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Cover Picture : Darshan Singh Pheruman laid down his life for justice to Punjab by keeping a fast unto death. This portrait was made by the late Kirpal Singh.

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RADICAL
DESI

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

100 years of the martyrdom of Babu Harnam Singh Sahri

This month marks 100 years of the execution of a radical political activist who not only fought for the rights of the South Asian immigrants in Canada, but also against the British occupation of India. Babu Harnam Singh was born in 1884, in Sahri village of Punjab in British India. His father Labh Singh was a well-to-do farmer. Sahri was among the four siblings of Labh Singh and his wife Chand Kaur. As he grew older, Sahri joined the British army, but quit his job after about eighteen months. In 1904, he moved to Hong Kong, where he worked with a tram company. While staying in Hong Kong, Sahri learnt that immigrants earn more in Canada. From there he came to Victoria in 1907. This was the year when Indians were disfranchised in BC. Wanted to make Canada a "white man's country," the authorities made this move to discourage Indians from permanent settlement. Such racist policies exposed the real face of the British empire that claimed to be just and fair. Since Canada was also a British colony like India, the Indians felt that they could move from one part of the empire to the other without any difficulty, as they were all British subjects. But while in Canada, they were treated differently. They could not bring their families, and the British authorities never came to their rescue in an event of racial violence. The political activists within the Indian community believed that they were being mistreated only because their home country was under foreign occupation, and wasn't strong enough to look after the interests of its citizens abroad. They started getting organized both against racism and the British occupation of India. Sahri came in contact with some of these activists and began supporting their cause. In 1908, he went to Seattle to pursue his higher education. But in 1909 he returned to Vancouver, where he along with other revolutionaries established the Hindustani Association, whose mandate was to liberate India from foreign rule. Through their activities, they educated the immigrants about their rights and mobilized them for future struggles. As part of their mandate, in 1910 they launched *Swadesh Sewak*, a monthly newsletter to outreach new immigrants to prepare them for future action. *Swadesh Sewak* was the first Punjabi newsletter to be published in North America. It was sent out to India and provoked the Indian soldiers working for the British armies to revolt and

jump into the freedom movement, following which its entry to India was banned in 1911. During 1910, Sahri was detained while trying to enter Canada from the US, where he went to raise funds for the newsletter. After being accused of not having landed immigrant status in Canada, he was refused entry to the country. Thus, he was forced to live in the US where he continued his propaganda among the Indian immigrants, and began his studies at Washington University in Seattle. He succeeded in coming to Canada in 1913, the year the Ghadar Party was formed in the US. The party believed in an armed resistance against the British empire. Wanting to establish a secular republic in post-British India, the party denounced all forms of discrimination and believed in people's unity. It did not allow any discussion on religious identity within the group. Sahri became a member of the Ghadar Party, which wished to begin an armed insurgency with the help of Indian soldiers in the British forces. He contributed cartoons to the *Ghadar* newspaper that was launched on November 1, 1913. His cartoons exposed the repression of the British rulers. In 1914, Sahri was arrested along with his comrades in the US, where they went to purchase some arms to be sent to India for a rebellion. These weapons were to be sent through the passengers of the Komagata Maru ship, which was forced to return on July 23, 1914 by the Canadian government under the discriminatory immigration laws. The ship carried more than 300 South Asian passengers, who had travelled all the way to Canada to earn their livelihood, but the Canadian government did not allow them to disembark. Accused of wrongfully entering Canadian waters, the passengers were compelled to leave after the ship remained stranded in Vancouver harbour for two months. Sahri was also a member of a shore committee created to defend these passengers. In the end, when the passengers lost their battle, Sahri and his associates decided to send some weapons to India through them. After Sahri's arrest, the police raided his house and found documents suggesting that he was purchasing material to make explosives. Subsequently, Sahri was deported from the US. But he gave the police the slip in Japan, and established links with Chinese revolutionaries. In August 1914, Britain declared war with Germany. The Ghadar Party members saw an opportunity to strike with the help of Germany. Many returned to India to face the gallows or long imprisonments, while others worked underground. Sahri decided to work on the Burma front. Burma was part of India back then. He was eventually arrested while trying to cross over to Siam from Burma in 1915. But Sahri would still not give up. He and his associates succeeded in escaping from the jail. They were rearrested and later tried for waging war against the empire. On November 14, 1916, Sahri was hanged in jail. While the Ghadar Party failed to overthrow the British government, its members did not give up the struggle, which brought official freedom to India in 1947. From this brief account, one can conclude how determined Sahri was in his mission to challenge racism and colonialism. Though Sahri is not among us, his legacy is still alive. As long as racism and colonialism exist, he will remain relevant. We must remember that racism has not ended in North America, where hate crimes continue against people of colour. Only recently flyers were distributed by supporters of the Ku Klux Klan, a white supremacist group, in Abbotsford which has a sizeable population of South Asian immigrants. The flyers were aimed at attracting white youth as potential recruits. Some days later, a white man was caught on video near Abbotsford City Hall, uttering words like "White Power" and making racist remarks to a person of South Asian origin in a very aggressive manner. The matter is being looked into by the police. Incidentally, the Ghadar Party was also active in Abbotsford. The heritage Sikh temple in the city used to be the centre of their activities. Likewise, colonialism has not ended in the lives of the indigenous peoples of Turtle Island. Repression is also going on in post-British India. Those at the receiving end are mainly people from the religious minority groups and marginalized communities. The secularism that was so dear to the Ghadar activists has come under assault under the current Hindu nationalist government. The voice of dissent is being crushed violently by the Indian state. Rather than paying symbolic tributes to Sahri, we must vow to keep his struggle alive for a just society.

