

PUNJAB ANNUAL



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A section of the Volunteers' Rally

The Doaba (the land between two rivers) is the name by which the districts of Hoshiarpur and Jullundur, lying between the Sutlej and the Beas, are known throughout the Punjab. "Patriotic Doaba"—the name and the adjective go together—for the Doaba symbolises the struggle for freedom of our province.

DEBT-RIDDEN and poverty-stricken, it has always been the Sikh villages of these districts which have sent their intrepid sons out into the new world of the Americas, to find fresh avenues of livelihood. From the beginning of this century when this emigration began, Sikh Kisans with all their characteristic courage, resourcefulness, determination and capacity for tireless labour, have gone out to the United States, Canada, the Argentine, Brazil—every land of the new world. Here they learnt new trades, became mechanics, skilled labourers, contractors, traders, grew rich, educated their sons. Here also, they learnt the meaning of freedom.

An Epic In Itself

Uniting all the patriotic Punjabis abroad, they founded the famous revolutionary Ghadr Party. The great story of the way in which they planned, worked, saved to help the national movement is an epic in itself. They sent back their tried and tested leaders to organise their people. They sent their brightest boys to Europe, to Moscow, to learn the science of revolutionary battle at the University of freedom.

It was the Doaba which was the birthplace of the Babar Akali movement, which won to its fold the bravest of the Sikh youth and shook the British rich. Bhagat Singh was born in the Doaba. To the Civil Disobedience Movement, the Doaba gave its love and succour.

The Congress and the Kisan Sabha grew fast and rapidly. The Tricolour and the Red Flag were implanted deeply side by side in the people's hearts. The Communist Party received into its ranks the priceless treasure-store of cadres, nurtured on the free soil of the growing Americas, trained in the schools of the citadel of liberty—the Soviet Union, and steeled in battle against imperialism.

In the fields of this Doaba, outside the walls of village Jandiala in Jullundur district, the Punjab's annual Kisan Conference met this year. Jullundur's peasantry had given Rs. 13,000 in handbills of grain and small cash for the expenses of the Conference to the propaganda squads of the Kisan Sabha.

Jandiala with its population of 6,000 was en fete for the Conference. The houses of the village are for the most part made of strong red brick (cash from America earned by the toil of the emigrants paid for this). On the walls were pasted the slogans of the Kisan Sabha. Red Flags waved from the roofs of the houses of kisan workers. A new bright

red flag hung from the flagpost in the village square.

In this square there used to be the Congress office, before the police locked and sealed it in August 1942. Here also are the offices of the Kisan Sabha and the Party. The kids had formed a Bal Sabha in Jandiala two months before the Conference, and could be heard joyfully shouting slogans all over the village.

Some of the women were taking out their best clothes, bright coloured ghaggras (skirts) and dopattas (veil to cover the head and shoulders). Other women were cleaning out their spare rooms for their guests—forty-three bathaks (outer or upper storey rooms) were lent to the Kisan Sabha for delegates and others; and every Jandiala household was full of relations and friends from neighbouring villages. Still other women were cleaning out the wheat for the communal kitchen, the langar. This was a job of honour, and women competed for the right to serve at the langar.

The men were busy with all the thousand and one jobs necessary for the success of the Conference. As they drew water, they looked down into deep wells and wondered how much lower the level of water would sink. This was their main problem: the drying up of wells, the sinking level, resulting in greater strain on the bullocks, more expense. Their biggest demand was for a Doaba canal. And drawing bucket after bucket of water for the Conference, Jandiala's kisans thought of the fillip the Conference would give to his urgent need for adequate water-supply.

The village opium-addicts looked out of their den and grinned shamefacedly conscious that they had no place till they left their pipes for the new joy of Jandiala.

Lone And Vicious Ones

The village Akali followers of Giani Kartar Singh and Master Tara Singh, unable to win support for their anti-unity, disruptive politics, sought to cover up their defeat in vile anti-Kisan Sabha, anti-Communist slander. Two days before the Kisan Conference they held an Akali, anti-settlement "Conference" at Bunsdala, two miles away from Jandiala.

