

Remembering a Hero

Dewan Bahadur SP Singha

It will be unfair not to recall Dewan Bahadur SP Singha (1893-1948) on June 23rd. Unfortunately, this name, and his role in the formation of Pakistan is unknown to the present generation (youth) of the country particularly other than Christians.

SP Singha and two other Christian colleagues in the Punjab Assembly casted their decisive votes for the creation of Pakistan and shaping the map of Pakistan what it looked like after 1947.

SP Singha hailed from a Christian family of Pasroor/Sialkot-Punjab with ancestral history of having Bihari grandfather and Bengali grandmother, Punjabi mother and ending up marrying a woman from from UP. His academic pursuits led him to Lahore. During his professional career he served as registrar in the Punjab University. Due to his efforts metric examination system and intermediate level degrees were introduced to education system that is still followed in the country. As recognition for his services he was awarded the distinction of “Dewan Bahadur.”

He was disappointed and disheartened due to miserable plight of Christians in united India as having no Christian graveyards in the villages, social sanction on drawing water from marked wells. The untouchable socially lower status native communities curbed by Hindu caste system and agrarian domination in the Punjab compelled those

communities to convert into Christianity to be recognized as identical to humanity. He believed that Muslim society was more secular in its nature and would be better off towards untouchability factor and looking down upon them as low caste over the cast ridden Hindu society and shall safeguard the right of other religions communities. Being Punjabi and experiencing the then different Punjabi mentality and traditions from rest of the India probably invoked him to come close to the formation of Pakistan. He could foresee a better place to live for Christians in Pakistan instead of going with India, which later proved to be false.

Let's count on what Singha did to Pakistan and how he stood by Father of the Nation Quaid e Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah. On the 21st of November 1942 Dewan Bahadar S.P Singha Register Punjab University held reception in the honour of Quaid e Azam and assured him support for Pakistan. The teachers and students of the Forman Christian College, Lahore (now a Chartered University) also expressed their confidence in alliance. Later representing entire Christian community SP Singha gave a statement on 25th July: "at the time of partition of the sub-continent of India, in the entire country, the Christians should be counted with Muslims."

During elections of 1945-46 on the basis of the partition both the Christian parties, All India Christian Association and All India Christian League enchanted slogan, for the first time, "Live long Pakistan". Dewan Bahadur S.P Singha was elected as member Punjab Legislative Assembly. Moreover he visited Pathan Kot and Gurdas Pur districts and got a resolution passed by the Christian population to be included in Pakistan.

On 20th November 1946 S. P. Singha assured Quaid by saying, “from today Jinnah is our leader”, all present Christians’ confirmed the voice. Quaid-e-Azam reciprocated and said, “we will never forget the favors and sacrifices of Christian”.

His political activism further raised him as Speaker of the united Punjab Assembly with support of the Unionist Party. He opposed the Radcliffe Award and called it one-sided injustice with Pakistan when on 17th August 1947, Punjab Boundary Commission decided to allocate parts of Pakistan to Hindustan. In Gurdaspur and Ferozepur districts SP Singha, C.E Gibbon, Fazal Elahi mobilized Christian pockets of population for inclusion of these districts in Pakistan under the Radcliffe Award.

On another occasion Tara Singh Akalidal Leader waved his sword in air at the gate of United Punjab Assembly said: “anyone who will demand for Pakistan will be killed”. It was S. P. Singha, Speaker of joint Punjab Assembly, replied: “Senay pe goli khain gey Pakistan banayengey” (we will die but will not stop demanding Pakistan).

Even many Muslim parties namely Majlas-e-Harar, Jamiat-e-Ulma-e-Hind, Jamat-e-Islmi, Surakhposh khudai Khidmatguzar, Khaksaar Tahreek, were against the partition but Christians under Singha’s leadership dared to dream of Pakistan as also evident from narratives of Dr. B.R Ambedkar (Harijan leader, architect of Indian Constitution and first Law Minister in the Cabinet of Jawaharlal Nehru) and K.K Aziz (historian and writer).

