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Cover Picture: Mewa Singh, the first Indian political activist to be hanged in Canada. This portrait was made by Jarnail Singh as part of his series of paintings depicting the history of Komagata Maru.

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RADICAL DESI

"If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor."

~ Desmond Tutu

Consequences of encouraging religious fanaticism are dangerous and far reaching

The December 16 terror attack on a military-run school in Peshawar, Pakistan that left over 130 children dead was the most dastardly act of Islamic extremists. The Taliban have once again shown their brutality by killing innocent children and targeting a school. Such a heinous act of violence in the name of holy war or crusade can never be justified. The incident, however, should not be seen in isolation, especially when religious fanaticism continues to grow across the world, in many instances legitimized by the state. We must remember that Pakistan is a theocracy that was built as an Islamic republic. It came into being in 1947 after being partitioned from India, and violence against religious minorities has continued there since. Gradually Pakistan was turned into a base for the Taliban to challenge "communist expansionism" in neighbouring Afghanistan. During the cold war era, the US used Pakistan's soil to create Islamic extremists who could fight against the Soviets in that region. In years to come, those very Taliban turned into foes, and now consider the US as their enemy. Islamic extremism in that part of the world can be best described as a Frankenstein monster that was once propped up by the US, which is now engaged in the "war on terror" against the Taliban. The Pakistani establishment, which acted at the behest of the US and encouraged the Taliban to open seminaries to train and recruit seasoned terrorists, is also paying the price for its bloody experiment. First the Taliban were targeting non-Muslims. Later, they started attacking women and their schools. Now they have started killing their own Muslim brethren and soldiers. Reacting to the Peshawar attack, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi said that it was an "unspeakable brutality". Of course it was, but Modi and other world leaders should see this as warning sign, and avoid pandering to religious terrorism of every shade. India chose to become a secular democracy after independence and the partition in 1947, but it's only a matter of time until the pluralist nation will be officially turned into a Hindu theocracy. At least, that is what Modi's Hindu nationalist Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) wants. Ever since the BJP came to power with a brute majority under Modi, religious minorities in India are feeling intimidated by the statements and actions of the BJP leaders and their affiliates belonging to far right Hindu nationalist groups. Modi was the Chief Minister of Gujarat in 2002, when Hindu fanatics engineered an anti-Muslim pogrom with the help of police. This pogrom was the culmination of the 1992 episode in which BJP supporters razed an ancient mosque in Ayodhya. The BJP claims that the mosque was built there by the Islamic rulers after demolishing a temple dedicated to Lord Rama. It's part of the BJP mandate to rebuild the Rama temple at the disputed site. In 2002, a train carrying Hindu pilgrims from Ayodhya was burnt, resulting in the deaths of over 50 passengers. After Modi's government blamed Muslim extremists for doing this, anti-Muslim violence broke out in Gujarat. The BJP's track record is well known to the voters, yet they picked Modi to run the country in last May's election. The chorus in support of a Hindu state is continuously growing in India. Not only is the Rashtriya Swayam Sewak Sangh (RSS) – the largest Hindu nationalist body of which Modi and other prominent BJP leaders have been a part - making statements emphasising Hindu identity and nationalism, BJP elected officials have also been sending signals which do not bode well for India's diversity. Only recently, the union minister Shushma Swaraj demanded that the Hindu scripture Bhagwat Gita should be declared a national holy book. Shortly after this statement, former Deputy Prime Minister and veteran BJP leader L.K. Advani suggested that the Hindu scriptures are a great source of knowledge in politics. As if this was not enough a BJP MP described Nathuram Godse as a patriot. Godse was the assassin of Mahatma Gandhi, the leader of the passive resistance movement in India against British rule. Godse was a supporter of the RSS,

something that the RSS is shy to acknowledge and continues to deny. Godse killed Gandhi on January 30, 1948, for speaking in support of Muslims during the sectarian violence that followed partition. The RSS was banned after the killing of Gandhi. Over the years, the pro-Hindu nation terror groups have intensified their violent campaign by engineering bomb explosions close to Muslim-dominated areas. The BJP has always tried to play down their crimes by squarely criticising Islamic extremists for bomb blasts in India. The Indian security agencies have generally remained lethargic in dealing with such groups, giving them enough room to grow. A political will to punish them effectively generally remains missing. Today, when the BJP has an absolute majority in the Indian parliament, nothing can actually stop it from amending the constitution and transforming India into a Hindu nation. But what will be the consequences? Indians should open their eyes and see for themselves the ugly situation Pakistan is going through. Ultimately, the choice is with Indians whether to remain a secular democracy or see their country turned into a Pakistan-like theocracy. Modi, who is so critical about the Taliban, must check his own set of religious fanatics who are trying to create another Pakistan. The lesson to be learnt from the Peshawar incident is that the cocktail of religion and politics is harmful and dangerous for humanity. Rather than condemning it as a courtesy, real soul-searching should be done to ensure that bigotry never gets any kind of patronage or legitimacy from the state. There are plenty of lessons that lie in the Indian history itself. The so-called secularist Congress party which ruled India for many years has already done enough harm to the secular fabric of the country by indulging in similar experiments. The Congress pitted fundamentalist Sikhs in Punjab to weaken the moderate Sikh leadership. Much like the Taliban, the Sikh extremists gradually became powerful enough to run a parallel administration in the state, with a potential to checkmate both the Congress and the moderate Sikh leadership. All this led to a decade-long violence that resulted in the killings of thousands of civilians, political activists, intellectuals and security personnel. The Modi government can learn a lot from the country's own history to better understand the roots of the crisis in neighbouring Pakistan - only if it is willing.

—Editors

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The Eternal Rebel

South Asians campaign to get Mewa Singh recognized as Canadian hero

When freelance journalist Gurwinder Singh Dhaliwal moved a motion at the BC Punjabi Press to seek support for a campaign to push authorities to recognize Mewa Singh as Canadian hero, he was met by immediate resistance from his own compatriots. After all, Mewa Singh remains a controversial figure in the mainstream Canadian history.

Hanged a century ago for murdering Immigration Inspector William Hopkinson, Mewa Singh was a political activist who remains respected within the local South Asian community. For many he was the first South Asian martyr to meet the gallows in Canada, but the nature of the act he committed still bothers many who do not want to upset the establishment with such a demand.

It was in 2009 that Dhaliwal proposed to the press club that a campaign be started by the Punjabi media to get Mewa Singh recognized as Canadian hero. He was told outright by some hostile members that such a move would result in a backlash from the wider community. However, Dhaliwal remained determined in his mission. As a radio broadcaster, he

started holding a moment of silence on air by playing a sad tune at 7:30 am on the mornings of January 11 – the day Mewa Singh was hanged in 1915. The person instrumental behind the initiative is an independent history researcher, Sohan Singh Pooni. It

was he who found out from his research the exact date and timing of Mewa Singh's execution, and encouraged Punjabi radio stations to start holding the moment of silence. Dhaliwal took the lead, and this year, when the community marks the centenary of Mewa Singh's hanging, the murmurings for recognizing his sacrifice have almost turned into a chorus.

Mewa Singh was born in Amritsar, India in 1880. Like other South Asian immigrants, he moved to Canada for a better livelihood in 1906. He worked at a mill in New Westminster. Most immigrants had come to this part of the world as British subjects, as both India and Canada were British colonies back then. Rampant racism against the immigrants and the anti-immigration policies of the Canadian government turned people like Mewa Singh into political activists. He soon came in contact with supporters of the Ghadar Party, established in 1913 by South Asian radicals who saw the British occupation of their home country as the root cause behind their sufferings abroad. They realised that the British government never came to their rescue in any event of racial violence, and they could live with dignity only if their

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motherland was free. The Indian immigrants were neither allowed to bring in their families, nor allowed to vote. The idea was to discourage them from permanent settlement to "keep Canada white". The Ghadar Party activists resolved to launch an armed rebellion against the British government to liberate India, so that they could be treated with respect in foreign lands.

Mewa Singh helped in raising funds for Vancouver's first Sikh temple, which became a center of political activities in which non-Sikh activists also freely participated. As the struggle against anti-immigration laws continued, the Komagata Maru episode became a major turning point. A Japanese vessel carrying over 300 passengers from India were denied entry at Vancouver port under the discriminatory continuous journey law. The ship was forced to return on July 23, 1914. The current Prime Minister Stephen Harper apologized for the incident in 2008, and Canadian officials generally acknowledge that it was a wrong thing to do.

Mewa Singh and temple president Bhaag Singh tried to arrange arms to be transported to India for a future rebellion through passengers aboard the Komagata Maru. To make this happen they travelled to the US. But the plan did not work. Mewa Singh was arrested along with pistols and ammunition upon entering the Canadian border. Despite pressure from immigration authorities to testify against Bhaag Singh and other prominent Ghadar party leaders, he did not cooperate with the authorities. He was later released.

Following this episode, a fight between the proestablishment faction of the South Asian community and the radicals broke out. On September 5, 1914, Bela Singh - who was penetrated into the community by the controversial Immigration Inspector William Hopkinson to spy on the activities of the Ghadar Party - went inside the Sikh temple and shot at Bhaag Singh and many others. Bhaag Singh and Badan Singh succumbed to their injuries. Bhaag Singh had left behind his small children. His wife had already died. This incident had a devastating impact on Mewa Singh. As Bela Singh was facing trial, Mewa Singh went to the courts on October 21 and shot Hopkinson dead. He courted arrest without any confrontation. During his trial, Mewa Singh remained determined and gave a powerful

testimony in which he explained how the shooting inside the temple and the subsequent death of Bhaag Singh shook him to the core. He went on to suggest how racism was adversely affecting the lives of the immigrants, and the immigration officers were harassing the community and forcing everyone to bribe the authorities. He had no regrets for his action, and when he was taken to the scaffold on January 11, 1915, being a devout Sikh he chanted prayers. 400 Indians had gathered outside the New Westminster jail where he was hanged and raised slogans in support of Mewa Singh.

Dhaliwal believes that the simple facts of history suggest that Mewa Singh's act was the culmination of Canada's racist immigration policies. "Now when our Prime Minister has also

apologized for the Komagata Maru incident, we need to revisit Mewa Singh's story and present the correct history to our kids. He will always remain a martyr for us. All we need to do is that his image should be rehabilitated in the mainstream history." Dhaliwal has been raising this issue through his writings and public speeches. He points out that Louis Riel, a hero of the Métis resistance, was long viewed as a criminal. "If Riel can now be recognized as a respected figure in Canadian history, why can't Mewa Singh?"

He is not alone to raise this demand. Waryam Singh Sandhu, a renowned scholar and history writer, has been crisscrossing Canada with the same message. Wherever he goes, Sandhu reminds people that the Canada which now guarantees equal rights to immigrants and claims to be a

human rights leader in the world was not the same a hundred years ago. "All these privileges we are enjoying are an outcome of the struggle started by Mewa Singh.

"The simple facts of history suggest that Mewa Singh's act was the culmination of Canada's racist immigration policies."

Canada needs to recognize that these values were shared by Mewa Singh who sacrificed his life for a just society." He points out that the right to vote, which was given back to Indians in Canada in 1947, and the privilege to bring families, were the result of tireless activism by men like Mewa Singh. "If Canada respects all these rights what is stopping them from recognizing him as a Canadian hero?"

Gurbaksh Singh Sanghera of the Shaheed Bhai Mewa Singh Society is soon going to launch a petition to get Mewa Singh recognized as a Canadian hero. "We plan to present this petition in the House of Commons through elected officials of our community. They must understand that they are in the parliament due to the efforts of Mewa Singh and his associates."

The Society has been organizing special prayers and vigils in memory of Mewa Singh for the past ten years and has produced and distributed T-shirts bearing his picture to the community. Sanghera is currently trying to mobilize community groups for letters of support for an initiative to construct a memorial at the site of Mewa Singh's hanging in New Westminster. Naveen Girm, a young history

researcher, is behind the initiative. He was the main force behind a marker that was installed at the site where the first Sikh temple was established by Mewa Singh and his comrades. The Shaheed Mewa Singh Sports and Cultural Association is another group that organizes sports events in his memory, where the young winners are rewarded with free T-Shirts bearing his picture. "The idea is to generate interest for Mewa Singh and his contribution among the inquisitive members of the younger generation", explains Parminder Swaich, who is close to the group and has written articles for the souvenir brought out by the association. The two groups are unanimous in their demand for rectifying Mewa Singh's image in the history books and accept him as a Canadian hero.

However, independent community activist Parshottam Dosanjh holds a critical view. For him the recognitions and apologies mean nothing as "institutional racism" continues to prevail in Canada. The Harper government has tightened immigration and citizenship rules hitting hard at family reunions over the past several years. Bill C- 24, which can be used to take away citizenship, has particularly evoked sharp reaction within the immigrant communities. "What's the point seeking such recognition from a right wing Conservative government which is bringing controversial immigration laws

that might strip citizenship of people of foreign origin? A government that continues to attack the rights of the immigrants and refugees cannot be expected to accept such a demand in the first place. Even if we assume that it does accept the demand, it becomes meaningless when we see its ongoing onslaught on the immigrants." Dosanjh also expects the activists to get over symbolic demands, and rather focus on real issues. "We need to keep Mewa Singh's struggle against oppression alive rather than wasting energy on seeking apologies for the past mistakes and recognition of historical wrongs."

