Sikh Disinformation Lab

MISLEADING

The Light Was Never Borrowed: How Ruchi Wali Turns Sikh Religious Recognition into a Political Threat

How Ruchi Wali's social media posts and Substack article connect Sikh religious recognition to extremisim, terrorism and Canadian politics

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NARRATIVES
Portraying Advocacy for Khalistan as Terrorism · Denying Sikhi Is a Distinct Religion · Claims That Sikhs Are Taking Over Public Institutions

OUR ASSESSMENT

Ruchi Wali's November 2026 X posts and subsequent Substack article present Bandi Chhor Divas as a manufactured Sikh religious observance intended to separate Sikhs from Hindus and advance Khalistan politics. The argument conflates the relatively recent formalization of a festival name with the much older history of Sikh religious gatherings associated with Diwali. Historical accounts document Sikh congregations under the Gurus, the 1738 gathering associated with Bhai Mani Singh, and Sarbat Khalsa assemblies at Amritsar. These records demonstrate an established Sikh religious significance associated with the occasion, although they do not settle every historical question surrounding Guru Hargobind's release.

The article also attributes changes in Canadian politicians' festival greetings to organized pressure from the World Sikh Organization of Canada (WSO). This narrative omits that federal ministers Jason Kenney and Tim Uppal formally recognized Bandi Chhor Divas in October 2014, five years before the WSO intervention highlighted in the article. The original 2019 reporting shows that Jaskaran Singh Sandhu was requesting accurate and separate recognition of religious observances. Prime Minister Narendra Modi also publicly acknowledged Bandi Chhor Divas in 2019, further challenging the assertion that its recognition inherently serves separatist politics.

More concerning is the repeated association of Sikh religious recognition with the 1985 Air India bombing, historical extremist rhetoric and contemporary security threats. These events do not establish that observing Bandi Chhor Divas or requesting separate festival greetings constitutes extremist activity. CSIS itself distinguishes peaceful Khalistan advocacy from violent extremism. The article similarly dismisses WSO concerns about Indian interference without adequately addressing the findings of Canadian authorities concerning foreign interference and transnational repression.

Across the three publications, the recurring pattern is the portrayal of Sikh religious distinctiveness as politically manufactured, the characterization of Sikh institutional advocacy as separatist influence, and the use of historical terrorism to stigmatize contemporary religious expression. The evidence does not establish these connections. The resulting framing risks delegitimizing Sikh religious autonomy and associating ordinary Sikh religious recognition with extremism.

The circulation of Wali's claims also raises questions about their amplification by prominent political accounts. A screenshot supplied to the Lab shows an X notification indicating that a verified account displayed as Danielle Smith liked Wali's November 7 post, which characterized Bandi Chhor Divas as a manufactured religious observance and linked its recognition to Khalistani extremism and the Air India bombing.

The interaction is significant because the account appears to be associated with Alberta's premier, a public official whose engagement may increase the visibility and perceived credibility of such narratives. However, the screenshot alone does not establish that Danielle Smith personally performed the interaction or endorsed every claim in the post. The account identity and interaction should be independently authenticated before publication.

The concern extends beyond a single social media interaction. When narratives portraying Sikh religious distinctiveness as extremist gain visibility through prominent political accounts, they may contribute to the normalization of suspicion toward Sikh religious practices and institutions in Canadian public discourse.

