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Cover Picture : Harvinder Singh Phoolka, who has been campaigning for justice to the victims of 1984 anti-Sikh pogrom has stirred a new debate after writing a letter to Modi seeking an apology similar to the one made by Trudeau for Komagata Maru in Canada. This picture was taken by Gural Dhillon during Phoolka's recent visit to Vancouver.

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RADICAL DESI

"If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor."
Desmond Tutu

Help for Fort McMurray is fine, but what about Attawapiskat?

This month marks the 20th anniversary of National Aboriginal Day, which falls on June 21. Although the creation of National Aboriginal Day in 1996 was an important step in recognizing indigenous cultures and identities in this country, it appears to be too little and symbolic if one looks at the overall condition of the indigenous communities across Canada. The recent crisis in Attawapiskat represents the systemic discrimination against the original inhabitants of the Canadian nation that was built on their stolen land. In the past several months, there have been over 100 attempted suicides in that community, which has completely inadequate basic services, such as housing and schooling. An emergency debate was held in the House of Commons in connection with the crisis in Attawapiskat, but nothing significant beyond that has been done to address the issue. At the root of the problem is the collective attitude of the Canadian state and its society towards aboriginals. In comparison, the Canadian establishment and the mainstream community displayed extraordinary compassion to those affected by the wildfire in Fort McMurray. Apart from government aid, donations poured in from across Canada to help people who lost their houses in the Fort McMurray fire. The South Asian community, especially Sikhs, opened their purses and hearts generously for the people of Fort McMurray. But this kind of compassion remained missing when Attawapiskat, a First Nations community, was reeling in crisis following the attempted suicides on account of poverty and deprivation. While the tragedy of Fort McMurray was certainly horrific, and people there needed help, why did Attawapiskat not generate similar enthusiasm?

The two communities were definitely treated differently. This only shows the bias of the dominant society in Canada against the indigenous population that continues to face much more serious challenges for years. Their tragedy is often seen as something "normal". Since their miseries are not part of the popular discourse, they often get ignored. Of course, the big media should take blame for not doing enough to sensitize the public about the pitiable situation in the indigenous communities. Nevertheless, the Attawapiskat crisis is only part of the bigger story of structural racism against indigenous communities, who are over-represented in jails as against their population of four percent. The indigenous nations continue to live in poverty, as their lands are frequently taken away for mega- projects without much sharing of wealth. Third world conditions prevail in many indigenous bands, which speaks about the treatment First Nations receive in this country that claims to be a human rights leader in the world. In a situation like this, if the Canadian state and its people really care for National Aboriginal Day, they must shed hypocrisy and do more to ensure that indigenous peoples get equal respect and treated with dignity. More needs to be done to decolonize this system rather than seeing the indigenous peoples as wards of the Canadian state. Since they are the first people of Canada, we need to recognize and adopt their value system rather than imposing Eurocentric values on them with a paternalistic attitude. Their inherent connection with the land and nature for instance can teach us to mend our ways to save the mother earth. The corporate model of business and environment has already done enough harm. South Asians, who share a history of racism and colonialism with indigenous peoples, should also stand with them in solidarity whenever such crisis arises. The Sikhs in particular, whose daily prayer ends with an appeal to god for the well-being of all humanity, must be compassionate for the indigenous communities. It is easier to be part of any initiative which has a nationalist and patriotic appeal, but it's always challenging to stand up for the oppressed communities. This is not to underplay the help sent out to Fort McMurray by the generous Sikh community. The idea is to encourage them to do more for the marginalized sections of the society. After all, the Sikhs have been serving free food to homeless in Vancouver (a large percentage of them being indigenous). Their absence in the Attawapiskat story can be mainly attributed to the lack of media frenzy and a lukewarm response from the establishment. Unfortunately, both the media and the government responded to Fort McMurray crisis more forcefully. This year's National Aboriginal Day coincides with the tercentenary of the martyrdom of Banda Singh Bahadur, a great Sikh warrior who introduced land reforms and redistributed big land holdings among poor tillers. He was executed in June 1716. The Sikhs in Canada, who are gearing up to mark 300 years of his execution, need to look into the connection between the land struggles of indigenous peoples in Canada and those in India. It is not only the question of donating money for people of Attawapiskat; other issues need the attention of the South Asian community activists. A demand for a national inquiry into the Gustafsen lake episode continues to grow. The then- NDP government in BC, with Ujjal Dosanjh as Attorney General, had sent police forces to suppress resistance by the defenders of the lands in 1995. Dosanjh later became the first Premier of Indian origin to lead the province. The South Asians must support this demand to uncover the truth behind the handling of the Gustafsen standoff, so that we all know what role systemic racism against indigenous peoples played at that time, and who in power, both in BC and Ottawa, should be held accountable for suppressing a genuine indigenous struggle.

-Editors

Apology Aftershock

Trudeau's apology for Komagata Maru tragedy cause ripples in India

When Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said sorry for the Komagata Maru episode in the House of Commons last month, he wouldn't have imagined that his action will cause ripples as far as the Indian subcontinent.

Shortly after Trudeau's official apology for a racist incident that happened in Vancouver more than 100 years ago, Sikh leaders in India asked their government to make a similar apology in the parliament for the massacre of Sikhs in 1984.

Harvinder Singh Phoolka, the human rights lawyer who has been fighting for justice to Sikhs who were targeted in state-orchestrated violence, wrote a letter to Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi asking him to pass an apology resolution in the parliament. All he wants is that India should follow the precedent set by Canada by acknowledging the murders of its own citizens.

Manjit Singh G.K, a prominent

Sikh politician from Delhi, also raised a similar demand. This reflects the impact of the apology made in Canada's parliament, which has been widely accepted within the South Asian Diaspora in general and the Sikh community in particular.

That the Komagata Maru apology would have evoked such a demand did not surprise those who have been following Sikh politics in Canada and the campaign for justice for 1984. Even in Canada, demands for regrets for other past incidents have also been growing, and with the official apology for the boat incident they are only expected to grow further.

Whether other apologies are on the way, or if these demands will bring positive results, is hard to guess, but Trudeau's move has raised hopes among a section of community activists. Nevertheless, the die-hard critics remain unimpressed by these "emotional" demands and "symbolic" gestures.

Komagata Maru

The Komagata Maru ship carrying over 300 passengers from India was turned back from Vancouver by the Canadian establishment in 1914, under a discriminatory immigration law that was passed to prevent permanent settlement of South Asian immigrants in Canada.

