

In Honour Of A True Hero

ON June 25, 1985, at 6.30 p.m. Manushi organised a public meeting to commemorate Shri Prabhu Dayal and to honour his wife Atam Devi. Prabhu Dayal died in November 1984 due to injuries incurred while helping three Sikh women escape from their house which had been set on fire by rioters. (See Manushi No. 26) Manushi's appeal to readers to contribute towards a fund for his Wife and children received a heartening response. We were able to collect about Rs. 13,000.

Rulers of nations have a long established tradition of honouring soldiers who come back victorious from battle after killing others and also those who die in battle while trying to kill others. Thus, violence inflicted on others has been glorified as heroic. This has led to a situation whereby the very survival of humanity is today at peril. Therefore, it has become all the more imperative to ask : what is real courage ? To kill other human beings as proof of one's power, or to choose to place oneself at risk, as Prabhu Dayal did, in order to save the lives of others ?

During the November riots, many ordinary people displayed remarkable courage and humane feeling in trying to save their Sikh sisters and brothers from brutal attack. In honouring the memory of Prabhu Dayal, we wished to pay tribute to all those who cherish and seek to preserve human life and human values in the face of the forces which are spreading hatred, enmity and fear between different groups of people.

Ironically, this hatred is being spread in the name of national unity. It is time we realise that national unity is a mere myth if people are divided against each other, and that it is far more important to preserve and value human life than to try to unite the nation by force and violence. No nation is worth preserving

at the cost of human life and happiness.

The meeting, conducted in crucial role in holding society together and inspire us to build a more humane, just and free society. Therefore, it is important that we honour such people.

People like Prabhu Dayal play a Hindi, began with some group songs. Professor Rajni Kothari, president of the People's Union for Civil Liberties, spoke. He paid tribute to Shri Prabhu Dayal, and said that as long as there are human beings



From left to right: Smt. Atam Devi, Vandana, Sant Longowal, Lalit

like him, leaders like Sant Longowal who lay stress on human love and amity, and small independent social activist groups to act as catalysts for their coming together, there would seem to be some hope for humanity.

Sant Longowal garlanded Atam Devi and her two children, Lalit and Vandana. Her eldest daughter, Neelam, was not able to come because of the illness of her grandmother. Sant Longowal presented to them Rs 5,100 on behalf of the Akali Dal. He said that people like Shri Prabhu Dayal are the real unifiers of the country. He pointed out that the ruling party is to blame for communal

tensions, past and present. He said that if he had known of Prabhu Dayal's death he would have visited his family and shared their grief. He stressed that nothing in the world is greater than the love of human beings for each other, and that Prabhu Dayal had given evidence of this love in its noblest form. The meeting closed with the singing of "We Shall Overcome" in Hindi.

We had initially planned to hold the meeting in the park next to Manushi office and had received a very positive response from all individual residents we had approached. However, a couple of local members of the ruling party opposed the idea and tried to spread panic in the neighbourhood by saying a riot might

result from Longowal's visit. They also caused a lot of harassment and pressure tactics to prevent the meeting from taking place.

Consequently, even though we had official permission to use the park, we were forced to hold the meeting on the terrace of Manushi office. Apart from about 200 people on the terrace, several thousand men and women, both Hindus and Sikhs, stood on the streets below, and listened to the proceedings over the loudspeakers. All of them showed remarkable patience even though Longowal's arrival was delayed by two hours. An atmosphere of peace and cordiality prevailed. □