THE CLAIM

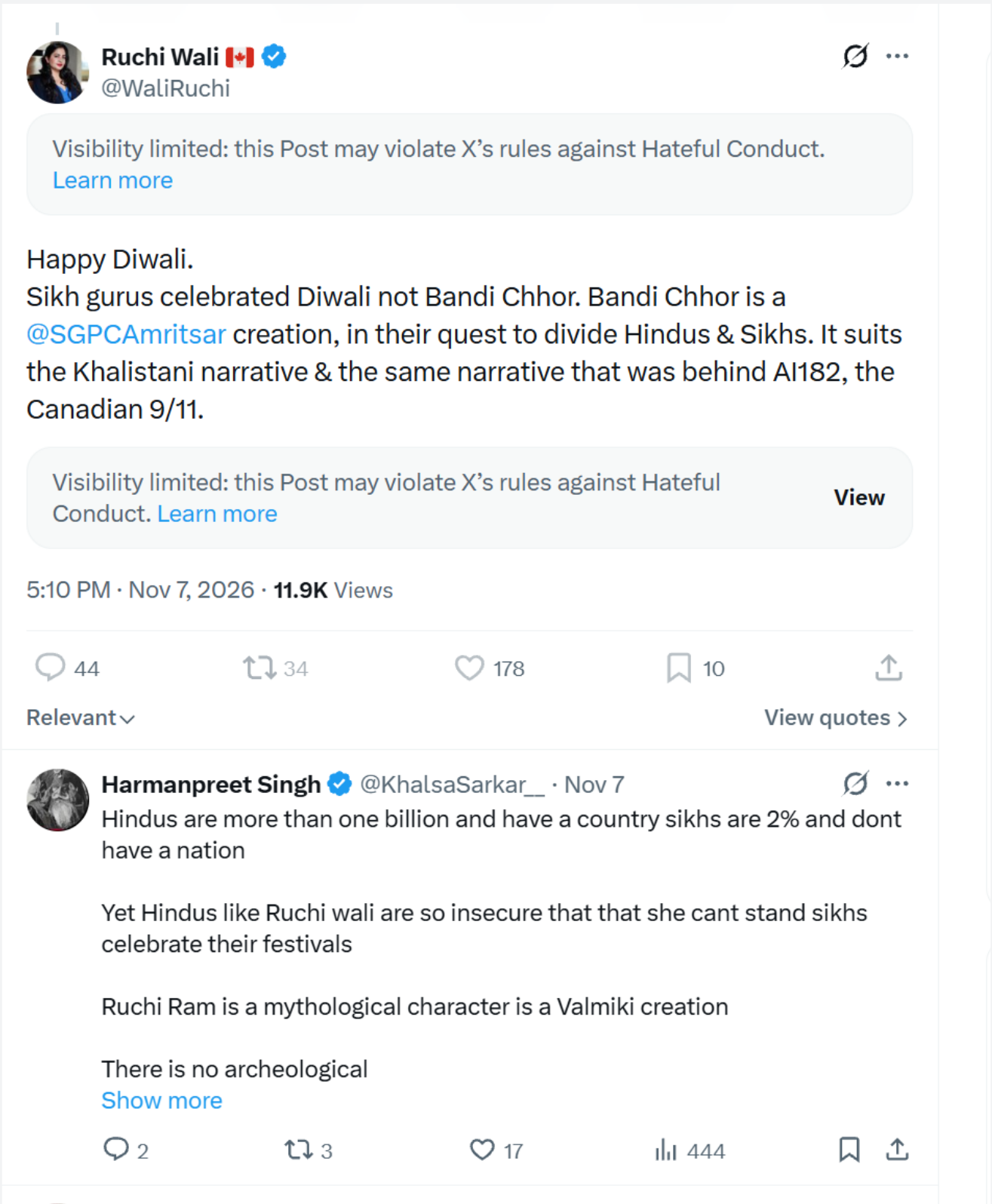
When Sikh Religious Distinctiveness Is Recast as Extremism: Examining Ruchi Wali's Bandi Chhor Divas Narrative

THE ANALYSIS

What was published

Between November 7 and 26, 2026, Ruchi Wali published two posts on X and a Substack essay attacking Bandi Chhor Divas, the Sikh day that marks Guru Hargobind Sahib's release from Gwalior Fort. She started with a claim about a festival name. By the end, she had dragged in Khalistan, the SGPC, two Sikh MPs, the World Sikh Organization of Canada (WSO), the Air India bombing and Narendra Modi's visit to Canada.

On November 7 she wrote that "Sikh gurus celebrated Diwali not Bandi Chhor," called Bandi Chhor Divas an SGPC creation meant to divide Hindus and Sikhs, and tied it to "the same narrative that was behind AI182, the Canadian 9/11." X limited the post's reach because it may have broken its rules on hateful conduct. On November 10 she said "Khalistanis across the globe" were rattled by her tweets. On November 26 her Substack, "Manufacturing Separation: The Politics Behind Bandi Chhor Divas," pulled all of it into one argument.