-Editors

Broken Promises

How the creators of Punjabi speaking state continue to deceive people to enjoy fruits of power

Aao, Jalandhar Ko Saaf Rakhen (Come, let's keep Jalandhar clean), reads a sign in Hindi that greets visitors at a small municipal park in the city of Jalandhar, in the heart of Punjab state of India.

There is nothing unusual about the sign, which asks the citizens to keep a city park clean. What is unusual is that it isn't written in Punjabi, the official language of present-day Punjab state that came

into being fifty years ago in November 1966. More ironic is that Punjab is currently ruled by the Akali Dal, the party that fought a long battle for a Punjabi speaking region.

While Punjabis across the world are celebrating the golden jubilee of the Punjabi speaking state, the Punjabi language and other related issues have become irrelevant for those running the state government. If a small park sign is any indication, the Akali

Dal government continues to enjoy the comforts of power rather than worrying about the status of the language and fulfilling their unfinished agenda on related matters. If nothing else, it is a reflection on the political will of the party that is sharing power with the Hindu nationalist Bhartiya Janata Party. The BJP is the very force that opposed demands for a Punjabi speaking state in its previous avatar, and continues to

harbour an ambition to turn India into a Hindu theocracy of which the Hindi language would be an essential element. Whatever may be the compulsions of the Akali Dal, it cannot deny its role in the campaign for a Punjabi speaking region in the face of stiff opposition from both Hindu chauvinists and the Indian establishment. On one hand, Indian officials had imposed a ban on the slogan for a Punjabi speaking state; on the other, an ideologue of the Rashtriya Swayam Sewak Sangh (RSS), an ultra Hindu nationalist body of which the BJP is a part, accused supporters of the demand to be acting at the behest of Pakistan, the neighbouring Muslim country.

As Punjab heads for assembly elections next year, the Akali Dal finds itself on the defensive due to its unconditional support to the BJP, and turning volte face on a number of issues, including those that arose in the aftermath of the creation of the Punjabi-speaking state and culminated in violence and bloodshed.

Punjab: The story of two partitions

Punjab is a Persian word that means the land of five rivers. Indeed, Punjab had five rivers Jhelum, Chenab, Ravi, Sutlej and Beas. But the geographical boundaries of Punjab greatly changed when India was divided on religious

lines in 1947, when official independence was gained from the British occupation.

Following a sustained campaign by Hindu and Muslim chauvinists, India was partitioned, and Muslim Pakistan was carved out of India. Both the RSS and the Muslim League supported exclusionary Hindu and Muslim nations respectively. Notably, both groups remained aloof from the struggle against colonialism. Since Sikhs were in a minority (they still make up 1.7 percent of the Indian population), they lacked bargaining power and were forced to choose between India or Pakistan. A demand for a separate Sikh nation raised by a fringe element did not have many supporters. The Sikh leadership, under the Akali Dal that claims to be the sole representative of the Sikh community, chose to go with India. Notably, the Akali Dal had played a significant role in the independence movement against British occupation, alongside the Congress party that dominated the political landscape. The Akali Dal mainly fought for the liberation of their historic shrines from the corrupt priests who enjoyed the backing of the British government, which wanted to maintain influence over the Sikhs after they annexed Punjab in 1849. Both the Congress and the Akali Dal accepted this campaign as

part of the national liberation movement. Since then the Akali Dal politics has been inseparable from religion. There was also a fear of religious persecution in Pakistan, which became an Islamic state, whereas India chose to remain a secular state under the Congress government, despite challenges from Hindu extremists. The Congress party had also tried to woo the Sikhs by promising to give them an autonomous region in India if they refused to go with Pakistan. The towering Congress leader Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, who became the first Prime Minister of post-British India, declared in 1946: "The brave Sikhs of Punjab are entitled to special consideration. I see nothing wrong in an area and a set up in the North wherein the Sikhs can also experience the glow of freedom."

When India was finally divided, a big part of Punjab went to Pakistan along with two rivers: Jhelum and Chenab. The eastern Punjab that remains with India was left with only three rivers. The Sikhs who were forced to migrate to eastern Punjab not only had to leave behind their ancestral lands, but also important shrines, like the birth place of Guru Nanak, the founder of the Sikh faith. On top of that, they had to suffer violence alongside Hindus at the hands of the Muslim

fundamentalists in Pakistan, during the sectarian violence that gripped the region in the aftermath of the division.

Punjabi was widely spoken by all three religious communities of the region - Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs. But the Gurmukhi script of Punjabi was largely identified with the Sikh religion, as it was created by the founders of Sikhism. The Muslims largely used Persian script, while the Hindus preferred Devanagari when it came to writing. So, Urdu was mainly identified with Muslims, Hindi with Hindus and Punjabi with the Sikhs. The language issue was therefore confused with the religion.

After independence, it dawned upon the Akali Dal that they lacked power even in eastern Punjab, where the Sikhs were still a minority. The Hindus dominated Punjab, and the Akali Dal found it difficult to wrest power in the state with the sole support of the Sikh community. The Congress did very little to remove their anxiety, and it seemed to the Akali Dal that all promises of autonomy were false.

