

NEWS AND VIEWS

HON. BALJIT SINGH CHADHA JOINS QUEEN'S PRIVY COUNCIL OF CANADA

Prof Devinder Singh Chahal, IUS

Institute for Understanding is proud to welcome the news that the Canadian Prime Minister, Rt. Hon. Jean Chretien, appointed one of its distinguished patrons, Sardar Baljit Singh Chadha, as a member of the Security Intelligence Review Committee (SIRC). In accordance with the requirements of the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) Act, Governor General Adrienne Clarkson also named Mr Chadha to the Queen's Privy Council of Canada. As a member he is entitled to be addressed as "Honorable" for life and to the use of initials "PC". All Cabinet ministers are appointed to the Queen's Privy Council in addition to other persons of distinction chosen by the Prime Minister as a special form of honour. Hon Chadha is the first non-

politician of Asian origin to be named to the Privy Council.

The SIRC is composed of three to five members of the Queen's Privy Council and is responsible for assuring that CSIS uses its powers legally and appropriately. SIRC provides an external review of CSIS's performance of its duties and functions. It also examines complaints by individuals or reports by Ministers relating to security clearances and the national security of Canada. The Committee is required to report annually to Parliament through the Solicitor General.

This appointment is one of the most prestigious and important appointments in Canada, especially after 9/11. Hon Chadha will be the first Indo-Canadian and Asian-Canadian to join SIRC.



2003 : The Honourable Baljit Singh Chadha, P.C., with the Governor General of Canada, Adrienne Clarkson, after the swearing ceremony as member of the Queen's Privy Council of Canada. Mr. Chadha took oath on the Sikh Prayer Book (Japji Sahib Gutka) as seen in Mr. Chadha's hand.

Hon Baljit Singh Chadha of Montreal, Quebec, is a prominent Sikh / Punjabi member of the Indo-Canadian community in Canada. Mr. Chadha emigrated from India to this country in 1973, at the age of 21, and in 1976 created Balcorp Limited, one of Canada's successful trading houses. Balcorp markets food products, processed foods, forestry products and minerals.

He has worked unstintingly to promote understanding and harmonious relations between South Asians and the rest of the Canadian community. Hon Chadha has been

personally responsible for starting the Montreal Council of the Indo-Canada Chamber of Commerce, the Canadian Sikh Council and the International Punjabi Society for Central Canada. He has also been very active in benevolent and philanthropic causes.

Read more about the contributions of Hon Chadha in: *Sahni, Balbir Singh. 2002. Contributions of S Baljit Singh Chadha for promoting Sikhism, education, and multiculturalism. Understanding Sikhism Res. J. 4 (1): 48-49.*

TV DEBATE ON KALA AFGHANA

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Of all the controversies that excite the modern day *Panth*, the current impasse over the writings of Canada based Mr Gurbaksh Singh Kala Afghana (KA) appears to be the most divisive. While a number of Sikh organizations and individuals are deadly against him and his writings, an equally large number of organizations and individuals swear that what he has written is the true elucidation of Gurbani.

Sardar Gurcharanjit Singh Lamba (GSL), Advocate, and Editor of *Sant Sipahi*, monthly magazine, is reportedly one of initial complainants against KA's works, has been the most outspoken of all the critics. On the other hand Prof Gurtej Singh (GS), IAS and National Professor of Sikhism, is leading KA's defense. When Alpha TV Punjabi organized a two-episode discussion on KA's writings between the two above-mentioned gentlemen it surely indicated to be a firework show.

While the first episode was more of general discussion about the issue the second episode focused on specific quotations.

In the **first episode** GS seemed to carry the day. It did not appear that GS was there to defend anyone's views rather appeared to be declaring his opinions very impressively. GSL on the other hand was continually referring to written quotations that were unnecessarily long and in some respects inappropriate. He was repeatedly ruffling through a pile of books and papers with numerous visible post-it notes. His agenda was crystal clear – to attack KA and GS.

