

Editorial

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The bloody mind and the Nature's kindness

Mother Nature is not so cruel. The moment when the people of this land started crying for water, she pours it from the sky.

But we are so cruel to her that the blessing was sabotaged by wasting it at streets and other filthy potholes. In a world where technology had reached its height, where leaders of the western nations talk about building modern cities under the sea or somewhere at the sky, we in this portion of the earth do not know how to make good use of what Mother Nature has gifted us.

It is a known fact that during dry season people of this region faced acute shortage of water and during rainy season the place is normally flooded with the rain water. This phenomenon has been experiencing by the people for the past few decades.

No people of this generation have ever heard our great great grandfather facing such a disastrous phenomenon. This clearly shows that the present crisis of water is the creation of this generation.

One cannot simply blame on the mass deforestation as a result of the drastic situation being faced by the people. Politicians and those who are running the government cannot make their way out of this by blaming the citizens for not following the orders of the government.

Draughts and floods which were once only learnt through geography books and newspapers have now become routine event of this little state since the last two three decades.

As for the Imphalites from a small child who can read and write to those who hold top post in the government departments or those doing doctoral degree in any discipline, everyone knows that the kind of flood or draught that we the people of Manipur are facing every years is a man made one created by lack of proper planning on water management. Every time when the people faced such a situation there will be hue and cry from the side of the general public demanding the government for a proper water policy for the state. Even at the state assembly, some of the MLAs had brought up the issue and drew the attention of the government for proper management of water by framing a water policy. Concerned Ministers in the government every time assured to look into it but nothing visible action was seen taken up.

This is perhaps those in power responsible or looking after this section of department - say, for example the then Irrigation and Flood Control Department (IFCD) now converted into Water Resource department and Public Health Engineering Department (PHED) seems to be deliberately waiting for occurrence of flood or draught.

Everyone knows that when there is flood the Ministers or the authority of the government department looking after it are entitle to spend huge amount of money in the name of taking up relief measures. This fund utilized, only benefitted to those who are actually assigned to utilize it. So, if no draught or flood no special package or huge fund to utilized it at which they can manage to arrange to get their share.

Which means that those in the government never wanted a permanent solution to solve either flood or draught in this state which have adequate amount of rainfall every year.

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In Honouring Ranjit Singh, Pakistan Is Moving Beyond Conceptions of Muslim vs Sikh History

Courtesy The Wire
By : Haroon Khalid

Lahore is no ordinary city. It is a metaphor, appropriated and employed by empires, states and regimes of all kinds over its millennia-long history. In this symbolism, the landscape of the city becomes a medium through which kings, queens, administrators and politicians express their rhetoric and political ambitions.

For example, the city under Dara Shikoh became a symbol of his love towards his Sufi mentor, Mian Mir. The greatest infrastructural project that he planned - a pathway of red tiles from his palace at Naulakha to the shrine of Mian Mir - was an expression of this love. The project could never be materialised as the war for the Mughal throne ensued pitting all the brothers against each other. Emperor Aurangzeb, who took over the Mughal throne, used the red tiles to construct another symbol, something that has come to represent the city of Lahore - Badshahi Masjid.

Maharaja Ranjit Singh too appropriated the symbol for himself. He conquered the city in 1799 and soon after got himself



declared Maharaja. While Lahore before the conquest had lost much of its charm, replaced by the burgeoning Amritsar, the metaphor remained. For Ranjit Singh, it was the capture of Lahore that was the ultimate step, transforming him from a warlord to a Maharaja. Lahore was a symbol of Mughal power, on whose model Maharaja Ranjit Singh fashioned his Lahore Durbar.

Lahore under the British
Under the British, Lahore was to transform into its most potent symbol. On one hand, the construction of civil lines, Mall Road and the cantonment, in a grid, with wide avenues and spacious bungalows - when compared to the congested houses and the winding roads of the walled city - symbolised the emergence of a new more 'organised' and 'scientific' empire.

On the other, the development of a saracenic architecture that amalgamated traditional Indian architecture with the European style, represented in the buildings of Punjab University, Lahore Museum and Lahore High Court, represented a certain continuity - with the British casting themselves as the 'successors' of the Mughal Empire. This new city of Lahore, a modern incarnation of an ancient city, was a powerful symbol the British would use to justify their rule.

Facing the Punjab Parliament on the Mall Road was the Statue of Queen Victoria, sitting under a pavilion that borrowed from the Mughal architectural tradition. The British Queen appropriating Mughal architecture was the epitome of this symbolism, of this need to show a continuity between the ancient and modern Lahore.