Ruchi Wali's November 7, 2026 X post describes Bandi Chhor Divas as an SGPC creation intended to divide Sikhs and Hindus, linking the Sikh religious observance to separatist politics by criminalizing the idea of Khalistan and the 1985 Air India bombing. The screenshot also shows an X visibility restriction indicating that the post may violate the platform's hateful-conduct rules. The association with terrorism is made without evidence connecting the religious observance to the bombing. — Source:Twitter

That argument is simple. If Sikhs have their own holy day, someone must have invented it for political reasons, and those reasons lead back to Khalistan and terrorism. Every step of it falls apart once you look at the Sikh record she leaves out.

The history Wali leaves out

Wali's main point is that older Sikh records say "Diwali" and that the name "Bandi Chhor Divas" became common much later. She is challenging the label or the name but the thing that matters is what Sikhs were doing on that day, and why. On that question, the record is clear, and it is Sikh from start to finish.

Guru Amar Das, the third Guru, called Sikhs to gather in the Guru's presence at Goindwal on Vaisakhi and Diwali. Britannica describes this as taking two existing harvest festivals into a new Sikh calendar and changing their purpose. The point of the day became the Guru, not Ram or Lakshmi. Wali leans on hukamnamas that mention Diwali. She never tells readers what they say. Guru Gobind Singh's hukamnamas call the sangat to come into his presence at Diwali, and tell Sikhs to bring their offerings straight to the Guru instead of the masands. These are orders from a Sikh Guru, organizing Sikhs, through Sikh institutions. Her best evidence proves our point.

When the SGPC tells the story of Guru Hargobind, it records that he reached Amritsar at Diwali after Gwalior, and that the city was lit to welcome him. He had refused to walk free unless the other prisoners walked out with him. That is why Sikhs called him Data Bandi Chhor, the generous liberator. The epithet belongs to the Guru. The calendar name came from it, not the other way round.

Bhai Gurdas wrote about Diwali night. Read what he said

Wali wants Diwali night to be a shared Hindu and Sikh celebration. The best-known early Sikh writing on that night says something else. In Vaar 19, Pauri 6, Bhai Gurdas writes:

[illegible]>2@ (?

On Diwali night the lamps are lit, and they burn out. Stars come out and fade. Flowers get picked. Pilgrims wander from shrine to shrine. All of it passes. The Gurmukh holds on to the one thing that lasts, the Shabad.

Bhai Gurdas puts Diwali's lamps in a list of things that do not last. He points the Sikh past them to the Guru's word. That is not shared ritual. That is a Sikh teacher drawing a line.

Gurbani does the same with the figure at the centre of the Hindu festival. Guru Nanak writes that Ram wept in exile, separated from Sita and Lakhshman (Ang 953 to 954). Guru Tegh Bahadur, the same Guru whose hukamnamas Wali quotes, writes: "0[illegible]am is gone, and Ravan is gone too) (Ang 1429). And Guru Arjan Dev says it plainly: "([illegible]>((I am neither Hindu nor Muslim) (Ang 1136). There is no Guru, and no line of Gurbani, that asks Sikhs to celebrate Ram's return or worship Lakshmi.

A Sikh was cut apart for a Sikh Diwali

In 1738, Bhai Mani Singh, the head granthi at Harimandar Sahib, asked the Mughal governor of Lahore, Zakariya Khan, for permission to hold the Diwali gathering at Amritsar. Permission came on one condition: a large payment to the state. He planned to pay it from the sangat's offerings, but Sikhs were stopped from reaching Amritsar. He could not pay. He was taken to Lahore, refused to give up his religion and faith in Sikhi, he was tortured and then

attained martyrdom. Sikh memory holds that he was cut apart joint by joint, and the Ardas remembers those who gave their lives that way.

No Hindu family needed a Mughal permit to light a lamp at home in 1738. The state taxed, and then hunted, one thing: Sikhs gathering as a Panth at their own centre. Bhai Mani Singh gave his life for that gathering. Wali's essay does not mention him once.



