of condoling their deaths and comforting their families Ghandhi Ji, in his own wisdom, had chosen to proceed to Bombay to see off Lord Irwin, the outgoing Viceroy who had declined to commute the death sentence of the three young freedom fighters. There was general indignation. The black flag demonstration against Gandhi Ji was a manifestation of the pent up anger of the people.

Vedic Influence On Martyrs

An analytical study of the events in the Punjab in the first few decades of the twentieth century points to the influence of the Arya Samaj, founded by Swami Dayanand Saraswati in Bombay in 1875 and in Lahore in 1877. No section of the populace remained untouched by this great historical event, irrespective of the religious faith they subscribed to. I need not emphasize the obvious historical fact that the foundation of the Arya Samaj in Lahore was laid in the garden of a Muslim gentleman, Doctor Rahim Khan. The Vedic discourses were attended by a cross section of the population comprising Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs. Reverting to our subject of the martyrs, it would be appropriate to mention that Bhagat Singh, a born Sikh, had his sacred thread ceremony, Yajnopavit, done as a child, notwithstanding his caste being a Sandhu Jat who were not entitled to hold the ceremony. The Arya Samaj, a reformist movement, had opened the portals of Vedic knowledge and sixteen sanskars to one and all. Bhagat Singh was a beneficiary of the Arya liberalisation, courtesy his grandfather, Arjan Singh and father, Kishen Singh. His one uncle was also hanged as a freedom fighter and another had to leave India for Iran to avoid persecution at the hands of the British overlords.

Sukhdeo, the second martyr, too was from Lyallpur like Bhagat Singh and the family did not remain untouched by the waves of reform powered by the Arya Samaj. Both Sukhdeo and Bhagat Singh had enrolled themselves for studies in the National College, Lahore that had a preponderance of professors who had received their education and baptism in Nationalism at the Gurukul Kangri, Haridwar, founded by Swami Shradhdhanand. Bhagat Singh was a student of the DAV School, Lahore too for a period of time and the spirit of freedom was indeed instilled in him there too. Vedalkar, Vidyalankar – the two degrees of Gurukul Kangri were in evidence in surfeit among the teaching faculty of both the educational institutions that shaped the personality and instilled patriotism and moral courage among many a freedom fighter, including our national Martyrs, Bhagat Singh and Sukhdeo.

Rajguru's was a different story. Born in a village near Pune in Maharashtra in a family that comprised Purohiths and students of the Vedas, they were appropriately addressed as Rajguru. It was the pursuit of Vedic studies that brought Shivram Rajguru to Varanasi and later to Kanpur to meet revolutionaries of the eminence of Chandra Shekhar Azad. Bhagat Singh too had made more than one visit to Kanpur with the common intent of freeing the motherland through other ways and means than the one espoused by Gandhi Ji. These young men had no faith and, of course, no patience to follow the path of Ahimsa for achieving independence. Of course, the three had become inseparable comrades-in-arms in the noble cause where bomb – making and killing of foreigners or their lackeys was not a taboo. The revolutionaries from Bengal were a great help and they always came forward unhesitatingly. Many a time Bhagat Singh, Sukhdeo and Rajguru had to miss a meal, forego new clothes to save money for the revolutionary cause.

FIGHT TO FINISH

AIM – that indeed is the first principle of war. Our revolutionaries knew this and indeed practised this. They had Independence of India as their sole aim. They did not allow any other thing to come in between that could make them deviate from the AIM. Not even the girls. Delving deep into their contemporary history, a researcher will have no option but to pronounce that celibacy was their creed. They could not but cling to creed unflinchingly. They had great disdain for the institution of marriage until independence was achieved. A mere mention of marriage was to them like a red rag to a bull. Bhagat Singh, Sukhdeo and Rajguru had left their homes and near and dear ones for

the cause celebre and would not let marriage derail their noble mission. Notwithstanding their young age, the period when the urge for sex is at its zenith, they never thought of women, leave aside craving for company. This character quality is indeed laudable. It is a beacon light for the youth of the twenty first century where sex is taken as a dynamo to energise all activities. The three Martyrs show us light at the end of the tunnel. Even a blind person will not miss it.

