



IPA's SPECIAL AWARD 'DARE TO PUBLISH' TO LATE SHRI RAJPAL

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We are gathered here today to pay tribute to one very courageous man, who fell as a martyr to freedom to publish decades ago. The late Shri Rajpal.

Late Shri Rajpal, was a very special man. This is the reason why we have decided to give him a special award during this formal visit of the President and Secretary General of IPA: The "Dare to Publish Award", named after his son's Dina Malhotra's famous book "*Dare to Publish*", first published here in India in 2004.

Shri Rajpal was a pioneer in the publishing of spiritual, social and political books in the 1920s. He had a humble beginning, but by the work done by him, he was admired by all the social circles in Lahore and throughout Punjab. Late Shri Rajpal was a fearless publisher. Even in the short span of his life, he created a name in the world of publishing, bringing out books in four languages, Hindi,

English, Urdu and Punjabi. He was an incredibly courageous man who took up every cause which was needed for the uplift and reform of society. He was one of the leaders of the reformist movement in northern India.

The Assaults

As said, Shri Rajpal was a leading publisher and whenever any cause came, even if threatened by fundamentalists, he was the first one to take it up. In 1923, he published a controversial book depicting the life of Prophet Mohammed (PuH), *Rangeela Rasool*, infuriating the fundamentalists of the Muslim community in Punjab, and threats were given to him from then onwards. He was first attacked in 1926 and was consequently hospitalised for three months, but his life was saved. Then, a second attack by another fanatic was made in 1927, which hit another person by mistake who, thankfully, also survived the attack. But the tension was now very high among the communities throughout the region. The third attempt, on 6 April, 1929, proved fatal when another fanatic, Ilam Din, took his life on this very dark day, Rajpal thus having only lived 44 years.

The Book

Back to the book: after its publication a court case was instituted against Shri Rajpal. This went on for four long years, wherein hundreds of evidences from scholarly historical books were cited. Finally, the Punjab High Court of Lahore, reversing the six months imprisonment sentence given to him by a lower court, acquitted Late Shri Rajpal of all charges. As the entire material in the book was based on facts, it could not be challenged, according to the High Court. This

judgement of the High Court infuriated the fundamentalists who took the law in their hands to assassinate Mr. Rajpal on 6 April 1929.

A Courageous Publisher

In my humble opinion, the most vital aspect of Rajpal's courage was that the author of the book, though a great scholar, was not a man of courage and was afraid of the wrath of fundamentalists. Due to this situation, the author took a solemn promise from Shri Rajpal that the book would be published under a *nom de plume*. This meant that the publisher would take all the responsibility of writing and publishing this book on himself and would never divulge the name of the real author, Pandit Chamupati, who was afraid of the wrath of the extremists.

Rajpal was threatened and asked to reveal the name of the author. He was offered by the fundamentalists that if he came out with the name of the real author, his life would be spared. But *because* he was courageous, *because* he defended freedom to publish even before such a concept really existed, *because* he dared to publish, he did not do such a thing. Thus, the whole burden, the entire agitation was directed against the publisher.

Let's face it: Late Shri Rajpal gave his life to save the author's life, and to uphold the sacred principle of Freedom to Publish.

Not a case on its own...

Decades later, in 1993, four years after Ayatollah Khomeini's fatwa, another publisher, in a very different part of the world, was also shot for publishing Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*: Norwegian publisher William Nygaard.

Thankfully, after several months in hospital, he survived the attack. We just learned this week that the Public Prosecutor in Norway has recently ordered the case to be reopened and that the Norwegian Publishers Association has offered a NOK 500.000 reward to anyone who can offer crucial information to the Police in the investigation.

Not to forget!

In 1997, the Federation of Indian Publishers gave Rajpal a posthumous Freedom to Publish Award at the time of the Delhi Book Fair.

Now, thirteen years later, at a time when IPA is fighting efforts at UN level to draft a treaty that would ban religious defamation, thus limiting freedom of expression, IPA is giving a special “Dare to Publish Award” to Late Shri Rajpal who, despite the attacks, did not bear any ill-will against the Muslim community during his lifetime. Even after the first two attacks against him, he used to say that these were the acts of fanatics, not the entire Muslim community. As Dina Malhotra underlines in *Dare to Publish*, Rajpal considered Muslims as ‘breathren’.

In giving *Late Shri Rajpal* the “IPA Special Award Dare to Publish” to his sons, we pay tribute to the timeless exemplary integrity, humanity, compassion, determination, and courage that he so marvellously embodies.

We thus honour one of the very first martyrs to the Freedom to Publish cause.