When the Indian establishment decided to reorganize the states on a linguistic basis, the Akali Dal raised the demand for a Punjabi Suba (state). A commission was set up to look into the process in 1953, but it refused to concede the

demand for a Punjabi Suba. Prime Minister Nehru rejected the demand by arguing that the Akali Dal was asking for a sectarian Sikh state in the garb of a linguistic state. The RSS ideologue M.S. Golwalkar echoed similar feelings in his book; *Bunch of Thoughts*. He accused the Punjabi Suba supporters of taking the help of Pakistan. "They have even gone to the extent of seeking its (Pakistan) sympathy and help, forgetting all the barbaric atrocities and insults they had suffered at the hands of Pakistanis during the days of Partition." In a way, he was questioning the patriotism of the Akali Dal. Both the Congress and the RSS were playing on the fears of Hindus that Gurmukhi would be imposed on them in a Sikh-dominated Punjabi Suba.

From the Akali Dal's perspective, the Congress was trying to woo the Hindu majority by rejecting their rightful demand. The Akali Dal also saw in their campaign an opportunity to create a Sikh majority state where they could enjoy the balance of power.

As the government remained adamant, the Akali Dal intensified the agitation. Indian officials overreacted to the situation and banned the raising of slogans in support of Punjabi Suba in 1955. Akali Dal leader Tara Singh courted arrest after defying the ban. A police force was also sent to

arrest Akali Dal supporters who had gathered at the Golden Temple Complex, the holiest Sikh shrine in Amritsar. The police used tear gas shells injuring some devotees. The incident galvanized the movement and after much criticism, the government was forced to revoke the ban on raising the Punjabi Suba slogan. The then Chief Minister of Punjab, Bhim Sen Sachar, had to resign.

While the agitation continued, Nehru died in 1964, and Lal Bahadur Shastri became the new Prime Minister. An Akali Dal leader, Sant Fateh Singh, announced that he would fast unto death if their demand was not met. In 1965, when India and Pakistan went to war, the Akali Dal called off its agitation. Fateh Singh decided to postpone his fast on the request of Shastri. Not only that, Singh also appealed to Punjabis to cooperate with the government during the war. Sikhs living in the border areas of Punjab showed complete solidarity with the Indian forces, and served food to the soldiers deployed on the frontiers.

Shastri was influenced by the gesture of the Sikh community in general and the Akali Dal in particular. When the war ended, the Indian government softened its position and agreed to accept the demand for Punjabi Suba. A parliamentary committee was formed to consider the

demand. However, during the 1961 census, Hindu chauvinists encouraged Punjabi Hindus to declare Hindi and not Punjabi as their mother tongue. This polarized the entire issue on religious lines. The boundary commission that was set up to demarcate the boundaries of Punjabi Suba took into consideration the 1961 census figures, leading to the creation of present-day Punjab, much smaller in size as compared to pre-independence Punjab. It brought a second partition to the state, as a new province of Haryana was carved out, almost equal in size, while many areas went to the Himachal Pradesh. Apart from this, Chandigarh was declared as Union Territory and joint capital of Punjab and Haryana. Some other issues also cropped up, like the division of resources such as river waters, badly affecting the future of the Sikh farmers, who form the backbone of Punjab's agricultural economy.

The Akali Dal felt betrayed. It believed that some genuinely Punjabi speaking areas have been separated from Punjab as part of a grand design by the Congress and the Hindu chauvinists, including the supporters of Jan Sangh - the previous avatar of the BJP that currently rules India and shares power with the Akali Dal in Punjab. The BJP is a

political wing of the RSS, whose leader saw Pakistan's hand in the campaign for Punjabi Suba. Despite these limitations, the Akali Dal was now able to form government on its own with the help of the 60 percent Sikh population in reorganized Punjab, or so it thought.

Bloody phase

In Punjabi Suba's first general election in 1967, the Akali Dal emerged as the single largest party. It formed a coalition government with the help of the Jan Sangh and the Communists. This was the first non-Congress government in the state since partition. The language issue remained a bone of contention for some time. An ambitious Akali Dal minister in the government, Lachman Singh Gill, often quarrelled with the members of Jan Sangh. Gill wanted Punjabi to be declared as the official language, while the Jan Sangh opposed it. Others remained indifferent to the issue and had a laid back approach. They thought the issue would be gradually resolved through consensus. Eventually, Gill revolted from the Akali Dal and floated a new party. To avert fresh election, Gill was given an opportunity to form his own cabinet. Interestingly, he formed a government with the support of the Congress party that was in the opposition. He brought a motion to make Punjabi the official language, that was

passed and implemented in 1968. Shortly after, the Congress withdrew its support from the minority government and a fresh election was held in 1969.

While voters in Punjab kept on picking between the Akali Dal and the Congress, which became permanent enemies, Sikh activist Darshan Singh Pheruman announced that he would fast unto death until Punjab was given its due. 85-year-old Pheruman had participated in the freedom struggle. He emphasised an autonomous Sikh homeland within India. He also took a dig at the Akali Dal leaders who he felt failed to deliver on their promises, including keeping their word on fasts unto death. He noted in a signed declaration that these leaders had made religious vows which were broken shamelessly. He now took upon himself the responsibility to restore the sanctity of the religious vows, and sat on a 74 day fast that resulted in his death on October 27, 1969. His death was a big jolt for the Akali Dal which had started showing signs of weakness. In 1973, the Akali Dal was forced to make a declaration, the Anandpur Sahib Resolution, that categorically asked that the areas taken away from Punjab or "intentionally" kept apart should be immediately merged with Punjab.

The resolution also hardened

its tone on the Sikh identity, stating; "the Sikhs of India are a historically recognized political nation". It also asked for state autonomy and to restrict central intervention to Defence, Foreign Affairs, Posts and Telegraphs, Currency and Railways.