In a November 10, 2026 follow-up, Wali characterizes those challenging her historical claims as "Khalistanis across the globe," without establishing their individual political affiliations. The post received approximately 49,200 views at the time of capture. The language shifts the dispute from historical evidence toward the political characterization of Sikh respondents, presenting disagreement as separatist mobilization. — Source: Twitter

The Khalsa governed itself on this day

All through the eighteenth century, the Sarbat Khalsa met at the Akal Takht twice a year, on Vaisakhi and Diwali. There, with every Sikh holding an equal voice, they read the political situation, planned against common dangers, chose leaders for battle and passed gurmatas, binding decisions for the whole Panth. On October 14, 1745, at Diwali, after the death of Zakariya Khan, the gathering passed a gurmata recognizing 25 Sikh jathas and authorizing action against Mughal strongholds.

These were not people enjoying a shared festival. These were Sikhs, hunted by two empires, sitting in council under the Akal Takht and deciding how to survive. That is what Wali calls a shared Hindu-Sikh tradition.

Yes, the name is new. So what?

Wali treats the new name as her big discovery. The Shap calendar calls Bandi Chhor Divas a newer name tied to the Nanakshahi calendar of 2003. The SGPC adopted it then. None of this is secret, and none of it helps her.

Communities name their holy days as they understand them better. The night Wali defends is Deepavali in the south and Kali Puja in Bengal. Jains mark it as the night of Mahavira's nirvana. Nobody writes essays accusing Jains of "manufacturing separation." The question was never how old the label is. The question is whether the people using it are describing something real. Sikhs are, and the record above shows it.

Her Pew number works the same way. Pew found that 90 per cent of Indian Sikhs celebrate Diwali. Pew also found that nearly one in five Sikhs and Jains in India celebrate Christmas. Nobody thinks that makes Sikhs Christian. Taking part in a widely marked day says nothing about what it means to you. Ask a Sikh family at Darbar Sahib on that night who they are remembering. It is Guru Hargobind.

Sikhs said "we are not Hindus" long before

Wali writes that "Khalistan politics needs Sikhs to believe that their history is detached from Hindus." She has the history backwards.

In the 1890s a writer named Thakur Das published "Sikh Hindu Hain" (Sikhs are Hindus). In 1898 Bhai Kahn Singh Nabha answered with "Ham Hindu Nahin" (We are not Hindus). He wrote it while Arya Samaj preachers were attacking the Gurus and running campaigns to pull Sikhs "back" into the Hindu fold. Sikh distinctness comes from the Gurus, from Gurbani, from Amrit, from the Akal Takht. It is centuries older than any modern politics. Wali's argument is the old "Sikhs are Hindus" claim with a Diwali lamp in its hand. Calling Sikh identity a Khalistani project does not expose separatism. It just tries to put Sikh identity itself under suspicion and recast it as threat, as she tries hard to criminalize the term Khalistan.

The WSO quote she cut in half

Wali presents a 2019 quote from the WSO's Jaskaran Singh Sandhu as the moment "organized pressure" split a shared festival. Here is what actually happened.

In October 2019, Andrew Scheer's team posted a Bandi Chhor Divas greeting using a photo of a Theyyam ritual from Kerala. It had nothing to do with Sikhs. Global News covered the backlash. The same story noted that Prime Minister Trudeau had put out one combined statement for Diwali and Bandi Chhor Divas. Sandhu said: "The respectful thing would be to do two separate statements because they are separate occasions. We wouldn't expect any different from any other background or festival."

Wali quotes the first sentence. She drops the second, because the second sentence destroys her argument. Sandhu was asking for the same respect every other community gets. That is not separatism. That is basic courtesy.

Tim Uppal recognized Bandi Chhor Divas five years before that

Wali also says Tim Uppal moved from joint greetings to separate Sikh ones, and treats that as proof of a growing political pattern. The federal record says otherwise.

On October 23, 2014, Jason Kenney and Tim Uppal, as federal ministers, issued an official statement recognizing Bandi Chhorh Divas on its own. It explained Guru Hargobind's release and noted that the day coincides with Diwali. That was a Conservative government, five years before the Sandhu quote Wali builds her case on. The WSO did not invent separate recognition in 2019. Canada was already doing it.

Her story about Uppal is not just weak. It is wrong.

Even Narendra Modi said "Bandi Chhor Divas"

Wali claims separate recognition "serves Khalistani separatism, regardless of the speaker's intent." Look at who that sweeps up.