Swaich agrees and says that Mewa Singh will always be known as a hero in the South Asian community, whether or not the Canadian government recognizes his contributions. "His action needs to be situated in a broader context of the history of racism in this country. Unfortunately, racism refuses to die despite the apology for the Komagata Maru incident by this government. It's unfortunate that immigrant communities and refugees continue to bear the brunt of the inhuman laws under a Prime Minister who had apologized for something that happened a century ago."

-RDNB

Mewa Singh speaks

Excerpts from Mewa Singh's court statement :

My name is Mewa Singh. Up till to-day I have been a man that has always had my prayers, a God-fearing man. There are no words in my language to express the sorrow and troubles and worries I have had to put up with here in Vancouver....

All of us living Sikhs, when we go to the Sikh Temple, it is with the object of saying our prayers, but these others have gone to ruin us altogether, and others going into the temple, and firing there, destroyed the goodness of the temple spoiled it by having them shooting, and the man being killed there. In the temple that day that the shooting was done by Bela Singh....

At the time that Bela Singh did that shooting we were saying prayers that anybody hearing them would have warmed their hearts together, and come to God with hearing those words, and Bela Singh, first of all shot Bhaag Singh, and he has two little children, without thought Bela Singh killed him, and leaving those two little infants without a mother. Bhaag Singh had no wife, just the two little children. Seeing that badness done there, the killing of the innocent people has burned into my heart....

All this trouble and all this shooting, Mr. Reid and Mr. Hopkinson are responsible for, and I

shot Mr. Hopkinson out of honor and principle to my fellow men, and for my religion. I could not bear to see these troubles going on any longer. You, as Christians, would you think there was any more good left in your church if you saw people shot down, and killed in it, and you would not put up with it, because it would be bringing yourselves to a Nation that is dead, to tolerate such conduct, and it is better for a Sikh to

"I shot Mr. Hopkinson out of honor and principle to my fellow men, and for my religion."

die than to bring such disgrace and ill-treatment in the temple. It is far

better to die than to live....

I, for my own self, have always said I did not want a barrister, and I do not expect any justice. I know I have shot Mr. Hopkinson, and I will have to die, but it is for the others that the case will be properly represented, and to help all the others, and show this treatment to the public, and bring it in front of them. There is no justice issued out to us by the judges, nor the police, nor any of them, and that is why I am giving my life to show this matter up. I understand God's ways, and am a God-fearing man. I say my prayers for an hour in the morning, and half an hour at night. When I know that this wrong has been done, I cannot expect God to bless me if my prayers were not accepted. I know my prayers have been accepted, and God knows between the right and the wrong. In our prayers it says that we must see right done. We cannot shut our eyes, and see wrong done....

Let our best judges and barristers fathom this out, why Mr. Hopkinson has been shot, and get at the end of this trouble. They are always doing evil before us. The other men may go and drink, and do whatever they like, and go to the Immigration, and are accepted as right. We, that are God-fearing, and say our prayers, are being crushed, and dragged down. I cannot, as a God-fearing man, look on at that any longer....

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In Sumas I had a case against me, and I got a pistol, and the Immigration men caught me, and I was taken in front of the Judge, and was fined \$58. After that case was dismissed, they brought another case against me, saying that I had brought the fire arms from one country to the other, and at that time Bela Singh, Hopkinson and Reid went there. When I was locked up at Sumas, they took me out of the gaol, and Hopkinson, Mr. Reid and Bela Singh said, "You have got to say that these pistols were for Bhaag Singh, Balwant Singh, and Harnam." When they took me out of gaol Mr. Reid, Mr. Hopkinson and Bela Singh said to me, "I will get you off free if you say that Bhaag Singh, Balwant Singh and Harnam have given you these pistols to give to Mr. Raheim." I turned around and told them, "You can cut me into little bits, but I will not tell that lie for you." Bela Singh said this to me, but the others, Reid and Hopkinson, told Bela to say it to me. First of all the three said it, and then Bela Singh kept on saying it to me. First of all, the three followed me around for days, and afterwards only Bela Singh. Mr. Hopkinson said to me again, "I am all powerful here; I can get you right off if you make that statement." I told Mr. Hopkinson, "I cannot, I am a God-fearing man, I may be cut into little pieces, but I cannot say that." Then Bela Singh said to me, "Give Mr. Hopkinson some dollars, and get it settled." I said, "I will give you the dollars, but a lie I will not tell. I do not mind paying the money, but lies I will not tell." The case where I was charged they had it put aside, and dismissed. I paid \$40 to Bela Singh. Mr. Hopkinson was present....

They told me the whole

case is settled. There will be nothing more about it. I do not know if they had really settled this case or not, but I got a letter from the Ottawa Government. After my case was all dismissed from there, one day, Bela Singh took me down to the Immigration Office. He took me inside, and Mr. Hopkinson was present. Mr. Hopkinson started writing a letter, and he turned round, and asked me to tell him where I came from, my father's name, my village, and everything. Mr. Hopkinson and Bela Singh were present in the office. I told them all this, and they wrote it down. Mr. Hopkinson said, "Do you not remember I got you off five years gaol the other day. Now, you tell me the names of the men that are against the Government"; they said, "You know them, give out their names, and tell us." I told him I did not know who is with the Government, or against the Government. I can give you no information. Then again they said to me in that office Mr. Hopkinson, and Bela Singh, to say that those pistols that I had at Sumas were given to me by Bhaag Singh, Balwant Singh and Harnam to give to Mr. Raheim, and then we will be your friends. "No," I said, "I have given you the dollars before, and now again you tighten me up, and want me to tell lies. I cannot give innocent men away, and get them punished by making false statements." Then they said to me, "If you will not make this statement, then you are no friend of ours, we cannot make any Harnam Singh of Kahri Sari more friendship with you." Then Mr. Hopkinson went and brought another man who was a white man. I cannot say if he was a barrister, or who he was, but Mr.

Hopkinson brought him there. Mr. Hopkinson took the letter that had been written first, the truthful letter, and tore it up, before he went out to call this strange man in he destroyed the proper letter with the truth in it, and then when he brought the other man he started to write down another statement; I do not know who he was, whether he was an Immigration barrister, or who he was. Mr. Hopkinson and Bela Singh kept on saying, "We got you off five years, cannot you make this statement for us," and I still refused, and said, "No," but I told him exactly how I went to Sumas, and what happened at Sumas, and I made no wrong statements. For some lot that we had in Seattle, that is what we went for, and I told the truth in that statement. I cannot tell you any more why we went there, only fort his lot....

Then they kept talking in English, which I do not understand, I neither read nor write it. Mr. Hopkinson said to me, "Cannot you give us some of the names; do not be afraid. Put down Raheim's name, or anyone. Do not be afraid, I will help you through...."

Mr. Hopkinson said "When you went to Sumas was Raheim at the Sikh Temple, or not, cannot you tell us that?" I said, "I don't know." Mr. Hopkinson again reminded me by saying, "I have got you off five years about those pistols, and you cannot do this little thing for me. Come along, and make this false statement, do not be afraid." Then Bela Singh turned to Mr. Hopkinson, and said, "Mr. Hopkinson, this is a God-fearing man, who says his prayers. Do not make him tell any lies." After they wrote the letter I would not sign it, or have anything to do with it, and Bela Singh and I

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went out to my home. This is the whole story, it stops here.....

Then the letter came to me from Ottawa; I went to the post office, and they told me, "Go and get Mr. Hopkinson, and you can get this letter. If Mr. Hopkinson signs this letter, you will get it, otherwise you cannot." And I went off to get Mr. Hopkinson, to the Immigration. When I met Mr. Hopkinson we talked, and Mr. Hopkinson said, "You are a witness of Bela Singh," when we were going along to the post office, Mr. Hopkinson said to me on the way from there, "now, you are going to give evidence about Bela Singh. You turn around, and give evidence on this side, in favor of Bela Singh, otherwise it will be bad for you. You will go the same road that Bhaag Singh and Baddan Singh have gone," and threatened me. On the way from the post office he said this to me. I said, "Mr. Hopkinson, after taking money from me, and threatening me, and getting me to write all these things, who do you tell me I will be killed like Bhaag Singh, and Badden Singh, what are things coming to, and then you write that letter which you knew was not true, and you take dollars from me, and then you want me to give evidence now in favor of Bela Singh, and threaten my life." Mr. Hopkinson said to me, "I am all-powerful in this Vancouver." Then he said at the post office, after the letter was opened, it was found to be about the pistols, etc., and it was handed to me, and they opened the letter, and read that it was about the pistols, and in that letter I was exonerated, there was no more case against me. Mr. Hopkinson went to the Immigration, and I went home.....

All night long it haunted me that here I am a man that says my prayers and those men harassed me like this with these wrong statements, and trying to disgrace me, and bring me into trouble. I kept this in my heart all that night, and could not sleep with thinking that this disgrace should follow me about. Why should Mr. Hopkinson bring me down to this disgrace. Then two or three days after I was going along Hasting Street; there I met Baboo Singh. I said "Good morning" to him, and asked him how he was. Baboo Singh said to me, "Which side are you going to give evidence, our side, or their side." I said to him, "I don't know just now, I will see at the time." Then from the other side of the street Gurdit Singh was coming. Gurdit Singh's village is Bilga. When Gurdit Singh was coming Baboo Singh used bad language to Gurdit Singh, and said, "I am going to ask Mewa Singh in front of Gurdit Singh, and see if he will say on which side he is going to give evidence," to get me to say in Gurdit Singh's presence. Then again when Gurdit Singh was there, he asked me which side I was going to speak for, I turned around, and said, "I will tell the truth I saw in the temple and nothing else." Gurdit Singh told me to tell the truth, and say whatever I saw in the Sikh temple. Do not go behind the truth. Baboo Singh turned around and said to Gurdit Singh, Bhaag Singh and Badden were the two men killed by Bela Singh in the Vancouver gurdwara on 5 September 1914....

"You go to the court, and tell the truth. Mewa Singh will say whatever we want him to, because we have the power over him." Then Baboo Singh started using abusive

language to Bhaag Singh, the man that was dead. He said, "We have killed him," and he abused his little girl. Then Gurdit Singh told Baboo Singh, "Do not abuse Bhaag Singh; do not abuse the dead man," Baboo Singh said, "Yes, I will." Those two men abused themselves among each other; they both used bad language. Then Baboo Singh hit Gurdit Singh in the face. When I saw them fighting I divided them, and said, "Brothers, do not fight," and I told Gurdit Singh to go home. When Baboo Singh hit Gurdit Singh, he hit him with a stick on the head. Then they went away, after the fight was over, and Baboo Singh came near me, and threatened me there, and said, "If you do not give evidence on our side, you will have to be fixed." At that time Seren Singh was there too. Baboo Singh kept on swearing at me, and using bad language but I never said anything back to him. Again Baboo Singh said, "We are all powerful in Vancouver. We can do what we like to you. I alone have the Immigration Department behind me. I can fix you. You can do nothing, I am all-powerful, I have you all fixed." After leaving Baboo Singh, I began to take all this to heart, and began to think, it cannot go on....

This went deep into my heart. Then when I went to the police court I gave the true evidence. Then I walked about Vancouver kind of frightened after giving the evidence. Then again I was alone, and met Baboo Singh. He asked me, 'Brother, where are you going?' Baboo Singh said, 'What work do you do?' I said, 'I live away, and do some work,' and Baboo Singh said, "If you walk about Vancouver we will kill you, but I will show you you cannot, we

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will kill you." I took all this deeply to heart, I thought I must do something. I then thought it better to die, I will die like a man straight. These people have disgraced us altogether; They think we are nothing. Sikhs are nothing; there is nothing of us left, we are walked on. There is no judge listens to us. These four men are all powerful. No one can do anything here except Bela Singh, Baboo Singh, Mr. Reid and Mr. Hopkinson. That is why I have killed Mr. Hopkinson and I have sacrificed my own life....

Hopkinson was a deceiver, both to the Government on one side, and to us Sikhs on the other, and was a blood sucker. He catches hold of two or three on one side, and two or three on the other, and uses them as the tools in front of the Government. Anyone that could pay Hopkinson properly he would manage to get off. He would do the Government, bring new men right in here, and say those are old men that have been here before. He used to take \$100 from each of the new men. He used to take from both the Government side, and from our side. The Government listened to Hopkinson, and never paid any attention to us. We are poor, only coolie men, and whatever Hopkinson said was law. The Government listened to him completely. Everyone knows that Hopkinson did these underhand things, and it must be brought to light. The European public must be aware of the fact that Hopkinson draws money from us poor native men. In the Vancouver public there are a few who are Christian men, who have received us with the proper spirit, the other have treated us like dogs.....

