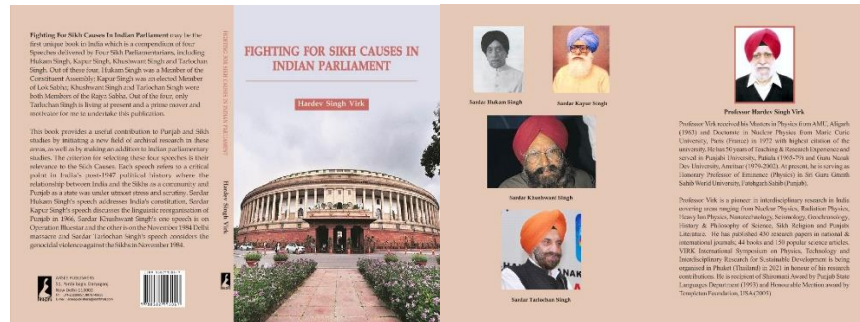


Fighting for Sikh Causes in Indian Parliament

Book Review by

Dr. Devinder Pal Singh



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“Fighting for Sikh Causes in Indian Parliament” is a compendium of speeches delivered by four Sikh Parliamentarians, i. e. Hukam Singh, Kapur Singh, Khuswant Singh and Tarlochan Singh. Each speech refers to a critical point in India’s post-1947 political history where the relationship between India, the Sikh community, and Punjab was under utmost stress and scrutiny. Prof. Hardev Singh Virk has done a yeoman's service to publish the speeches of these eminent Sikh parliamentarians who fought for the Sikh Causes in the Indian Parliament. In the Foreword to the book, Vikramjit Singh Sahney has outlined the background of the current project. Herein, he points out that both Hukam Singh and Kapur Singh made outstanding contributions in highlighting the majoritarian bias against the minorities in the Indian Parliament. In addition, Khuswant Singh and Tarlochan Singh recapitulated the events leading to the Sikh genocide and its aftermath by presenting the Sikh Cause assiduously.

In the Preface of the book, Prof. Pritam Singh states that the criterion for selecting these four speeches (by Hukam Singh, Kapur Singh, Khushwant Singh and Tarlochan Singh) has not been specified. However, it can be inferred that these speeches refer to India's post-1947 political history. He opines that this book is expected to fulfill at least two objectives. Firstly, it allows Punjabis/Sikhs to investigate the role of their representatives in the Indian Parliament and raise awareness of their standing in the Indian federation. Secondly, it helps the social sciences researchers to understand the role of some of the Sikh/Punjabi parliamentarians. Welcoming the advent of this book, he states that the book can play a significant role in liberating the issues raised in these speeches from the records of parliamentary proceedings and presenting them to a broader readership.

In the Introduction (Chapter 1) of the book, Prof. Virk states that its objective was to highlight the contributions of four prominent members of the Indian Parliament who fought for the Sikh Causes. The parliamentarians chosen are Hukam Singh, a Member of the Constituent Assembly; Kapur Singh, an elected Member of Lok Sabha; Khushwant Singh and Tarlochan Singh, both Members of the Rajya Sabha. Hukam Singh was one of the two Sikh Members who did not sign the Indian Constitution in protest for providing no guarantees to the Sikhs, as promised by the leaders of the Indian National Congress, for joining India. Kapur Singh's speech on the Bill for the reorganization of Punjab state dilates on eight different controversial issues concerning the Sikhs. When the discussion was going on the floor of Parliament concerning Blue Star Operation and White Paper of the Government, Khushwant Singh intervened as a member of Rajya Sabha with the following remarks "..... a tragic error of judgement, a grievous mistake and a gross miscalculation....". Tarlochan Singh's speech, under review in this book, was delivered on 14th Dec. 2009 during the call attention motion on the killing of Sikhs in 1984.

