

# FREEDOM-LOVING DOABA

# AB KISANS' AL ASSEMBLY



into Jandiala village. Clenched fists shoot up as it files into the Conference grounds.



Peasant delegates at a meal in the Communal Kitchen

Photos by SUNIL JANAH

ing freedom. We heard groups of kisan women chanting in these processions the same Sikh national hymns they sang when they marched on the gurdwaras in the days of the Akali struggle.

DALIP SINGH TAPIALA was the Volunteers' GOC. It was he who commanded the whole contingent of a 1,000 volunteers from every district. BABA BHAGAT SINGH CANADIAN, healthy, red-cheeked, white-bearded, was not just the Chairman of the Reception Committee—he was the father at a family reunion. He met each jatha himself, saw they had their food, that tents or houses were allotted to them, that the sick were given special diet.

WASDEV SINGH, for many years a State Prisoner and now General Secretary of the Punjab Kisan Committee, and JAGJIT

SINGH LYALLPURI, Vice-President of the Kisan Committee, were responsible with Tapiala and PRITAM SINGH, the Deputy GOC for the Conference arrangements. In khaki shirts and trousers, with three blue stars on their shoulders, they were the generals of our own volunteer army.

Orders were issued to the volunteers as soon as they arrived: every volunteer to wear a red kerchief round his neck; the clenched fist salute to be given by volunteers to section leaders, district and provincial comrades; cleanliness is the essential requisite of every squad—the best protection against disease—the best squad is the one with the least number of sick.

Every one spoke of the splendid way in which orders were carried out. It was different from last year's kisan conference at Bhaikhna and Chugawan. The discipline of the Sabha and the Party transcended all other ties—district, local and individual.

The volunteers were at their best in the larger, serving routes, lading out hot dal, pouring gallons and gallons of water for thirsty delegates and visitors. In all nearly 30,000 meals were served at a communal kitchen in the three days of the Conference. Onions and acchar (pickle) were specially given out generously as an anti-cholera precaution. Forty professional cooks were responsible for food.

Tea was in the hands of a local comrade who had learned the great art of brewing tea in Gujrat Jail, where he was in charge of tea arrangements. Even the well-known tea-connoisseurs of Ferozepore were satisfied. Anti-cholera precautions meant cinnamon and cloves added to the tea, and the delegates found this made the tea

even more tasty than ever.

On the 23rd, the Subjects Committee met to discuss the resolutions recommended by the Working Committee of the Provincial Kisan Committee. Wasdev Singh explained the resolutions and one by one they were passed. The delegates put up their own local resolutions on their district problems.

## New Mahabharat

During the day, crowds gathered in the pandal to hear our kisan poets recite, LAHORI RAM PAIR-DESI'S epic story of the war—Jangnama—told in his own sharp, sweet poetry, held the audience spellbound.

He told his tale in bits, interspersed with songs and poems by others. Jangnama is written in the traditional epic style of the travelling minstrels—a new Punjabi Mahabharata telling of warriors and people—Stalin, Voroshilov, Tito, Zoya, the guerrillas of all Europe; of places that have made history like Stalingrad—of tyrants and murderers—Hitler, Himmler, Goering and all their prototypes and quislings.

Many kisan homes have their sons in the army: their future, their lives were tied up in Pardi's epic and mothers and fathers listened raptly. They will be back soon, that was what they understood from the story of the Red Army's victories. But what will become of them after demobilisation? They waited to hear the answer in the rest of the Conference.

## Conference Begins

The next morning (the 24th) the Conference proper began. 3,000 including 700 women, were in the presidential procession which wound its way through the village. Thousands watched from the rooftops, in the doorways, from every vantage point. 100 huge red flags with hundreds of small ones....

The women had never walked in a procession before. They had debated the problem of what to wear for the occasion a day earlier. The festive phaggas would get spoilt in the dust. But then this was a Big Day. The phaggas must be worn. And so here they all were, struggling hard to hold them up safe from the dust. They were shy too, many of them, hiding their faces in their dopattas. It was a long march, but they stuck to the end.

The procession was a stream of many colours, representing the various periods of Sikh patriotic struggle—from the veteran Babas to the new Bal Sabha kids.

Tapiala rode about on a horse marshalling the giant procession for the march past. Then ACCHAR SINGH CHHINA, the President, rode round taking the salute. The police, insistent on objectionable, had banned marching tunes. So

the band struck up joyful, festive music, as the procession moved off.

After the procession, the flag was shot up, as the band strikes up a tune and tall, massive B.P.L. BEDI hoists the Red Flag.

The Conference begins. First the welcome by Baba Bhag Singh. Greetings from the Trade Unions by Fazal Elahi Qurban, from the Muslim Students' Federation by Karmani. Abdulla Rasool brings greetings from the All-India Kisan Sabha. 20,000 listen to Chhina's Presidential address. The problems facing the kisans—the rapidly lowering prices of foodgrains, the black-market in cement and iron, sugar and cloth, the failure of procurement—all these were brought out. The special problem of Doaba—the urgent need for canal irrigation—all this was the audience's own demand.

## Growing Membership

The Kisan Sabha had grown to command vast influence. A membership of a lakh and a half was expected this year. Better sugar distribution had been won in a number of districts by the Sabha. In districts like Amritsar, whole areas of land had been brought under cultivation as a result of the Grow-More-Food Campaign of the Kisan Sabha. All these were the delegates' own achievements.

But the audience cheered loudly every time the speakers talked of the Gandhiji-Jinnah meeting, of the possibilities of unity. Years of patriotic consciousness had made them acutely conscious of the dire need of a National Government to solve their problems.

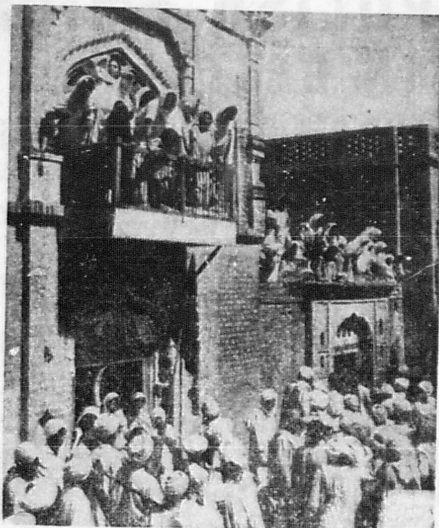
The next day came the resolutions. Eagerly, the audience listened to TEJA SINGH SWANTANTRA and SOHAN SINGH JOSHI on the political resolution.

"Unity alone can win National Government and take us out of the deadlock of death and destruction."

The disruptive anti-unity politics of the Akali leadership were exposed, their slogans of "Khalistan" blown up. Delegates from the Sikh States of Patiala, Nabha, Kapurthala, Malerkotla, Faridkot—knew well the alliance of the Akalis with their rajahs and maharajas and saw straight the logic of Giani Kartar Singh's "Khalistan": a feudal princedom surrounded by Patiala and the Sikh states ruled by the "royal" hand.

Tapiala lashed out at the Unionists in a resolution on the Zamindari League. These men have blackened the name of the Punjab in the rest of India by their criminal hoarding. At the end of his speech he got every single kisan in the audience to raise his hand above his head and shout slogans for Congress-League agreement.

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Women crowd the balconies and roofs to watch the procession of delegates and visitors go by.