On October 28, 2019, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi wrote: "May the special occasions of Diwali and Bandi Chhor Divas bring happiness and good health in everyone's lives." It is still on his government's official website. In 2024, India's own Ministry of Culture posted the history of Bandi Chhor Divas before deleting it after online pressure. Wali counts the deletion as a win. She skips the part where the Government of India posted it first.

So by her rule, Modi served Khalistan in 2019, and so did India's Ministry of Culture. Of course they did not. They used the name Sikhs use for their own holy day. That is what everyone else is doing too.

Using Air India against a Sikh holy day

The Air India and Narita bombings of 1985 killed 331 people. They are the worst terrorist attack in Canadian history, and the victims deserve better than to be used as a weapon in an argument about a festival name. That is how Wali used them. She called Bandi Chhor Divas part of "the same narrative that was behind AI182." X restricted the post.

Canada's own intelligence service draws the line Wali refuses to draw. CSIS's 2025 public report says only "a small group of individuals who use Canada as a base to promote, fundraise, or plan violence" count as Khalistani extremists. It says "Non-violent advocacy for the creation of a state of Khalistan is not considered extremism," and that such advocacy in Canada "is lawful political activity." If CSIS will not treat peaceful political advocacy as extremism, there is no basis at all for treating a Sikh holy day that way.

Wali's method is to put a Sikh religious word next to a bombing often enough that readers stop seeing the difference. That is guilt by association, aimed at an entire community.

The interference record she ignores

Wali calls the WSO's November 2026 advisory an attempt to "police Sikh contact with India," and says Canada's idea of foreign interference is "elastic." Here is what the advisory said. Dated November 18, it reported that people claiming links to the Government of India were approaching Sikhs and offering talks on issues like Sikh political prisoners. The WSO asked Sikh institutions to be careful, warning that photos and private letters can later be leaked to divide the community. It pointed to the 2022 leak of Ripudaman Singh Malik's letter. That is a warning, not a ban.

And it was issued in a country with a clear public record on Indian state activity:

RCMP, October 2024: investigations found links between agents of the Government of India and homicides and violent acts in Canada, the use of organized crime to target the South Asian community, and interference in democratic processes.
Foreign Interference Commission, January 2025: India is the second most active country interfering in Canada's elections. It works through its officials and through proxies, and it tries to bring Canada's position in line with its own, especially on supporters of Khalistan.
CSIS, 2025: India "has cultivated covert relationships with Canadian politicians, journalists, and members of the Indo-Canadian community," and uses surveillance and coercion to "create fear in the community."

Wali spends paragraphs on the WSO's supposed influence and not one sentence on any of this. An essay that warns about outside influence over Sikhs, while ignoring the influence Canada's own agencies have documented, is not giving readers the full picture.