Chapter 2 presents Hukam Singh's Speech in the Constituent Assembly on "Sikh Grievances." In this speech, Hukam Singh, as a representative of the minority Sikh community, excelled in viewing various provisions of the Indian constitution from the angle of majority-minority relations. Criticizing the constitution, he touched on several issues, which in his opinion, had grave implications for the Sikh community. He was very incisive in commenting on the power imbalance between the judiciary and the legislature in India, where the legislature was

dominant. He eloquently expressed his fear, shared by several members of the Constituent Assembly, that the legislature might accumulate unwarranted powers. His remarks on the dangers of the provisions for emergency powers have proved prophetic.

Chapter 3 reports Kapur Singh's Speech on "Betrayal of the Sikhs." He delivered this speech on 6th Sept. 1966, in Lok Sabha. In it, he dilates on eight different controversial issues concerning the Sikhs. Moreover, he put forward a compelling argument highlighting the betrayal of the Sikhs by the leaders of the Indian National Congress and the Indian government in a chronological manner. Thereby, he did make an outstanding contribution in highlighting the majoritarian bias in the Indian Parliament.

Khushwant Singh's speech on "Operation Blue Star" is delineated in Chapter 4. He delivered it on 25th Jul. 1984 in the Rajya Sabha. In his remarks, Khushwant Singh tore apart the lies of the government— controlled media and the subservient press on Operation Blue Star. Furthermore, he touched on the role of the army cautiously but boldly. In addition, he successfully highlighted the degree of alienation being felt by the Sikhs.

The next Chapter reports Khushwant Singh's speech on "Massacre of Sikhs in Delhi." He delivered this speech in response to President's address in Rajya Sabha on 22nd Jan. 1985. Speaking about the 1984 November genocide, he narrated his own experience and highlighted the degree of insecurity felt by every Sikh, however highly placed. He pointed out that 6000 innocent Sikhs were massacred in these two days. At least 900 women were windowed, 50,000 Sikhs were rendered homeless and removed to refugee camps, thousands of crores worth of property of the Sikhs was destroyed. In this context, he even brought two reports to the notice of the house. Firstly, the report: 'Who are the guilty?' by Dr. Rajni Kothari, and secondly, the report by a committee presided over by the retired Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, Justice S. M. Sikri. He ended his speech with his prophetic remarks: "unless the guilty are identified and punished, mark my words, there will be no settlement of the Punjab problem, and there will be no peace in this country."

Chapter 6 describes the translated version of Tarlochan Singh's speech, originally delivered in Hindi on 14th Dec. in 2009. He delivered this speech in Rajya Sabha during the call attention motion on the killing of Sikhs in 1984. Tarlochan Singh referred particularly to the role

of the police, the judiciary, and the central government in demonstrating majoritarian institutional bias. Tarlochan Singh is known for his political acumen and oratory. At his rhetoric best in his speech, he reminds the Parliament: "Why didn't the earth shake when Mahatma Gandhi was murdered, how many Marathas were murdered in the country, because the murderer was a Marathi? When Rajiv Gandhi was killed, how many Tamils were killed? Why were only the Sikhs victimized? Why the tree had to fall only on the Sikhs?". He boldly invoked the UNO convention on Genocide and Article 7 of the International criminal court of crimes against humanity to demand a trial of the guilty from India's Supreme Court for the November 1984 violence.

The last Chapter of the book reports the profiles of the contributing members of Parliament. Except for the profile of Sardar Hukam Singh, whose source was Lok Sabha Speakers, all other profiles are reproduced from Wikipedia. Unfortunately, Wikipedia is not credited as an authentic source of information in academia.

By initiating archival research in Indian parliamentary affairs, this book provides a valuable contribution to Punjab and Sikh studies. A collection of such speeches has the potential to highlight the roles and relevance of parliamentarians in Indian democracy by presenting a record of their activities and views to a broader readership. I hope that this initiative of Prof. Virk will inspire other social science researchers to produce similar works focused on Punjab and Sikh affairs.



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