Buckling under pressure from the white supremacists, the Canadian government decided to keep it as a "white man's country". In 1908, a "continuous journey" regulation was adopted as an order-in-council, to force passengers to take a direct voyage from their country of origin. The intent was to stop the immigration of Indians. The Komagata Maru was forced to leave under this controversial law.

Not only were the ship passengers forced to return, Indian immigrants were disfranchised in 1907 and not allowed to bring in their families. Also, there were attempts to

relocate them to British Honduras. All this happened when India was under British occupation. While Canada was formally a British dominion back then, these laws were enacted by the Canadian government. The British Indian government was also complicit in these racist acts by the Canadian establishment, as it did not want Indians to go abroad and get enlightened about their rights after getting exposed to the virtues of political freedom in their other dominions. Such exposure was seen as dangerous to the survival of the British Empire. Since the Komagata Maru passengers had come to Canada as British subjects seeking better livelihoods, the incident galvanized the freedom movement in India. Upon returning to India, the passengers also faced police bullets when they refused to be detained and forcibly transported to Punjab by a special train. Under these circumstances, the radical activists intensified their struggle for freedom from foreign occupation in India and racism abroad.

The whole episode culminated in

a bloody fight between the radicals and the supporters of the pro-establishment camp, in which a towering community leader, Bhai Bhaag Singh, and his comrade Bhai Badan Singh, were shot to death inside the Vancouver Sikh temple in September 1914. The killer, Bela Singh, was patronized by a controversial Immigration Inspector William Hopkinson, who was spying on the Indian immigrants. Hopkinson was assassinated by political activist Bhai Mewa Singh, who was executed in January 1915.

A hundred years later, when India is free and Canada has changed, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau apologized for the Komagata Maru incident in the House of Commons on May 18. This apology follows a long struggle by the Prof. Mohan Singh Memorial Foundation, which first launched a petition for it 15 years ago. Over 30,000 signatures were collected on petitions and presented in parliament. Finally, Trudeau announced during the election campaign last year that if elected he would make an official apology. Fulfilling his promise, he

made the apology in the presence of nearly 500 South Asians in parliament. A significant number of South Asian and other delegates travelled from BC to attend the historic moment. Among those in attendance were BC Premier Christy Clark, Prof. Mohan Singh Memorial Foundation Leader Sahib Thind, descendants of the passengers aboard Komagata Maru, and representatives of the Khalsa Diwan Society, the oldest Sikh religious body that helped the boat passengers.

Since a majority of the passengers were Sikhs, who dominate the South Asian Diaspora in Canada, the presence of Sikhs from various temples in Greater Vancouver was noticeable. When the apology was made, some of them chanted religious slogans. Some politicians, particularly Christy Clark and federal NDP Leader Thomas Mulcair, explicitly emphasized the sizable number of Sikh passengers on the vessel. Mulcair went to the extent of ending his statement in response to the apology with a Sikh religious greeting. Thus, the

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Komagata Maru story that encompassed all South Asian communities, including Hindus and Muslims, became a Sikh narrative. This was despite the fact that Gurdit Singh, who chartered the ship, had also provided religious space for Hindu and Muslim passengers aboard Komagata Maru. Since his action was seen by the British Empire as seditious, he was ostracized by the pro-British Sikh clergy. Gurdit Singh also emphasized that his was an act of resistance against racism, whereas the Indian government records continue to see him as a businessman.

Whatever may be the logic, the over-emphasis on the Sikh identity partly contributed to the demand for a similar apology for the massacre of Sikhs in India.

1984

The year 1984 is an ugly reminder of political events that adversely affected the minority Sikh community in India.

In June of that year the Indian army invaded the Golden Temple Complex, the holiest shrine of the Sikhs. The army operation was planned and executed to flush out religious extremists who had fortified the shrine. This was in response to a political agitation by the Akali Dal, the mainstream Sikh political party of Punjab, and a parallel armed movement launched by Sikh militants in support of autonomy for their state and some religious demands. The situation had turned so violent that the Hindus and critics of Sikh fanaticism started becoming the target of death squads. However, the army operation was avoidable according to some observers, and killed many innocent pilgrims who had assembled there to commemorate the martyrdom of

a Sikh guru. Several important buildings inside the shrine were heavily damaged. The community feels that "excessive force" was used to win the support of the Hindu majority in the forthcoming general election, and other alternative means to resolve the conflict were avoided to "teach Sikhs a lesson".

The operation alienated the Sikhs from the Indian mainstream, and strengthened the hands of the separatist forces seeking a Sikh homeland. In a fit of rage, then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi was assassinated by her Sikh bodyguards on October 31, 1984. This was followed by a well-organized anti-Sikh pogrom across India. Leaders of Indira Gandhi's Congress party, which claims to be secular, were seen leading the mobs that targeted innocent Sikhs, with the connivance of the police. Sikh men were burnt alive, while women were gang raped. Until now, no senior Congress leader has been punished. Rather those involved were rewarded with key positions in the government.

Since 1984, Sikh activists have been campaigning for justice both in India and Canada. They have not only been seeking a full explanation for reasons behind the army attack, but also punishment of those involved in the massacre. The delay in closure and justice has only helped the cause of the Sikh separatists, who remain active in North America and keep the horrific memories of 1984 alive. Petitions and motions asking to recognize the events of 1984 as a "Sikh Genocide" have been presented in legislatures across Canada and the US.

Trudeau mania

In the 2015 parliamentary

election, Justin Trudeau came to power with an absolute majority, defeating the Conservatives, who had lost credibility among visible minorities for tough immigration policies aimed at discouraging immigrants from bringing their parents and grandparents, banning Muslim women from covering their faces during the citizenship oath ceremony, and annoying Indigenous communities on a range of issues.

If the diversity of Liberal MPs under the leadership of Trudeau is any indication, this mandate was clearly against the anti-minorities stance of the right-wing Harper government. Recently, Trudeau jokingly remarked that his cabinet has more Sikhs than Modi's government in India. He created history by appointing Harjit Singh Sajjan as the first turbaned Sikh defence Minister of Canada. History was also created in the sense that Sajjan once headed the army regiment responsible for turning away the Komagata Maru. While making the apology in the Commons, Trudeau mentioned this fact, saying that had Sajjan's elders been on the ship, they too would have been turned away.