For two months I have gone with Bela Singh, and saw Mr. Hopkinson doing all these underhand things, taking money, etc. After going with Bela Singh, then my eyes were opened. I could not believe before that Hopkinson used to do these things, but now I know it is a fact. I have never, and no one in the world has known what underhand bad dealings have gone on in Vancouver, and without anyone's help or suggestion from anyone, I alone killed Mr. Hopkinson.....

Any meetings that we ever had in the Sikh Temple were in the bottom storey, and there we always talked about not having been

allowed to have our wives here, but that was never talked of in the top storey where the shooting was done. That shooting disgraced the temple. Mr. Hopkinson has brought us all these cases, and trouble, and has taken the money to the Government, and left us almost without bread, and all this has been through Mr. Hopkinson. After seeing all this, that is why I shot Mr. Hopkinson. It is to show the Vancouver public the truth of this matter....

Courtesy: National Archives, Canada

Opinion

To honour Mewa Singh's sacrifice we must commit ourselves to eradicate racism

One hundred years ago, Mewa Singh was executed by the Canadian government. He arrived in Canada in 1906 and was active with other Sikh radicals and community leaders through the creation of the Vancouver Sikh temple. With the formation of the Ghadar Party in 1913, it is believed he started working in the Ghadar movement alongside Bhai Bhaag Singh and Bhai Balwant Singh. He was hugely impacted by racism within Canada and specifically the injustice of Komagata Maru. So much so that Mewa Singh was arrested attempting to smuggle in ammunition to supply the Komagata Maru passengers with. He then experienced the shooting in the Vancouver Sikh temple by Bela Singh, an informant of Immigration inspector William Hopkinson.

At his trial for shooting Hopkinson he stated: "You, as Christians, would you think there was any more good left in your church if you saw people shot down, and killed in it, and you would not put up with it, because it would be bringing yourselves to a Nation that is dead, to tolerate such conduct, and it is better for a Sikh to die than to bring such disgrace and ill-treatment in the temple. It is far better to die than to live." He further stated: "The government listens to Hopkinson only. We are never bothered about. For the government, we are two-piece valued starving coolies and Hopkinson's every word is law.

Because of this, I have murdered Hopkinson and am sacrificing my life."

One hundred years later, we must ask ourselves how best to honour Mewa Singh's sacrifice and to commit ourselves to eradicating the racism that continues to exist in Canada and in our communities.

Anti-immigrant racism in Canada

Canada currently accepts more migrants under temporary permits than those who can immigrate permanently. Permanent residency for refugees, skilled workers and family members is restricted, citizenship is becoming harder to get and easier to lose, but the migrant worker program is exploding.

These changes are drastic. The number of family-class immigrants dropped by 10,000 in the first four years the Conservative Party of Canada formed government. According to Avvy Yao-Yao Go, Director of the Metro Toronto Chinese and Southeast Asian Legal Clinic, "Thirty years ago, family-class immigrants made up the majority of all immigrants. Today, they account for less than 20 per cent of the total intake."

The Conservative government has instituted a quota of 5,000 applications (note, not acceptances) on the sponsorship of parents and grandparents. This comes after a complete two-year moratorium on reunification with parents or grandparents. In order to even qualify, the government has imposed

stringent income requirements and families have to sign a 20-year financial undertaking.

As an alternative to family sponsorship the government is lauding its new "quick" Super Visa Initiative, a temporary visa that requires the purchase of private Canadian health insurance. All this makes family reunification a privilege for the wealthy.

For other family sponsorships, such as reunifying with partners or children, there are similar barriers. As of August 2014, children over the age of 18 can no longer come as a dependent family member. Spouses must now arrive on a two-year conditional probationary visa before gaining permanent status. This increases the vulnerability of immigrant women in abusive relationships as it makes their legal status contingent on staying with abusive partners.

The situation is equally dire for refugees. The number of refugee claims has decreased by 50 per cent and the number of accepted refugees has dropped by 25 per cent. Between 2006 and 2011, Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA), tasked with immigration enforcement, carried out 83,382 deportations.

Due to the Conservative's Refugee Exclusion Act, refugees are contending with a discriminatory two-tier system based on nationality. Countries like Mexico are classified as 'safe' -- making it essentially impossible to seek

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asylum irrespective of one's individual circumstances. Swept aside by the successive Immigration Ministers as 'bogus', Canada fast-tracks deportations of refugees from these 'safe' countries.

Over the past ten years there has been an average of 11,000 migrant detentions per year, including up to 807 children detained each year behind razor-wire fences and barred windows. Migrant detainees spent a total of 183,928 days (that's over 503 years) in immigration detention last year simply for administrative offences. Some are incarcerated indefinitely. Over one-third of migrant detainees are crammed in provincial prisons, including maximum-security facilities, where they sometimes spend up to 18 hours a day in cells.

One of these detainees was 42-year Mexican refugee Lucia Vega Jimenez. An undocumented hotel worker in Vancouver, she was detained by CBSA after transit police racially profiled her based on her accent and believed "she wasn't originally from Canada." Even when Lucia showed CBSA officers her scars from past incidents of domestic violence, they proceeded with processing her for deportation. She hanged herself while incarcerated in CBSA custody and died shortly thereafter.

On top of escalating deportation and detention rates, many refugees are facing limited legal options including no right to appeal, while drastic cuts to the Interim Federal Health Program mean no access to basic health care. In a rare move for the profession, doctors across Canada occupied federal MP offices to protest these cuts that, according to Canadian Doctors for Refugee Care, "place the pregnancies of refugee women at serious risk, cause denial of treatment for sick children, and deprive refugees with cancer of

coverage for chemotherapy." Even though the Federal Court of Canada handed down a monumental decision this year calling the cuts unlawful and unconstitutional, the government is appealing the decision.

Finally, the Conservative government has ended the Federal Skilled Worker Program and a new 'Expression of Interest' system has been implemented. Like an online dating system, employers cherry pick from a pool of immigration applicants, selecting those they want to come to Canada permanently as workers. Those who are favoured are wealthier English-speaking migrants with university degrees in one of only twenty-four accepted occupations.

Instead of permanent workers, the number of temporary migrant workers in Canada has tripled from 101,100 to 300,210 over the past decade. Migrant workers are indentured to a single employer, don't have guaranteed access to social services or labour protections despite paying into them, work long hours and are often paid less than minimum wage, and are not granted permanent residency upon arrival. As migrant worker Noé Arteaga puts it, "It's modern day slavery."

For the few refugees and migrants who do become permanent residents or citizens, the battle for secure legal status doesn't end there. The Immigrant Criminalization law that passed last year allows for deportations of thousands of permanent residents who have been convicted for minor offences including traffic offences.

And the new Stealing Citizenship law makes it possible to revoke citizenship from dual nationals or even from Canadian-born children who have the possibility of accessing dual citizenship. In a shocking precedent, Ottawa-born and Canadian passport-holder Deepan

Budlakoti is facing deportation.

Anti-Black racism in Canada

In September of this year, 33-year-old Jermaine Carby was shot and killed by police at a traffic stop. Eyewitnesses saw Carby walking with his arms stretched out when police fired several fatal shots. Ajamu Nangwaya has compiled an overwhelming list of over 50 police killings in the African community. Year after year -- for example in the shootings of Albert Moses and Tommy Anthony Barnett and Andrew Bramwell and Hugh Dawson -- police officers have been cleared of any criminal wrongdoing.

Over the past ten years, the *Toronto Star* uncovered a troubling trend on racial profiling by Toronto Police Services. "While blacks make up 8.3 per cent of Toronto's population, they accounted for 25 per cent of the [police] cards filled out between 2008 and mid-2011," they reported. Based on freedom of information requests, the *Toronto Star* has also revealed that Black males aged 15-24 are stopped and documented 2.5 times more than white males the same age.

And when it comes to hate crimes, Black people are one of the primary targets. Last year, those who identified as Black reported 42 per cent of all race-based hate crimes.

Paralleling the explosion of Indigenous women and immigrant detainees behind bars, Black people are one of the fastest-growing prison populations. Canada's federal correctional investigator Howard Sapers even launched an investigation into the 80 per cent increase (52 per cent increase proportionally) of Black prisoners in federal jails over the past decade. Sapers found that while representing 2.5 per cent of Canada's population, 10 per cent of those in federal prisons are Black. He also

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found that Black prisoners are more likely to do time in maximum security and solitary confinement.

In a study on Canada's racialized labour force, researchers Sheila Block and Grace-Edward Galabuzi found that those who identified as Black faced the second-highest unemployment rate of all racial categories and the third-lowest earnings. Statistics by the Canadian Association of Social Workers reveals how the racialization of poverty is compounded by the feminization of poverty. The average wage of Black women is 79 per cent of what Black men earn.

And finally, according to a recent report, over 40 per cent of apprehended youth placed into the Children's Aid Society of Toronto system are Black youth, in particular those of Jamaican background. In one blatantly racist example, Children's Aid was called because a teacher believed that a child eating *roti* was "not healthy." This criminalization of Black mothering and Black families exists alongside the annihilation of Indigenous families through the child welfare system, our modern-day residential schools.

Anti-Native racism in Canada

Indigenous peoples, cultures and nations have survived and thrived despite genocide -- despite a long, shameful and racist history of residential schools, forced sterilization, small pox and germ warfare, the breaking of treaties, legislative control including through the Gradual Civilization Act and the Indian Act, forced dispossession from lands and relocation to reservations, outlawing of ceremonies such as the potlatch and traditional activities such as fishing and hunting, and much more.

This continues today. Indigenous people within Canada are the most impacted by the pillage of lands,

experience disproportionate poverty and homelessness, are over represented in statistics of missing and murdered women, have their children apprehended and put into the child welfare system, and are the primary targets of repressive policing and prosecutions in the criminal justice system.

According to Mi'kmaq lawyer and scholar Pamela Palmater, "The creation of Canada was only possible through the negotiation of treaties between the Crown and Indigenous nations... The failure of Canada to share the lands and resources as promised in the treaties has placed First Nations at the bottom of all socio-economic indicators -- health, lifespan, education levels and employment opportunities. While Indigenous lands and resources are used to subsidize the wealth and prosperity of Canada as a state and the high-quality programs and services enjoyed by Canadians, First Nations have been subjected to purposeful, chronic underfunding of all their basic human services like water, sanitation, housing, and education."

Colonialism has forcibly displaced Indigenous peoples from their territories, seeks to destroy autonomy and self-determination within Indigenous governance, and has attempted to assimilate Indigenous cultures and traditions. Settler-colonialism has been normalized to such an extent that, instead of revealing itself, it presents its victims and survivors as the source of their own problems. We see this in comments such as "Natives don't pay taxes and receive all kinds of special treatment," "Natives should stop complaining and get a job," "Natives are responsible for their own social condition on and off reserve," and so on.

Such comments reflect deeply colonial attitudes in three main ways: they hide the reality of genocide that

has created the deliberate conditions of marginalization and impoverishment for Indigenous people, they propagate the idea that Indigenous communities need to assimilate into the dominant settler and consumerist way of life, and finally, such comments evade a discussion on how the theft and appropriation of Indigenous lands and resources subsidize the Canadian economy rather than the other way around.

Racism within our communities

All these forms of racism don't just exist within Canadian institutions or mainstream Canadian society; it also exists within our communities. We see and hear racist stereotyping of Indigenous and Black people. There is exploitation of migrant workers and Black workers (like the Khaira case) in our communities. Parents are judgmental against children who have friends of other races or forbid marriages with Black and Indigenous people.

In order to honour the legacy of Mewa Singh and to end racism, we also have to fight racism within our own communities that we have internalized from mainstream society. And we have to understand that fighting racism doesn't just mean fighting against the forms of racism that impact our own community, but it means building solidarity with all marginalized racialized communities.

Harsha Walia is a social justice activist who is associated with No One is Illegal. She has also authored a famous book, "Undoing Border Imperialism" and is very articulate on issues like racism and colonialism. She is part of the editorial team of Radical Desi.

Special Article

A meeting of different worlds: Mewa Singh and Reverend Kenneth Grant

Born in Halifax in the middle of the nineteenth century, Reverend Kenneth James Grant is one of Canada's most celebrated Presbyterian missionaries. Having grown up and gone to school in Atlantic Canada, he spent the majority of his life founding and running the Susamachar Church in Trinidad. His specific purpose in Trinidad was to convert British Indian indentured labourers of Hindu and Muslim faiths to Christianity and his autobiography, *My Missionary Memories* is filled with stories of his successes. Page after page recounts his efforts to describe Hinduism and Islam for his Christian audience while also illustrating his efforts at community building. Many of his converts went on to become political and business leaders in Trinidad at beginning of the 20th century and after close to 40 years stationed there he returns to Halifax to retire.