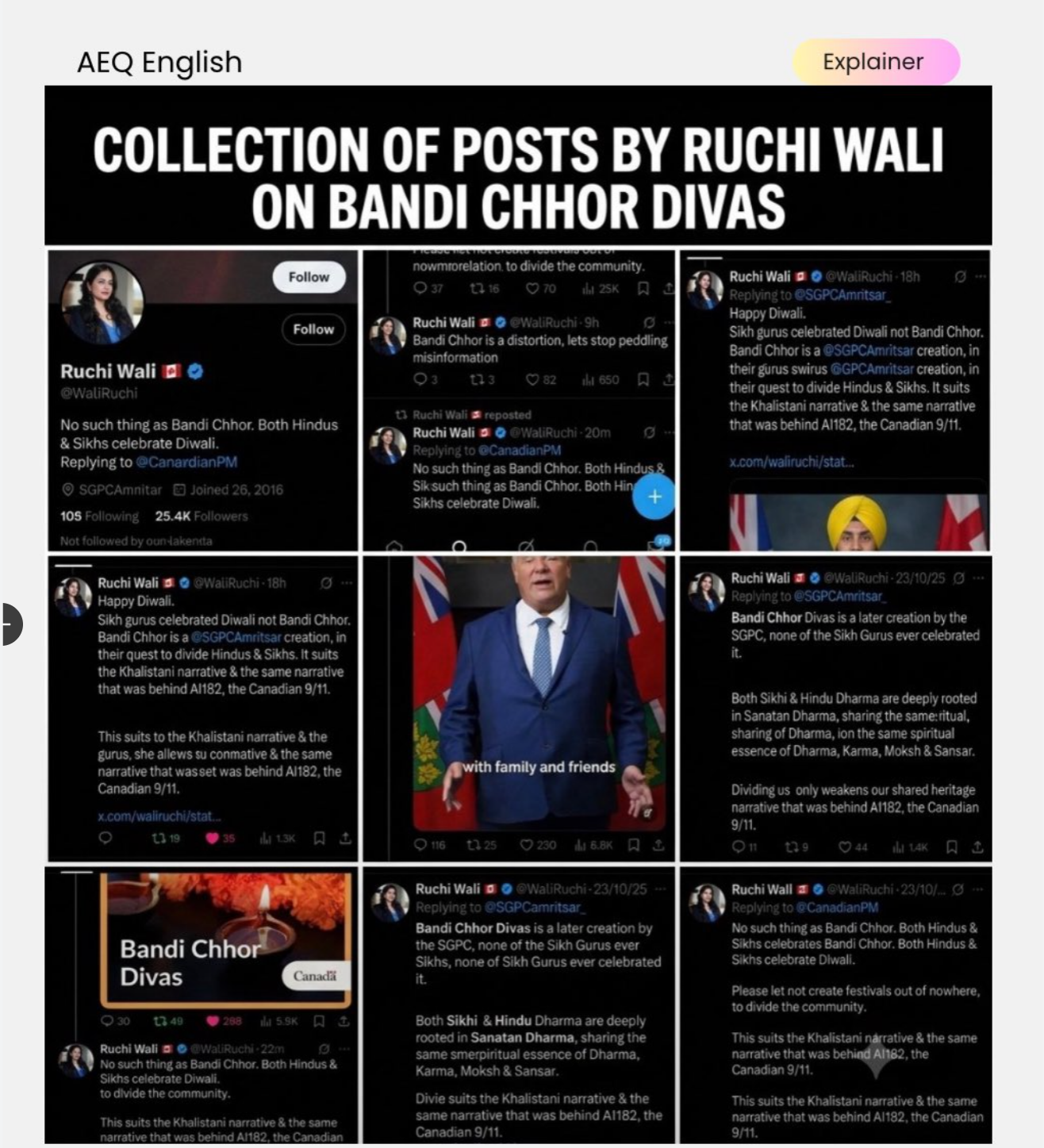
The pattern across all three posts

Put the three items side by side and the direction is clear.

The November 7 post says a Sikh holy day is fake and links it to terrorism. The November 10 post labels every Sikh who disagreed as a Khalistani. The November 26 Substack turns on Sikh MPs, a Sikh organization, Canadian security policy and a prime ministerial visit. Each step widens the circle of suspicion. What stays the same is the target. In every post, Sikh distinctness is treated as something that needs explaining, as if it were a problem. The effects are real:

