



Sach Kanwal Singh

*If you think examples like Sant Singh Chatwal were not blatant enough, meet the new hero that the Indian Government has presented to the world for being ostensibly worthy of an award given by the President of the Republic of India: Muma Kaana. After New Delhi declared his name, it was so difficult to find the man himself. Nobody knew this outstanding Kashmiri and Deputy Commissioners of various districts were working overtime to locate the man. Who is Muma Kaana? And why does India want to honor him?*

# INDIA FINDS A HERO SHAME ON IT

M aninderjit Singh Bitta, a two-penny street smart boot-licker of the powerful is propped up by the Indian ruling establishment as a patriot of sorts. Governments of all hues, and that includes the Akali Dal government in Punjab, pay deference to him. He gets huge bungalows to live in in Chandigarh and in Delhi. The man is singularly incapable of learning anything except make a rabble rousing speech about himself in which he calls himself a "Zinda Shaheed" and has never uttered a single insightful comment. Not even on his favourite subject of Desh-Bhakti.

But he is a hero of the Indian Government. Bhai Daljit Singh Bittu, a man who has spent his youth trying to be part of a revolution which he then thought was the best way to fight injustice and discrimination, educated himself, engaged with the democratic norms, participated in genuine political activity and is determined to give his life and time to the larger cause of fighting for his community and his land.

But he is a villain of the Indian Government. No wonder, the Indian Government had selected someone like Sant Singh Chatwal as a hero it wanted to honor. Sant Singh Chatwal holds no ideology, takes no position, makes sure he says nothing that can construed as speaking up for his community, and did not even take up the cause of the Sikhs killed in Chattisingpora which even Clinton took up, and about which the then Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright, then wrote also.

But in case you think such examples are not blatant enough, meet the new hero that the Indian Government has presented to the world for being ostensibly worthy of an award given by the President of the Republic of India.

Muma Kaana, aka Ghulam Mohamad Mir. Muma Kaana made it to the top of the list for his "public service". Clearly, it was expected that the Government of Jammu and Kashmir will be well aware of the "service" rendered by such a man, particularly when he is being selected for highest honors that Indian establishment bestows upon anyone on this planet. But somehow, and in a most peculiar sort of revelation, it came to light that the state government led by Omar Abdullah was least aware about who this Muma Kaana, aka Ghulam Mohamad Mir, was.

Nobody knew this outstanding Kashmiri. Journalists were running helter-skelter trying to find the man so that they can interview him. Magazines were asking for his photographs. And Deputy Commissioners of various districts were trying to find if he hailed from their part of the state. Some attention went to former Congress Minister Ghulam Ahmad Mir; but it was rather improbable that the President of India would like to honor him. Besides he was not free. He is under arrest for involvement in the Srinagar sex scandal.

All the sleuths of the state government were working overtime to find this Ghulam Mohamad Mir. And it took days before it emerged that the man was none other than Muma Kaana.

Hence were we able to learn the real man behind the name. The man is known for even in his native Magam village, has been his feared but derogatory nickname Muma Kanna — a name that had become synonymous with extortion, torture and extra-judicial murders across Kashmir during the initial years of militancy.

And then he entered the area that makes young people especially



Kashmiri Muslim protesters shout pro freedom slogans as they protest the killing of 17-year-old Zahid Farooq Shah, on the outskirts of Srinagar last Sunday, Feb. 7, 2010. Shah who died Friday is the second teenager in a week whose death has been blamed on police and government forces in Indian-controlled Kashmir's main city. Widespread protests have rocked the disputed Himalayan region a week, and thousands of armed troops patrolled the city warning residents to stay indoors.

beloved of the Indian intelligence agencies and police forces — Counter Insurgency.

As sections of the Indian media has brought out, Muma was someone who took upon the role of an informer when the government suddenly encountered a total lack of ground support for counter-insurgency, and announced hefty awards in lieu of information. Kaana joined, promising

to be an informant.