Trudeau's emergence to power with the help of Sikhs in swing ridings, and his apology, have struck an emotional chord with the Sikhs who have been campaigning for justice for those who suffered the state violence in 1984. Enamored by Trudeau mania, the Sikh activists associated with the issue feel that his apology will somehow pave the way for an acknowledgment of guilt by the Indian establishment. For others, the apology has a potential to bring closure on other historical

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wrongs in Indo-Canadian history.

What Phoolka expects

Phoolka is a practising lawyer in New Delhi, the national capital of India, which witnessed more than 3,000 murders by the goons of the Congress party. He himself survived with the help of his Hindu neighbors. Since 1984 he has been fighting the cases of the victims' families. He has also coauthored a book on the massacre with Manoj Mitta, a renowned journalist. *When a Tree Shook Delhi* takes a dig at a former Prime Minister, the late Rajiv Gandhi, who had justified the anti-Sikh violence saying that when a big tree falls, the earth around it shakes a little. The son of Indira Gandhi, Rajiv was elected as Prime Minister with a brute majority in the aftermath of the massacre. Phoolka recently released a video of Rajiv Gandhi using the metaphor of a falling tree in his controversial public speech.

Phoolka had also launched a campaign to plant 3,000 trees in New Delhi in memory of those killed. He is currently associated with the fledgling Aam Aadmi Party that is in power in New Delhi. For his continued struggle for justice, he has a big following in Canada. This year when Phoolka visited Surrey, more than 1,500 people came to hear him speak about his fight for justice. Shortly after Trudeau made an apology, Phoolka took the opportunity to highlight the issue of 1984. He wrote a letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi asking for a similar apology in the Indian Parliament. His argument is that if Canada can ask for forgiveness for injustice to people who were not even Canadian citizens, it's a shame that the Indian government has

not apologized to its own citizens for the massacre.

Interestingly, Modi is the leader of the Hindu nationalist Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) that is frequently accused of instigating violence against religious minorities, particularly Muslims and Christians. Sectarian violence has grown under Modi in the last two years. Modi, who was previously the Chief Minister of Gujarat state, is also blamed for allowing an anti-Muslim massacre in 2002, following the burning of a train carrying Hindu pilgrims. Over 50 passengers had died, and the incident was blamed on Muslim fundamentalists by the Modi government that reportedly let Hindu mobs target Muslims. A similar technique was followed that was used against Sikhs in 1984.

Not to be left behind, Manjit Singh G.K., the leader of the Akali Dal, also asked Modi's government to make an apology for 1984. G.K.'s party is an alliance partner of the BJP. It is pertinent to mention that the BJP and the Akali Dal consider Congress as their common enemy. While the BJP hardliners see Sikhs as part of the Hindu fold, they treat Muslims and Christians as alien communities. It is a separate matter that the Sikh settlers from Punjab also came under attack in Gujarat under the Modi government. Then there are reports that suggest the individual involvement of several BJP men in the anti-Sikh violence of 1984. BJP supporters had also justified the attack on the Golden Temple Complex.

The chances of Modi's government accepting such demand appear bleak, but cannot

be ruled out in view of competitive politics between BJP and the Congress. Both parties continue to accuse each other of indulging in sectarian violence. After all, senior BJP leader Subramaniam Swamy recently demanded that all files related to the army attack on the Golden Temple be declassified. It was a former BJP government that ordered a commission of enquiry into the anti-Sikh pogrom.

Whether Phoolka or G.K. succeed in their mission cannot be said definitely, but the demand has evoked mixed responses in Canada. Those who believe that Trudeau's apology will make an impact are hopeful, while others remain skeptical.

Not everyone agrees

Harminderpal Singh, a well-respected Sikh priest at the Khalsa Diwan Society in Vancouver, says that the Indian government should follow the precedent set by Canada and acknowledge its wrongdoings. Singh went to Ottawa to witness the apology, and returned satisfied. He told RDNB that the Indian government must apologize for the army invasion on the Golden Temple Complex and the anti-Sikh riots. Singh, who is not a supporter of Sikh separatist movement, hopes that the Indian government will look into this genuine demand in light of what Trudeau did. Quoting the scriptures, he noted that Sikhism teaches humanity to forgive if anyone expresses genuine remorse.

The Khalsa Diwan Society had welcomed Modi on his Vancouver visit in 2015, despite protests by many Sikh and leftist activists. The society had also been welcoming former Conservative Immigration minister Jason Kenny, who was

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instrumental behind tightening immigration and citizenship rules. Ranjit Singh Khalsa, one of the leaders of the movement for a Sikh homeland, feels the same. He also went to Ottawa to attend the apology event. "Apology for 1984 incidents must be made. I won't leave hope." He however insisted that a mere apology is not sufficient, and those involved in the massacre must also be punished.

Sikh historian Puran Singh slightly differs. "We shouldn't only insist on apology for the anti-Sikh violence. The apology should also be made for anti-Muslim violence in Gujarat and violence against Christians. Sikhism teaches us to stand up for everyone and not just for our own community."

Khalsa agrees and feels that an apology for violence against other minority and oppressed communities is equally important.

Not everyone is impressed though. Gian Singh Gill, who supports a Sikh homeland and is a spokesman for Dashmesh Darbar Sikh temple in Surrey, has rejected the demand. "Canada has paid its dues over the years. The Canadian government has honestly tried to reduce racism by indulging in affirmative actions to accommodate minorities. What has Indian government really done except to pay lip service? There is absolutely no comparison between India and Canada."

Gill's associates from the temple congregation were also part of the BC delegation to Ottawa. Gill is bitter about the state-sponsored violence in India against all minority groups. "They have targeted everyone, including the so-called

untouchables." He is rather harsh in his criticism of those raising this demand in India. "Even if they are able to convince Modi to make an apology it will only serve his interest and help him politically even though we all know what he stands for."

Gurpatwant Singh Pannun of the Sikhs For Justice is on the same page as Gill. He has been raising his voice in North America for justice to the victims of 1984 violence, and has been instrumental in initiating legal proceedings against visiting politicians from India. Like Gill, he also supports the demand for a Sikh state. His organization also participated in demonstrations against Modi during his North American tours. "We don't support demand for an apology. The massacre of the Sikhs was deliberate and intentional. Nothing short of justice is acceptable to us". Pannun pointed out that those responsible for "Sikh genocide" continue to be protected by all political parties of India for three

decades. "We rather want be given the right to decide our political future through referendum on self determination".

