

When it came to August 15, not one newspaper, not one TV channel, not one politician, not the Sardar Sahib who climbed the 52 steps leading to the ramparts of the Red Fort had a word to say about the mayhem, the killings, the massacres, the riots, the looting, and the uprooting of Punjabis this day 62 years ago. Why does the Indian nation state forget so much so soon?



Whose Independence Day?



Sach Kanwal Singh

In a bout of misplaced ultra nationalism dumbing all sense of proportion and propriety, a newspaper that calls itself Punjab Di Awaz went tricolor this August 15, its enthusiasm to be seen as a chip of the establishment completely in consonance with the way the Indian polity, academia, intelligentsia, media and vast swathes of urban-centric civil society mark the day.

Such a complete loss of propriety strikes a quom only when it forgets to hear the deafening noise of silence of what is not said, what is omitted from the national orchestra, what is removed from the debate, from the newspaper pages, from the cackle on the TV.

Punjab Di Awaz was no different, and no more guilty.

Indian newspapers and TV channels devoted reams and hours to showcase the bravery of Indian soldiers in the Kargil war just weeks ago. The hysteria was built up despite the fact that it was poorly affecting the efforts being made on the peace front with Pakistan. But days down the line, when it came to August 15, not one newspaper, not one TV channel, not one politician, not the Sardar Sahib who climbed the 52 steps leading to the ramparts of the Red Fort had a word to say about the mayhem, the killings, the massacres, the riots, the looting, and the uprooting of Punjabis this day 62 years ago.

The Red Fort Sardar Sahib was not really expected to remember that a brave quom was deprived forever from its heritage of Sri Nankana Sahib and much more, that the entire Sikh Nation was forced to include a prayer to be able to have darshan of the gurughars left behind in Pakistan in its daily Ardas. Sardar Sahib himself hails from the sleepy village of Gah in Pakistan but that perhaps no more pulls on his heart strings.

But does he not know that there isn't a Sikh alive who has not

Indian media could have used the August 15 occasion to delve back in history in the light of the explosive material thrown up by the Transfer of Power documents and many later works impinging on the last weeks leading to August 15, 1947, and could have brought out the role of Lord Mountbatten in Partition, delay in announcement of Radcliffe award and the consequences that the brave people of Punjab bore. It could have started a debate in earnest about the history's increasingly clear verdict as to the role of the so-called leading lights of Indian freedom struggle.

cried at the first sight of Sri Nankana Sahib?

Partition is already a forgotten tale in Indian political lore, but the worse part is that even the Akali Dal politicians seem to be faithfully echoing the familiar Delhi political line. So, the so-called Independence Day was an occasion for them to promise more development, which, as per their interpretation of development, meant more shopping malls, air conditioned bus stands, international airports, wider roads, flyovers, hospitals that will remind one of five star hotels and of course, that favourite of the Kaka variety of politicians -- surplus power production!

Thank you very much. Happy Independence Day to all for whom it is an Independence Day. As for those who cannot erase from their memories the sight of the blood and pain of hundreds of thousands of dismembered Punjabis, and who cannot bear to witness so much blood and shared pain going waste amidst corporate din and crafty politics, our appeal is to never stop hearing the deafening sound of silence.

In a rather anti-people model of development that the neo-liberal lover establishment in India has

chosen, it is best not to engage with the aspirations of the minorities or issues of consciousness about heritage. Indian media could have used the August 15 occasion to delve back in history in the light of the explosive material thrown up by the Transfer of Power documents and many later works impinging on the last weeks leading to August 15, 1947, and could have brought out the role of Lord Mountbatten in Partition, delay in announcement of Radcliffe award and the consequences that the brave people of Punjab bore. It could have started a debate in earnest about the history's increasingly clear verdict as to the role of the so-called leading lights of Indian freedom struggle.

But no, it was busy telecasting the theories and the content spun out by the establishment. So, the larger picture was oh-so-rosy that you would almost blush at the amount of progress India has made.

Sixty-two years after the so-called Independence, India continues to treat its minorities with disdain, tramples over their aspirations, discriminates against a whole class of teeming millions that it has reduced to lowered

castes, attacks religious places like Sri Darbar Sahib and Sri Akal Takht Sahib, does not spare places like the Hazratbal shrine, lets off the hook those guilty of demolishing a mosque sacred to its Muslims, fails to prevent atrocities against Christians, creates amiable space for hate agendas and blesses those who carry out yatras aimed at spreading hatred.

Of the 500 plus districts in India, more than 200 are today directly affected by naxalite violence; violence at the roots of which are poverty, discrimination, stupid development policies, a stubborn refusal to understand that other ways of life and living style exist, officialdom's apathy, and the Indian state's decision that everything can be handled by its security forces.

In the north, Kashmir has been in ferment for so long that no Urdu poetry about the

Dal Lake brings joy anymore. The north-east has been smouldering for decades. In India's west, entire swathes of Gujarat and Maharashtra are swamped in rank communalism. In times of high-decibel talk of unprecedented development, the poor farmers who grow food grains are dying of hunger and poverty. Hundreds of thousands are dying simply while trying to cross swollen rivers in rickety boats; hundreds die because buses roll over into khuds regularly. Millions sleep on hungry stomachs when grain godowns are bursting at the seams. Official India does not hear the cries. It is dumb and deaf and blind but not helpless. New Delhi talks of cell phone density while landless labourers are unable to understand why every inch of India's visible skyline suddenly supports huge hoardings asking everyone to buy foreign brands, wear Gucci shoes, sport Chanel bags, and ad lib.

The state has turned on against its citizens so that a few can have a good life. The state has obliterated the concept of human rights, has given up the idea of welfare, has turned

into an oppressor. Official India has taken a side, and it is not in favour of the millions of oppressed, poor, deprived, and discriminated against. On August 15, it would have been better if anyone with any pretense towards being the Punjab Di Awaz had taken a side other than the tricolor one.