In spite of their bringing their top-notch provincial Giani-ite leaders like Jathedar Mohan Singh, they had an audience of just 400. For their procession, they could only secure two horses; those of the Jaidlar and Thanedar! The sort of people they are, the anti-national policy they pursue, came out when all Jandiala saw that it was their leader Chanchal Singh, who lodged and fed in his house,

the contingent of C.I.D. officers and men sent to attend the Conference.

The local Congress Secretary sells smart pairs of shoes from the city factories, all in cardboard boxes, as in any shoe store in Bombay or Calcutta. He had over 500 pairs of shoes in his stock, and business was always brisk. A village like Jandiala, in which every home had some one or other returned from abroad, demanded the latest fashion in shoes.

Many Veterans Still in Jail

But apart from being a shoe-shop, this is a political adda (meeting place), where people come and read the papers and gossip. The Congress Secretary's eyes shone as he told us of the 'old days.'

"This is a great national, patriotic village. In 1922 we held a big meeting here. Sarojini Naidu came. Since then, till now, there never has been such a big meeting."

"Oh, those were the times," he went on movingly, "when we were all united in this village. Now the Akalis are trying to split the village into two."

"Four of our leaders from this village are still in jail: the old veteran Baba Lal Singh, Jagjit Singh, Durbala Singh, and Pore Ram."

When jatha (batch) after jatha of kisans from different districts passed through the village shouting for the release of his co-workers, he was quietly happy.

There are 150 Muslim kammin (artisan and labourer) households in Jandiala. Poverty stricken and oppressed for centuries, living the lives of slaves, they saw in the Kisan Sabha session a hope of the end of their privations.

On the train, we saw three kammin child brides, ranging in age between four and eight, and the awful plight of these people was forced on us. They had to marry off their kid girls, because if the father died, the girls would starve to death, because kammin can own no property in the village. The Sharda Act takes no account of the kammin, and it has no meaning for him.

In the village, an old kammin woman told her tale.

"Do you know it is the law that we cannot own a house, cannot buy an inch of land in the village? We have to buy our food from the kisans at five seers a rupee, however low the market price may be. We are paid our wages for piece work grudgingly, after cutting drastically for every little fault. We are made to do forced labour without payment. If we complain, we are reported to the tehsildar, who increases our already exorbitant professional tax."

Outside her house was a League Flag, crossed with the Red Flag.

"Now my son is in the Kisan Sabha. He is a matriculate. Now



A women's jatha (formation) marches into Jandiala



The processionists starting from the Conference pandal towards Jandiala village.

that you are all here, we shall have better conditions. The Muslim League and the Communist Party will help us."

How glad and confident she became, when, together with twenty other kammin women, she paid her two annas and joined the League at the end of the Conference.

On the 22nd, jathas began to pour into Jandiala. They had come walking—some as much as fifty to sixty miles. In each jatha was a strong contingent of white-bearded old kisans. In each jatha were women with kids in their arms.

From Montgomery came eleven women, and all eleven carried kids. Their leader had the Red Flag in one hand, and her child on the other.

One jatha claimed to have a centenarian who had walked over forty miles with them; each jatha

competed with the other in having the largest number of babas.

There was a buffalo with one of the jathas. The whole family, husband, wife, three kids had come—no one was prepared to stay at home to look after the buffalo. So she came along too.

A woman had come ten miles to the Conference because she knew that here she would learn the truth about the war, and news meant news of her soldier-son.

At the head of a jatha of men, marched a resolute woman with her hair tied up on her head, her sleeves rolled up, flag in her hand. Old kisans told us that seeing her reminded them of the days when the Sikhs had fought to take possession of their sacred gurdwaras out of the hands of the swindling, debauched, toady mahants. It was then that women had tied up their hair and marched as warriors of Kisan (

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