Bhagat Singh and Rajguru came from different ethnic backgrounds but their aim was the same. Bharat Mata Ki Jai – that was their creed and that was their slogan. They had unflinching faith in their mission and knew that they would achieve the AIM – living or dead. In any case, the Vedic philosophy of life had it ingrained in them that the soul never dies, it only changes the bodies. Believers in the Vedic Trinity know it well that Parmatma, jeevatma and Prakriti have separate existences, never born and never die. Why grieve for a change in outer appearance. This Vedic belief buttressed their determination to fight to finish; fight to win. Bhagat Singh, Sukhdeo and Rajguru had seen the barbarity of the British police officers when they came charged the Indian procession at the Lahore railway station where they had assembled to show black flag to the Simon Commission as it was anti-Indian. An old and venerable leader like Lala Lajpat Rai, a doyen among Aryas and Congressmen alike, was not spared the baton. Saunders, a police officer, himself beat Lala Ji resulting in his premature demise within a month. It was then and there that Bhagat Singh, Sukhdeo and Rajguru had vowed to avenge the insult and injury to venerable Lala Lajpat Rai, a great disciple of Swami Dayanand Saraswati. Our revolutionaries fought to finish and achieved their aim. Chandra Shekhar Azad too had joined them when they made a plan to kill the Superintendent of Police, Scott, who had ordered the lathi charge. He was present at the time of execution of the plan too. Well, under a mistaken identity, Saunders, who was equally guilty of humiliating Indians, was killed by their bullets near the police station in Lahore. It shook the British administration not only in Punjab but in the rest of India too.

Bhagat Singh and Batukeshwar Dutt had the moral and physical courage to bomb the Central Assembly in New Delhi on 8th April 1929 and fire a few shots from the visitors' gallery when the Public Safety Act was being passed as an ordinance after it was voted out by the Indian members. Our Duo had not intended to kill or injure anyone. By a loud explosion and smoke they wished the deaf government in Delhi to heed to the voice of the Indian masses. Their mission was a success, notwithstanding the sentence of life imprisonment awarded to them. Of course, the case of shooting the police officer in Lahore and trial of the three freedom fighters in Lahore gave a new turn to events as mentioned heretofore.

MEMORIES OF MARTYRS

Bhagat Singh was in the hot seat after Saunders, the British police officer was shot dead by the revolutionaries to avenge the death of Punjab Kesari, Lala Lajpat Rai. Lahore was not a safe place for him and his comrades-in-arms. To avoid detection by the British government sleuths, Bhagat Singh had shorn off his long hair and beard. He dressed like a European, was accompanied by a lady, Durga bhabhi (wife of another revolutionary) with a babe in her arms to give the impression of a family leaving Lahore and travelled first class in the train. They left Lahore undetected. A great escape indeed like that of Neta Ji Subhash Chandra Bose later from Calcutta. Rajguru left Lahore like a labourer and Sukhdeo like a daily wage earner. Chandra Shekhar Azad was clever by half and even his friends were amazed how he got away from the prying eyes of the alert spies and police personnel. He too died a Martyr's death later in Allahabad Alfred park fighting the police like a possessed man.

The three Martyrs were almost of the same age group. Great bonhomie prevailed among them. Notwithstanding heated discussions on political and economic matters they remained bosom friends till they breathed their last at the gallows with a broad grin and smile on their faces. Bhagat Singh was merely 23 years old and so was Sukhdeo Thapar; Shivaram Rajguru was only 22 years old when they kissed the noose at the gallows and attained martyrdom. Every year on 23rd March we remember them for their patriotism and courage. Many men and women go to their Samadhi – the place where they were cremated on the banks of the Sutluj river in Ferozepore to offer flowers. Their lives thrill our youth till today. No wonder more than half a dozen movies have been made and screened by Bollywood handing down their sacred memory to posterity so that the boys and girls of today are prepared to defend the hard won freedom and keep our Bharat mata free from shackles of all kinds.

Let us take a leaf out of the prison diary of Shaheed Bhagat Singh and share his thoughts.

He wrote : “ ***Social progress depends not upon the ennoblement of the few but on the enrichment of democracy ; universal brotherhood can be achieved only when there is an equality of opportunity – of opportunity in the social, political and individual life.***”