However, here his autobiography – and his life – takes an interesting twist. Due to his experience with Indian people and his loneliness after the death of his wife, he is sent to Vancouver to see if he can have similar success in converting Sikhs to Christianity. He arrives in 1913 and describes a city full of racial distrust and political unrest. Grant places the root cause of the unrest at the unjust laws that

Canada has set up against Sikhs. These laws and repressive measures (such as limiting the entry of Sikh women into Canada) have sown the seeds of distrust between Sikhs and the majority population. Grant states that considering the role that Sikhs played in policing the British Empire and in quashing the 1857 Mutiny, Canada owes Sikhs a debt of gratitude.

This chapter is particularly insightful for illustrating the context of Vancouver in 1913-1914. He writes about the creation of the Ghadar Party and the spread of Ghadar newspapers throughout

Vancouver. He documents the arrival of the Komagata Maru and how Canada was wrong by denying the passengers entry. He even goes on to cite newspaper editorials from that time supporting the suitability of Sikhs to Canada.

Importantly, he also mentions the series of murders that takes place in Vancouver in the wake of the Komagata Maru and focuses particular attention on the shooting of Inspector William Hopkinson by Mewa Singh. Surprisingly, Reverend Grant is able to meet with Mewa Singh and preserves his conversation:

"Later when I visited the murderer in his cell and shortly before his execution, he spoke to me of some property which he wished to have disposed of in the interests of his family in India. Referring to Samuel Jagat Singh, my catechist, who had been an old friend, he said to me: - 'He has a good understanding in these matters of property, but he has been unfaithful to his religion, and I cannot trust him.'" (187).

There are a couple of things to unpack from this statement. Firstly, Mewa Singh's statement corresponds quite closely to the statement he made at his trial and which is preserved in the court transcript (<http://komagatamarujourney.ca/node/10171>). As such, it paints the portrait of a man still deeply concerned about the well-being of his family. Even in the last weeks of

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his life, this consideration for others re-affirms for us the image of piety and selflessness that we popularly associate with him.

Secondly is the mention of the "unfaithful" Samuel Jagat Singh who it turns out, is Reverend Grant's only Christian convert. Samuel perhaps played a larger role in organizing the meeting with his friend Mewa for which the Christian priest perhaps tagged along. However we have no record of any other visitors that Mewa Singh may have had or what the purpose of this meeting may have been (ie. did Mewa request it? Did Reverend Grant meet other prisoners scheduled for execution?). What becomes clear later in the chapter is that Samuel and Mewa shared a bunkhouse together with several other Sikhs (was this the "property" that Mewa wished to sell and whose proceeds he wished to send back to his family?).

Another striking feature of this passage is the attention it calls to the intended audience for Reverend Grant's autobiography. He is clearly writing for a White, Christian audience and hence the narrative focuses on his one 'victory', Samuel Jagat Singh. He uses the Mewa Singh story as a segue into describing Samuel's road to conversion and the hardships he faced along the way. In particular, Grant focuses on the violent reaction that some Sikhs have to Samuel's increasing involvement with the Christian church before he decides to convert. In fact, on two occasions in early 1914 he is physically assaulted. Upon hearing of the first assault, Reverend Grant goes to Samuel Jagat Singh's home where he meets Mewa Singh for the

first time as he answers the door. Mewa Singh assures Grant that Samuel is not at his home and endeavours to find him within the day. In fact, Mewa is able to find Samuel "about an hour later" and sends Reverend Grant to a doctor's office where Samuel is being treated for a facial laceration. Samuel refuses to press charges and after a subsequent assault – and one must assume much personal soul searching- decides to convert to Christianity. Again, this story highlights the charged nature of the Vancouver community before and after the Komagata Maru. We must remember that even Mewa Singh himself mentions in his court transcript that he was accused by some local Sikhs of working in collusion with William Hopkinson – and was only saved by his own protests and the timely intervention of community leader Gurdit Singh Bilga.

The two meetings with Mewa Singh that I have described are cursory to Reverend Grant's larger mission of illustrating an exciting life journey and providing a

guidebook for young missionaries. The fact that he is able to portray the story of the (mostly unknown) Christian convert Samuel Jagat Singh and by extension, his meeting with Mewa Singh is only important in hindsight and because it was read with a particular lens towards highlighting South Asian Canadian stories. Mining books like these from this era can provide a fruitful avenue for future scholar to 'fill in' the gaps in our nation's official archive and provide an opportunity for the silenced histories of our past to be heard.

Naveen Girn is a cultural researcher and community engagement specialist whose interests center on Vancouver's South Asian community, intercultural history and curation. Naveen co-curated Bhangra.me: Vancouver's Bhangra Story at the Museum of Vancouver and Spectacular Sangeet at the Surrey Art Gallery and curated two exhibitions on the Komagata Maru at the Surrey Museum and Museum of Vancouver. He was Project Manager for the Komagata Maru 1914-2014: Generations, Geographies and Echoes project (www.komagatamaru100.com) that brought together 8 institutions across Metro Vancouver to collaboratively commemorate the centennial anniversary of the Komagata Maru. As principal at Digital Handloom, Naveen leads a community storytelling practice that engages with and shares untold community stories.

BC NDP calls for protection for passengers, fairness in taxi industry

With app-based ride shares and cabs like Uber trying to make headway in this province, the governments must take steps now to show them that the same rules will apply to everyone making a living in passenger transportation. Rules like criminal record checks for drivers, proper insurance and safe vehicles exist to protect passenger safety in the taxi industry. Online companies should not be allowed to bypass these rules, putting passengers at risk and undercutting our locally owned taxi industry, which supports thousands of jobs. App-based ride-shares and cab companies should fall under the rules of the Public Transportation Board, and should be subject to the same standards as licensed taxi companies. A strong stance is needed against operators who wilfully break the law. Companies like Uber must be held to our provincial standards. The B.C. government need to take action to protect safety and jobs in the taxi industry. These concerns are also echoed by the Coalition of People with Disabilities and Council of Senior Citizens' Organizations. BC NDP tabled a bill in the legislature that would bring these operators under the law with stronger enforcement tools. The NDP bill is to ensure that app-based ride-share and cab

||| CURRENT AFFAIRS

companies fall under the Passenger Transportation Act and raise the maximum fine for someone operating without a permit from \$5,000 to \$20,000.

I have heard from people who believe that in order to break existing taxi "monopoly", we should allow app based companies like Uber to operate here in BC. There are many serious issues we must look at before we jump to dismantle our taxi service system in favour of app based taxi service.

Passenger Safety

Under our current system taxi drivers are required to go through criminal check every two years in every municipality they wish to operate. They must also have appropriate driver's license to operate a taxi. The taxi cars must pass safety checks on a regular bases. Every car is equipped with a camera for the safety of passengers and the driver. The taxi operators charge fare only what is decided through regulations. Every taxi must carry appropriate insurance to provide coverage for passengers.

On the other hand, there are many high profile cases mentioned in the media alleging Uber drivers involve in crimes including sexual assaults on passengers. As a result many big cities in the world have decided to ban Uber services including New Dehli where according to media reports, the Uber cab driver was accused of raping a 25-year-old woman. He was arrested in Mathura.

The accused allegedly raped the woman, working for a company in Gurgaon, when she was on her way home in north Delhi from the Vasant Vihar.

Uber also charge fair according to the time of the day and one

passenger is quoted in the media saying he was charged \$367 for a 20 minute ride on a busy night on Halloween.

Protection for Drivers

One only need to read a recent report published in *The Slate* magazine in New York outlining Uber driver's concerns. The drivers interviewed in the article suggest that they are making approximately \$11 to \$12 per hour, dismissing Uber suggestion that in New York its drivers make over \$90,000 per year. They say "Lately though, as fares have fallen and Uber's own commissions increased, drivers have grown disillusioned with the company and its promises". From London to San Francisco to New York, they've banded together to protest against Uber. The rhetoric they once saw as uplifting now seems deceptive and manipulative. Slowly but surely, Uber drivers are questioning whether Uber's promises about wages and "small business" opportunities are actually aligned with reality.

The way Uber drivers see it, ride volume can only increase so much in response to lower prices.

They say first Uber said they would employ only 400 cars then they brought in 1200 so there is only so much work to go around and as a result no one is making anywhere near what they were promised.

Therefore, if passenger's safety is compromised and fair gouging is allowed and the drivers are left at the

whim of Uber with no certainty to make family supporting jobs why jump to Uber.

If any app based company wish to offer taxi service in BC they must operate under same laws that our taxi companies operate.

We cannot allow them to flaunt our laws.

If governments do not bring strong deterrence such as heavy fines for breaking our laws and regulations then no business is safe and why would anyone care about our laws.

Our taxi Industry like any other existing institutions have problems and are needed to be fixed to provide better, efficient service to the passengers and that its drivers are treated with respect and fairness,

These changes are needed but Uber is not the answer to these problems.

Harry Bains is the MLA for Surrey Newton and represents the BC NDP, which is the official opposition in the province.

Optimism is based on our unity

Every New Year brings both hope and worries, optimism and pessimism, and 2015 is no different. There is certainly considerable cause for deep concerns about the situation in Canada and around the planet. News reports tell us for example that salaries for CEOs and profits for big transnational corporations are still skyrocketing upwards, while millions of people in Canada, and billions in other countries, struggle for survival, lacking decent jobs, adequate housing, clean drinking water, or access to schools or medical care. While a tiny minority of the northern hemisphere's population jet to tropical destinations to escape the winter chill, the unrelenting expansion of greenhouse gas emissions poses a dire threat to the global climate - especially for the "environmental refugees", those who are too poor to escape the consequences of fierce storms or rising ocean levels. Millions more are displaced by wars and internal conflicts in many countries, fuelled by the drive to control land and resources. The threat of fundamentalist bigotry directed at religious or social minority groups is on the rise, whether we look at the push for a Hindu state in India or the racist and fascist violence directed at immigrants, Muslims and others in much of the so-called "advanced Western world."

Here in Canada, we see a vast and growing gap between the "one percent" and the rest of the

population, in particular indigenous peoples. The original owners of this part of Turtle Island continue to face shocking levels of poverty, unemployment, incarceration, and police violence. Sitting in his office in Ottawa, the Prime Minister arrogantly rejects the rising demand for a full public inquiry into the deaths and disappearances of Aboriginal women and girls, an inquiry which would have been conducted long ago if the victims were (for example) non-Aboriginal residents of upper-income enclaves in Canada's major cities. With a federal election looming, the same Conservative government continues to scapegoat a wide range of so-called "enemies", ranging from immigrants and racialized communities, to trade unions, environmentalists, federal scientists, and even disgruntled military veterans and their families.

Truly these are difficult and dangerous times. But as the New Year begins, it is crucial to seek inspiration from a much larger group - all those who keep speaking out and working for social justice, human equality, environmental protections, and an end to arbitrary state persecution. Despite threats and intimidation, those who defend human rights refuse to remain silent. Surely we must learn from the courageous examples of the relatives and friends of the Mexican students who were abducted and killed last September, for example, just as we stand in solidarity with indigenous activists here in Canada, and many others:

the Palestinian people displaced from their homes for over sixty years, the Roma people across Europe who face the legacy of centuries of racism and discrimination, the peasants of Colombia who struggle for land and labour rights against vicious paramilitaries and fascist governments, rural communities across Latin America and other regions who keep mobilizing against the devastation wreaked by Canadian-based mining companies and other resource corporations, LGBT people who face enormous obstacles in any countries to their efforts to live and love in freedom rather than fear. The examples of these and many other oppressed groups prove that the human desire for liberty and equality cannot be conquered. As we look ahead to the coming year, let us remember that we are never alone and isolated - we have allies everywhere around us, in every corner of the world, despite the attempts of the rich and powerful to promote divisions along the fault lines of colour, caste, religion, or ethnic origin. Our unity is the most powerful reason for optimism. Together we can win real progress during 2015, towards a better world for all those who hunger for freedom, justice, peace, real democracy, and a sustainable natural environment.

Kimball Cariou is the Editor of People's Voice, a social justice activist, and a member of the Radical Desi Editorial Team.

Modi: A Madari or A Nation Builder?

For many days I have been meaning to write a few lines about the sheer madness of the 'Ghar Vapsi' (back to home) conversions of Muslims, Christians and other minorities back to being Hindus. As the ancestors of most non Hindu Indians were Hindus the religious right directly or indirectly associated with the ruling Bhartiya Janta Party (BJP) believe what they promote is not really conversion but a home coming. Hence the term 'Ghar Vapsi'.

As a child growing up in India in the afterglow of the freedom movement I learnt to be Indian first and foremost before belonging to any of its states or any of its many faiths. I did not completely escape the inescapable and ubiquitous reality of its religiosity. It touched me too but the robust secularism and deep religiosity of Mahatma Gandhi helped infuse in me an abiding respect for not just one but of all of India's faiths, believers and nonbelievers. As a result I am moved more by the collective Indian heritage and our common humanity rather than by any one faith.