Even as the ground was being laid for new agitation seeking the merger of Punjabi speaking areas of the neighbouring states, the Akali Dal was heading for a major confrontation with the Indian establishment. In 1975, the Congress government in New Delhi under Prime Minister Indira Gandhi declared Emergency in the country. Opposition leaders were arrested and thrown in jails, and press censorship was imposed. The Akali Dal vehemently opposed the Emergency as its leaders and volunteers courted arrests. This widened the distance between the Akali Dal and the Congress, but it paid some dividends to the former. In 1977, after the emergency was lifted and a fresh election was held, the Janata Party came to power with Akali Dal as its ally. The Akali Dal's stand on human rights and civil liberties was widely appreciated in the non-Congress circles. The current Akali Dal government's Chief Minister of Punjab, Parkash Singh Badal, became a minister in the central

government. But the period of joy was short lived; the Congress under Indira Gandhi recaptured power in the 1980 general election. In Punjab, the Akali Dal was again out of power, as Congress won the assembly elections in May 1980. The Akali Dal that had been in power did not do much to achieve the merger of Punjabi speaking areas separated from the state at the time of creation of Punjabi Suba, or even to achieve political autonomy. Once out of power, they came out with a charter of demands, including those covered by the resolution of 1973.

In 1981, a list of 45 religious and political demands was presented to the government. Among them were merger of Punjabi speaking areas and Chandigarh into Punjab, and second language status to Punjabi in the neighbouring states of Haryana, Himachal Pradesh and Rajasthan, besides Delhi. And of course, it repeated the demand for political autonomy to the state.

The Congress government dubbed the Anandpur Sahib Resolution as subversive, even though demands for a federal structure of governance with autonomy to the states were also emerging from other parts of India.

The stage was set for a long battle. With the government remaining adamant in its opposition to the demands,

the Akali Dal launched its crusade. Parallel to this agitation, a fiery Sikh preacher, Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, launched his campaign. He persuaded the Sikhs to carry weapons and fight back against discrimination. Many allege that he was the creation of the Congress party, which wanted to weaken the Akali Dal. After all, the Akali Dal had lost credibility, as it did not do much to achieve what they were asking for while in power. This gave Bhindranwale an upper hand over the Akali Dal among the ordinary Sikh masses. He gradually became more popular than the moderate Akali Dal. As days passed, more militant youth came into his fold. The Akali Dal was forced to support him as the Congress government refused to give them any respite.

An era of political killings began. The first high profile civilian to be murdered by the Sikh militants was Lala Jagat Narain, the editor of Hind Samachar Newsgroup. He was a right-wing Hindu journalist who had opposed the Punjabi Suba movement in the past. Narain was a staunch critic of Bhindranwale and had been regularly writing against him and his agitation. The violence then picked up and more assassinations followed. Ordinary Hindus and moderate Sikhs also became the target of the militant attacks. The

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Golden Temple Complex was turned into a nerve center of the extremist activities. The Akali Dal, which had control over the management of the shrine, did not prevent militants from bringing in arms, and hardened their own agitation. Parkash Singh Badal and his supporters burnt copies of the Indian constitution in protest against Article 25, which brackets Sikhs with Hindus and does not recognize them as a separate community. The Hindu extremists also became active and began targeting innocent Sikhs outside Punjab. In June 1984, Indira Gandhi ordered the army to invade the Golden Temple Complex. Many people died during the operation, including Bhindranwale, and several buildings inside the shrine were badly damaged. The Sikh community was offended across the world, but the BJP welcomed the assault.

In October that year, Gandhi was murdered by Sikh bodyguards at her official residence. Her assassination was followed by a well-organized massacre of Sikhs in different parts of India. The members of the so-called secular Congress party of the slain leader were seen organizing the mobs who burnt alive Sikh men and raped their women.

The ugly political events of 1984 fuelled more violence in Punjab. For almost a decade,

the Sikh separatists ran a parallel government in the state. Unlike those who were content with autonomy and the transfer of Chandigarh and Punjabi-speaking areas into Punjab, the separatists were seeking a separate Sikh nation

of Khalistan. The Akali Dal was completely caught in a dilemma. They could neither oppose militants vehemently, nor compromise with them openly. They meekly supported the militants, as in the case of Bhindranwale.

They often went to attend religious ceremonies organized in commemoration of the slain militants. The Akali Dal still considers some of the radicals as martyrs.

From 1983, when an elected government was dismissed due to disturbances in Punjab, until 1992, the state mostly remained under President's rule. The Akali Dal did form a government for a very small period in 1985, but that too was dismissed on the grounds of large scale violence.

By early 1990s, the Sikh militancy had almost ended, either because of state repression or because the militants lost their support among the people due to the excesses they committed.

In 1995, Congress Chief Minister in Punjab, Beant Singh, was murdered in a powerful bomb attack. The militants targeted him because his government was responsible for large scale repression in the name of "war against terrorism". The forced disappearances of political activists and the killings of suspected militants in staged shootouts became a common occurrence under his democratically elected government.

The Akali Dal for all these years remained ineffective, mainly because of the ruthlessness of the Indian establishment. It continued to fight from the margins with a long list of grievances against

the Congress. They did their best to cash in on the anger that had built up among their constituents since Punjabi Suba days. The most common complaint against Congress has been that it is the party which has always beaten and looted the Sikhs.