Even Quaid-e-Azam seemed unsure of West Punjab’s inclusion in Pakistan knowing the fact that the votes tie between the members of

Muslim League and the supporters of Hindustan as both parties secured 88 seats each. It seemed that the vote was going against Quaid e Azam when the Hindus and Sikhs refused to support and joined forces to make Punjab a part of India. There were four Christian members and the fortune of West Punjab was in the hands of Christians members. S. P. Singha, re-assured the support of Christians to Quaid despite powerful influence of Nehru, Gandhi and Patel.

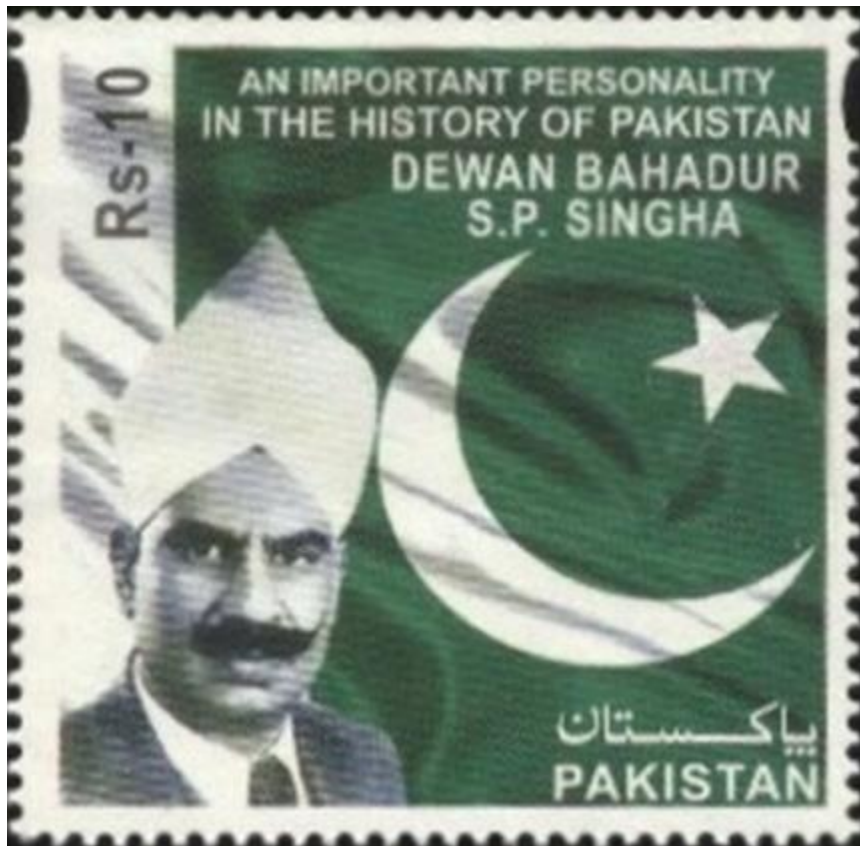
Finally the defining moment reached on June 23rd, 1947 S. P. Singha who was the Speaker of Punjab Assembly at that time. He stood up to vote for Pakistan, followed by other Christian members of the Punjab Assembly Fazal Elahi and C. E Gibbon. This is how 91 votes were casted in favor of Pakistan and 88 votes in favor of Hindustan.

Christians considered it a vote for freedom on that day but it became a big question mark soon after the demise of Quaid e Azam when in Pakistani Punjab Assembly a vote of no confidence was moved against its Speaker S.P. Singha on the basis of religion, asserting that only a Muslim could be the Speaker of the Assembly. Was it a vote for freedom or slavery? Should Christians be proud of that decision? Where were the speeches of the founder of the nation ensuring other religious communities' freedom "to go to your temples" and "equal citizens of one state"?

It took no time after Jinnah to airbrush the services and commitment of Christians under the leadership of SP Singha. He had to step down from the position of Speaker Punjab Assembly solely because of his religious identity. With the Quaid gone, who could he turn to? Finally, he passed

away on 22 October 1948. His wife and daughter left the country in 1958 and lived in India.

Only recently in May 2016, once again Dewan Bahadur SP Singha is officially reclaimed and recognized when the government of Pakistan has issued a commemorative postage stamp of Rs 10 to acknowledge his services as a hero.



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[HTTPS://ARCHIVE.PAKISTANTODAY.COM.PK/2016/06/22/REMEMBERING-A-MARGINALISED-HERO/](https://archive.pakistantoday.com.pk/2016/06/22/remembers-a-marginalised-hero/)