Parshottam Dosanjh, a leftist activist, asks why Modi should even be expected to make an apology when he himself was involved in a similar pogrom in 2002. He also says that the Indian government should rather be pressured to rectify the history of Komagata Maru in its own records. "The Indian government has not until now fully acknowledged the act of resistance against racism by Gurdit Singh, while Canada has apologized."

Other historical wrongs

The apology has created fresh hopes for apologies for other historical wrongs as well, not only the events of 1984.

A new campaign is anticipated for an apology for the disfranchisement of Indians in 1907. To discourage Indian immigrants from exercising political power in Canada, they were disfranchised in BC. The right to vote was finally restored in 1947 after a 40-year-long struggle. That the Canadian parliament and provincial legislatures have significant number of Indo-Canadian politicians today is a result of that struggle. The legislation that disfranchised Indians came before the Komagata Maru episode, yet it has not generated the same amount of interest among the elected officials of South Asian origin, and a campaign was never launched for an apology for disfranchising the community elders.

Sukhminder Singh Gill, whose father Naginder Singh Gill was in the forefront of the struggle for

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the right to vote, feels that the community is late in starting a similar campaign on this important issue. He was also in Ottawa. Though he welcomed the Komagata Maru apology, he thinks that the time has come for another apology for disfranchising Indians in BC. "The MPs of the Indian heritage in the house must know the history of the struggle for right to vote. After all, they are there today because of these efforts."

Historians like Puran Singh agree. "The Komagata Maru was not the only injustice done to our community. They were denied the right to bring their families and a conspiracy was hatched to relocate our elders to Honduras." Avtar Gill, a famous community activist, feels that Trudeau should also have recognized these other forms of injustices in his apology. "Right from disfranchising Indians to the execution of Bhai Mewa Singh, all actions need to be recognized as gross injustices by the Canadian state." Gill is supporting a campaign seeking recognition of Bhai Mewa Singh as a Canadian hero. Already the campaign is picking up, and in the light of Trudeau's apology it is expected to gain popularity. Launched by the East Indian Defence Committee (EIDC), the petition has received more than 7,000 signatures so far. The petition asks for rectifying the image of Mewa Singh, who is portrayed as an assassin in the official records. EIDC leader Parminder Swiach argues, 'He did not assassinate Hopkinson for personal reasons. His was a political action that was the result of Komagata Maru episode. If the government feels that the Komagata Maru was wrong thing to do, it only means that Mewa Singh should stand vindicated.' The EIDC believes that Mewa Singh stood for social justice and

equality, the values enshrined in the Canadian charter of rights.

Looking beyond apologies

BC Premier Christy Clark, who went to Ottawa to receive the apology on behalf of the people of her province, made a very significant statement about the politics of bigotry that is still alive. She repeatedly drew attention towards the nomination race for US presidential elections across the border. Without naming Donald Trump, the potential Republican candidate, she condemned the politics of creating fear against immigrants. Trump has been attacking Muslims and Mexican migrants in his speeches. Similarly, New Democrat leader Thomas Mulcair mentioned how the Komagata Maru history remains relevant in the light of recent instances of racism against immigrants in Canada. He mentioned the incident of Tamil refugees who came to the shores of BC under the previous Conservative government. Mulcair pointed out that they were mistreated in the same way as the Komagata Maru passengers. Mulcair has also raised the issue of anti-Sikh massacre in the past.

On the face of it, these statements are very valid, and remind us to look beyond apologies, but there is something missing in both statements coming from two politicians. If Christy Clark is to be believed, it's the US where the politics of bigotry has been going on, while Canada is more open. The truth however is inconvenient. Similar politics was played in Canada during the last year's federal election by the Conservatives, but Clark has never been so candid in her criticism against them. The Conservatives had not only been tough on immigration, but attacked the right of Muslim women to wear veil, and were insensitive to the demand for a

national inquiry into missing and murdered Aboriginal women. Likewise, Mulcair, who has repeatedly shown passion for Tamils and Sikhs who hold the balance of power in swing ridings, was very tough on NDP candidates who were critical of Israeli aggression on Palestinians. These statements clearly reflect a selective approach of our leaders on human rights, however smart they seem to be attempting to link the past with the present.

To be fair with these leaders, Sikh activists who are also impressed by the apology and see Canada as Utopia, must also take some blame. Just because Trudeau and others care for the Sikhs does not necessarily make Canada perfect. The four percent population of the original inhabitants of Canada continue to face structural violence and systemic racism. Often this reality is ignored when Sikh leaders rejoice in these tokenistic gestures, even as their daily prayer ends with an appeal to the god for the well-being of the entire human race. Also unlike the political activists of the generation of Gurdit Singh, Bhai Bhaag Singh and Bhai Mewa Singh, whose legacy they continue to celebrate, barring a few exceptions they have showed a general lack of will to stand up against powerful political figures such as Modi or Harper in the face of politics of hate.

Those campaigning for apologies for past events both in India and Canada cannot be unaware of the divisive politics under the patronage of nation states. While the issue of apologies will take time to settle down, there is a need to look beyond the politics of repentance for mishaps of the distant past.

-RDNB

Indian parliamentary left should stop being apologists of the killers of Sikhs

As the Indian left continues to fight against the ruling Hindu nationalist Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) which continues to threaten religious minorities, particularly Muslims and Christians, it has never shied from behaving like apologists of the so-called secular Congress party that was responsible for anti-Sikh pogrom in 1984.

Members of the Sikh community were targeted across India by the goons led by the Congress party, which was in power at that time. The massacre followed the assassination of Congress Prime Minister Indira Gandhi by her Sikh bodyguards on October 31, 1984. That same year, in the month of June, she had ordered

the military invasion of the Golden Temple Complex, the holiest shrine of the Sikhs in Amritsar. The army attack followed violent activities in Punjab blamed on Sikh extremists who had fortified the place of worship. The army operation left many pilgrims dead and the buildings inside the complex badly damaged. This enraged Sikhs across the world, and there was a huge demonstration against the Indian government in Vancouver. The wounds are so deep that the Sikhs continue to remember the victims of genocide in Canada in June every year.

