

SOUTH ASIA POLITICS

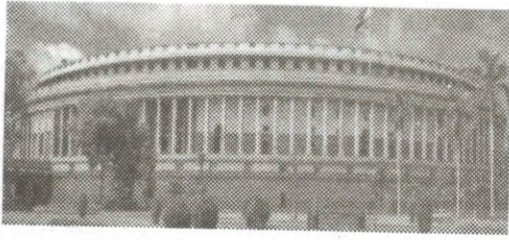
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ISRAEL & GAZA

Abolish Padma Awards

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The only respectable and dignified course is to abolish the awards – in democracy the affection and recognition by the masses is the best tribute to stalwarts in various fields of life.

AN acrimonious public debate is going on as to the names which may be picked up by the Central government for award of Bharat Ratna. The conferment of civilian awards has no sanction in the Constitution. It was introduced by an Executive order in 1954 by the Central Government. They are of various categories beginning with Padam Shri to the highest of Bharat Ratna. Their concept as propounded by government describes Bharat Ratna as per (India 2013 Pg. 1154) "The highest civilian award. It is given for exceptional service towards advancement of Art, Literature and Science and in recognition of public service of the highest order. Since its inception in 1954, 41 persons have been decorated with Bharat Ratna so far." There are also three categories of Padma Awards – 'Padma Vibhushan', 'Padma Bhushan' and 'Padma Shri'.

Such awards have had their critics right from the beginning. That is why many individuals including Gandhians, eminent journalists, Historians and human Right activists have politely declined to accept the awards as recently as 2007. That is why the assumptions and actuality in giving these awards needs to be debated in a brutally open manner. The first Bharat Ratna awards were given in 1954 to first Governor General of India C. Rajagopalachari, S. Radhakrishnan, Pt. Nehru (1955), Pt. G.B. Pant (1957). It is

unfortunate that Pt. Nehru who was the tallest of leaders' in 1955 set up a bad precedent by being persuaded to accept Bharat Ratna. He was the Prime Minister. He did not require the award to increase his stature. In fact there is credible information that Maulana Azad declined to accept it in 1955 and advised Nehru to do so accordingly. But once Nehru had accepted it, politicalisation and partisanship of the award was inevitable. So we have a curious example of Maulana Azad (though he was against this institution) being given the award posthumously in 1992; Sardar Patel in 1991, while Pt. G.B. Pant had already been given in 1957. Is that not perverting seniority and history. The only way out is to abolish the institution of awards.

But then I suppose politicians suffer from the vanity and enjoy giving awards in all spheres; curiously even in sports, when in reality they may not even know what is off break bowling in cricket or offside in Hockey. That is why hockey in which we had wizards like Dhyan Chand (in 1936), the winner of Olympics has not been given Bharat Ratna, because the present day small politicians find more money in IPL Cricket. It is money angle that determines the supremacy of game. Is that not the reason why 'Kabaddi' our home grown game, and especially so popular in North especially Punjab was never picked up – was rather scoffed at by the Anglicized Indians

when Dr. Lohia, the socialist leader wanted it to be treated as a national game. Now of course it is one of the most upcoming event (all because of T.V. IPL presentation and the consequent money making in the bargain).

The awards of Bharat Ratna raise serious question of propriety, and especially the conceit and impudence of present small time politicians to arrogate the right to recognize the contribution of our national heroes of past. I firmly believe that any attempt of pygmies of our generation to pick our heroes and freedom fighters of pre 1947 like Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose and Bhagat Singh is shamefully presumptuous. Who do these small politicians think they are – puny individuals strutting in false feathers by purporting to confer honour on our heroes, when we should instead be bowing our heads for their sacrifices in the fight for freedom. Let their life be an inspiration to all of us.

Let me share with you the courage and bravery of Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev, Rajguru. In 1930 after they had been sentenced to death, efforts were being made by some well wishers to persuade Bhagat Singh to sign an application to be sent to the government for his commutation to life imprisonment. My father was also in Central Jail Lahore, where he had been detained as a Satyagrahi in a movement started by Gandhiji. In the evening prisoners were allowed to come out of a cell for some time

to walk and exercise in the outside lawn. Father and Bhagat Singh used to walk in the same place. After his death sentence father told Bhagat Singh "Many people are requesting you to sign the petition. Don't you think that if your life is spared, movement will get a big push". On this the young man of 23 years said unflinchingly 'No, Sachar Sahab, I feel my sacrifice will bring higher results'. Such was the courage of a young man. We all know the wave of revolutionary ferment which swept the country after his execution. Of course I was then a young kid, but I still remember the electrifying current in the country. And lest any one forget – the Congress which was up-till that time content with asking for Dominion Status, was forced into demanding complete independence as insisted by Bhagat Singh when

it held its Annual Conference on the banks of River Ravi at Lahore on January 26^h 1930 (Bhagat Singh was hanged on 23 march 1930)

One of the suggestions given by an eminent columnist is to give Bharat Ratna to Field Marshall Maneskshaw. Personally speaking if awards are to be continued, it is an apt name. But then the journalist in his enthusiasm has made the unfortunate comment that Maneskshaw's contributions were greater and more memorable than those of awardee Aruna Asaf Ali.....". I feel that in his over-enthusiasm, the journalist friend has hit his own toe. Probably he was too young in 1942, when Quit India movement called by Gandhiji was at its peak. All the Congressmen even at the village level were put in jail. Quit India movement was led by Socialist leaders, Jaya prakash

Narian, Dr. Lohia and Aruna Asaf Ali. In 1942 Aruna Asaf Ali was the face of the underground movement. She bravely traveled throughout the country and inspired the youth. To try to underestimate her contribution is unforgivable. But then modern newspapers have a different priority. I say this because none of the main newspapers even carried a small information chip of 9th August being the Quit India movement day.

In this background the only respectable and dignified course is to abolish the awards in democracy the affection and recognition by the masses is the best tribute to stalwarts in various fields of life.

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