

Unfolding Sikh history – a matter of pride, not politics

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The institutionalization of 26th December as the Veer Baal Diwas has not come a day soon. The recognition of the sacrifices of young children of seven or so age is a glorious chapter in Indian history.

It is surprising that with all this prevalent talk of foregrounding of the marginalized in postcolonial times, the focus has all along been on certain minority communities like the Dalits and the Muslims which have a sizeable number. What that translates into are the vote banks – the real moving force behind political initiatives taken in their interest. Vote bank politics theory may be ascribed to the present initiative also by interested people but then we must look at it through a different lens.

The postcolonial theory – the darling of our theory classes as also of research by students – started with the intent to re-write history but in India it got embroiled in politics. All that students have been learning over seven decades is about the Mughal period in great detail with pre-Muslim invasion period forming a footnote only. For that matter, while a student will parrot Babar's progeny in one go without so much as stopping for breath, it will take a good bit of time for him to say a few words about Gupta period, Maurya dynasty, Chola and Chalukya kingdoms, etc. It seems that for us Indians, history started with the arrival of Muslim invaders only! Surprisingly, even the literary writers like novelists too hardly applied imagination to write about the pre-Mughal period.

It is only now that the Modi government launched on the laudable project to highlight the hitherto obscure portions of history and the heroes and heroines of struggle against Muslim or British rulers. Hardly did we hear before the names of Kempe Gowda of Karnataka, Tiruppur Kumaran of Tamilnadu, Alluru Sitaram Raju of Andhra, Binoy Basu of Bengal, or Tirot Sing of Assam who have been now added to the hall of fame. There are women fighters also like Durga Bhabhi, Matangini Hazara, queen Velu Nechiyar who fought bravely against the British rulers.

Likewise, the unsung heroes and heroines of the period when Mughals ruled India are also being brought to light and accorded honour long due to them. We now hear of Lachit Borphuken who along with other kings of the region ensured that the Mughals did not enter Assam. Similarly, Maharaja Chhatrasal fought and kept at bay Aurangzeb in Bundelkhand. The supreme sacrifice made by Guru Gobind Singh ji is unparalleled in the annals of history. Not only did he lay down his own life fighting the cruelest Mughal king

Aurangzeb but his worthy children – all four of them – too laid down life for refusing to convert to Islam. The two young children aged five and seven were bricked alive in wall at Sirhind which stands after 300 years as testimony to the ghastly persecution.

Several other gurus like Guru Arjun Dev ji and Guru Tegh Bahadur ji along with several Hindu (in today's discourse, for there was no such difference between Sikhs and Hindus in that age) followers were also put to death by Mughal rulers for refusing to convert to Islam. The sacrifices of the Sikh gurus have been known to the Sikh community as also the people of north-west region, but the highlighting of this chapter of supreme sacrifice needs to be done for the knowledge of all Indians. That indeed should make us proud of having such brave ancestors. That is the foremost purpose of instituting the Veer Baal Diwas.

This historical episode also brings to mind the large-scale conversions happening in our times which stand in sharp contrast to the chapter of hallowed history. It is not liberalism with regard to religious beliefs, rather monetary benefit or inducements of various kinds that we find mostly at the root of conversion to Islam or Christianity. There is also the use of undue force that has been happening even in free India. The Supreme Court has cautioned openly against the possibility of the change in demography due to proselytization, but more than that it is a challenge to democratic ideals which the state must uphold and an aspersion on commitment to values which we as members of a civilized society are losing.

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