As years passed the list of grouses grew. So, when the Akali Dal came back to power in 1997, the people who have

had enough from the Congress-led regimes heaved a sigh of relief. Moreover, the Akali Dal under Chief Minister Parkash Singh Badal, had as a partner the BJP that now ruled New Delhi. For the first time in many years, Punjabis in general and Sikhs in particular hoped that the Akali Dal would deliver on its many promises. The expectations were very high. Not only did people feel

that the long-pending issues of Punjab would finally be settled, they also expected the Akali Dal-BJP combine to punish those who had engineered violence against Sikhs in 1984, and to jail the police officers who had killed people in Punjab during the militancy. The Akali Dal had promised during the elections to order a judicial enquiry into these excesses and the role of the state in police violence. But people missed the point that whatever Congress did by perpetuating violence against Sikhs was aimed at pleasing the Hindu majority- a natural constituency of the BJP which was also complicit in state violence against Sikhs. They were the ones who welcomed the invasion of the Golden Temple Complex, whose supporters participated in the anti-Sikh pogrom as foot soldiers, and who justified police repression in Punjab. Apart from that the BJP is known for its anti-Muslim bias. The BJP government in Gujarat back in 2002 had engineered 1984-like violence against Muslims. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi was the Chief Minister of the state back then. Under Modi, many Muslims were branded as terrorists and killed in staged shootouts in Gujarat, in the name of peace and security. The pattern was no different from the Beant Singh regime in Punjab.

Since public memory is short,

everyone saw the coming together of the Akali Dal and the BJP as a beginning of a new era of hope. Akali Dal backtracked from its promise of a judicial probe and remained non-committal on the unfinished agenda of Punjabi Suba. All they talked about was development. So much so, some of the police officers who were involved in human rights abuses continued to enjoy the backing of the new government. These contradictions led to a crisis and then a split in the Akali Dal. Badal indirectly branded his critics as subversives, accusing them of trying to disturb peace in Punjab, forgetting his party's earlier alignments with the radicals. The Akali Dal-BJP government completed its term, and then came back in 2007. They have been in power in Punjab since, but Chandigarh remains a joint capital of Punjab and Haryana, with no possibility of the

Punjabi-speaking areas in the neighbouring states to be merged back into Punjab. This is despite the fact that the BJP is in power in New Delhi, where the daughter-in-law of Parkash Singh Badal is a central minister. The BJP is also in power in Haryana, and Chandigarh is represented by a BJP MP. All this makes it easier for the Akali Dal to settle the overdue territorial matters.

As Punjab state heads for elections next year, the Punjabi Suba's golden jubilee this month might bring some embarrassment to Badal's government, in relation to the issues of language and the unfinished agenda of the Anandpur Sahib resolution.

Badal roars

Sukhbir Singh Badal is a powerful man of Punjab. He is not only the son of the Chief Minister, but also the President of the ruling Akali Dal. Besides, he holds the posts of Deputy Chief Minister and Home Minister, with the entire police force under him. His wife Harsimrat Kaur Badal is a minister in the central government. When he speaks, everyone listens. His aggressive political statements these days have made him both famous and infamous. If his supporters like them, his critics are generally unimpressed and keep poking fun at him on social media.

With the Punjab elections scheduled for early 2017,

Badal Jr. has been working hard to remain in the headlines. On top of his agenda is development of the state. All other issues, such as Punjabi language and long pending demands of the state, are a thing of the past as far as he is concerned. But the problem is that he is facing a challenge from not only the Congress, an arch-rival of the Akali Dal, but also the fledgling Aam Aadmi Party (AAP). After having ruled Punjab for two successive terms, he cannot take the upcoming elections for granted. A remarkable change in his narrative is that between his two immediate enemies, Congress and the AAP, he is angrier against the latter. Maybe because Congress bashing has become redundant, or maybe because the newly born AAP cannot be blamed for the mess Punjab is in. AAP has been gaining ground among the masses, who are fed up with both the Congress and the Akali Dal. Whether that sentiment will translate into electoral victory for the AAP is hard to predict, but the party made a big impact in Punjab in the 2014 parliamentary elections. Punjab is the only state in the country that elected four MPs from AAP. A party of activists, it gained on the anti Akali-Dal and anti-Congress sentiments among the people of the state. If that trend prevails, the Punjab elections might see the emergence of a new political

force. This unusual scenario can be partly attributed to the fact that people have lost faith in the two major parties. The Sikhs, who still care for long pending issues that brought sufferings, have grudges against both parties. Congress discriminated against them, and the Akali Dal took advantage of that pain, without addressing the root cause of the problem. The AAP, being a blank slate, gives them some hope.

The Sikhs, however, are not an exception. Other communities also have a section that is disgruntled with the old players for broken promises on many real issues. It is therefore understandable why Badal Junior is angrier against the AAP. Not surprisingly, the Punjab Congress Party leader, Capt. Amrinder Singh (who has previously served as the Chief Minister) is equally upset with AAP. If the Badals are scared of losing Sikh votes to AAP, the Congress is fearful about losing their secular vote bank to a party that has already set an example by roping in Sikh activists who have worked hard on the issue of 1984 anti-Sikh violence. Harvinder Singh Phoolka, a senior advocate who has been fighting the cases of the 1984 massacre victims, was an AAP candidate for the parliamentary election in 2014. Although he lost that election, he is a key contestant in the upcoming assembly

elections, and could be nominated as the Chief Minister if his party comes to power. In Phoolka, people see some hope of settlement of the issues that pushed Punjab into crisis.

Sukhbir Singh Badal and his father keep insisting that they are different from others, and have not given up their fight for justice to Punjab. But Badal Jr. has clearly closed all options by borrowing from the discourse of the Congress government under the late Indira Gandhi and RSS to target his detractors. Only recently he accused the AAP of aligning with Sikh radical groups of Punjab. In the same media statement, he claimed that Pakistan is trying to destabilize peace in the state. If this was not enough, he wrote to the Indian Home Minister to investigate the AAP funding sources abroad. Clearly, he was repeating the words, albeit differently written, in the controversial white paper on Punjab agitation issued by the Congress government in July 1984.