As I sat down to write these few lines I remembered my wife's affectionate and oft repeated admonishment to be brutally blunt, if I must, but always respectfully so. A scholar friend thought respect was fine in so far as it went but how could one respect imbeciles? I wanted to agree with his clear statement. But that was an insult to the people

in question. Imbecile is an offensive term that deliberately insults my targets' intellect deeming them of low IQ. I decided to not use that term to describe the people I was going to talk about. I made up my mind to call them idiots thinking that to be a relatively innocuous word so often used by all and sundry. But to my utter horror imbecile and idiot were interchangeable; synonyms.

The people I am talking about are neither idiots nor imbeciles. They are some of the smartest people in India; the architects and pillars of the Modi victory in the last Indian election. However being smart does not guarantee good judgement; that is quite obvious from their utterances and actions like 'Ghar Vapsi'. It is unfortunate for Modi and India that these elements now control the machinery and might of the country. So figuring out who they are is not just a semantic exercise. It is fundamental to the kind of India they will build or how they will mould it. The Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh (RSS), Bajrang Dal and many other incarnations of the religious right in the world of Hindutva have essentially derailed Modi's development agenda if he ever was committed to one. The sceptic in me says this because Modi has so far done nothing to rein in the 'religious' forces that substantially fuelled his victory in the national elections. Perhaps his agenda was always Hindutva not development. More charitably one may easily conclude from his actions and omissions so far

that his agenda all along may have been development steeped in Hindutva. In either case it is the wrong way to go for the land of many religions, ethnicities and languages that is India.

The 'Ghar Vapsi' campaign unleashed by the religious right sponsors and supporters of the BJP would not have lasted a nanosecond without its implicit support or encouragement. At any rate it is absolutely nonsensical to describe an extremely ill conceived campaign of religious conversion as 'Ghar Vapsi'. Any religion, without more, cannot a home make. A home is much more than spiritual moorings, religious worship or beliefs. And in that wider and real sense the targets of the 'Ghar Vapsi' are already at home. They are Indians; an integral part of the Indian family. They are in their home; India is their home. They are not homeless. One can never be homeless in one's motherland. In the embrace of mother India they are free to be seekers of spirituality, worshipers of any faith and pursuers of worldly or other worldly matters including atheism.

If the geniuses who thought up the harebrained 'Ghar Vapsi' scheme had urged the Indian diaspora to return home to help rebuild the country I would have unconditionally applauded them for arguing that 'Ghar Vapsi'. I would have cheered them on too if they had expressed concern about the condition of the Roma in Europe, the

gypsies as some have called them in the past. The Roma are the Indians who were taken as slaves over 1000 years ago in the many invasions beginning with the numerous by Mehmood Ghazanvi. These slaves now known as Roma were transported to Afghanistan and beyond. Once the subjugating sultanate weakened they were free to move on. They trekked westward to Europe. They did not go back home to India the "Bara Thao" as they refer to India. They felt in the India of that age they would not have been accepted having been 'polluted' by being forced out of the country and mingling with the foreigners.. In some places in Europe they suffered slavery for several hundred years and slave like conditions all over Europe. These Indians from North West India and their descendants are still being persecuted in many parts of Europe. Currently France is the worst culprit in it's treatment of the Roma. There are close to 20 million of them all over Europe; a population the size of Punjab being persecuted in many places in Europe. Most of them live in a state of near statelessness. Instead of engaging in divisive and disruptive 'Ghar Vapsi' schemes for people who are already in their home called India the conversion hawkers could have spared a thought for the Roma and given voice to their struggle for equality and social justice in Europe.

If the promoters of 'Ghar Vapsi' couldn't raise a voice for the rights of the Roma in Europe or they did not want to give a call to the diaspora to help rebuild India they could have focused on the millions of life and death issues faced by Indians at home. It isn't as if they have go too far to find them. They could have easily given voice to the glaring need for equality for the Dalits who have

suffered and continue to suffer the heinous crime of untouchability. They could have urged the Modi government that they helped elect to move aggressively to end corruption, tackle poverty, end child labour and child slavery and provide free healthcare to each Indian. They could have been out there in the streets of Delhi, Mumbai, towns and cities, large and small, to press Modi to move on these and other issues and quickly. These are real issues that affect India's ability to be a real player on the world stage. Instead these supporters of BJP have offered religious "Ghar Vapsi" as if India and Indians need more religion. India does not need more religion. We are steeped in it already and have been for ages. Let the seekers seek and the wanderers wander in search of their own truths. Anyone in India is free to seek the truth, worship what and who one wishes.

Then there is talk of no law or more law on religious conversions. People of India must reject the thoroughly vacuous debate about more law, an anti conversion law or the freedom of religion law as proposed by many. India's constitution already guarantees freedom of religion which includes freedom to choose and freedom from coercion from the pushers of 'Ghar Vapsi' or of any other variety.

The 'Ghar Vapsi' is dangerous and irresponsible. It has the potential to ignite unrest in the country that could spread like an uncontrollable prairie fire. What makes it even more incendiary in a multifaith, multilingual, multiethnic and multiracial country is the fact that the outfits that are carrying out the 'Ghar Vapsi' campaign are directly and indirectly associated with the ruling BJP. As if that was not dangerous enough the BJP government is home to the those

who see Indians as either *Ramzadas* or *Haramzadas*; that tell people to vote for Modi or go to Pakistan; that believe Nathu Ram Godse the fanatic killer of Mahatma Gandhi was a patriot. Then there are the *Love Jihad*, *Beti Lao Ghar Bachao* and more. All of these schemes and utterances pander to paranoia and subvert whatever peace, sanity and stability remains in the Indian polity.

The most troubling aspect of the communal posturing and muckraking by the likes of RSS is the deafening silence of Prime Minister Modi. He must know he can't run with the hare and hunt with the hound at the same time. That is an impossible feat even for a superb political madari like him. He needs to be part of the conversation on conversion. He needs to rein in his onetime Ghar the RSS. The dangerous dance of communalism, conversions, *Ramzadas* and *Haramzadas* must cease. The country's future demands it. Modi's promise and focus on development demands it. If the development politician Modi claims to be is silenced by the RSS Parcharak he once was it will be catastrophic for the country and for the hopes and aspirations of many who elected him. Would Modi turn out to be just a madari or will he prove to be a nation builder that India so desperately needs? For the sake of India I hope a nation builder, not a madari!

Ujjal Dosanjh is the former Premier of British Columbia. He also served in the federal government as Health Minister in the past. Dosanjh is a known secularist and critic of religious fundamentalism within the Sikh community in Vancouver. He was assaulted for speaking out against violence and terrorism.

Hindutva terror isn't a new phenomenon

The sound of the siren that used to blow on the mornings of January 30 during our school years still echos in my memory from childhood. We were told year after year to stand up and observe a moment of silence as the siren blew from a distant location. By doing so we were paying our respect and homage to Mahatma Gandhi, who was murdered on the fateful day in 1948.

The towering leader of the passive resistance movement against British rule was assassinated for defending secularism, by a Hindu nationalist extremist, Nathuram Godse. We were always taught that Gandhi was the father of the nation, and a practicing and conservative Hindu, yet he was shot to death for coming out in support of Muslims who were being targeted by Hindu fanatics following partition of India on religious lines in 1947. That partition saw the creation of Muslim Pakistan and a secular India. There were riots on both sides of the border. Gandhi and other secularist leaders became an eyesore for those who wished to see India become a Hindu nation, with a complete exchange of population - Muslims going to Pakistan, and Hindus and Sikhs transferred to India.

The "Hindu nation" supporters started conspiring to eliminate Gandhi, and after earlier failed attempts, succeeded in killing him on January 30, which came to be known as the martyrdom day of Mahatma.

This was the first high profile murder committed by those dedicated to the cause of turning India into a Hindu nation. The story did not end there. The Rashtriya Swayam Sewak Sangh (RSS), the largest Hindu nationalist body of which Godse was a part, was banned after the assassination. A Government of India resolution dated February 2, 1948 not only declared RSS as "unlawful" but clearly accused it of carrying out "undesirable and even dangerous"

activities. The resolution stated, "It has been found that in several parts of the country individual members of RSS have indulged in acts of violence, involving arson, robbery, dacoity, and murder and have collected illicit arms and ammunition. They have been found circulating leaflets, exhorting people to resort to terrorist methods (my emphasis) to collect firearms, to create disaffection against the government and suborn the police and the military."

The ban was, however, lifted later. Today while we are observing the 67th death anniversary of Gandhi, the RSS not only remains a free bird, its leader was allowed to address the nation

through a public broadcast under the Hindu nationalist Bhartiya Janata Party government headed by a dedicated RSS member, Narendra Modi. This was in sharp contrast to the secular principles of the Indian constitution.

Despite years of homage to Gandhi and acknowledgement of his cold-blooded murder, resulting in a ban on the RSS which was accused of using "terrorist methods" in the government circular, the Indian establishment continues to claim that Hindutva terror is a new phenomenon. This state of denial reflects both the prejudice of the Indian authorities, and a lack of political will to punish the Hindu fascist forces. The debate over the acceptance of Hindutva terror as a reality actually intensified after a bomb explosion in Malegaon, Maharashtra state of India in 2008. Maharashtra happens to be the native state of Godse and an RSS headquarters. Six people died in the blast, and close to 100 were injured. Earlier, it was a general tendency of the police and intelligence agencies to quickly blame Islamic extremists originating from both Pakistan and Muslim-dominated areas in India for almost every blast. But Malegaon became a virtual eye opener. It gradually emerged that this was handiwork of the Hindutva terrorists who want to establish a Hindu state and to avenge bomb explosions done by Islamic terrorists, by committing similar acts in Muslim-dominated areas. Thanks to the efforts of honest police officers, like Hemant Karkare of the Anti-Terrorism Squad, these signs started appearing in other bomb blast investigations as well. It became clear that some of the previous bombs targeting Muslim shrines in

2007 were committed by individuals associated with the right wing Hindu nationalist movement. The most classic example is the Samjhauta Express blast case. The rail service was started to strengthen relations between India and Pakistan. Religious fundamentalists on both sides of the border were opposed to this initiative. Following a February 2007 blast on the rail that claimed 68 human lives, mostly Pakistani passengers, the authorities prematurely blamed Pakistan-based extremists. An open minded investigation demands that all possibilities be looked into. To the embarrassment of the Indian government, the blast later emerged to be the result of a conspiracy hatched by the Hindutva terrorists.

Karkare worked with professional integrity and was instrumental behind exposing this network. But going against the current was not an easy thing to do. The Hindu nationalists started attacking his credibility. The BJP also tried to play down the involvement of Hindu extremists in terrorist activities. Both the RSS and BJP shouted that Hinduism cannot be linked with terrorism. Karkare faced a lot of criticism and humiliation. On November 26, 2008, when the city of Mumbai was attacked by Pakistan-based terrorists, Karkare died while fighting the attackers. The man who was hounded by the fanatics now became a hero in his death. Modi, who was then the Chief Minister of Gujarat, offered to give his wife a monetary award, which she refused to accept.

The fate of investigations and trials against the suspects remains to be seen, but the fact remains that all this was not a new phenomenon. There was obviously

a lack of strong will to call a spade a spade and accept that Hindutva terror has existed since the assassination of Gandhi. One of the names that emerged during the investigation of the Malegaon blast was Himani Savarkar, the leader of Abhinav Bharat, an ultra Hindu nationalist organization. She happens to be the niece of Godse, and has been seen praising Godse in a video. She had allegedly supported the "bomb versus bomb" policy. It should not surprise anyone that Godse is celebrated as a hero by a section of Hindu nationalists in Maharashtra. So much so, a BJP MP recently praised him as a patriot, only to retract his statement later. When Maharashtra was under BJP rule back in late 1990s, a play glorifying Godse was openly enacted. Compared to that, both the BJP and the Congress had opposed a Punjabi film glorifying the assassins of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, who was murdered by her Sikh bodyguards in retaliation for the army attack launched on the holiest shrine of Sikhs to flush out armed militants in June 1984. Her assassination was followed by an anti-Sikh pogrom engineered by Indira Gandhi's so-called secularist Congress party. No such retaliation happened against the people of Maharashtra after Gandhi was murdered. A direct or ambivalent pro-Hindutva bias is therefore very much rooted in the politics of both the parties. It won't be inappropriate to guess why the previous Congress government did not ban Hindutva terror groups, or why the then-home minister described saffron (read Hindutva) terrorism as "a new phenomenon" in 2010. Or why for that matter Hindutva terror suspects were never

killed in staged police shootouts, a common occurrence when it comes to Sikh or Muslim terror suspects.

I can go on writing to illustrate the omnipresent bias in support of Hindutva terror, and the reluctance to accept Hindu nationalism as a real threat, but a few examples are enough to understand the seriousness of this challenge.