Ever since the BJP government came to power with a brute majority in 2014, violence

against religious minorities has increased. Any voice of dissent is suppressed with an iron fist. The leftist activists who have been campaigning against growing religious intolerance are frequently branded as anti-national by supporters of the current government, led by controversial Prime Minister Narendra Modi. It is pertinent to mention that Modi was the Chief Minister of Gujarat state when the anti-Muslim pogrom broke out in that territory in 2002. The carnage followed the burning of a train carrying Hindu pilgrims. Over 50 people died in the incident that was blamed on Muslim extremists by the Modi government. Human rights activists and witnesses continue

to allege Modi's complicity in mass murders. The technique used to target Muslims was similar to the one used against Sikhs back in 1984. Electoral rolls were used and the houses of members of the minority community were clearly marked. In both pogroms, the police sided with the mobs at the behest of the ruling parties. The only difference between the two parties is that one claims to be secular, while the other is known for its Hindu nationalism stance and wants to transform India into a Hindu state. Whereas the Congress has no clear cut program to create a Hindu theocracy, the BJP has such a policy. The Congress experiment with sectarian politics has been driven by sheer opportunism, aimed to divide and rule for short term benefits, while the BJP has a clear mandate to turn India into a Hindu theocracy.

It has been established that Indira Gandhi's son Rajiv Gandhi, who later took over as the Prime Minister, was directly involved in

the massacre. He openly justified the violence in a public speech saying, "When a big tree falls, earth around it shakes a bit." That the Congress party under his leadership engineered a pogrom for short term political gain became visible after his party was elected with a brute majority in the election that followed the bloodbath of the Sikhs. The election campaign was primarily run on the slogan of national unity, with an idea of creating a divide between the Hindu majority and the minority Sikh community.

For the record, the Communists who ruled West Bengal state at that time resolutely worked hard to save the lives of Sikhs within their jurisdiction. Though Communists are well aware of the role of the Congress behind anti-Sikh massacre, they have always seen Congress as less dangerous than the BJP which is an outrightly sectarian party, forging alliances with the Congress to keep BJP out of power. Under Modi, they have

once again come close to the Congress to weaken a common enemy. Interestingly, they supported a minority Congress government in the past. In 2008, they took back their support from the Congress government, after the latter struck a nuclear deal with US accusing the Congress of compromising on sovereignty.

In a changed scenario, they again joined hands with the Congress to campaign in the recent assembly election in West Bengal, whereas in Kerala they had a direct fight with Congress. Under these circumstances, Communist student leader Kanhaiya Kumar, who was recently charged with sedition for organizing a demonstration against the policies of BJP in Delhi, stated that there was a difference between what happened in 1984 and the anti-Muslim violence of 2002. According to him, what happened in 1984 against Sikhs was mob violence, whereas the 2002 pogrom was engineered by a BJP government. This

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obviously led to angry reactions from both human rights activists and the Sikh community. Those who worked hard to collect evidence against the Congress following the anti-Sikh violence were understandably upset. Kumar was shamelessly selective in his criticism of violence against religious minorities. This demonstrated the mindset of the parliamentary left and its desperation to survive with the help of the Congress party.

On several occasions, I had arguments with some prominent leftist friends from India who are not willing to see Congress as the killer of the Sikhs, much as the BJP being the killer of Muslims. One of them repeatedly sent links on Facebook suggesting the BJP men were also involved in 1984, and made silly arguments to minimize the magnitude of the 1984 violence as compared to the intensity of anti-Muslim violence. During a heated debate with me, he said that Rajiv Gandhi had used the metaphor of the tree only out of emotion after losing his mother. Others went to the extent of claiming that Kumar was misquoted by the media to divert attention of the Sikh community. These arguments are not only ridiculous, but offensive. There is no doubt that BJP members were individually involved in the 1984 carnage, but the blame mainly lies at the doorstep of the Congress party which was in power. The Congress was successful in pitting Hindus against Sikhs in the name of national unity, and certain BJP members became willing partners to act as its B team. But that also happened in Gujarat, where a section of Congress supporters also indulged in violence against

Muslims. The problem is that both parties have been playing majoritarian politics at different times. One very blatantly, the other meekly, to attract majority votes. Much like Rajiv Gandhi, Modi also won with a landslide victory in the Gujarat assembly election following the Muslim massacre in 2002. To say that Rajiv Gandhi's speech was an emotional outburst is another

absurd argument. He was a sly politician and he exactly knew what he was stating. The metaphor of the tree was used to suggest that the massacre of the Sikhs was a natural reaction to the assassination of his mother. In other words, he tried to cover up the complicity of the state machinery by blaming the crime on mob mentality. Even if one has to believe that, why did such violence not happen when Mahatma Gandhi was murdered by a Maharashtrian Hindu in 1948? Why, for that matter, were Tamil Hindus not targeted when Rajiv Gandhi himself was

assassinated by Tamil separatists? Lastly, Kumar's speech is documented and available on social media and can be heard by anyone. He exactly said what he is being criticized for.

In politics, one can understand how opportunism works and it is important to differentiate between a bigger and the lesser evil, but one cannot be fooled on historical facts. And one of the most inconvenient truths about Congress is that it has Sikh blood on its hand. The left is more than welcome to join hands with Congress to defeat the BJP or for the sake of its own survival, but it must not give Congress a certificate of secularism. Also it must not underplay or try to rationalize what happened in 1984. The response of some leftists to the criticism of Kumar actually reflects how they are trying to twist the facts to please the Congress. Let the Congress come clean by admitting its guilt and forcing those involved in the 1984 carnage to face the courts, rather than pointing fingers at the BJP all the time and playing down its own misdeeds. By repeatedly behaving like apologists of the Congress, the Indian left is putting its own reputation at risk and leaving real secularists wondering whom to trust. The villainy of both Modi and Rajiv Gandhi should be treated alike, instead of being dishonest to history and to one's own self.

Gurpreet Singh is the founder of Radical Desi. He is a newscaster and talk show host at Spice Radio in Burnaby and freelances for Georgia Straight and People's Voice.