Soon his ambition transcended that of a role, and he set up a private militia ostensibly to fight militants. While Kaana did help security forces, he simultaneously brought together a group of notorious criminals who started a wide ring of extortion, torture and even murder. The police still talks of Kaana's wrath across central Kashmir and how his torture cham-

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bers forced dozens of local boys to join the ranks of militants. The story of a local militant, Mustafa, is revealing. Mustafa was a Class 8 student when Kaana and his gang started harassing his family for money. They got no help from the police, as Kaana ruled central Kashmir then.

Villagers still recall when Mustafa ran away from home to pick up arms with the aim of taking revenge, soon

after they misbehaved with his mother in front of him. Mustafa was finally killed in a fierce encounter a few years ago.

So when a Padma award was conferred on Kaana, it came as a rude shock in Kashmir, especially at a time when the state is struggling with a poor record of human rights and has been incapable of making much progress despite lack of major vio-

lence for a long time.

Muzamil Jaleel of the Indian Express minced no words when he said the "award has two major connotations — it is seen as the Centre's open endorsement to the Valley's brutal past where private militias had become notorious for extra-judicial killings, torture and extortion in the name of counter-insurgency. It also exposes a fundamental disconnect between Kashmir and New Delhi. Awarded for public service, Kaana is only viewed as a public tormentor in Kashmir."

But Jaleel may like to think that the Centre has goofed up, he should know better that the Centre and its agencies have a very consistent record on such an approach. The police officers known to have killed hundreds of Sikh youth in fake encounters in Punjab were rewarded and awarded by the Centre.

So much so that, unlike the Jammu and Kashmir Government, where the Chief Minister is displaying a far more saner approach and is keeping his ear to the ground, the Punjab Chief Minister Prakash Singh Badal preferred to chose a man as Chief Secretary who was specially brought in by the Indian Government as the Deputy Commissioner of Amritsar when Operation Bluestar was to be carried out. Also, it preferred to make Sumedh Saini the chief of Vigilance Bureau. A large number of police officers who at one time were arraigned by the much welcomed People's



K ashmiri civil society has been least surprised by New Delhi's decision to confer Padma Shri civilian honour to the notorious renegade Ghulam Mohammad Mir and has termed it a reflection of New Delhi's outlook on Kashmir.



"This is New Delhi's CBM to Kashmiris. They are talking of dialogue, on one hand, and awarding murderers on the other side," noted Human Rights activist and programme coordinator of Jammu and Kashmir Coalition of Civil Society Khurram Parvez, has said.

He described the interview of Mir, aka, Muma Kanna to TV channels as confession of a murder by the renegade who is nominee for Padma Shri this year for "social services."

"Muma Kaana's interview to the media channels is an ample proof that he has killed and facilitated the killing of Kashmiris. Legally it is a confession of murder. He is not a policeman or any other security personnel," he says.

"In what capacity has he killed Kashmiris, taken law into his hands? It shows that government of India is giving awards to the killers of Kashmiris," Khurram added.

Criticizing his recommendation for the award by the mainstream politicians, Khurram asked them to explain contribution by Mir to society.

Surprisingly, there is now some talk that his name was recommended by Farooq Abdullah, Hassan Mir and Sarfaraz Khan. Clearly, they need to explain to people why they recommended his name. Also, some civil society leaders have questioned the silence of Wajahat Habibullah, who boasts of feeling pain for Kashmiris and there is talk that he too has backed that name.

Dr Sheikh Showkat Hussein, Professor of international law and Human Rights in Kashmir University's department of Law and a well known name in intellectual circles in Kashmir, asserted

## Give Awards to Killers, Tell Us Where Our Children Are

that award to Muma Kaana was no surprise.

"New Delhi has been giving these awards to those people who have been its collaborators in

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Kashmir in one way or the other. Whether these awards were given to pen wielders, gun wielders or poets, they have been only collaborators," he says.

Prof Noor Ahmad Baba, Prof of political science in Kashmir University articulates this aptly defines the relation of Indian State with Kashmir:

"Basically, it is the reflective of how Indian state has been dealing

with Kashmir. Those who are considered criminals in Kashmir are heroes for New Delhi. This exactly defines Kashmir's relation with India," says Baba.

Stating that India was shielding the killers of Kashmiris by awarding prizes and jobs, Parveena Ahanger, president of Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons (APDP) says instead of patronizing the criminals, the government should reveal the whereabouts of their kin.