It was the year 1992. I used to write for a small publication in Chandigarh. I had a chance to cover an agitation in support of Rama Temple that was picking up across India. The city walls were covered with provocative slogans asking people to reach Ayodhya, the birthplace of Lord Rama. The BJP claimed that the original temple was demolished by Islamist rulers to build a mosque that now needed to be removed. BJP and RSS supporters were holding public meetings in various temples in the city, where young men were enrolled to be part of the bands heading to Ayodhya. On December 6, the news came of the demolition of the ancient mosque. The whole episode sparked tension everywhere. The former BJP Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, where the incident took place, later came for an election campaign in Chandigarh, where he was given a rousing welcome at a public rally. He was introduced to the crowd as "a brave son of the soil" and the demolished mosque was described as a "rotten structure." Another female BJP leader made an inflammatory speech against Muslims. Sikh militants seeking a separate homeland were still active around that time and being killed in fake encounters, while the BJP and RSS supporters moved freely, spreading hatred without fear. Nobody was charged for sedition for

spewing venom.

While working with *Indian Express* I had a chance to visit an RSS-run school in Punjab. The school curriculum I obtained had potential to poison young minds against Muslims and Christians. My editor remained reluctant to publish the story. He instead advised me to simultaneously check what's going on in Sikh schools to give a more balanced view. I was taken aback by his response, as the BJP-led government in New Delhi was already under fire for rewriting history from a Hindutva standpoint. Anyhow, the story finally ran after several months of waiting, when there were protests by opposition MPs in the Indian parliament over this issue.

As a reporter with *The Tribune*, I faced a similar experience, but not from my office this time. I gathered from my research how the RSS-run schools were getting ministerial grants under the Punjab government in which the BJP was a key partner. A Communist MLA, Hardev Arshi, whose party was actively opposing the BJP's agenda on education, was reluctant to say anything on this. His argument was why criticise schools?

I kept writing stories on the growing RSS activities in Punjab and found how history was distorted to suggest that Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth master of the Sikhs, had tried to liberate Rama Temple in Ayodhya. A senior police officer, who was in the forefront of anti-terrorist operations to end Sikh militancy in the state, suggested to me that the RSS is a respectable organization and I should refrain from maligning its image. He categorically said, "They don't kill people." Wow. How come he can't

see that Gandhi was assassinated by an RSS guy?

Former Punjab Police Chief K.P.S. Gill, who is always credited for crushing Sikh militancy, almost exonerated the Hindu extremists of allegations of spreading terror during an interview with me on *Radio India* in Vancouver. The conversation took place in the aftermath of the anti-Muslim massacre of Gujarat. Gill was appointed as special security adviser to the Gujarat government back then. He clearly said that anti-terror laws do not apply to people who indulge in an anti-Muslim pogrom.

Another former Punjab Police Chief, Julio Ribeiro, who had also fought against militancy, said during an interview with me in 2009 that Hindutva terrorism is a new phenomenon. All this suggests that the Indian authorities have learnt to look the other way whenever an inconvenient question of Hindu militancy is raised. If Gandhi's murder or other crimes committed by supporters of Hindutva are not sufficient to shake our collective consciousness, then what else will do so? Perhaps, this prejudice was very much there even at the time of Gandhi's assassination. There were five attempts on his life before he was finally murdered. Godse was involved in at least two of them. In all probability, the police and the intelligence were aware of Gandhi's vulnerability, but in a communally charged environment after the partition, they preferred to overlook the warning signs.

That this bias has trickled down to the people's level must be recognized and fixed can be gauged from another firsthand experience, which I am going to share as a

journalist and broadcaster. In 2008, I interviewed Gladys Staines, the widow of Graham Staines, a Christian missionary from Australia who was brutally murdered along with his two sons by Hindu extremists in Orissa in January 1999. They were all burnt to death while sleeping in a station wagon. Dara Singh, the leader of the gang involved in the crime, was convicted. He had been associated with Hindu nationalist groups and was active in cow protection and anti-conversion movements. In spite of such brutality, Gladys had forgiven the killers of her husband. After airing her interview, when I opened the lines many hostile calls started pouring in. To my surprise, instead of appreciating her, the majority of callers started attacking Christian missionaries and blaming them for the brutal murders. They accused missionaries of converting poor Hindus instead of condemning the murders. When such hostilities become omnipresent, it becomes rather easy to give a clean chit to those indulging in violence in the name of religion. And the Hindutva forces know this truth. They are only taking advantage of this. As one says, society gets what society is; the ascendancy of Modi to power reflects prejudices in the popular psyche. To make the power acknowledge the truth of Hindutva terror, people at large should also be educated about the growing threat from it. Much like Pakistan-based Islamic extremists who kill their own Muslim brethren, Hindu fanatics are not sincere to their Hindu brethren either. Organizations like Shiv Sena in Maharashtra have been terrorising not only Muslims but also Hindus from other states, including Modi's Gujarat. By remaining silent to these atrocities, the majority is putting the lives of their own people in great danger. All people need to do is start questioning the supporters of Modi and Hindutva: where do they ideologically stand when it comes to the story behind the assassination of Gandhi? Or who is their real role model? Gandhi or Godse? Ironically, Modi started a "clean India" campaign on the birth anniversary of Gandhi on October 2, 2014, yet the BJP government under his leadership had turned Gandhi's birthplace of Gujarat into a Godse-land where Muslims were killed mercilessly. If he really respects Gandhi, he should be forced to shed the ideology of Godse, instead of making film stars and public figures hold brooms in their hands for photo ops.

Gurpreet Singh is an independent journalist and one of the founders of Radical Desi.

Calendar dedicated to Bhai Mewa Singh and Kartar Singh Sarabha released

A calendar dedicated to 100 years of the martyrdoms of Bhai Mewa Singh and Kartar Singh Sarabha was released in Surrey on December 13.

Bhai Mewa Singh was hanged on January 11, 1915 in Vancouver, for assassinating controversial immigration inspector William Hopkinson; Sarabha was hanged on November 16, 1915 for his involvement in the attempted rebellion against the British occupation of India. Both men were associated with the Ghadar Party, a revolutionary group formed by Indian immigrants in North America to wage war against British imperialism and racism abroad. The party believed in secularism and social equality.

The portraits of the two heroes on the calendar are made by prominent painter Jarnail Singh.

Produced by *Radical Desi*, *Mehak Punjab Di* and *People's Voice*, the calendar was issued in partnership with *Spice Radio*, Fraser Valley Peace Council and Shaheed Bhai Mewa Singh Society. The calendar unveiling was done by South Asian community elders. Among them were Manjeet Dhillon, whose grandfather Niranjan Singh Pandori was a member of the Ghadar Party, and Harjit Dhillon, the daughter of another prominent revolutionary, Moola Singh Bahawal. Others who unveiled the calendar were veteran communist activists, Nazir Rizvi and Harjit Daudhria, besides the editor of *Radical Desi* and *People's Voice*,

Kimball Cariou.

MLAs Harry Bains and Bruce Ralston were also present at the ceremony where Harjit Daudhria was given a "Life Time Achievement Award" for his tireless activism and contributions to the cause of social justice. The speakers insisted on keeping the struggle of the Ghadar heroes alive in the contemporary world, where racism, caste-based oppression, religious sectarianism, violence against women and exploitation of the poor continue to prevail.

The event began with a moment of silence in memory of the victims of the Montreal massacre and the Bhopal gas tragedy. December marked 25 years of the Montreal episode, in which 14 women were murdered by an anti-feminist gunman, and 30 years of the tragedy that claimed many lives after a gas leakage at a Union Carbide pesticide plant in Bhopal, India. The speakers threw light on these two tragic events and the

relevance of the Ghadar history.

The speakers also paid tributes to Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, whose death anniversary falls on December 6. Ambedkar was a well respected scholar and social justice activist, also known as the author of the Indian constitution that guarantees religious freedom and democracy. Incidentally, the event was held in a library room renamed after him. His death anniversary coincides with the Babri mosque episode of 1992, when Hindu fundamentalists razed the ancient mosque in the presence of leaders of the Hindu nationalist Bhartiya Janata Party which currently rules India. The speakers warned the gathering about the growing threat of Hindu extremism in India.

Those who spoke on the occasion were Amarjeet Sufi, Kimball Cariou, Nazir Rizvi, Jai Birdi, Minakshi Sidhu, Hardev Singh and Harjeet Dhillon. Manjeet Dhillon, Amrit Diwana and Devinder Takhar recited poems and songs dedicated to the Ghadar history. **-RDNB**

Canadian politics eclipsed by Sikh affairs

Recent nomination races in Greater Vancouver have revealed how mainstream Canadian politics is increasingly eclipsed by Sikh affairs.

The issue at heart is the involvement of associates of the World Sikh Organization (WSO), an influential special interest lobby group formed in 1984 in the aftermath of the Operation Bluestar. The infamous army operation was launched to flush out religious extremists who had fortified the Golden Temple Complex, the holiest Sikh shrine in Amritsar. The military invasion had left many people dead and buildings inside the temple complex damaged. Following this bloody episode, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi was assassinated by her Sikh bodyguards, sparking anti-Sikh violence across India. All this culminated in the Air India bombings that left 331 people dead in 1985.

The WSO has been active within the Canadian Sikh community since those ugly political events, raising issues ranging from Sikh sovereignty to human rights by using dialogue and peaceful means as a strategy. The WSO do not explicitly support the demand for a separate Sikh homeland at this time, but it used to support this in the past.

Following the nomination of Lt. Col. Harjit Singh Sajjan as the federal Liberal Party candidate in the Vancouver South riding, the WSO has once again captured the headlines. Sajjan's father is a member of the WSO, and he is being openly

supported by past WSO president Prem Singh Vinning, who is close to the Liberal Party. Sajjan's rival Barj Dhahan stepped aside from the nomination fight only recently. Dhahan says that he stepped aside on his own, but his supporters among the moderate Sikh leaders are blaming the WSO for exerting pressure on the Liberal Party to force Dhahan's ouster. However, the WSO denies this and claims that it is a non-partisan group which does not endorse any particular party or its candidates. Vinning also claims that he is supporting Sajjan at an individual level and it has nothing to do with the WSO.

As if this was not enough, it has now emerged that Sajjan and other members of the Canadian Armed Forces had visited the Dashmesh Darbar gurdwara in Surrey that glorifies the Sikh militants. The gurdwara management staunchly supports the demand for a Sikh state. The temple had organized special prayers in memory of fallen Canadian soldiers on the occasion of Remembrance Day in 2011. But Sajjan reportedly warned his colleagues to stay far from the pictures of the militants. Ironically, Sajjan had served in Afghanistan during the "war on terror", while pictures of pro-Khalistan extremists greet visitors in Dashmesh Darbar gurdwara. Following a protest by Indian officials, Canadian authorities had to apologize for this episode. But that was not the only time that members of the Canadian Armed Forces visited the temple. A contingent of Canadian soldiers

seeking recruits has regularly joined the annual Vaisakhi parade in Surrey where pictures of the militants are displayed. The Surrey Vaisakhi parade is held under the aegis of Dashmesh Darbar gurdwara.

Sajjan says that the armed forces only want to outreach the community through such auspicious occasions where people come out in big numbers, and this should not be seen as an effort to legitimize any particular group or its philosophy.

In the meantime, former MP and Surrey Newton Liberal candidate Sukh Dhaliwal, who has been raising the human rights issue particularly concerning the Sikh community in India, did not get support from Vinning, who actually helped his rival Randeep Singh Sarai. Sarai is a turbaned Sikh like Sajjan. Dhaliwal had angered a section of moderate Sikhs by supporting a petition seeking justice for the victims of the anti-Sikh pogrom of 1984. He was also honoured by members of the Dashmesh Darbar gurdwara for doing so. As a result, the moderates opposed him in the last federal election and supported current MP Jinny Sims, who defeated him in a close contest. Yet Vinning did not support Dhaliwal this time. Despite all odds against him, Dhaliwal managed to defeat Sarai in the nomination bid.

It is pertinent to mention that NDP MP Jasbeer Singh Sandhu also attracted criticism from the moderates for sponsoring a parliamentary dinner for the WSO in 2011. The event was held in memory of those who died during 1984.

- RDNB

Sukh Dhaliwal wins nomination race

Former Member of Parliament Sukh Dhaliwal will be the Liberal candidate in Surrey Newton in the next federal election. Dhaliwal won the nomination race after defeating his rival Randeep Singh Sarai by a margin of at least 2,000 votes, in a contest that generated curiosity within the South Asian community across Canada.

The nomination on December 13 was followed by counting of votes that continued until late night. Dhaliwal emerged as winner with over 4,500 votes, while Sarai bagged close to 2,200 votes in the contest. Dhaliwal, a former MP for the Newton North Delta riding, was defeated by current MP Jinny Simms in the 2011 federal election. The next election is scheduled for 2015.