The wildfire tragedies, global warming, and justice for indigenous peoples

The Fort McMurray fire broke out on May 2nd during an unprecedented spring heat wave in northern Alberta. By late May, the fire covered nearly half a million hectares of boreal forest - over 5000 square kilometers stretching to the Saskatchewan border. Over 80,000 Fort McMurray residents had to evacuate amidst fire and smoke, knowing they might never see their homes again. Most are still unable to return. But less well known is that the fire has also had a devastating impact on First Nations and other communities in the area. And while the public's generosity for the people of Fort McMurray has been overwhelming, there has yet to emerge an equally powerful response to the economic and social crises faced by First Nations people in Canada. Fort McMurray is not the only such conflagration in western Canada this spring. Dozens of fires are burning in British Columbia, Saskatchewan and Manitoba. In the Peace River region of northern BC, a fire which burned over 75,000 hectares came within 2 kilometers of the Doig River First Nation. Nor is this the first year which has seen such widespread fires. In July 2015, over 7000 residents of the La Ronge area in northern Saskatchewan were evacuated for three weeks when fires threatened their community, mostly First Nations and Metis people, including personal friends of my own family. In fact, the entire northern boreal forest region of Canada, which is particularly vulnerable to massive fires, is largely inhabited by Cree,

Metis, Dene Tha and other indigenous and aboriginal peoples. Their lands are also rich in minerals and hydrocarbons, such as diamonds taken by the De Beers company from surrendered First Nations lands near the poverty-stricken community of Attawapiskat on James Bay, and the Athabasca tar sands in Alberta.

Such tragedies raise serious questions about the impact of human economic activity on the environment. NASA recognized in 2010 that wildfires in northern latitudes are a symptom of the Earth's warming and climate change. These fires are accelerated by the rising emissions of hydrocarbons on a world-wide scale. Scientists state that every year the length and severity of the fire season worsens. Our earth is burning.

While the Alberta tar sands projects did not directly cause the heat wave, this industry is one of the most significant contributors to carbon emissions in Canada. For that reason, the TNCs involved in the tar sands and the international oil and gas industry, including ExxonMobil, BP, Shell,

Total, CNRL and Chevron, have been accused by some as the "arsonists" who caused the Fort McMurray fire.

Scientists also say it is not too late, if radical action is taken to halt climate change: emergency legislation to slash greenhouse gas emissions, more renewable energy and conservation programs, expanded urban mass transit, stringent vehicle emission controls, and so forth.

For the Aboriginal peoples and communities facing wildfires and health problems exacerbated by tar sands extraction and exports, it might be necessary to consider compensation payments. At the very least, we need to support their campaigns to stop the Enbridge, Kinder Morgan, Keystone XL, Line 9 and Energy East pipelines, and to restrict or ban oil and gas exploration and shipping on the west coast.

These issues should be considered by all Canadians as we head into another long, hot summer!

Kimball Cariou is the Editor of People's Voice, a social justice activist, and a member of the Radical Desi Editorial Team.

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Documentary raises rightful concern over proposed revival of Saraswati river and water crisis in Punjab

A documentary film on the water crisis in Punjab has raised concerns over the proposed revival of the Saraswati river in Haryana state of India.

Final Assault, which was shown to the public at the Bell Performing Arts Center in Surrey last month, is based on river waters' shortage, which has resulted in the agrarian crisis in Punjab.

Talking to RDNB, the producer of the film, Sukhdeep Singh said that based on his research he believes that there are attempts to divert Punjab river waters to the neighboring state of Haryana, to revive the mythical Saraswati river as part of the grand design of the ruling Hindu nationalist Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) in New Delhi.

Although he clarified that there is no paper trail to establish this, he insisted there are apprehensions that the amount of water required for such an ambitious project will be diverted from rivers in Punjab. "The only option to feed Saraswati seems to be Sutlej river in Punjab". He warned that the people of Punjab should be vigilant about any attempt to take away more river water from the state, which is already reeling under agrarian crisis on account of shortage of river waters.

Haryana once used to be part of Punjab, and was separated from it in 1966. The Indian government, according to Singh, had unfairly distributed river waters of Punjab to please Haryana. "The river water share was given to Haryana in complete violation of the international

riparian laws." He thinks that the plan to revive a mythical river that finds mention in Hindu scriptures should be situated in a broader context of the policies of the BJP, which has been trying to rewrite the history of India in the name of religious nationalism.

"The way they created divisions among the people in the past by raising issues, such as rebuilding ancient Ram temple at the site of a mosque in Ayodhya, they are now trying to create another controversy by reviving Saraswati in Haryana and polarizing people in the name of religion." The BJP supporters demolished an ancient mosque in Ayodhya in 1992, claiming that it was built by Muslim rulers after razing a temple originally built at the birthplace of Lord Ram.

Final Assault cautions against such "divisive politics" on the basis of some public documents, news clips and interviews. He has tried to link the current water

crisis in Punjab with the political events of the past, including the anti-Sikh pogrom of 1984 and other incidents of "repression of Sikhs." Replying to a question, he said that though he condemns the murders of migratory labourers who worked at a disputed canal site by the Sikh militants, the blame for violence lies mainly on the doorstep of the policy makers. "Whatever may be the reasons, innocent killings can never be justified." Sikh extremists had murdered some labourers who were hired for the completion of a canal that was supposed to link two rivers flowing through Punjab and Haryana. The move was vehemently opposed, both by the extremists and the moderate Sikh leaders of Punjab.

There was thunderous applause from the audience at the end of the show, and Sikh religious slogans of victory were raised by several spectators.

Attawapiskat crisis elicits sympathy and support from South Asian community

South Asian activists came together to show their support to the people of Attawapiskat at Holland Park in Surrey on May 1.

There have been more than 100 attempted suicides in the northern Ontario indigenous community during the past seven months.

Under the aegis of *Radical Desi* publications, progressive South Asian activists participated in a rally for residents of the town, where an emergency has been declared.

Participants carried placards with slogans, including "South Asians in Solidarity with Attawapiskat". The Mohawk warrior flag and flag of Ghadar Party were raised alongside each other on the occasion.

The Ghadar Party was established by South Asian radical activists in North America in 1913. It fought against British occupation of India and racism in Canada and the U.S. The party wanted to establish an egalitarian and secular society in post British India. Since the indigenous peoples and South Asians share a history of racism and colonialism, *Radical Desi* wanted to show its support to First Nations during crisis, which has sparked Canada-wide protests.

Speakers were unanimous in their support for aboriginal people and emphasized their willingness to continue raising their voices against structural racism and violence against indigenous communities.

Among those who spoke on the

occasion was NDP MLA Harry Bains. He was the only elected official from Surrey who showed up at the event. Other prominent speakers included veteran South Asian journalist Promod Puri, who threw light on the systemic racism against indigenous communities in Canada.

Others who participated included the Indian Rationalist Society leader Gurmail Gill, former Student Federation of India leader Hardev Singh, Fraser Valley Peace Council leader Minakshi Sidhu, Canadian Union of Public Employees representative Rachna Singh, Committee of Progressive Pakistani Canadians leader Saif Khalid, East Indian Defence Committee member Iqbal Purewal, progressive Punjabi poet Amrit Diwana, and Mewa Singh Cultural and Sports Association leader Santokh Dhesi. Mewa Singh was the first Indian martyr to be hanged in Canada in 1915 for assassinating

a controversial immigration inspector William Hopkinson, who spied on supporters of the Ghadar Party.