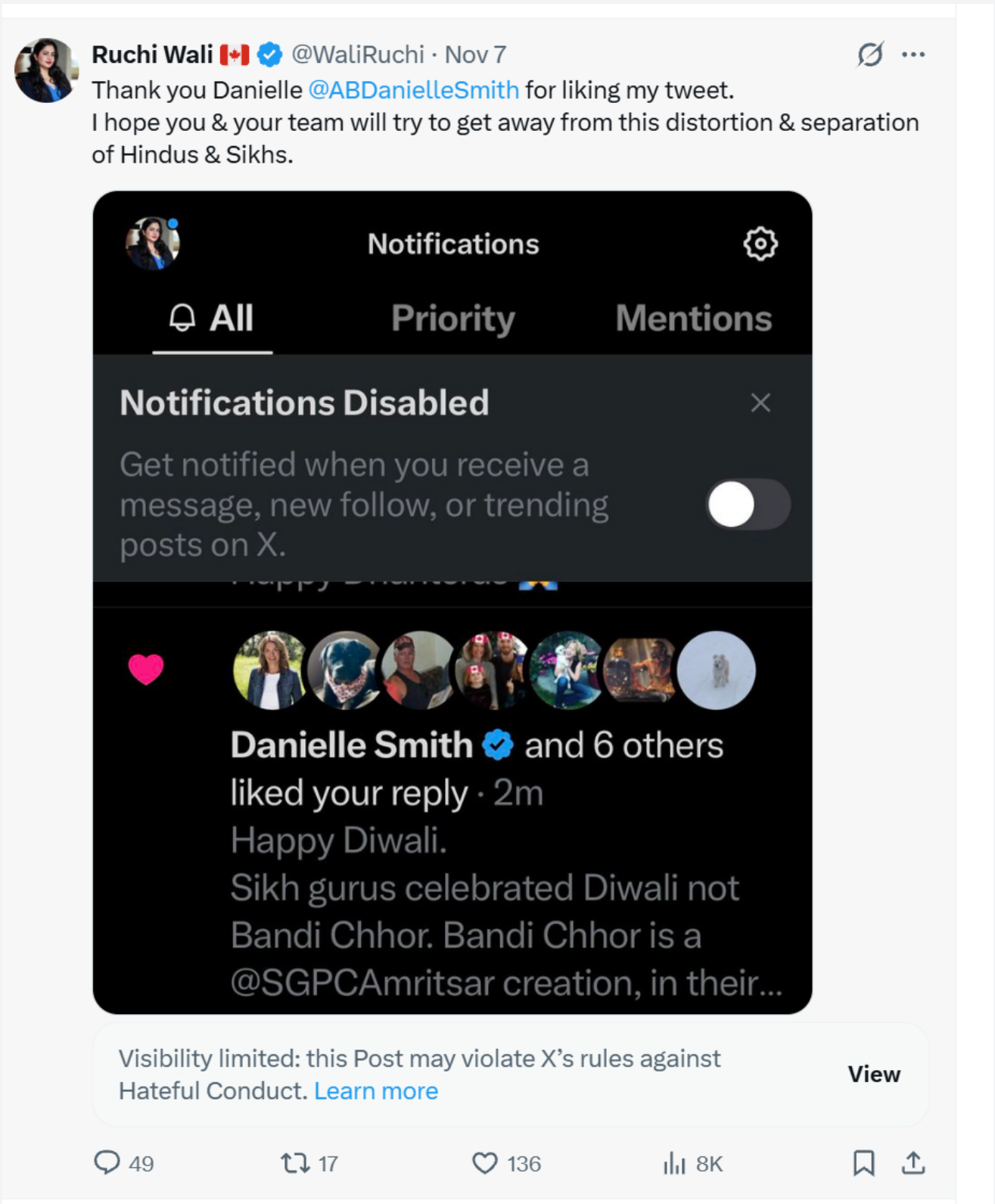
It erases. Guru Hargobind's return, Bhai Mani Singh and the Sarbat Khalsa disappear, replaced by "Hindus and Sikhs both celebrate Diwali."
It silences. Any Sikh who objects is a Khalistani before they say a word. Her phrase "regardless of the speaker's intent" means no Sikh answer can ever count.
It shrinks. A day that remembers a Guru who refused freedom unless others were freed is reduced to an argument about greeting cards.
It securitizes. Placing a holy day beside Air India and a call for mass murder, timed to a state visit, invites governments to treat Sikh religious life as a public safety file.

The posts also reached people with power. A screenshot shows a like from a verified account displayed as Alberta Premier Danielle Smith on the November 7 post, the one X had restricted for possible hateful conduct.



An AEQ English compilation brings together multiple X posts attributed to Ruchi Wali challenging the legitimacy of Bandi Chhor Divas. The posts repeatedly describe the observance as an SGPC invention, associate distinct Sikh religious recognition with Khalistan politics, and invoke the Air India bombing. The compilation includes material bearing earlier dates, suggesting that this framing was not limited to the November 2026 posts. Individual posts and publication dates should be authenticated before being counted as separate occurrences. — Source: Twitter

SDL Review



In a November 7, 2026 post, Wali publicly thanked Alberta Premier Danielle Smith's X account, @ABDanielleSmith, for reportedly liking her earlier post about Bandi Chhor Divas. — Twitter: name the source

The Sikh Disinformation Lab finds that Ruchi Wali's November 2026 posts and essay do not just get history wrong. They turn Sikh religious identity into a security threat.

