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Let Justin Trudeau introspect coolly

February 23, 2022, 10:00 PM IST / Jagdish Batra in Cultural Inputs, World, TOI

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Now that the 'Freedom Convoy' in Canada has been broken up with the use of force by the Canadian police, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau must be feeling relaxed although with a guilty conscience. He must have realized the difference between preaching to others – in this case his statements favouring the farmers' agitation in India – and practising at one's own end. In common parlance, such a behavioural trait would be called

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duplicitous. Indeed, for him, the chickens have come home to roost or bad Karma, as some have said.

There are clear similarities between the farmers' agitation in India and the truckers' protest in Canada. Both have been allergic to reason. In the former case, they were not ready to discuss what exactly was anti-farmer in the three farm acts; in the latter, they failed to cite any rationale behind their demand to abrogate the vaccine mandate. They also put forth extra demands just as the farmers in India did. The Canadian police called it a siege and cited losses to industries and trade.

A siege it was in India too that lasted much, much longer than the Canadian blockage of the highway connecting Canada to America. The farmers' agitation constricted the Indian capital, restricting movement of goods and people, to and from Delhi. This also led to huge financial loss due to closure of factories and businesses for want of raw material or market as also dearth of labour due to closure of borders, all of which dealt a severe blow to the already weakening economy under the impact of the Covid epidemic. It was a hellish experience for the people living on the periphery of Delhi. In Canada, the citizens complained against the noise pollution created by the

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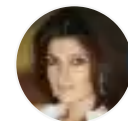
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blaring of horns and playing of loud music by truckers apart from their clashes with them. And still the government in India did not use any force to disperse the farmers. It was giving liberty to a fault, but surely, it put Indian democracy at a much higher pedestal than the Canadian. However, Modi is not preaching to Canada in return!

The response of the Canadian Prime Minister initially was rather surprising. It was reported by the Indian media that he went into hiding – not a flattering description for a prime minister to be working from a secret location! Barely three weeks after the agitation, euphemistically christened ‘Freedom Convoy’ had begun, Trudeau invoked emergency powers which meant arresting the protesters without warrant, seizing bank accounts of protesters and their supporters. The police swung into action using force to clear the roads and arresting the protesters. Surprisingly, the media did not write against Canadian government in sharp contrast to their virulent condemnation of Indian democracy and its leaders.

Trudeau’s action in preaching to India was also surprising in another sense. His illustrious father, former Prime Minister of Canada, Pierre Trudeau, who, in 1968 took over the office and became one of the

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longest serving premiers, is recognized as the leader who worked to avoid the secession of the Quebec province from Canada. Compare this to the active help that the farmers' unions in India were receiving from the pro-Khalistan elements in Canada. Besides financial help, they also misrepresented India on the international fora. That was a clear attempt to impair Indian sovereignty. Looking from the historical angle, it can be argued that the leadership that promoted wrongdoers became, in course of time, its victim too. So, it would be worthwhile for Justin Trudeau to allow the kind of liberty to others as he would have for himself or his countrymen. That is a sound policy in line with the principle of non-interference in others' affairs and respecting the unity and integrity of other nations. Having faced similar type of protests should bring the two governments closer. One would like to remind PM Trudeau of the Kanishka bomb blast of 1985 and expect him to rein in anti-India elements operating from Canadian soil. The way to deter such elements lies in facilitating with greater urgency the deportation of separatists demanded by India.

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