A moment of silence was also observed in memory of a prominent progressive Punjabi writer and activist, Satnam, who died in India recently. Prior to his death, he conducted a first-hand study of indigenous peoples in India and the ongoing Maoist struggle in the tribal areas. His famous book *Junglenama*, which was based on his travel to the areas where the Maoist insurgency goes on, was translated into English by Penguin. The speakers noted that issues of land and indigenous rights in Canada and India are related.

Since it was the evening of May Day, slogans in memory of the martyrs of May 1 were also raised on the occasion. The speakers also shared their thoughts on the issues of concern to the working class.

The story of modern day Sharavan Kumar

Some voices disturbed my sleep, I get up and see my mother walking near the kitchen. She's crawling and in pain as she broke her left foot some days ago. Her right knee was already in pain because of major arthritis.

It's 4.00 am and my mother felt hungry and a little dizzy. It's because of her fluctuating diabetes, it's very low this time.

I leave my bed and bring her back to bed, and now I start looking for my glasses as I need them to do anything.

Now I need to give her something to eat to control and balance her appetite and sugar level. I gave her one banana, an orange and make a veggie sandwich.

But now I can't sleep anymore, and so many thoughts are crossing my mind.

Just started thinking what parents go through in today's world when their kids throw them in orphanages or just don't live with them. Yes there are some genuine reasons, like for studies or work, but temporarily not permanently.

In an age where elders lament their children have forgotten how to show respect, or are downright cruel to aged parents, COMES ALONG THIS MAN who will give you goosebumps for the devotion he shows his 92-year-old blind mother. It was many moons ago, more than 20, says Kailash Giri Brahmachari, that his mother Kirti Devi expressed a wish to go on a pilgrimage of the chaar dhaams the four most sacred religious sites in India for Hindus.

Without missing a heartbeat, this

man set out to fulfill his mother's dream. He was in his mid-20s then. He is close to 50 now. And he has covered, on foot, a distance of over 36,000 km.

Much like Sharavan Kumar, whose story from the *Ramayana* is legendary, Kailash too carries his mother in a double basket slung over his shoulder. While his mother sits in one of the baskets, Kailash keeps all his clothes, utensils and other heavy day-to-day items in the other to balance the weight. He walks four to five km like this every day, beginning his day at 6.30 am, resting in the afternoons and walking again when the sun becomes less unsparing. Mother and son then rest for the night at some roadside temple or the other.

Kailash cooks food from whatever people offer him, and serves it to his blind mother first.

Their journey, which has taken them across the length and breadth of the country, has covered most of the well-known temples and holy cities in India: Rameshwaram, Jagannath Puri, Tirupathi, Ganga Sagar, Basukinath Dham, Tarapith, Badrinath, Kedarnath, Hrishikesh, Haridwar, Kaashi, Ayodhya, Chitrakut, Allahabad, Narmada, Pushkar a long long list indeed.

Although Kailash receives much praise for his love and allegiance towards his mother wherever he goes (people even seek his

blessings), he does not like being compared to Shrivani Kumar.

We wish Kailash and his mother much luck and success in completing their pilgrimage and making it home safely.

Anyways now it's already 6.00 am & time to get ready for the radio. Just wanted to add a small request here to all the readers, we read all these stories coming all the way from different far places, and we feel so good about people, but are we doing the same for the people around us? I mean, are we compassionate and helpful to people near us or we are jealous and competitive? Our request is this - please look carefully around us, and first feel compassionate and helpful towards people in need close to us. The world will be beautiful if we can do even this much.

God bless you all.

Luv

To listen to Gaurav Shah's good story every morning Monday thru Friday, tune in Spice Radio 1200AM Band at 8:45am. Also Listen to his entertainment program Spicy Chah With Shah from 10-12 pm on the same frequency.

Relevance of Banda

This month marks 300 years of the martyrdom of Banda Singh Bahadur, who established an egalitarian rule in Punjab, India, where big landholdings were seized from the rich and redistributed among the poor tillers, a very radical move of its time that remains overlooked in the world history. With the land struggles both in India and elsewhere (including Canada) making headlines internationally, his legacy remains relevant in the contemporary world. The emergence of Banada Singh Bahadur and the revolution that swept north India under his command was a culmination of social reforms started by Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism during the 15th century. Sikhism was born as a

progressive religion to challenge the orthodoxy of Hinduism and Islam. Guru Nanak, who was born in a Hindu family in Punjab, denounced both these established religions and laid the foundation of a new faith group that stood against the ritualism, dogma, sectarianism and discrimination on the basis of caste and gender. Guru Nanak travelled to different parts of the world to spread the message of humanity and compassion. He not only opposed the barbaric caste system within the Hindu community, but also challenged the repression of the people under the Islamist rule of King Babar. Nanak was arrested and thrown in jail for doing this. He lived in the company of the poor and destitute, and had the

courage to challenge the power. Gradually he became popular both among the Hindus and the Muslims. Thus, a new religion with an aim to form an egalitarian society was established. After Nanak, nine more Gurus led the Sikh community, and each tried to make Sikhism as distinct as possible. What bound all of them was that they preached equality. They started the practice of community kitchens where people from all castes were served food without discrimination. The foundation of the holiest shrine of the Sikhs in Amritsar in India was laid by a Muslim saint. The Sikh scriptures include the hymns of both the Hindu and Muslim saints, including those who were denounced as untouchables by the conservative Hindus. The

RADICAL HISTORY OF THE MONTH

tenth master of the Sikhs, Guru Gobind Singh, ordered the community to follow their holy scripture Guru Granth Sahib as their guiding light in the future. He also founded the Khalsa, the army of the devout Sikhs who were expected not to cut their hair, and baptized to fight against tyranny of the state. Guru Gobind Singh raised this army from mainly among the oppressed communities.

So when Banda Singh Bahadur established a Sikh state and introduced land reforms, he clearly carried forward the mission of the ten Gurus.