That document had also clubbed the Akali Dal with secessionist elements both in India and abroad. But he can be excused on one ground - that a similar framing was used by Golwalker against the supporters of Punjabi Suba, considering that Badals are coopted by the RSS and the BJP.

-RDNB

Hypocrisy of hysteria over Indian soldiers' deaths

The Indian leadership and a section of the intelligentsia have been shedding tears over the deaths of 19 soldiers in a recent attack on an army base in Kashmir.

The September 18 attack, which also left four militants dead, has been blamed on Pakistan-based terror groups. The Indian government continues to claim that insurgents fighting for the right to self-determination in Kashmir are being aided and abetted by Pakistani agencies from across the border. Since then, the Indian government has conducted surgical strikes on the alleged militant camps near the border, and intensified its pressure to isolate Pakistan internationally. So much so, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has described Pakistan as the motherhood of terrorism.

Not to be left behind, a hawkish media and certain stars associated with the Indian film industry have created an atmosphere of hostility against Pakistan across the country. Pressure is also being built to prevent Indian filmmakers from engaging Pakistani actors.

Those blinded by nationalism are not willing to listen to alternative views. As a result, those expressing reservations over this rhetoric are being hounded and intimidated by the right-wing groups. Any voice of reason is seen as unpatriotic.

Undoubtedly, Pakistan is responsible for supporting Islamic extremism and was instrumental in the creation of Taliban at the behest of the US, as a counterweight to Russia during the cold war era. But India's ruling Hindu nationalist Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) is only trying to create a war hysteria in the aftermath of the attack, to attract votes during upcoming assembly elections in Punjab and Uttar Pradesh. It must not be forgotten that Pakistani soldiers and civilians are also getting killed at the hands of the Islamic extremists, who are active in the Kashmir region. The bigger question, however, is that even if we believe what is being served to us by the Indian leadership and the media, or their apologists in the film industry, why was such outrage and patriotism not shown when several Sikh soldiers were brutally murdered during the 1984

anti-Sikh massacre? The pogrom followed the assassination of then-Prime Minister Indira Gandhi by her Sikh bodyguards. In the first week of November 1984, thousands of innocent Sikhs were murdered in different parts of the country by mobs led by Gandhi's Congress party activists. Even uniformed soldiers travelling in the trains were not spared. No film actor or leader expressed any anger over such disrespect shown to the Sikh soldiers, who were serving for the security and safety of the nation.

One can argue that it is an old incident, and since the BJP was not in power it cannot be blamed. But this certainly reflects on the collective consciousness of the nation that was built on the principles of secularism and inclusiveness.

Now consider a fresh instance to understand the selectivity of patriotism. In June this year, a paramilitary force convoy was attacked in the Kashmir by the militants, leaving eight soldiers dead. One of them, Constable Vir Singh, was a Dalit or so-called untouchable, a community that has faced caste-based

discrimination in Hindu society for centuries. When Vir Singh's body was taken for cremation to his native village in Uttar Pradesh, the upper caste chauvinists declined to give his family public space for last rites. They were forced to give in after the intervention of the administration. It's a shame that there was no national outrage shown to such disrespect to a slain soldier because of his caste. Even otherwise, the way Indian soldiers are immortalised by the political leadership and the intelligentsia is problematic. Before the Uri attack, over 80 Kashmiri civilians had died at the hands of the Indian forces. They were killed during protests against the death of a militant in an alleged staged shootout. A number of Kashmiris also lost their eyes

in pellet attacks by the soldiers. 25 years ago, Indian soldiers had raped about a hundred women during a raid on two Kashmiri villages: Kunan and Poshpora. During the infamous military operation of 1991, men were separated from the womenfolk, after which women, including minors and seniors, were brutally raped by the soldiers. Until now no justice has been done to the victims of Kunan and Poshpora. Those who are so much pained over the deaths of 19 soldiers must ask themselves: why was such outrage not shown for the civilians killed or raped by the army? Is the army the only custodian of national interest? Or is the national interest more important than the life and dignity of the people of any nation? And why only see

Pakistan as the motherhood of terrorism, when the BJP government shields those involved in acts of terror and violence in the name of Hindu nationalism? Among them are those who targeted Samjhauta Rail, which connects India and Pakistan, killing 68 people, mostly Pakistanis, in a 2007 bomb blast. Why was there no outrage when a statue of Nathuram Godse, the Hindu extremist who killed Mahatma Gandhi in 1948, was recently unveiled in Uttar Pradesh? Why these double standards on terrorism? If this is how the national interest is defined, then please include my name in the list of anti-nationals as well.

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The death of Colten Boushie: a story of Canadian values

The shooting death last August of Colten Boushie, a resident of the Red Pheasant reserve in northern Saskatchewan, could be seen as a tragic metaphor for the centuries-long history of anti-indigenous racism in Canada. Gerald Stanley, the farmer who killed Boushie, faces charges, but the province is the scene of a much larger debate, reflecting the huge gap in incomes and living standards between indigenous and non-indigenous peoples, and many other measures of inequality.

Recent details about the killing of Colten Boushie were reported by the Globe and Mail's Joe Friesen, based on police documents and interviews with the families involved in this case.

Unfortunately, until recent years it has been relatively rare for the mainstream media in Canada to pay serious attention to the voices of First Nations people. But Friesen's article about the events that fateful day from the perspective of Boushie's family is powerful writing. He describes how a flash of headlights in the darkness drew Debbie Baptiste to a window, as she saw a convoy of police vehicles driving along

the dirt road that runs through Red Pheasant reserve. When the cars pulled in to her yard she immediately feared for her son Colten, who was late getting home. To Baptiste, Colten was "the baby of the family, the one who normally stayed close".