However, in the **second episode** GSL seemed to be all prepared and roaring to go. He started by emphasizing that the definition of Sikh as per the Sikh *Rahit Maryada* required "*faith in the Bani of the ten Gurus*". Since KA doubted the Bani of the Dasam Granth he was not a Sikh. He went on to add that KA was also ridiculing the institution of *Amrit* by doubting the story of 40 *Muktey* (liberated) that even GS had accepted in his book. To this GS retorted that KA meant that Guru's words should not be taken literally and we should look at the deeper meaning in them.

Next GSL stated that GS regards Late S Kapur Singh, Former Professor of Sikhism, as his mentor and S. Kapur Singh accepted *Bachittar Natak* as the Bani of Guru Gobind Singh. Then how come GS is supporting KA, who does not regard *Bachittar Natak* as Guru Gobind Singh's work? To this GS said that everybody

was entitled to his or her opinion and it is not necessary that he had to agree with everything S Kapur Singh had stated.

Further GSL stated that KA had hurt Sikh sentiments by calling "*Vaar Sri Bhagauti Ji Ki*" in the *Ardas* as "*Koor Kabaar*" (bundle of lies). To this GS said that KA writes in a sarcastic way and his sarcasm should not be taken literally. GS went on to say that KA was a staunch *Amritdhari* Sikh and he was promoting *Amrit* through his writings. He further added that KA's lines should not be taken out of context as GSL was doing. He said that in reply to the 11 sentences that the charge sheet against KA contained, GS had been able to extract 14 pages from KA's books that stated exactly opposite of what the 11 sentences in question said. To this GSL retorted that GS's logic was akin to a thief who on being told that there are witnesses testifying to the statement that they had seen him burgling someone's house, states that he can present witnesses who would testify not seeing him burgle the house!

Next GSL said that *Ardas* was a part of the Sikh *Rahit Maryada* and KA was ridiculing it. The host asked GS that doesn't he think Sikh sentiments would be hurt by such statements about the *Ardas*. GS said that *Ardas* was man made and could be changed. To this GSL said that GS had himself written in one of his books that those who want to revise the Sikh *Rahit Maryada* are enemies of the *Panth*.

Finally, GSL said that Giani Bhag Singh earlier made the kind of statements KA is making about *Ardas* and *Benti Chaupai* and for this Bhag Singh was excommunicated from the *Panth*. Now again "this group" was trying to circulate the views of Giani Bhag Singh under another name. To this GS wanted to know from GSL what he meant by "this group" and stated that the press that published KA's books also publishes all titles by Singh Brothers.

The host had to then cut the discussion short due to the time running out. Both the participants seemed as if they wanted to carry on the discussion till eternity.

In the second episode GSL seemed to be quite excited and he would even jut in when GS was talking. Also sometimes GSL would take GS's name when he actually wanted to use KA's name. This was in contrast to GS who used to give GSL a patient hearing. In one instance GSL made so much noise that GS had to say that this way it is not possible to discuss things.

From the discussion one thing emerged clearly - that we the Sikhs have not matured enough to discuss in public

media. The high decibel levels and also both the participants were speaking at the same time made it look like a fish market. After seeing the debate one wonders

whether it would at all be possible to have a democratic public discussion on important Sikh issues, needed to be settled since a long.

KALA AFGHANA EXCOMMUNICATED

Varinder Walia reported from Amritsar that Sikh clergy today the 10th July, 2003 has excommunicated Canada-based cop-turned-controversial Sikh scholar and close aide of Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, Gurbksh Singh Kala Afghana, from the Sikh Panth for his "blasphemous acts". Mr Kala Afghana is the author of the set of 10 books, '*Bipran ki rit ton sach da marg*' (from Brahmanism to the path of Sikhism).

Mr Kala Afghana had been pleading before Akal Takht that he was unable to visit the Takht as he would be arrested whenever he tried to enter India due to his close association with Sant Bhindranwale. The plea given by Mr Kala Afghana was that he could not travel as he was bed-ridden for a long time. However, Mr Gurtej Singh, a former IAS officer and Sikh scholar, who made efforts to plead the case on his (Kala Afghana's) behalf was not allowed to do so. While accepting the problems of Mr Kala Afghana, the Sikh clergy had allowed him to

clarify his position through video conferencing. However, Jathedar Vedanti backed out from the promise on "technical grounds". It may be mentioned here that in a letter faxed to the Akal Takht secretariat yesterday, Mr Kala Afghana had sought more time to clarify his position. However, Jathedar Vedanti said that he was already given enough time but he failed to appear before the Takht till the deadline, which ended today.

