

Last salute to the memory of Frontier Gandhi!

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It has been more than a year since Haryana chief minister Manohar Lal Khattar 'desired' to rename the Badshah Khan Hospital after Atal Bihari Vajpayee in Faridabad. As per the notification of Haryana's director general health services, dated 3 December 2020, the chief minister 'desired' to change the name of the hospital. The director health sent that order to the principal medical officer (PMO) of the hospital on 14 December 2020, and from 15 December the work of the hospital was started taking place under the new name in all communications and references. Needless to say, chief minister Khattar must have consulted the prime minister Narendra Modi in this contentious issue before fulfilling his 'desire'. There is a possibility that he might have placed the desire of the prime minister as his own while ordering the director general health to rename a seven-decade-old hospital. The then chief medical officer (CMO) of Faridabad had asked the people who were hurt over the renaming of the hospital to approach the prime minister's office (PMO), which is in-charge of the hospital regarding the change of name.

Although the work of renaming the hospital took place during the Corona pandemic, there was still a lot of uproar and opposition to the move. Among those who protested were some local Congress leaders and some socio-religious organizations. The incident, however, went unnoticed by leaders or intellectuals at the national level. I myself could not pay attention to the incident related to BK Hospital, whose name kept ringing in my ears since the childhood. The real opposition to the government's decision of renaming the hospital came from the residents of New Industrial Town (NIT) Faridabad, whose forefathers came during the partition from districts like Bannu, Dera Ismail Khan, Kohat, Peshawar, Hazara, Mardan in the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP) and settled in Faridabad.

Those who settled in Faridabad, away from their homeland, considered Abdul Ghaffar Khan as their beloved leader. Many of them were associated with the Khudai Khidmatgar (Servants of God) formed in 1930 by Badshah Khan during the independence movement. They had built this civil hospital with their initiative and hard work, out of their desire to always keep their beloved leader around them. Badshah Khan used to visit these people when he came to India. The hospital was inaugurated by the then prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru on 5 June 1951. The opening plaque of the hospital read: "Badshah Khan Hospital,

the hospital built by the people of Faridabad with their own hands was named after their beloved leader Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan." These people, apparently not being Muslims, had prayed to the government and the chief minister not to change the name of the hospital, linking it with their very identity.

It is not important that the prime minister of India inaugurated the hospital. Important is the fact that the people of Badshah Khan, who came from the remote outskirts of the Indian subcontinent and settled in the newly settled townships of Haryana (then Punjab), built this hospital with their own initiative and diligence. The hospital happened to be a memorial of their love to Badshah Khan along with their identity, and the sacrifices of the people of the border province in the freedom movement. The chief minister Khattar's 'desire' destroyed that monument in a jiffy.

Any desire is a desire for a fruit. It is not difficult to know for what fruit chief minister Khattar had made this 'desire'. In fact, it is the two-edged desire of his parental organization, the RSS: one, to erase the sacrifices and values of the freedom movement; Two, to wipe out the remnants of the pre-colonial 'Muslim-raj' forever from the history of India. In doing so, on the one hand, it takes the pleasure of performing valour, and on the other, feels proud of establishing the 'Hindu-Rashtra' of its dreams. The chief minister Khattar must have been appalled at his decision of renaming Badshah Khan Hospital that he had made a humble contribution in making of 'Hindu-Rashtra'. Always indulged in the excitement of hollow valour and pride, the children of the RSS cannot really see how pathetic they become. Therefore, it is futile to expect chief minister Khattar or prime minister Narendra Modi to reconsider the decision by referring to the great personality of Badshah Khan. Where Gandhi's picture is shot again and again, who cares for the Frontier Gandhi?

Some friends believe that even though it has been more than a year since the renaming of the hospital, a struggle should be started to get the decision changed. They feel that giving exposure to a great personality like Badshah Khan a larger civil society will join the movement, and will put a pressure on the government to change its decision. Personally, I don't see any point in resistance on the issue now. If there had been a true will to protest in this case, the resistance would have come to the fore at the time of chief minister Khattar's 'desire'; And that resistance, possibly, would have compelled Mr. Khattar to change his decision. But such will-power was neither seen in the opposition nor in the intellectuals. The people who came from the North-West Frontier Province or their heirs presented their point of view clearly and firmly before

the government and the local administration in order to oppose the decision. But they did not get the support of the civil society and public of Faridabad. If the will-power of the political and intellectual leadership becomes weak, then where will the will-power of the people come from?

Therefore, it would be better to consider on the pretext of this incident why the true will for resistance has waned in the civil society to such an extent that it is unable to act with full force even on such blatantly wrong decisions? The answer to this difficult question calls for a great detail. In short, a very simple and clear phenomenon can be read behind it. Due to the progressive expansion of corporate politics in the last 30 years, there has been a contraction of proper political consciousness in the society. While commenting on the incident of changing the name of the hospital, a senior local Congress leader Mr. AC Chaudhary had said that chief minister Khattar may not have been given correct information about Abdul Ghaffar Khan. Had the chief minister been given the correct information, he would not have decided to change the name of the hospital. Mr. Chaudhary had expressed confidence that if he would give correct information to the Chief Minister, he would change the decision. Had there been a real political consciousness, Chaudhry would have rather raised the question with regret that a leader who did not know a personality like Abdul Ghaffar Khan has become the Chief Minister of a state.

It is also to be noted here that there is a coalition government of BJP and JJP in Haryana. That is, the legacy of Chaudhary Devi Lal's struggle has also been dragged into the act of humiliating Badshah Khan. The condition of the contraction of political consciousness in the era of corporate politics is such that Narendra Modi has been taken as the incarnation of God and Arvind Kejriwal as the incarnation of revolution. Those who favour Badshah Khan often ridicule Modi and his 'bhaktas', but they have no doubt that Kejriwal is an incarnation of revolution in new India. They have completed 'Tirangi Kranti' (tri-colour revolution) thrice in Delhi and now 'Basanti Kranti' (spring colour revolution) in Punjab under the leadership of Kejriwal. The festival of 'Basanti Kranti' was celebrated in the village of Bhagat Singh. It has been decided in the progressive and secular camp that the revolution will continue under the leadership of Kejriwal even in the rest of the states of the country. This is a strange hotchpotch (khichdi) cooked in the pot of counter-revolution that has taken place in the country!

On behalf of those opposing the name change of the hospital, it was said in a good manner that the government can build a new hospital or some other project in the name of Vajpayee. Had there been a serious political consciousness, it would have been immediately understood that it was not at all a case of Badshah Khan vs. Vajpayee. Badshah Khan was an adamant Satyagrahi and freedom fighter. Whoever Vajpayee may have been, he was neither a Satyagrahi nor a freedom fighter. If the civil society, which calls itself progressive and illuminating, cannot stop, does not want to stop, the pandemic of depoliticization which is spreading through corporate politics then it should get rid of Frontier Gandhi and his legacy. Similarly, as chief minister Khattar has freed Frontier Gandhi from the hospital named after him. We are no longer the worthy heirs of the legacy of Frontier Gandhi. So, the last salute to his memory.

Those who defy the RSS/BJP while standing in the camp of counter-revolution may find this pessimism. Whereas this is the bitter reality of new or corporation India.

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