As anyone familiar with Canadian history knows, what happened next was sickeningly common. While four uniformed RCMP officers approached the family trailer, others stood watch outside, weapons drawn and scanning the property. Witnesses say

the police were "prepared for trouble." The officers entered the home, searched each room with flashlights, and accused Baptiste of having been drinking.

And there you have it. Why should the RCMP officers have been "prepared for trouble?" In the view of this writer, the RCMP was founded on the ideology that "Indians are trouble." The force was created shortly after Canadian confederation, with the mandate to help subdue the First Nations and Metis peoples while a massive influx

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of European settlers began to arrive. Unfair treaties were signed, the enormous buffalo herds were slaughtered (mainly south of the 49th parallel by US soldiers), and the vast prairies of Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba were turned over to the production of grain and cattle. The RCMP was the main armed body of the Canadian state responsible for ensuring that the victims of this process remained quietly on their reservations, barred from organizing resistance movements or even holding meetings. For over a century, the RCMP was the enforcer of racist colonialism in western Canada, and the Indians were the de facto enemy.

So it's not surprising that when the RCMP arrived at the home of a young man shot by a white farmer, their attitude was that they were now in hostile territory. Did they act in the same fashion at the farm where Boushie was killed? Of course not, even though the only armed person in this case lived on that farm.

The rest of Friesen's account is utterly heartbreaking. "Ms. Baptiste couldn't comprehend what she was hearing. Colten was the gentle one, the optimist, the one who persevered when his crippled arm briefly prevented him from working. He was a ceremonial fire keeper whose certificates of good citizenship she'd kept in a folder since he was five.

She let out a scream so urgent and anguished that those who heard it recall it with a shudder. She fell to her knees right there on the porch..."

The RCMP have not provided a detailed response to the complaints raised by Colten's family, saying only that "full details will be released through court proceedings."

A preliminary hearing to determine whether there is sufficient evidence to put Gerald Stanley on trial is set for January. Among some white farmers in Saskatchewan (and certainly not all - it would be wrong and even shameful to promote stereotyping of farmers as "racist rednecks"), there is an attitude that they have the

"right" to use armed force to prevent anyone not invited from entering their property. We shall see what happens with the court case in these tense circumstances.

But there will be no case brought against the RCMP officers who mistreated the aboriginal family of Colten Boushie, displaying the racist attitudes of an occupying colonial army. And that is perhaps the most terrible thing about this case: it reflects the real "Canadian values" which are widely accepted as the norm in our society.

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

Nanak will always be relevant

This month marks 547th birth anniversary of Guru Nanak, the founder of the Sikh faith.

Born in a Hindu family in 1469 in Punjab, India, Nanak was an extraordinary child with many qualities, such as an ability to raise questions and quickly grasp everything that was taught to him.

Nanak arrived into the world during a period when India was under Islamist rule, and the Hindu society was divided on caste lines. The tyranny of the state and the oppression of

the Dalits or so-called untouchables by the priest class was prevalent everywhere.

Right from his childhood days, Nanak showed signs of his deep sense of spirituality and compassion. He liked spending time in the company of ascetics, wandering in nature and sharing with the poor whatever was given to him by his family.

This worried his father, who wanted him to grow up as an average well-to-do family person, but Nanak had already

chosen the course of his life.

One of his first acts of resistance was his refusal to wear *janeu*, a sacred thread worn by the upper caste Hindus. He questioned the priest what could a thread of cotton really do to liberate him? Much before he established the Sikh religion, he proclaimed that he was neither Hindu nor Muslim. This suggests that he had made up his mind to establish a new order that would be more open and secular, and denounce social ills among both the

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Hindus and the Muslims.

His family tried to settle him by marrying him to Sulakhani, and he got a job as a store keeper, but his heart lay elsewhere. He began travelling to find the eternal truth and went as far as Sri Lanka, China and the Middle East. Everywhere he went, he engaged in a dialogue with the Hindu and Muslim preachers. He fasted without fear and challenged blind faith and rituals, such as idol worshipping.

He preferred to live in the company of workers and marginalized people. He also spoke about women's empowerment and condemned gender bias. He tried to break the caste barriers by introducing community kitchens where all sat together to eat. This was a direct challenge to the brutal caste system under which Dalits were not allowed to eat or drink alongside the upper caste chauvinists. Dalits were not even allowed to enter a temple or listen to the scriptures, but Nanak gave them a right to pray and recite the name of the god during his discourse. He wrote poems in an easy and accessible language that could be understood by a common man, unlike Sanskrit, which was reserved only for the upper caste Hindu Brahmins, who did not want Dalits to listen to the scriptures. He once snubbed a Brahmin, who refused to dine at his community kitchen due to the fear of coming in physical

contact with "untouchables". For Nanak, only a bad deed should make one untouchable, and not the birth in any caste. Nanak once declined the invitation to a lavish dinner for saints, organized by Malik Bhago, an influential and arrogant official. Instead he accepted a very modest dinner invitation from Laalo, an ordinary carpenter. He argued that Bhago had earned his rich lifestyle by exploiting the poor and squeezing their blood, whereas Laalo's simple food was earned by his hardwork.

On another occasion, he had an argument with Hindu priests who were offering river water to the sun as a ceremony to pay respect to the departed souls. After watching this, Nanak started doing the same, but made the offering towards the opposite direction. On being confronted, he said that he was sending the water to his village fields in Punjab. He questioned the priests: if the water being offered by them to the dead can reach to another world, why won't his village fields, which were not that far, benefit from this ritual? Similarly, in Mecca, some Muslims were enraged when he dozed off with his feet pointed towards the holy site. He asked them, why didn't they move his feet towards a direction where there is no god? This embarrassed the believers, who think that god is omnipresent. Clearly, Nanak was not a conformist, and had a capacity to challenge superstition.