Sources say that Dhaliwal was given the green light by the Liberal

Khalistanis by supporting a petition seeking justice for the victims of 1984 anti-Sikh pogrom. This group had supported Simms to ensure Dhaliwal's defeat in the last election. Dhaliwal was reportedly denied an Indian visa for supporting the controversial petition. However, Dhaliwal never publicly acknowledged this. But since there are no permanent enemies and friends in politics, Dhaliwal was virtually abandoned by a section of the pro-Khalistan leaders who wanted to see Sarai - a turbaned Sikh - nominated in his place.

In the meantime, Dhaliwal had to resign as BC Liberal candidate in the last provincial election, following allegations of tax evasion. Despite all odds against him, Dhaliwal was able to sign up enough supporters to win the nomination.

-RDNB

South Asians come out to protest against terror attack in Pakistan

Braving cold weather and drizzling rain, close to 200 people showed up at a protest rally against the recent terror attack in Pakistan. Organized by the Committee of Progressive Pakistani Canadians at Surrey's Holland Park on the night of December 17, the vigil was attended by people of diverse backgrounds. Not only Pakistanis, but people of Indian origin also came out to show support.

Party leader Justin Trudeau, but following pressure from grassroots supporters, he was forced to open the nomination for the riding.

Dhaliwal was vehemently opposed by a section of pro-India moderate Sikh leaders, who accused him of pandering to

Among those in attendance were children and seniors. The speakers unanimously condemned the attack carried out by the Taliban on December 16. The terrorists targeted a military-run school in Peshawar resulting in the deaths of

130 children. The elected officials present on the occasion were MPs Jinny Sims and Jasbeer Sandhu, besides MLAs Harry Bains and Sue Hammell.

-RDNB

“BJP playing politics over 1984 issue”

Accusing the BJP of playing politics over the “1984 issue”, visiting Aam Aadmi Party MP Bhagwant Maan says that the Modi government is not sincere about delivering justice to victims of the anti-Sikh pogrom.

Addressing press conference, Maan said that the Home Minister's statement acknowledging the anti-Sikh massacre of 1984 as “genocide” and the announcement of compensation to the victims' families is a gimmick. “They have been in power in the past too. Had they been sincere they could have punished the guilty.”

Maan alleged that the BJP was resorting to such tactics in view of the forthcoming Delhi assembly election. He pointed out that his own party had constituted a Special Investigation Team (SIT) to relook into the 1984 carnage after it came to power for a brief period in Delhi. “Rather the BJP government had the SIT term lapse. If the BJP had a will it could have prevented that from happening. We want those involved to be punished instead of these half hearted gestures.”

He also warned against the growing threat from Hindu fanatics under the BJP government. “On one hand India is sending missions on Mars, while on the other fundamentalists are converting the people from the minority groups into Hindu fold.” He called these forcible conversions “unfortunate and regressive”.

“If the government is keen to hold negotiations with countries like Pakistan, why are the former Sikh separatists not being allowed to return and contribute to the development of India?”

Maan assured that his party will stick to the policy of secularism and oppose the political forces that are bent upon dividing the people of India in the name of religion. He clarified that his party supports the demand for amnesty to all political prisoners, irrespective of their ethnic background, who are being detained even after serving their time in Indian jails. He also reiterated the demand for scrapping the blacklist of Sikh separatists living

outside India. “If the government is keen to hold negotiations with countries like Pakistan, why are the former Sikh separatists not being allowed to return and contribute to the development of India?”

Earlier, he addressed a big gathering organized by the local AAP supporters on the night of December 29. The “Greet-and-Meet” event received a huge response. Maan said that he has been officially deputed to Canada by party leader Arvind Kejriwal to express gratitude to Non Resident Indian supporters. He made an appeal for fresh support during the Delhi election campaign.

In the meantime, Maan visited the Indian consulate in Vancouver to enquire about the status of blacklisted Non Resident Indians who continue to be denied visas to travel back to their home country. He presented a memorandum of demands on behalf of these individuals to the consulate officials.

-RDNB

Bharat (India)

Bharat...

the word, deserving of my highest
regard,
whenever gets into vogue
renders inane all other words,
to me this word
for those sons of the soil stands
who with shades of tees
still measure the passing of time,
with no problem except the belly,
they, when by hunger are oppressed,
even their own bones can munch
death is not less than a deliverance
if life is a convention for them.

when someone of one Bharat speaks
or national integration flaunts,
his cap in the air to hurl
is all then that i so much want.

thus to put it into his head
that the meanings Bharat generates
do not match with any Dushyant,
they register themselves in the
fields
where all the corn grows
and so many burglars go.

*Paash was a revolutionary
Punjabi poet, who was
assassinated by the religious
extremists in 1988. Translated by
Tejwant Singh Gill, this poem has
been reproduced here in
recognition of India's Republic
Day which falls on January 26.*

Eyes in the dark

His wife Kulvir and his new-born daughter were both sleeping, and the nurse told Parminder that they would probably sleep through the night. He decided to leave, but it was early Friday evening and he didn't want to go home. He stopped in the hospital lobby and called his friend Piara to invite him over for a few drinks. Piara, who lived alone in a two-bedroom apartment in an old three-storey building in East Vancouver, insisted that he should come over to his house instead.

When Parminder entered Piara's living room he was surprised to see the place comparatively clean and Piara all dressed up as if ready to go some place. After shaking hands with Parminder, Piara immediately picked up the bottle of scotch that sat on the kitchen table, poured the liquor into two glasses, and said, "Do you want water or something else with your drink?"

"Water," Parminder said. Again, he was surprised at Piara's quickness.

"Man, I got worried about you ever since you told me this morning that your wife had a baby girl. I know how it is. I thought you probably needed cheering up." Piara emptied his glass and placed it back on the table.

"Oh, I'm okay," Parminder said.

"Have you called your folks back home?" asked Piara.

"No, not yet. I don't know how to tell them. I know my parents

were really hoping for a grandson." Parminder pulled a chair away from the kitchen table to sit and said, "How are things with you?"

"Things couldn't be better. I've been on compensation for the last few weeks, nothing to do, life is good."

"What's the matter? You seem to be a bit nervous about something."

"Oh, nothing, yaar. You know my friend Nanju; I think you met him here once. He was supposed to come an hour ago. I don't know if the bastard is going to show up or not."

Piara went to the living room window to look. On his way back he poured another drink, sat across from Parminder, and said, "You know, some people have all the luck in the world. Nanju has found this native Indian woman. She is from Prince Rupert or somewhere near there. She looks just like a Punjabi woman and even understands and speaks a bit of Punjabi. She can cook our food, does all the work in the house. I heard she was married to a Punjabi and when he got his immigration status, he kicked her out. She has a three or four-year-old son and that bastard didn't care about the boy either."

Parminder listened silently. Sara came to his mind, but then there were so many other Punjabis who had married native Indian women in order to get landed status.

Piara went to the window

again. He saw Nanju's car stop in front of his house. He jumped with pleasure. "He is here and she is with him. Maybe it's my lucky night too."

Nanju walked in, supporting a drunk woman, followed by a scared little boy who was holding a teddy bear under his arm. Nanju sat the woman on the sofa and said to Piara, "Brother! She had too much to drink and didn't want to come."

Nanju shook hands with both Piara and Parminder. Piara gave the boy a cookie and asked him if he wanted to watch TV. The boy nodded. Piara took him into the next room where he had a small TV. The boy passed by Parminder and looked at him in the same expressionless way he had looked at Piara. For a moment, Parminder thought he had seen those eyes before.

He turned towards the woman to look at her but she had slid sideways on the sofa and her face was hidden behind her arm.

Nanju had gone to the bathroom and Piara was still in the other room with the boy. Parminder got up from the chair, poured a big drink of scotch, and gulped it down. He could not bring himself to look in the direction of the sofa again. He picked up his jacket and left.

He sat in the car for a few minutes before starting it. He did not want to admit that the woman he had just seen was Sara; those expressionless eyes of the little boy haunted him.

■■■ RADICAL NARRATIVE

He thought of going back to the hospital, it was only eight o'clock. He fondly recalled Kulvir's face, so clear and tender after giving birth, but when he tried to imagine his newborn daughter, he could only see the rounded face of the little boy with a cookie in his hand, staring at him as he walked behind Piara.

Parminder drove aimlessly for a while and then parked his car by John Hendry Park. He walked to Trout Lake in the middle of the park. There weren't many trees by the water and there was just enough light to see his way. He stood staring in the dark, recalling how he had walked around this little lake with Sara and sat on these benches by the water with her hundreds of times.

Sara came to live next door to the house where he had moved in upon arriving from India. He lived with the Johals, from Nangal, his own village back in Punjab. It was a small house, and they lived on the main floor while renting out the basement. Parminder shared a room with Balbir, the youngest of three brothers. The eldest, Charan, worked in a sawmill and Harbans worked in a meat-packing plant. Both Charan and Harbans were married, but their wives were still in India. To cover Parminder's expenses, his father had made arrangements with their family back in Nangal.

Soon after arriving as a visitor in 1973, Parminder applied to become a permanent resident of Canada. He had to hire a lawyer because the immigration department had become suspicious of the large number of Punjabi visitors applying for landed status. His lawyer was able to get him extensions to stay

longer in Canada, but permanent status was still out of reach.

Many of their friends who came over to visit the four men were also single. Their talk often involved their longing for women. Occasionally, Charan and his friends went to a beer parlour in Vancouver's skid-row area in search of women. Sometimes a friend of Harbans brought a middle-aged native woman to the house. Parminder quickly learned that native women were more accepting of Punjabi men than white women were. He had learned English in school and could understand it

fairly well, but found it hard to speak. However, talking to these women, who were often drunk, helped him gain confidence speaking English.

It was on a sunny day in early December that he first noticed a girl next door. As he found out later that evening from Charan, she was Gordon's niece. Gordon worked with Charan in a sawmill in South Vancouver and they often shared a ride. Her name was Sara and she was twenty years old, a year younger than Parminder.

Sara's hair and eyes were black and she looked Punjabi. Parminder

■■■ RADICAL NARRATIVE

watched her and wanted to talk to her but was hesitant. He noticed one day that she was also watching him. She was sitting on the front porch and Parminder, standing by the fence outside his house, said hello. He introduced himself as Peter, explaining to Sara that it was short for a long and hard name. They went to see a movie the next evening.

Harbans, who had seen Parminder talking to Sara, later said to him, "Hey Peter, don't forget to share with others, it's not right to eat the whole dish all by yourself, you know. You can always get another one easily because you know English. I don't speak the language so I can only take what others leave for me."

Parminder laughed. Charan, who was also sitting there, said, "Parminder, if you have any sense get this Indian girl to marry you."

"Just watch me, brother, that is exactly what I am working on," Parminder said shyly.

"Sara had spent most of her life in a small remote reserve up north. She had only come to Vancouver a few times for short visits. She didn't have any friends here in the big city.

In her innocent way, she told Parminder to stop when he tried to kiss her while they were walking in the park. "Why not, Sara, there is no one here who knows us," said Parminder grabbing her by her arms.

"I am afraid to fall in love with anyone. I know people get hurt," Sara said. She went and sat on a bench by the pond.

Parminder followed her. He gently held her hand and said, "Sara, I am a good person. You can trust me."

"Peter, I am not saying you are

bad; it's just that something happened to my sister."

"What happened to your sister?"

Sara looked at Parminder for a brief moment and then started to tell her sister's story as if she were telling it to herself. "Janet was five years older than me. She was much more prettier than I am—she was so nice too—and she knew everything—how to talk to boys and all. She loved me a lot. Then Robert, a white boy from Edmonton, came to our reserve with my cousin Steve. My sister fell in love with him and went away to Edmonton. She hugged me before she left—I cried—she cried too. She told me to look after our dad and she said she would write. She never did. She came back a year and a half later with a one-month-old baby—Robert had left her. After a while she went away again and we don't know where she is now."

Sara was crying.

Parminder held her close to him and said in a soft voice, "Nobody will ever leave you, Sara, I love you." Sara responded by holding him tightly in her arms.

Parminder went home and told Charan, "Well, brother, I have done my part. Now go and talk to her uncle so that we can arrange something quickly before I have to go and get another extension from Immigration."

Parminder married Sara in a courtroom in the beginning of April. As soon as he received his social insurance number, Harbans found him a job in the meat-packing plant where he worked.

Parminder and Sara moved into a small basement apartment. While staying with the Johals he had

learned to make *roti* and cook Punjabi *da's* and vegetables. The three brothers often praised him for his tasty curry chicken. He taught Sara some Punjabi dishes to cook. In many ways, she was like a typical Punjabi girl. She did not drink or smoke and never went outside the house by herself. She kept the little place clean, cooked for Parminder, washed his clothes, and more than anything else, she loved him.

After a while, Parminder started to offer her liquor, which she refused at first, but then began to have a drink or two with him, especially on weekends.

Six months after they moved into their own place, Sara's father became seriously ill, and she went to see him and ended up staying for two months. Parminder spoke to her on the phone a few times but didn't insist too much on her coming back.

