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Indian sub-continent

Baght Singh day in Pakistan

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On March 23, at Shadman Chouck in Lahore, the place where Bhagat Singh was hanged on 23 March 1931, several groups including Labour Party Pakistan organized a vigil. There were a good number of political activists present on the occasion. Lok Raqs organized a street theater on the spot. Later on in the night, we were joined by our Indian friends who drove straight from Islamabad to Shadman Chouck.

They included Ramesh Yadev, based in Amritsar and actively involved with folklore society, Shahid Siddiqui, a former member of parliament and editor of Nai Duniya, a leading Urdu daily, Jatin Desai, an activist-journalist, a national joint secretary of Pakistan-Indian Peoples Forum for Peace and Democracy (PIPFPD) and a bureau member of South Asia Human Rights (SAHR), Mazher Hussain, from Hyderabad and executive director of COVA, Haris Kidwai, General Secretary of PIPFPD, Delhi chapter, Bharat Modi, from a fishing community, based in Porbandar (Gujarat), Kangkal Shanth Kumar Nikhil Kumar, a journalist based in Delhi, Mahesh Bhatt, a prominent Indian film director, producer and screenwriter and renowned South Asian intellectual Kuldip Nair.

We demanded that the place should be named as Bhagat Singh Chouck. On the occasion, Asid Hashmi, a leader of the Pakistan People's Party and chairman of Auqaf Department announced that one of the main buildings in Lahore will be named as Bhaght Singh building.

I spoke to Kiran Singh, son of the nephew of Bhagat Singh on the telephone and we exchanged greetings and a commitment to continue the struggle of Bhagat Singh for a socialist Indian sub-continent.

Some history of Bhagat Singh

Bhagat Singh was one of the most prominent faces of Indian freedom struggle. He was a revolutionary ahead of his times. By Revolution he meant that the present order of things, which is based on manifest injustice, must change.

Bhagat Singh studied the European revolutionary movement and was greatly attracted towards socialism. He realized that the overthrow of British rule should be accompanied by the socialist reconstruction of Indian society and for this political power must be seized by the workers.

Though portrayed as a terrorist by the British Imperialism, Bhagat Singh was critical of the individual terrorism which was prevalent among the revolutionary youth of his time and called for mass mobilization.

In February 1928, a committee from England, called the Simon Commission visited India. The purpose of its visit was to decide how much freedom and responsibility they felt could be given to the people of India. But there was no Indian on the committee. This angered Indians and they decided to boycott Simon Commission.

While protesting against Simon Commission in Lahore, Lala Lajpat Rai, an Indian author, freedom fighter and politician who is chiefly remembered as a leader in the Indian fight for freedom from British Imperialism, was brutally Lathicharged and later died as a result of these injuries. Bhagat Singh was determined to avenge Lajpat Rai's death by shooting the British official responsible for the killing, Deputy Inspector General Scott. He shot down Assistant Superintendent Saunders instead, mistaking him for Scott. Bhagat Singh had to flee from Lahore to escape death punishment.

Lala Lajpat Rai had established a TB hospital in Lahore in memory of his mother Ghulab Devi. The hospital is still

one of the largest in Pakistan fighting TB.

On 8 April 1929, Singh and Dutt threw a bomb onto the corridors of the assembly and shouted "Inquilab Zindabad!" ("Long Live the Revolution!"). This was followed by a shower of leaflets stating that it takes a loud voice to make the deaf hear.

The bomb neither killed nor injured anyone; Singh and Dutt claimed that this was deliberate on their part, a claim substantiated both by British forensic investigators who found that the bomb was not powerful enough to cause injury, and by the fact that the bomb was throwaway from people. Singh and Dutt gave themselves up for arrest after the bomb.

He and Dutt were sentenced to death by a court in Lahore. Bhatgt and his comrades went on hunger strike which last for several weeks against the conditions of the prison for prisoner rights.

Even Muhammad Ali Jinnah, one of the politicians present when the Central Legislative Assembly was bombed, made no secret of his sympathies for the Lahore prisoners - commenting on the hunger strike he said "the man who goes on hunger strike has a soul. He is moved by that soul, and he believes in the justice of his cause." And talking of Singh's actions said "however much you deplore them and however much you say they are misguided, it is the system, this damnable system of governance, which is resented by the people

On October 7, 1930 Bhagat Singh, Sukh Dev and Raj Guru were awarded death sentence by a special tribunal in Lahore. Despite great popular pressure and numerous appeals by political leaders of India, Bhagat Singh and his associates were hanged in the early hours of March 23, 1931.

Several popular Bollywood films have been made capturing the life and times of Bhagat Singh: Shaheed-e-Azad Bhagat Singh (1954), Shaheed Bhagat Singh (1963), Shaheed (1965), The Legend of Bhagat Singh (2002), 23 March 1931 Shaheed (2002), Shaheed-E-Azam (2003), Rang De Basanti (2006)