His candid behaviour invited the wrath, both of conservative Hindu and Muslim preachers, and the rulers of that time. But Nanak remained fearless and had the ability to win over his critics with his logic and humility.

He had Mardana, a Muslim balladeer, as his companion. Together they organized prayer meetings and recited hymns. He emphasised working hard to earn one's livelihood, share and pray. When the time came, he himself worked in the fields as a farmer and took cattle for grazing. He loved nature and considered earth as the mother and water as the father.

Nanak was thrown into jail by King Babar, following complaints that he was mobilizing the poor and the working class by exposing the priest class and those in power. Seeing the repression of Babar, he composed a poem to question why the god remained unmoved by the sufferings of mankind. He had the courage to call Babar an oppressor.

Nanak was equally loved by both Hindus and Muslims. The legend has it that when he passed away, both communities argued over how to perform his last rites. Hindus wanted to cremate him, while Muslims wanted to bury him.

Before he died in 1539, Nanak appointed Angad as his successor. Notably, he preferred Angad over his two sons, because he found Angad

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to be the true follower of his ideology, and believed that only he could make Sikhism stronger after him. Indeed, Angad made Sikhism stronger by adhering to its philosophy of equality and sharing, and adding more features to make the new religion more distinct. Likewise, eight further gurus who followed Angad to lead the Sikhs kept the struggle of social justice started by Nanak alive.

In today's world, where religious intolerance refuses to die, and any voice of reason is being crushed Nanak remains relevant. As long as racism, caste-based oppression or violence against women continue in India, he will always be relevant.

It's a shame that some so-called followers of Nanak have deviated from his path of egalitarianism. They continue to indulge in caste-based discrimination, and have frequently discriminated against women. In a male-dominated Sikh society, often boys are preferred over girls, a trend which has widened the sex ratio in Punjab. They are also responsible for growing fundamentalism and blind faith within the Sikh community.

Nanak's birthplace was separated from India in 1947, when the country was divided on religious lines. Following a sustained campaign by both Hindu and Muslim fundamentalists,

India and Pakistan were partitioned. Nanak's birthplace now falls in Pakistan. Religious fanatics on both sides of the border killed people of the other faith group when riots broke out following separation. Since then religious violence continues to raise its ugly head in the region. In Pakistan, non-Muslims continue to live under fear from the Muslim extremists who are patronized by the Pakistani state. Similarly, in India, which claims to be a secular democracy, religious minorities have been persecuted many times by Hindu fundamentalists who frequently get overt and covert support of the establishment.

The Sikh politicians who continue to pay symbolic tributes to Nanak in India have maintained a studied silence over the ongoing repression of Muslims, Christians and Dalits

by the goons of the ruling Hindu nationalist Bhartiya Janata Party which is playing a dangerous game of appropriating Sikhism as a part of the Hindu fold and creating divisions between Sikhs and other minority groups. In particular, the Akali Dal, the party that claims to be a sole representative of the Sikhs in Punjab, continue to enjoy power in partnership with those who are bent on turning India into a Hindu theocracy.

Since Nanak had travelled to different countries, his message of humanity also has global relevance. His teaching to share especially needs to be recognized, and those super-rich who control the wealth of the world should be made to part with what rightfully belongs to the poor. Since he had a great respect for mother earth, Nanak's message for the environment must also be spread internationally to save our planet from global warming.

-RDNB

Nanak

Excuse us
 It's quite hard for us
 to envisage the true image of Nanak
 Legs messed up with the dust of the winding
 path
 Cracked heels
 Beard entangled by turbulent winds
 Skin toughened in arid-cold seasons
 Concave and skinny cheeks
 Eyes popping from the facial bone structure
 dazzling & renegade
 Eyes, which refute-
 the hierarchy
 the monarchy
 and clergy
 The real Nanak can prove fatal to us
 That Nanak, who we can't even dream
 He can
 destruct our homely institutions
 lead our children into the throws of non-
 conformism
 Can create quests
 to point our feet towards Kaaba
 Consequently
 we can be injured and amputated
 We may be motivated for many more wrong
 deeds
 For instance
 We may perceive the irrelevance of religious
 symbolism
 we may bring out a manifesto
 to divert the flows
 to challenge propriety
 We are wary of this preposterous Nanak
 All we want is
 success

succor
 solace
 We desire luxurious graces
 familial blessings
 and promotion and progress
 in terms of wealth
 Nanak depicted by Sobha Singh's school of
 portraits
 is well suited for us
 White Sun-Silky beard
 spherical shining cheeks
 Fair and Lovely
 rosy Topsy lips
 soft Gemini feet
 delicate Barbie hands
 Arielly cleaned messianic robes
 The walls of our homes can only hold
 Nanak in the pictures of Sobha Singh's style
 The true picture of dangerous Nanak
 who rejected the well-traversed paths
 is too momentous for our walls
 Excuse us
 we can't afford ruining of homes
 those we created with labour of blood
 We can't afford losing kids
 those we got with prayers
 We can not envisage the real image of Nanak
 Excuse us please

Jaswant Zafar is a prominent Punjabi poet. Originally written in Punjabi, the English translation of Nanak has been reproduced here to mark the birth anniversary of Guru Nanak that falls this month.

Courtesy: <https://parchanve.wordpress.com/category/authors/jaswant-zafar/>