"New Delhi will give awards to informers and killers. There is no surprise in it. The killer of Human Rights activist Jaleel Indrabi, Major Avatar Singh was sent to Canada. Rashid Billa, who is accused of killing three civilians in Soura, is enjoying official patronage at Jammu. They always shield the killers of Kashmiris," says Parveena.

"I want to convey it to Omar Abdullah, who is himself young blood, that we need neither money and nor jobs that are being given to murderers. We demand only the whereabouts of our relatives. They have been subjected to involuntary disappearance? Where are our ten thousand children?"

She said that instead of encouraging killers, the state government should provide whereabouts of the missing. "Mukhbirs are given awards but no one pays heed to our woes," adds Parveena, whose son Javid Ahanger was picked in August 1990 from batamalo and subjected to custodial disappearance.

### Export shawls for honor

Last year, the Government of India had tried to pass off an exporter of shawls in J and K as a national craftsman while conferring the prestigious Padma Shri award in the field of art and culture. Senior government officials even at that time had said they never recommended Hashmat Ullah Khan's name in the first place. Even at that time when his name was announced, the hunt for who this man was started. It was found that no craftsman by that name existed in Jammu and Kashmir.

Poor Khan himself was surprised: "I had no idea that I could have got such an award."

It is men like Bhai Daljit Singh Bittu who are languishing in jails. The Indian civil society has learnt to live with the likes of KPS Gill and even considers him a part of the larger civilian debate.

It is to be welcomed that the Omar Abdullah government has openly distanced itself from Kaana's award. He may have done a yeoman's service for the North Block in New Delhi in the company of Kuka Parrey, Usman Majid and Sonah Ullah Lone and other counter insurgents to contain the tidal wave of rebellion against the centre but his name has come to evoke much rancor and disgust in the valley. But at the same time, the Badal government has never dissociated itself from the names that have troubled the Sikh community. Sukhbir and his family is on great friendly terms with Kamal Nath, the man whose name figures on the list of the Sikh community of those who played a shady role in 1984 massacre of the Sikhs. Ramesh Inder Singh's love affair with the Badal family is an unending one. The Punjab police has never been purged of the black sheep.

### The Many Muma Kaanas of Kashmir

K ashmir valley has a long tradition of throwing up such characters in its history of shifting sands. Youngster may not have heard of Jumma Jangi, Qadir Natta and Hasan Paccha the predecessors of Muma Kanna.

Qadir Natta was to Bakshi Ghulam Mohammed the then Prime Minister what Muma Kanna has been to Mufti's and Abdullah's. Right from 1953 to end of 1964, Qadir Natta held sway and carried the odds for Bakshi Brother's Corporation. Of course the gun toting was not the wont those days and human life was still precious. The very look of blood would evoke heart-rending cries and the dirty tricks involved only Dhakka-Mukki, some noisy disruption in the public gatherings of any opposition to Bakshi's. Or at best, a kidnapping given the colour of an elopement. Poor Ashok Mehta the legendary socialist stalwart of India had a taste of Qadir Natta's prowess and sweep when his large public gathering in Srinagar in the ground which now houses the High Court of the state was thrown helter-skelter in a jiffy and poor Ashok Mehta with his



other socialist colleagues had to run for their lives.

Hasan Paccha, though groomed by the very elements who propped up Muma Kaana in the 1990's became the fact totem goon of Ghulam Mohd Shah who in a coup of shifting loyalties of the National Conference acquired the chair of Chief Ministership of the state and ruled from July 1984. Hasan Paccha's services had been used to browbeat and bring around the elected members of the legislatures to betray and back stab Farooq Abdullah who had been elected the Chief Minister with the thumping majority against the wishes of the rulers at New Delhi.

Hasan Paccha ruled the roost during the rule of Ghulam Mohd Shah and every corner of the valley had a taste of his vile and guile. Padma awards of those days carried a halo of their own. Late Sonam Narboo, Ram Nath Shastri and Hamidi Kashmiri evoke a different aroma when referred to as Padma Shri's. Now these legendary personalities have to share the dais with Muma Kaana.