A few kilometres from here, next to the Lahore High Court, was the statue of John Lawrence, who before serving as the viceroy of British India served as the chief commissioner of Punjab, overseeing the transitioning of Punjab from the Sikh Empire to British. Most importantly, it was his role during the 'Rebellion' of 1857 that transformed him into a legend, with him single handedly coming to



the rescue of the Empire. The iconic statue that was removed in the 1920s after much protestation held a sword in one hand, and a pen in the other, with the following line at its base, "Will you be governed by the pen or sword?"

Similar to architecture, statues played an important role in articulating the political aspirations of the state. The one of John Lawrence, for example, expressed how the 'benevolent' British Empire was willing to use force if the people

onwards came to be seen as a symbol of Islamic nationalism. While some of the colonial names and symbols were retained, the biggest victims of this new-found metaphor were Hindu and Sikh symbols.

Ranjit Singh's statue

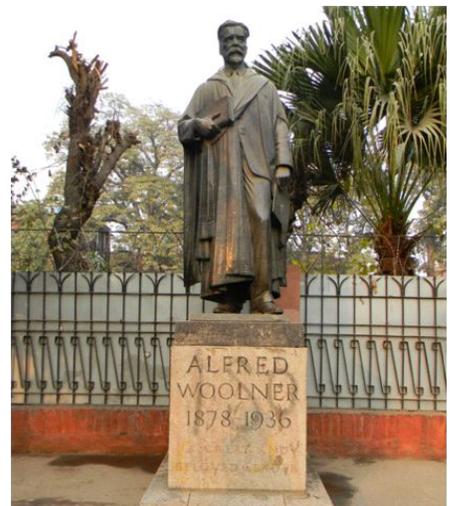
In this context, how is then one to interpret the recently-inaugurated statue of Maharaja Ranjit Singh inside the Lahore Fort? For years we have gone out of our way to cast the Sikh history of the city in a particular framework. The years of Sikh rule in Punjab, which predate the rise of Ranjit Singh and also continue for a few years after him, are projected in the Pakistani historiography as tumultuous years, particularly for the Muslims. While part of it is propaganda, there are certain truths behind it as well. For example, it is true that under Maharaja Ranjit Singh, the Badshahi Masjid was used as a stable. There is also a popular story of him spending a night on the minaret of Masjid Wazir Khan with his favourite consort, Moran Sarkar. The problem is not the inclusion of these stories. The problem is the selective inclusion of stories and choosing to drop others to fit a particular narrative. So while students will be taught that Ranjit Singh used Badshahi Masjid for a stable, they will not be taught how one of his wives, Maharani Jind Kaur, the mother of Maharaja Daleep Singh, donated a collection of handwritten Qurans to Data

mentioned. What is also not mentioned is the phoenix-like rise of a persecuted religious minority to the pinnacle of power under Maharaja Ranjit Singh. What Ranjit Singh represents to the Sikh community today needs to be understood in the background of centuries of persecution of the community at the hands of the Mughals and its cronies. Towards the end of the Mughal Empire, there was once a time when to be born a Sikh carried with itself a death warrant, such was the religious bigotry of some of the Mughal governors of Punjab.

In less than a century emerged Maharaja Ranjit Singh, who transformed the most persecuted minority of Punjab into its ruling class. Ranjit Singh was no religious leader. He was a secular ruler, rather shrewd who sometimes appropriated religious symbols for political gains, as rulers have done and continue to do so. But in Sikh iconography, he acquired a religious significance, primarily because of how persecuted the community was only a few years before his rise.

By honouring Maharaja Ranjit Singh, the government of Pakistan has undertaken a wonderful step, sidestepping decades of policy. It represents how the state today is willing to move beyond the narrow conceptions of Muslim versus Sikh history but rather willing to accommodate a more holistic history.

Interestingly, this comes at a time



Darbar. Or how on the insistence of his Muslim minister, Ranjit Singh renovated and handed over the Sunehri Masjid of Lahore to Muslims, which had been converted into a *gurdwara* before he came to power.

In this narrative, what is also conveniently ignored is the political persecution of the Sikh gurus and community by the Mughals. The executions of Guru Arjan at the hands of Emperor Jahangir and of Guru Tegh Bahadur on the orders of Emperor Aurangzeb are not

when the Indian state is almost seeing a reverse direction with deliberately sidelining Muslim history and heritage. This is a step in the right direction, a step that shows how the Pakistani state is willing to share its most important metaphor, Lahore, with other religious communities. Let's hope this step is followed by several others.

Haroon Khalid is the author of four books including *Imagining Lahore and Walking with Nanak*.