She arrived on a bus one Saturday afternoon. Parminder took her to a restaurant to eat in the evening. Later at home, he offered her a drink. She was very happy to be back and gladly took the drink. Parminder poured her more drinks until she was quite drunk.

Parminder, acting drunk, asked her, "Sara, were you drinking while you were away?"

No Peter, I never touched the damn thing." Drunk as she was, Sara gazed at Parminder, her hurt showing in her eyes. She tried to embrace Parminder. "I love you, Peter, I wouldn't even think of drinking with anyone else."

"Don't give me that bullshit. You are no different than the rest of the Indian whores. I know that you have been drinking and sleeping around all this time. No wonder you didn't want to come back to Vancouver."

Sara angrily picked up her half-full glass of liquor and threw it at Parminder. He ducked, and then started to beat her. He was careful not to hit her in a way that would draw blood or show.

Parminder had behaved in a calculated manner, just as he had planned for weeks. Sara didn't want to stay with him. She called a cab and went to her cousins in North Vancouver. She returned to her father the next day.

Sara and her father came to stay with her uncle the following winter. Parminder managed to convince Sara to come and live with him again. She was a changed person now. She sat quietly most of the time, looking sad and disoriented. She drank beer, wine, hard liquor, whatever she was offered. This was exactly what Parminder was hoping for. He was a landed immigrant now and wanted to legally divorce Sara so he could go back to Punjab to get married there.

His lawyer had prepared the

necessary papers for him. It was easy to get Sara drunk and sign the divorce papers. Sara in her innocent way told him that she had missed her period and she might be pregnant with his baby. She had been with him more than six weeks, and he wanted her out immediately. He got her drunk again and accused her of sleeping around like before. This time he put her on the Prince Rupert bus himself.

Parminder found work in a sawmill in New Westminster that paid better than the meat-packing job, and moved close to his new place of work. He stopped seeing his old friends and the Johals. Sara would not have found him even if she had tried to.

Parminder lived alone, drove a cab on weekends, and bought a house in New Westminster within a year. He kept a portion of the basement for himself and rented the rest of the house to a large white family. The rent more than covered the mortgage. Three months after he

bought the house, he went back to India. He married Kulvir, a girl selected by his parents. She was a first-year student in a master's program at Punjab State University, Chandigarh. She abandoned her studies and came to Canada with him.

Parminder had a new life. He socialized with only a few friends, and a few families related to Kulvir. Piara was one of his new friends.

He sat on a bench by the lake that used to be Sara's favourite place. He didn't resist anymore the thought of who the woman had been in Piara's apartment. He sat looking into the dark water and saw clearly the expressionless eyes of his son watching him.

Sadhu Binning is a progressive Punjabi author and poet. This story has been reproduced here to recognize two years of Idle No More, a grassroots level movement launched by indigenous communities across Canada.

Remembering the revolutionary legacy of the tenth Sikh master

This January marks 349th birth anniversary of Guru Gobind Singh, who was the last of the 10 Gurus of the Sikhs. One of the most powerful legacies of the guru was the laying of the foundation of the *Khalsa* in 1699 at Anandpur Sahib in Punjab, India in the foothills of the Himalayas. The birth of the *Khalsa*, an army of the pure, not only gave Sikhs a distinct identity, but also challenged the age-old caste discrimination practised in orthodox Hindu society.

It was divided into four caste groups: *Brahmins* (priests), *Kshatriyas* (rulers), *Vaishyas* (food growers) and *Shudras* (menial workers).

In 1699, Guru Gobind Singh asked for the heads of brave Sikh men to raise an army to fight against oppressive Islamist invaders, who were persecuting Hindus. Due to a lack of unity among castes, Hindus were virtually helpless in defending themselves against this repression.

One by one, five brave men came forward to offer their heads to Guru Gobind Singh in response to his request. They succeeded in their test. At least three belonged to the so-called lowest castes not allowed in Hindu temples to perform even menial jobs.

They were then baptized by Guru Gobind Singh and given a new surname of Singh (lion). Guru Gobind Singh himself had been known as Gobind Rai before this. His new identity came only after he was baptized by these men, who

came to be known as *Punj Piaras* (five beloved ones).

Since this time, a baptized Sikh is supposed to sport what are known as the five Ks: *Kesh* (long hair), *Kangha* (comb), *Kirpan* (sword), *Kachhehra* (breeches), and *Karah* (iron wristlet). The common surname of Singh symbolized elimination of casteism.

In fact, casteism had been challenged in the Sikh religion since the time of Guru Nanak, the founder of the Sikhism who died in 1539. It's a separate matter that all the Gurus belonged to the *Kshatriyas* caste.

The practice of *langar* (community kitchen) allowed every

one to dine together. The four gates of the Golden Temple, the holiest shrine of the Sikhs in Amritsar, greet people from all four caste groups of India in open defiance of casteism.

Hymns of "Untouchable" saints, who were denounced by Hindu priests, were included in the Guru Granth Sahib, the holy book of the Sikhs. Guru Gobind Singh asked Sikhs to follow Guru Granth Sahib as their guiding light after his death. Since then, devout Sikhs have considered Guru Granth Sahib as their living Guru.

The birth of the *Khalsa* was not only a challenge to ruthless Islamist rulers but also to Hindu orthodoxy.

■■■ RADICAL HISTORY OF THE MONTH

Guru Gobind Singh fought battles with Islamic rulers and with Hindu kings. The latter group opposed his reliance on an army comprised of people belonging to "low-caste" groups.

He also had allies among Muslims. His struggle was not therefore just against Islam or purely for the defence of the Hindus, but against all state oppression.

Though all the Sikh Gurus opposed casteism, the Sikh community has been divided along caste lines. The Dalits, or "Untouchables", who were Sikhs, have been treated unfairly in Punjab.

The issue of caste-based discrimination, therefore, still remains unaddressed.

Due to the arrogance of the Sikh leadership, many Dalits are turning to sects led by living Gurus,

who are locked in a tussle with Sikh fundamentalists. This has partly contributed to the problem of Sikh militancy in Punjab.

The Sikh leadership should openly discuss these challenges and highlight the progressive aspect of our history. This would help end ongoing social injustice both within and outside the South Asian community.

The revolutionary mission of Guru Gobind Singh can only be achieved by eliminating casteism instead of indulging only in ritualism. Guru Gobind Singh tried to achieve his mission practically instead of relying on any spiritual power.

He lost his father at the age of nine—Guru Tegh Bahadur was beheaded by Islamist rulers in Delhi when he came to the help of the Hindus, who were being forced to embrace Islam.

In addition, Guru Gobind Singh lost his four sons in the war against oppression. Two died in the battlefield, while two were executed. His mother, Mata Gujri, died of shock after receiving news of their execution. Guru Gobind Singh himself succumbed to his injuries following an assassination attempt.

It is not surprising that Guru Gobind Singh's ideology impressed Bhagat Singh, a towering leftist revolutionary and freedom fighter of India who was hanged for killing a British police officer in 1931.

In one of his essays, Bhagat Singh, who died as an atheist, described Dalits as the "backbone" of Guru Gobind Singh. Karl Marx also briefly mentioned Guru Gobind Singh's military power in his notes on Indian history.

-RDNB

Hindu right wingers organize boycott of Bollywood film *PK* starring Aamir Khan

The reaction of Hindu fanatics to the release of the new Bollywood film *PK* is not surprising.

From an online protest to hashtags like #BoycottPK, all possible tools are being used to dissuade people from watching Rajkumar Hirani's movie, which takes a dig at religious hatred and superstition.

PK is the story of an alien (played by Aamir Khan) who lands on earth as a blank slate and is uninfected with religious prejudices and material urges. He realizes that the human species is no different from him and it's only religious beliefs and nationality that divide and polarize people against each other.

The story revolves around a Hindu girl, Jaggu (Anushka Sharma), who falls in love with Sarfaraz (Shushant Rajput), a Pakistani Muslim boy. But their relationship ruptures due to some misunderstanding and a Hindu saint takes advantage of the situation to create mistrust in her mind against Muslim men. That's where *PK* comes to the rescue.

The story actually challenges myths and prejudices being spread against Muslims in India by supporters of the ruling Hindu nationalist Bhartiya Janata Party. The BJP and other far-right groups recently launched a campaign against so-called "Love Jihad"—an imaginary project constructed to blame Muslim males for luring

Hindu girls into their traps to convert them to Islam.

Obviously, *PK* has stepped onto the toes of these BJP supporters by bringing up a highly sensitive subject. In the past, the BJP has used more violent means to protest

against books, films, and TV serials depicting such realities.

Earlier, a similar kind of film, *Oh My God!*, was banned by the Punjab government in which the BJP is a partner.

PK also ambivalently touches

upon the contentious issue of Rama temple, a favourite subject of the BJP. The party has always promised to build a Hindu temple on a disputed site in Ayodhya, the reputed birthplace of the Hindu god Lord Rama.

BJP supporters say that the Moghul ruler Babar, whose reign lasted from 1526 to 1530, destroyed the original Rama temple years ago and built a mosque in its place. Hindu extremists razed the mosque in 1992 and many top-level BJP leaders were present during the assault.

That culminated in the anti-Muslim pogrom in Gujarat in 2002. Indian prime minister Narendra Modi was chief minister of the state back then.

Human-rights groups and the victims' families have claimed that he was responsible for the carnage

that followed the burning of a train carrying Hindu pilgrims from the proposed site of Rama temple.

More than 50 people died in the incident, which Gujarat police blamed on Muslim fundamentalists. BJP leaders were seen leading the mobs targeting Muslims during the violence.

However, PK is not just about Hindu fanaticism. The story pulls no punches while questioning the blind faith and superstition that prevails in all religious communities. These include Muslims and Christians, besides the followers of Sikhism, which is largely known as a modern and progressive faith group.

The makers of PK have raised basic questions, such as why one has to waste time and money on rituals and ceremonies when everyone knows what material conditions cause miseries in life, or

why people blindly follow the saints and ascetics who actually con the public with magic tricks.

The larger question that PK has rightly raised is how come one god is better than the other or why people of different faiths follow different gods, making life complicated?

From an atheist's perspective, PK fails to question the myth of god. It rather accepts the existence of god and only attacks those who keep exploiting people in the name of religious beliefs.

Yet on the whole it must be watched by the humanists and secularists as it offers a refreshing outlook when the entire world is grappling with the danger posed by identity politics and religious nationalism.

-RDNB

Politicians and not cinema should be blamed for maligning the image of police

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi recently blamed the cinema for maligning the image of the police. During a public speech in Guwahati in December, Modi accused the Bollywood film industry of presenting a bad image of police officers in the public mind.

Oh really? Modi, who is so annoyed with the cinema for presenting the police in a negative light, should actually look at his own actions in the past.

Before being elected as Prime Minister, he was the Chief Minister of Gujarat which witnessed an anti-Muslim pogrom in 2002. The massacre followed the burning of a train carrying Hindu pilgrims. Over 50 people had died, and the Gujarat police blamed Islamic extremists for torching the train. Following this episode, a well organized pogrom against Muslims rocked Gujarat state. The supporters of Modi's Hindu nationalist Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) and other right wing Hindu groups systematically targeted Muslims, while the police remained mute spectators. Modi reportedly asked the police to look the other way in case Hindu protesters wanted to vent their anger. Going by these simple facts, who is to be blamed for presenting the police in a negative light? The cinema or Modi and his cohorts? The story did not end there. Gujarat witnessed a spate of cold-blooded

Instead of blaming filmmakers, Modi should end political interference in the working of the police department once and for all.

murders of Muslim suspects at the hands of the police. Those involved were shielded by the government of Gujarat under the leadership of Modi.

There were many red faces in the BJP when a thoroughly professional police officer from Maharashtra busted a network of Hindu extremists involved in terrorist activities. Hemant Karkare had uncovered the mystery behind several bomb blasts that were prematurely blamed on Islamic extremists. Karkare had done his job without being prejudiced, but the BJP supporters had humiliated him. He died during a terrorist attack on Mumbai in 2008. In his death he

became a hero for the Hindu nationalists, and Modi went out of the way to offer a monetary award to his widow, who refused to accept it. If Modi is really keen to improve the image of the police force, why did men like Karkare have to go through humiliation for doing their job with professional integrity?

However, Modi should not be singled out for all this. In the past, the so-called secularist Congress party also indulged in similar crimes against humanity. The Sikhs were targeted across India following the assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi by her Sikh bodyguards in 1984. The police were seen either helping the goons or remaining inactive. Extra judicial killings of Sikhs suspected to be involved in militancy by the police under a Congress government in Punjab was an open secret. Those involved not only got bravery awards, but also out-of-turn promotions in the name of the war on terror. Likewise, the police have been repeatedly used by all sorts of political parties to either muzzle the voices of dissent or settle political scores. So how can one blame cinema which is a reflection of social and political realities? Instead of blaming filmmakers, Modi should end political interference in the working of the police department once and for all, and let the security agencies work fairly and fearlessly to win public confidence.

-RDNB

