

In Memoriam
Gurmit Kaur



March 5, 1928 - August 21, 2022

With profound sadness we inform you that our veteran comrade Gurmit Kaur (Nunner) passed away on the night of August 21, peacefully in her sleep. Gurmit was 94. A communist since an early age, she lived a long revolutionary life, taking her place first in the front ranks of the struggles of her people in India for independence, freedom and democracy and then in Canada also, championing women's and minority rights and the rights of all by virtue of being human. Sadly, her last years were marred by dementia but our remembrances of her are vivid and will always inspire us to champion the fight for the rights of all, under all conditions and circumstances.

An active supporter of her younger brother Hardial Bains who founded the Communist Party of Canada (Marxist-Leninist) in 1970, and a proud member of the Party herself since 1971, one of her salient characteristics was to make sure her party organization was functioning well so that the tasks she was entrusted with could be accomplished with honour. For her fidelity to the principle of building the basic organizations of the Party, Gurmit was given the honour of opening the Seventh Congress of CPC(M-L) in March 1998.

The Party Archives record this important event as follows:

“On March 28, 1998, the Communist Party of Canada (Marxist-Leninist) convoked its 7th Congress, the Party's highest decision-making body, in the auditorium of Marion Hall at the University of Ottawa.



At 10:00 am the first delegate session convened and the Congress was declared opened by Gurmit Kaur, who declared: “Comrades, it gives me great pleasure to accept the honour that the Party has given me to perform this very important duty. As a member of a communist family, as an activist in the 1940s with the communist women’s organization in India, as an activist of CPC(M-L) since 1971, as a national minority woman in Canada, it is with great feeling and pride that I militate within the ranks of the Party. Comrades, I declare this historic 7th Congress of the Communist Party of Canada (Marxist-Leninist) open.”

Gurmit was the second daughter of Gurbaksh Singh, Sarpanch of Mahilpur, District Hoshiarpur, who played an important role in the anti-colonial struggle against the British, repeatedly imprisoned and forced to live underground. Gurmit grew up supporting the progressive struggle to free India from British domination and rule. She and her elder

sister Ranjit were the first women in Mahilpur to attend Khalsa College and then take on jobs to support themselves and help support their siblings. This reflected her family’s progressive attitudes towards educating women beyond their traditional roles of wife and mother and forever helped her to stand on her own two feet. Fiercely independent, she always worked for a living to support her family and herself. She encouraged all women to stand on their own feet and kowtow to no one.

Gurmit joined the communist women’s organization in India in the 1940s and became active in Canada in the struggle against state-organized racist attacks and for the rights of all, as well as against injustice and for freedom in India and South Asia. She was a founding member of the East Indian Defence Committee and People’s Front Against Racist and Fascist Violence and of the Democratic Women’s Union of Canada. During this period she returned to India, participated in the life of India at that time and ran a bookshop in Jalandhar which specialized in communist and progressive literature.

On her return to Canada, Gurmit became a proud member of the Association of Indian Progressive Study Groups (AIPSG) and served as the Secretary of the IPSG (Toronto). This was a crucial time when the Gandhi government invaded the Golden Temple in Amritsar and many other gurdwaras, unleashed massacres in Punjab and Black Laws were passed, plunging her homeland into anarchy and violence.

She later became Secretary of the South Asian Research Institute (SARI) when it was founded in 1992. During this period she participated in the work of the Party and Hardial Bains on Indian philosophy which addressed the need for the peoples of the Indian subcontinent to base their struggle on their own thought material, not that of the British Raj which imposed institutions, values and an outlook which blocks the people from achieving liberation.

As Secretary of the Toronto chapter of the IPSG she gave the welcoming remarks at the *A Look at Indian Philosophy* Conference held by the AIPSG in Toronto on November 9-10, 1991. At that conference Hardial Bains gave the important keynote speech entitled *Goddess of Light*. Gurmit's welcoming remarks eloquently explained the significance of this work and illustrated the role she played in communicating it to others. Referring to an earlier conference on Indian philosophy, she said:

"...When I decided to attend the conference in Montreal on July 21 to 22, I thought it would just be discussion of some abstract notions emerging out of some ancient ideas. But I was surprised as were others that we were dealing with actual problems of Indian philosophy at this time. What should be the problems of Indian philosophy at this time? Or, to put it more correctly, what Indian philosophy is. It was a puzzle to me how it could be said there is no Indian philosophy, and the conference created a definite feeling that there is an Indian philosophy. Right after the Conference, we hoped that such a conference could be held in Toronto as well. One thing followed another. Here we are. We thought it would be a great honour for us to host such a conference. I just want to tell you that we are very happy and honoured to host this conference and we are certain that this conference will take another major step forward in affirming Indian philosophy."

And so it did.

Subsequently Gurmit also joined the work of the International Committee for the Release of Political Prisoners and actively agitated for the release of, amongst others, her brother Justice Ajit Singh when he was imprisoned on fabricated charges under the Black Laws imposed by the government of India to silence the people of Punjab and commit crimes against them. In February 1993, Gurmit wrote a Letter to the Editor of the newspaper *Yeh Din/These Days* which reads:

"I add my voice in support of the Appeal issued in New Delhi on February 22, 1993, to 'Members of Parliament of Conscience.'

"I strongly denounce Congress (I) and the BJP for criminalizing the politics of India. They think that they can divert the attention of the people but I think things are going to change. I fully support the democratic renewal of India so that this bloodshed should be stopped and culprits be tried and punished, including the 1984 guilty ones, irrespective of their political affiliation or authority.

