

# Sr. Tarlochan Singh: Protagonist of Minorities' Cause

***KHUSHWANT SINGH***

IT HAS BEEN GOING ON EVER SINCE the partition of the country. Quite understandably, the main target was our latest minority, the Muslims, who were held responsible for the division of India. Christians came next because large sections, mainly tribals and lowercastes, converted to Christianity to escape cruel discrimination. Even Sikhs who were close to Hindus were not spared. At last, in 1978, the government agreed to set up a National Commission for Minorities (NCM) under Minoo Masani (a Parsi) comprising a Muslim, a Christian and a Sikh. As was proper, thereafter, most chairmen were Muslims because their community was targeted by anti-Muslim, goondas. Unfortunately, the notion that a Muslim would be best suited to safeguard the interests of his community proved to be wrong. Though many eminent Muslims, including retired chief justices, judges and governors, were made chairmen of the NCM, without exception they were keener to avoid being branded communalists and did little to highlight the unfair treatment meted out to Indian Muslims.

For the first time, a Sikh, Tarlochan Singh, hitherto the vice-chairman looking after his own community's interests, has been made chairman. I have little doubt he will watch Indian Muslims' interest better than his Muslim predecessors.

Tarlochan Singh had a chequered career. He was born in Dhudial village (Jhelum district). On partition, his family had to fight its way out of Pakistan, losing some of its members. They settled in Patiala where he completed his education. He was active in student politics and once prevented the then prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru from addressing a gathering in a gurdwara. He was jailed many times. Later, he joined government service and made his mark as a master of public relations. He served under Punjab chief ministers, helped set up museums and art galleries. He was director of publicity of the 9th Asian Games, director of tourism of Delhi State (*Dilli Haat* is one of his creations). For four years, he was press secretary to President Giani Zail Singh. If there was one person who saved Giani ji from being ostracised by the Sikh community by being declared a *tankhaiya* by jathedars, it was Tarlochan Singh.

Immediately after Operation Blue Star, he went to Amritsar and persuaded the jathedars that Giani ji was kept in the dark about the military action in the Golden Temple sanctioned by Indira Gandhi. (Later, he decorated officers who had taken part in it). When violence erupted all over northern India following Mrs Gandhi's assassination, Giani ji did not stir out of Rashtrapati Bhawan and refused to take telephone calls from friends under siege: Tarlochan Singh bore the brunt of their anger.

Members of Tarlochan Singh's family deserve mention. His wife, Uttamjit Kaur, is the daughter of Balwant Singh Anand who spent 15 years in jail during freedom movement. His son, Pawandeep Singh, played polo for India. His elder daughter, Preeti, is vice-chairperson of the Haryana State Women Commission. His younger daughter, Jyotika, and her husband practice medicine in London. His granddaughter,

Sehaj Lamba has just brought out a book of poems and short stories. So the saga of service runs in the family.

[Courtesy: Hindustan Times]



## An Extraordinary Act of Compassion Satyendranath Boral's Mission to save fish

*JHIMLI MUKHERJEE PANDEY*

TRUE TO GURBANI'S EXHORTATION "Above & beyond the good deeds, and bathing at 68 holy places, is the compassion that saves God's creatures" - here is the story of singleminded devotion of a Bengali gentleman.

Call him a maverick if you will, but Satyendranath Boral could well be the conscience of Bengalis always on the prowl for 'fresh' dead fish.

'Fishman' to his neighbours, 60-year-old Boral heads for Kolkata's Bowbazar fish market every Sunday, like any true Bengali. He buys up at least three kilos of *Singi*, *Magur* and *Koi* and instead of the kitchen, he heads for Chandpal Ghat jetty. Under protection of the River Traffic Police, he releases the live fishes back into the Hooghly river.

Sixty-year-old Boral embarked on his 'save fish' campaign in 1980. He is a lone voice in the wilderness of animal rights activism. "No animal welfare organisation thinks of fish welfare in a state where fish is so randomly slaughtered!" Boral says.

The fish campaigner turned vegetarian way back in 1965, when he was still in his early 20s. "I belong to the Suvarna Banik community and am a Vaishnavite. Our religion teaches us to abstain from non-vegetarian food, though this was not strictly followed in our family. I broke the family practice and decided to eat separately at home because I did not want to impose my choice on anyone else," Boral says. Which is why he never married!

"It is difficult to get a vegetarian Bengali girl. And even if I got one she wouldn't have approved of the way I spend my money - buying up fish only to release them," Boral says with a laugh.

And so in his ancient ancestral mansion at Bowbazar, Boral lives alone, but he is not lonely. He has company in neighbours, like former union education minister Dr. Pratap Chandra Chunder and ENT specialist Abirlal Mukherjee, who encourage him and often accompany him to the jetty to see him release the fish.

"Boral has been at his unique passion for quite sometime now. In an age of violence such activity does bring some solace and as Boral's neighbour it is my duty to encourage him," says Dr. Pratap Chandra Chunder.

On why he buys three kilos of fish: "Three is Vishnu's blessed number I had read in religious books and so I buy that much fish. On special occasions like the pujas I go up to even to ten kilos", Boral says. He normally buys *Singi*, *Magur* and *Koi*, the "tough" breeds of fish that will survive after being put back in water. "Fish like katla and Rohu succumb very easily after they are caught. Even if I manage to get live

Rohu or Katla from a fish seller, it will die on the way to the Hooghly or soon after release. I have experienced this earlier,” Boral explains.

He spends over Rs. 3000 every month on buying fish. Boral doesn't mind the expenditure, “I have not only inherited some property but have also worked as a successful stock broker at the Calcutta Stock Exchange. I have no one to look after so I don't mind spending upon after buying fish.”

But pursuing his mission has not been easy. From catcalls to brickbats Boral has experienced it all. “Onlookers at the jetty have abused me saying that when so many are starving I had no right to release live fish in the Hooghly”, Boral says. Some urchins used to remain prepared and the moment Boral empties his bucket in the Hooghly, they jump with their nets and catch them.

Lest his effort goes waste, Boral has now taken police protection for his fish. Now, every Sunday the River Traffic Police keeps vigil so that no one catches the released fish.

Among Boral's many supporters is Banibrata Basu, the deputy commissioner of police (head quarters), who often visits the jetty with his son on Sundays.

“Boral's work is unique and even though, on the face of it, the idea seems hilarious, it actually conveys a deeper message - that of compassion.”

**- Courtesy: Times of India**