The decision makers were: Jathedar of Akal Takht, Joginder Singh Vedanti, Giani Bhagwan Singh Head Granthi, Giani Balwant Singh, Jathedar Takht Damdama Sahib, Giani Tarlochan Singh, Acting Jathedar Takht Kesgarh Sahib and Giani Gurbachan Singh, Granthi Golden Temple.

<http://www.tribuneindia.com/2003/20030711/main8.htm>

ONLY AKAL TAKHT CAN PRONOUNCE 'TANKHAIYA': VEDANTI

Giani Joginder Singh Vedanti today reiterated that Akal Takht was supreme and had the sole right to declare any Sikh 'tankhaiya' or excommunicated.

Talking to the media persons here today, Jathedar Vedanti said though other takhts were also held in esteem by the Sikh Panth yet they were empowered to discuss only regional issues. Giani Iqbal Singh, Jathedar,

Takht Patna Sahib, had recently claimed that all Takhts were equal as per Sikh traditions and had the right to declare any Sikh as 'tankhaiya'. <http://www.tribuneindia.com/2003/20030711/punjab1.htm>

Question: Is there such a right to Jathedar of Akal Takht to declare any Sikh 'tankhaiya' and excommunicate in the Gurbani? However, Gurbani and Gurdwara Act 1925 are silent on this issue.

IN MEMORIAM OF Dr PRITAM SINGH QC

Pritpal Singh Saluja, IUS

The Sikhs of Montreal lost a prominent Sikh Lawyer and a Sikh scholar, Dr Pritam Singh QC on December 10, 2002. Dr Singh was born on October 1, 1914 in the village of Nahal, Jalandhar, Punjab, India. He immigrated to Kenya with his father where he received education up to Senior Cambridge, equivalent to Matriculation in India, from London University. Thereafter he went to England and completed studies in LLB from the King's College, London. He further completed his Degree in Bar from Gray's Institution. He practiced his Barrister-ship in the Law Courts of United Kingdom.

Being a successful in Law of Courts, the Queen of England ordained upon him the title of Queen Council

(QC) in 1976. This was recognized by a golden border on the right hand side of his white turban. Thus he came to be known as Dr Pritam Singh QC. He was a man of all seasons and tastes. He had built his Empire in England, East Africa, and later in Canada and United State of America.

He had good knowledge about Sikhism and had guided many Sikh associations to resolve their legal problems. He had also taken very keen interest in the managements of Gurdwaras and Sikh politics. He has written many articles on Sikhism in various journals and books. He had established Guru Nanak Memorial Lectures in Hull University where scholars from all over the world come and share their views on various topics in Sikhism.

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After retirement in 1982 and on arrival in Montreal he took very active part in establishment of the present Gurdwara, Gurdwara Sahib Quebec, and formulation of the Charter and By Laws of the Gurdwara with the collaboration of S Prithipal Singh Saluja, S Attar Singh Chawla, and S Surjit Singh Rehal. He served the Gurdwara as a Director and then as a Trustee.

He was also very active in Sikh politics. With the help of president Zia-ul-Haque, he managed to arrange for free access to, proper care and up keep of the Gurdwaras in Pakistan. Thus he became an international arbitrator. He had also played an active role in the formation of the World Sikh Organization (WSO) after the attack on Golden Temple, Amritsar.

He and Dr Devinder Singh Chahal were the representatives of Montreal Sikh Community in the first conference held in New York to form WSO.

Due to strict dress code for lawyers and barristers in England he had to struggle hard initially in the practice of law. This was due to wearing of his turban rather than the standard established headgear called 'Full Bottom Wig'. But through his sheer determination, patience, and struggle for existence as a Sikh wearing a turban, he successfully fought the British Government to have the right to wear a white turban. That he did gracefully in the Law Courts of England. He was honored in 1978 by the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, Amritsar for this achievement of practicing law in England with a turban.