"The appeal is justly raising the various issues, including the issue of rights and duties of citizens. It seems to me that the state has all the rights and no duties and the people have the duties and no rights. The rights of the people must be enshrined by the state. The Indian state is using the same tactics as the British government used before 1947. Nothing has changed. Divisions are created among the people. But now people have all sorts of experience and they are united. As regards Punjab there is not a single incident where a Hindu has killed a Sikh or vice versa. It seems the same is the situation everywhere else. People want *roti* and *kapda* (food, shelter and clothing). They want to enjoy a peaceful life. But the government, instead of dealing with the real problems of the people, gives them bullets under the hoax of solving the problems of law and order. The political parties, especially Congress (I) and the BJP, are diverting the issues.

"I congratulate those who have raised the real voice to solve the problems of the people. I join with them and will popularize the appeal to others.

"I thank *Yeh Din* for publishing the paper which serves the needs of the people. I wish it every success."

In those crucial years when the retreat of revolution set in with its anti-social offensive and restructuring of the state so that narrow private interests were served and the ruling class started putting everyone in a position of fending for themselves, Gurmit was also very active in establishing the work for the renewal of the political process. She agitated against the adoption of retrogressive changes to the Constitution at the time of the referendum on the Charlottetown Accord and she was a founding member of the Canadian Renewal Party established to take the work of empowering the people forward.



Gurmit Kaur with her close Comrade Anne Boylan at the Founding Convention of Canadian Renewal Party, April 24, 1993

Gurmit also actively participated in the fight for justice for women and minorities suffering discrimination. On September 25, 1993, AIPSG, in cooperation with the People’s Front and its affiliate, the East Indian Defence Committee (EIDC), held a conference against racism and ghettoization at the University of Ottawa at which Gurmit spoke. She also contributed to the success of the Public Forum on Minority Rights held in Toronto in March-April 1995 under the theme *Taking A Bold Step Together in Defence of the Rights of All*. This conference gathered hundreds from Canada and abroad to participate in providing rights with modern definitions consistent with the demands of the times. In her capacity as Secretary of the South Asia Research Institute, Gurmit addressed the aim of the Conference which also affirmed the rights of women, saying:

“The question of the affirmation of women is the most crucial in this period when women have to re-look at this time and see what has been going on with the women’s movement and what it has achieved. Have they been seeking equality with men in which case they can never affirm themselves or are they seeking to transform the society which is the source of their problems by affirming their rights by virtue of their being human and on account of their womanhood.

“I call upon all women to participate in these events being organized at this time irrespective of your ideology, especially in the Public Forum on Minority Rights and in the sessions of the International Seminar when *Communism and Human Rights* are discussed. Attend the Forum on the Affirmation of Women in order to celebrate what women associated with us have achieved in the last two years and to chart out our program for the future.”

In August 2000, Gurmit once again joined the work to elaborate the need for Indians to arm themselves with their own thought material when she helped organize the first World Punjabi Conference in Prince George, BC. As Secretary of SARI, she addressed the topic *The Right to Our Language: Some Aspects of How the Problem Poses Itself*. She introduced the topic as follows:

“I am honoured to be with you here today and speak a few words about the very complex issue of the struggle for our language. The material I will present today is taken from research carried out by the South Asia Research Institute (SARI) about which I will first say a few words.

“SARI was founded in 1992 by a group of professionals and intellectuals both from South Asia as well as abroad who are knowledgeable about South Asia. The goal of SARI is to make a serious contribution towards strengthening the political unity of the countries and peoples of South Asia in light of the extremely difficult and dangerous nature of our times. Towards this aim, SARI is dedicated to the development of a philosophy which enshrines the enhancement of the political, social, cultural and economic well-being of the countries and peoples of the South Asia region. It engages in research of all aspects of the issues which concern our peoples – philosophical, political, economic and social and then shares this research amongst its members and anyone else interested in benefitting from it. We invite all of you to contribute to our research database and use our research and library services.”

These are some of the examples of how Gurmit always stood with the Party as it provided leadership to women and national minorities in the context of fighting for the rights of all. She wholeheartedly participated in the work to bring forth modern definitions consistent with the demands of the times, ever loyal to the cause of the Canadian working class and people and their Party, CPC(M-L), and to the peoples of her homeland and of the entire world.



Gurmit with her brother Hardial at the 6th Congress of CPC(M-L) in 1993

When Gurmit hosted a meeting in July 1992 with Indian journalists and friends, Hardial Bains said: “Once again I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my sister Gurmit and the IPSG Toronto who organized this meeting. I always cherish very strong deep feelings for them and for all of you. These feelings are never going to disappear because, if these feelings go, the heart will go. It is not possible, because my heart and these feelings are one. In our culture it is said that you don’t thank your own brothers and sisters so I’m not going to thank them. We are one.”

Gurmit was predeceased by her brothers Hardial and Ajit and her sister Ranjit. Our deepest sympathies go out to her Party comrades with whom she shared weal and woe, to her children, her brothers Harmohinder and Yashdip and her sister Gurdev, and her many nephews and nieces with whom she enthusiastically shared her life in many ways, which they will always fondly remember.

With profound sorrow,

*Central Committee
Communist Party of Canada (Marxist-Leninist)
August 26, 2022*

Messages and remembrances to the Party can be sent to gurmikaormemorial@cpcml.ca.