

We all know what India's then newly anointed Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi, meant when he told us what happens when a big tree falls. Forever will India live with this shame. We now bring you another shameful chapter about how those in charge managed to find the Raagis for the Sarv Dharam Prarthna Sabha as Indira's body lay in state. FOR THE FIRST TIME EVER, read how these Raagis were picked up from their smouldering home inside a burning gurdwara. Kirtan was on even as Sikhs were still being burnt



to understand. "Should they go hang themselves too?" the driver was now getting angry. Rage is a human feeling. It is a very humane feeling also. Woebegone the man whose sense of outrage deserts him at such a point.

Finally they caught up with the place where the Raagis were. "Bhai Sahib! Bhayee Saahib! Rattan was shouting. "Kaun Hai?" someone responded. "Main Rattan, Bhai Sahib!" Two men in white kurtas and blue dastaars came out of the premises. One was a Raagi, the other his assistant. The Raagi started explaining what had happened: "We cried Bhai Sahib! We begged! When the mob still advanced towards us, I ran and asked my family also to run. I told them to jump from the stairs." He was crying, tears flowing down his eyes.

"Satyanaas ho giya ji iss mulak da. Chalo hun tusi kise theek jagah te luk jaavo," Deed was advising them. "Shukar karo tuhaanu Parmatma ne hath de ke rakh liya hai," Rattan was also trying to console as they prepared to leave.

The Raagi Singh understood. "Kaka Ji, We are the Singhs of the Guru. I had given you my word yesterday. Till then our house was not burnt and the Gurdwara Sahib was not burnt. What do you think? Now we will not go to perform kirtan for a dead one even after we have given our word?"

Deed cracked. He cried loudly now. If the mobs were there now, they would have recognized him, even without his *karra*. Rattan too was crying. Four Sikhs by the side of a burnt out gurdwara were crying because a Raagi Jatha was refusing to go back on its word to perform kirtan for a dead Indira Gandhi who had ordered army attack on Sri Harimandir Sahib and Sri Akal Takht Sahib and scores of other gurdwaras and killed thousands of innocents. These were Raagis whose own families were rendered refugees in the heart of Delhi because of Indira-loving mobs.

The four once again looked at the Gurdwara Sahib. The Raagi Singh brought out a Tabla and a Harmonium and sat in the jeep. His two more assistants also sat in the jeep as it raced towards Teen Murti Bhawan.

Indira Gandhi was lying in state. The Indian State was lying in a coma.

The AIR's recording team took positions. Ramayan, Koran, Geeta, then the Holy Bible, then Shabads from Gurbani. Giani Zail Singh stood by the body. Rajiv Gandhi too. Amitabh Bachhan was standing next to

him. A few more known names. Indira's body lay wrapped in a tricolor. It was soon 5 in the morning. Raagi Singhs were singing, "Sajjan Mainde Raangle..."

Some slogans were being raised. "Indira Gandhi Amar Rahe" and "Khoon Ka Badla Khoon Se Lenge" were clearly being heard. Raagi Singhs continued with their *kirtan*. Recording was on. Soon mobs were getting restive. Many voices were being raised. Fingers were being pointed. It seemed things will go out of hand right here. Soon Giani Zail Singh and Buta Singh disappeared from the stage. Everyone now feared for the safety of the Raagi Singhs. They were asked to quickly wind up the *kirtan*. Deed called up the radio station. He was duly updated. Delhi was on fire. Sikhs were being burnt with a ferociousness not seen in decades. Homes and shops were being looted.

By this time someone whispered in his ear. "Aap Akashwani se hain?" "Yes". "Raagi aap ke saath hain?" "Yes," Deed said. "You must return immediately," he was told. Deed waived to the Raagis who understood immediately. *Kirtan* was wound up fast. Slogans were getting louder.

The Raagis and Deed came out and were asked to sit in a huge military truck. The driver of the truck lifted one of the seats revealing a huge box underneath. "Get inside this and keep your head down. Do not say a word," he said. The Raagis jumped into the pit. The lid was put back. The Raagis who had cocked a snook at virtual death and left behind their pogrom-hit families to perform *kirtan* for a dead Indira were being taken home packed in a box like sardines from the place where the Prime Minister of India had called them.

Many nations have gone through periods of shame, and learnt their lessons. That is why they look the beast in the eye when they go to the museums that display what was done to the Jews. They look the beast in the eye so that the beast never gets a chance again to lunge at them. India too was shamed. It is just that its capacity to live with the shame is unfathomable. Can it be otherwise if its leader talks of big trees falling and earth shaking?

(Jaswant Deed, now 53, was soon transferred to All India Radio, Jalandhar. His description of the episode about picking up the Raagi Singhs for performing *Kirtan* will appear in the forthcoming book in Punjabi *Dharti Hor Pare*. Deed is a well known poet.)

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