The historical record is against her at every point. Sikh observance of this date goes back to Guru Amar Das. Guru Gobind Singh's hukamnamas called the Khalsa to him on it. Bhai Gurdas wrote that its lamps burn out and only the Shabad lasts. Bhai Mani Singh was executed over the Sikh gathering on it. The Sarbat Khalsa governed the Panth on it.

The political record is against her too. Canada recognized Bandi Chhor Divas on its own in 2014, with Tim Uppal's name on the statement, five years before the WSO comment she blames. Narendra Modi used the name in 2019. India's Ministry of Culture published its history in 2024. Her own WSO quote, read in full, asks for equal respect, not separation.

The security record is against her as well. CSIS separates lawful advocacy from violent extremism. The RCMP and the Foreign Interference Commission document Indian state activity targeting Sikhs in Canada, the very context her essay leaves out.

The central finding is this. Wali takes the most ordinary thing a faith community can do, naming its own holy day, and recasts it as separatism. She then props that claim up with the deaths of 331 people. The name Bandi Chhor Divas is new. The Sikh light it names was never borrowed, and it is not hers to take back.

CLAIMS ASSESSED

01	The SGPC invented the underlying Bandi Chhor tradition.	MISLEADING
02	Sikhs celebrating Diwali means they cannot have a distinct religious interpretation.	MISLEADING
03	Pew found 90% of Indian Sikhs celebrate Diwali.	MISLEADING
04	Critics have produced no historical evidence that Sikh Gurus celebrated Bandi Chhor Divas.	UNSUPPORTED
05	Sikh religious distinctiveness is a strategy for separating Sikhs from Hindus.	FALSE
06	The events like AIR India establish that modern Bandi Chhor recognition poses a public-safety threat.	UNSUPPORTED
07	WSO warned Sikh institutions about possible interference ahead of Modi's planned visit.	TRUE
08	WSO's warning proves it intends to isolate Sikhs from India.	UNSUPPORTED
09	India's Ministry of Culture removed a 2024 Bandi Chhor post.	TRUE
10	WSO's 2019 intervention turned separate recognition of Bandi Chhor Divas into Canadian political practice.	MISLEADING
11	CSIS warns about violent Khalistani extremism in Canada	MISLEADING
12	Khalistanis across the globe seem thoroughly rattled by my Bandi Chhor tweets. They're working overtime..	MISLEADING
13	Hindus & Sikhs both celebrate Diwali	MISLEADING
14	Hukamnamas of Guru Tegh Bahadur and Guru Gobind Singh name Diwali; Sikh Empire and British-era records contain "zero references to Bandi Chhor Divas.	MISLEADING
15	Separate greetings are "a framing that serves Khalistani separatism, regardless of the speaker's intent	MISLEADING
16	Sikh gurus celebrated Diwali not Bandi Chhor.	MISLEADING
17	Bandi Chhor Divas serves the same narrative behind Air India Flight 182.	MISLEADING
18	Tim Uppal moved from combined greetings to separate Bandi Chhor Divas greetings as identity politics developed.	MISLEADING

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Sikh Disinformation Lab

About Sikh Disinformation Lab

Sikh Disinformation Lab is an independent, evidence-based programme founded and hosted by the World Sikh Organization of Canada. It monitors, analyses and publicly documents disinformation affecting Sikhs.

The Lab examines claims against evidence, publishes assessments with that evidence attached, and tracks coordinated campaigns over time. Every published assessment names what was claimed, where it appeared, what the review found, and what that assessment rests on. Where an item makes several distinct claims, each is assessed separately.

Assessments are made against the methodology framework in force at the time of publication. That framework is public, versioned, and reviewed at each phase gate; a material change produces a new version rather than a silent edit. The full method is published at sikhdisinfolab.ca/method.

Corrections are dated entries, never silent edits. Where a published assessment is found to be wrong or incomplete, the correction is recorded against it and listed at sikhdisinfolab.ca/corrections. If you believe something published here is inaccurate, write to the programme and it will be reviewed.

Assessments are the responsibility of Sikh Disinformation Lab.

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