Banda Singh Bahadur was an ascetic based in Maharashtra. Although he was of Punjabi heritage, he had long-ago gone to live in Maharashtra state after coming into contact with Hindu preachers and sorcerers. One of the preachers who changed the course of his life was Swami Ramdass, who was influenced by the Sikh philosophy. Ramdass wanted to liberate Hindus from repression by Islamic rulers. He copied the idea of raising armed bands to fight against injustice from Guru Hargobind, the sixth master of the Sikhs. Guru Hargobind had decided to arm the Sikhs following the execution of his father, the fifth master, Guru Arjan Dev, by the Islamist state. Banda Singh Bahadur, known by the name of Narain Dass at that time, was taken under his wing by Ramdass, who later introduced him to a commander in the army of Marathas. Gradually, he became a guerrilla warrior. After the Maratha rule tumbled, he again became an ascetic.

Near the end of his life Guru Gobind Singh came to Maharashtra. By that time, he

had lost his four sons in the battle with the Islamist rulers. But his fight wasn't against Islam. It was against the oppression of the state, religious persecution of Hindus and also against caste-based discrimination within Hinduism. There were several Muslims on his side, while some Hindus sided with the Islamist rulers. So it was never a Sikh versus Muslim fight as is often portrayed by so-called historians and preachers. The Hindu kings also opposed him for giving equal status to those considered as untouchables. Two of his sons were tortured to death, while another two died fighting in the battlefield. His father, the ninth master of the Sikhs, Guru Teg Bahadur, had laid down his life to protect Hindus from persecution. After the death of Aurangzeb, the Mughal emperor who was instrumental behind persecution of non-Muslims, Guru Gobind Singh had an understanding with his son Bahadur Shah, who was soft as against his tyrant father. Bahadur Shah had assured Guru Gobind Singh that he would punish those responsible for repression and the execution of his sons. But he never delivered on his promise. So he discovered Banda Singh Bahadur and convinced him to leave the world of asceticism and rather dedicate his life for a just cause. He dispatched him to Punjab to revive the Sikh revolution. It was Guru Gobind Singh who gave him the name Banda Singh. Banda in Urdu and Punjabi means the man in service of the lord.

In the meantime, Guru Gobind Singh was assassinated by mercenaries sent to Maharashtra. Banda Singh Bahadur came to Punjab and raised a powerful

army that eventually established a Sikh rule, where big landholdings were seized from the rich and redistributed among the poor tillers. Another important feature of Banda Singh Bahadur's kingdom was that it never persecuted Muslims. The Muslim shrines were never razed. His army only punished those who had indulged in repression. However, his rule did not survive for very long. He was arrested and tortured to death on June 9, 1716 in Delhi.

Today, when the marginalized farmers in India are forced to commit suicides because of the neoliberal policies and growing debt, Banda becomes more relevant. The current right wing government in India is not only determined to implement controversial land acquisition laws that may render more farmers poor, but is also promoting fanaticism in the name of Hindu nationalism. Both these policies are completely opposed to what Banda Singh Bahadur stood for. Religious tolerance and egalitarianism were two major pillars of his rule. and today both are in great danger in India. So much so, there are attempts to appropriate Banda Singh Bahadur by both Hindu and Sikh separatists.

Likewise, his legacy remains relevant even in Canada where indigenous peoples continue to fight in defence of their traditional lands and revive the spirit of primitive communism, under which the land is a shared ownership and not an individual property. More than remembering him as a hero at the symbolic level, we all need to keep his legacy of social justice alive.

-RDNB

The Lion in Chains

A WAKE, ye dour and doughty Sikhs,
Your Guru calls.
Tie up your hair in twisted braids,
On Indus banks lift up your heads,
Your Guru calls.
The Sikh awake now greets the dawn
With steadfast gaze.
"Hail Guruji" - a thousand throats
The slogan raise.
The awful clamour rends the sky:
Guruji, Hail !
The fetters fall and fear goes by,
A thousand swords clang furiously,
And Punjab echoes to the cry:
Guruji, Hail !

The Day of Reckoning is now,
Now is the Hour,
To purge the breast of shame and fear,
Old scores to scour.
Life and Death are but meanest slaves,
The soul is free,
The Day has dawned on Punjab 's shores,
Hail, Guruji !

Lo, Delhi's Satrap in his bower
Stirred in his sleep:
Whose voices tear the midnight air,
Beneath the sky whose torches glare
On banks so steep?
The life-blood gushed from many a gashed
Devoted breast,
A hundred thousand souls fly past
Like birds to nest,
His mother's brow the warrior decks
With the blood-red stain.
Sikh and Mogul grimly fight,
In death's embrace each other tight
They clasp, the twain.
The bitten hawk now fights the snake,
With beak and nail,

The Sikh shouts back the fierce refrain,
Guruji, Hail !

In Gurudaspur's fort at last
They bound in chains,
And led the captive lion through
The streets and lanes,
To Delhi 's gate they led proud Banda
Bound in chains.
The Mogul troops marched on and raised

RADICAL NARRATIVE

The dust ahead,
Each soldier on his pike upbore
A gory head,
They raised the dust in Delhi 's streets
And marched ahead.

Seven hundred Sikhs lagged in the rear,
Their fetters rang,
The royal roads were thronged,
and windows
Open sprang,
They vied who should the foremost be
To give his life,
At dawn a hundred heads fell to
The butcher's knife.

Seven hundred dead in seven days;
The murder done,
In Banda's arms the Quazi gave
His only son.
"Your hand shall kill, nor wince to kill
The little one,"
They bound him fast, the little child,
His only son.

And Banda drew into his breast
The comely lad,
Just laid his right hand on his heart,
Just kissed awhile his turban red,
Then slowly drew his dagger's blade,
Looked in his eyes and whispering said;
"Jai Guruji, Jai Guruji,
"Fear not, my lad !"

A heavenly light lit up the young
And buoyant face;
A fresh young voice rang through the
hall:
"Jai Guruji, no fear at all,"
The boy kept fixed on Banda's face
His steadfast gaze.

Now Banda threw his left arm round
The little head,

His right hand plunged into his breast
The dagger's blade,
"Jai Guruji", the boy sang out,
And fell down dead.**

An awful hush fell on the court,
A silence dead
And Banda's flesh they tore in shreds
With tongs burnt red,
Brave Banda died without a groan
A hero's death,
All eyes were shut. Fell on the court
The hush of death.

Rabindranath Tagore was a Noble Laureate. This poem was originally written in Bengali and dedicated to Banda Singh Bahadur. Translated by SC Dutt, it has been reproduced here in recognition of the 300 years of the martyrdom of Banda Singh Bahadur.

