

# Singer Surinder Kaur - Nightingale of Punjab - lives on in Dolly Guleria, her daughter

Surjit Kaur (USA)\*

\* Social Scientist of long standing, in Washington D.C. Email: surjtk02@hotmail.com

My daughter Ranju called me as usual but this time with a firm invitation and admonition 'Mama, keep next Saturday evening free, we are having a musical in our home to honor Dolly Guleria, daughter of fabulous singer Surinder Kaur, the 'nightingale of Punjab'. I arrived at my daughter's house a little early and met the guests of honor – Dolly and her husband Retd. Col. Guleria. Dolly looks to be in her forties but I am afraid to confirm as she told me that she is a grandmother 'Nani and Dadi both'. Among the guests were Raminder Singh Jassal, the DCM of India in Washington and his elegant wife – Dr. Smita Tewari Jassal.

Tone was set by Ambassador Jassal who introduced the daughter of the Nightingale of Punjab in tender sentiments quoting lines from the legendary poet, the only, Shiv Batalvi.

Dolly sat comfortably in the center stage introducing herself as her mother's daughter who aspired to fulfill her mother's wishes and continues to do so.... "For me, my mother is still alive, she is guiding me to continue her legacy, she is always there to inspire me" said Dolly. Dolly's presence is noticed by all, she is graceful, attractive and articulate and being the wife of an army officer knows the protocol. Being the daughter of her mother she is cultured to the core of her being.

I am sitting among the audience but don't have the nerve to ask her for my favorite song of her mother Surinder Kaur and her aunt Prakash Kaur, '*Maanwa te Dhian Ral Baithiyan Ni Maaye Koyee Kardiyan Galorian*'. Lo and behold, Dolly starts the evening with the same song. I sat listening with my eyes closed and tears trickling down my old cheeks and I was least ashamed of weeping in front of the audience.

The evening was blessed with the charm of Punjab; everyone was quiet listening to the immortal folk songs of Surinder Kaur. Although, Dolly said that she had a sore throat and was not at her best, one could not feel any traces of a bad throat in her lilting voice. Among the songs she sang were '*Mainoo Heerey Heerey Akhey, Hai Ni Munda Lambaran Da*', a song that very few of us know is written by Shiv Batalvi, '*Gori Diyaan Jhanjhan Bulaondian Gayeean*'. Then she sang soulful songs of Shiv '*Bhatti Waliye, Chambey Diye Daliye*.' It was after 11pm when dinner was called with a promise that Dolly will resume her singing after dinner. We all knew that the evening was slowly coming to an end. Those of us who stayed out of our love and respect for the "Daughter of Punjab" chatted with Dolly who did not show any signs of fatigue in spite of her long journey, her sore throat and an evening full of loving demands for songs placed on her by admirers of her late mother Surinder Kaur.

The following day was dedicated to Dolly Guleria who is an accomplished woman and has her priorities well sorted out. She has released her new compositions in Canada through Iqbal Mahal. I spent major part of the day with Dolly and her husband – Col. Sharanjit Singh Guleria. First we went to see S. Mohinder ji who shared old memories of Surinder Kaur – it was in 1949 that Surinder Kaur recorded her first song for a Bombay film under his direction. She played some of her recorded songs that she is going to release on her return to Chandigarh and sought S. Mohinder's blessings.

Dolly is Surinder Kaur's oldest daughter and remembers clearly when her father Mr. Sodhi passed away when her mother was only 46 years old. An attractive young singer – Surinder Kaur became a single mother of three daughters. Loneliness was unbearable but she found self expression in music and her immortal songs became her means of livelihood.

Dolly learnt music from her mother's Ustâd Abdul Rehman Khan of Patiala *gharana*. Dolly who believes that classical music is the grammar of music, followed the classical traditions which her mother refused at times. Surinder Kaur is known for her unique style of singing which her music directors including S. Mohinder had to accept even if it clashed with their own style. **We talked of Surinder Kaur's rendering of Gurbani and the shabads she sang under the supervision of my late father Sd. Jodh Singh for the two long playing records of the 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur ji.** "*Eh jag meet na dhekhyo Koyee*" I remember my father complementing her "After the song *Mawaan te Dhian* this is your immortal song". Coming back to Dolly Guleria – she has her mother's voice, she has her mother's charm and much more. Her husband Col. Guleria has recognized her talent and seems to be supporting, nurturing and promoting to the utmost. He seems to take pride in Dolly's talents and achievements to the extent that I have rarely seen elsewhere. If Dolly ever needs emotional support, he is like a pillar of strength to lean on.

Dolly is blessed with a family of three children, two sons and a daughter who is taking after her mother. The sons live in Gurgaon and are technical geniuses. Dolly has started the Nightingale Music Academy in Chandigarh and teaches young talented children her art so that her mother's legacy lives on till eternity. What a blessing it was to meet Dolly and to know her. Her parting words to me were – "I have found my mama in you".

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