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Cover Picture: Shushma Datt, veteran broadcaster and leader of the Spice Radio team, raises her hands against racism. Courtesy : *The Province and Vancouver Desi*.

Editorial Team : Kimball Cariou, Gobind Thukral , Harsha Walia, Gurpreet Singh

Director: Gurpreet Singh

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RADICAL
DESI

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

~ Desmond Tutu

A dispassionate look at Paris episode needed to avoid future tragedies

The violent attack on *Charlie Hebdo* magazine's office in Paris by the Islamist militants that left 12 people dead is an ugly reminder of how religious intolerance and sectarianism continues to challenge world peace.

The bloody incident was the result of caricaturing of Prophet Mohammad by the satirical magazine, an act that the Islamic extremists did not find funny. Among the dead were four cartoonists. The incident has divided thinkers and opinion leaders across the world. Supporters of free expression are blaming the Islamists for showing intolerance, while others are blaming *Charlie Hebdo* for provoking the attackers. Such polarization however is not helpful and does not offer a solution to the problem. Rather, a more dispassionate look at the whole episode will be helpful to avoid such tragedies in future.

First of all, however offensive a cartoon or an editorial may be, bullets are not an answer to such expression. A response to a cartoon can be another cartoon. Those who attacked the *Charlie Hebdo* office had no right to take human lives. There are other means of protest. Islam is not so weak that a caricature can simply break it into pieces. Tolerance is therefore necessary. By killing people working for *Charlie Hebdo*, the attackers have isolated themselves from the rest of the world. In fact, the attack has popularized the magazine both domestically and internationally. So what did the attackers achieve except destruction and to give a bad name to peace-loving Muslims? What can be a bigger contradiction than revering god, and hating and killing people supposedly created by him or her? Those who committed the crime can be best described as enemies of their faith.

Having said that, any news organization or media outlet risks fanning hatred and divisions by targeting revered figures. Instead of creating sensationalism, the media should spend its resources and time on stories and issues that are good for humanity. They have every right to condemn Islamic extremists or Taliban, but dragging historic religious figures into such debates is like blaming the entire Muslim community for terrorism. If media outlets want to campaign against terrorism and violence in any part of the world, who stops them? To denounce terrorism in the name of Hinduism, Sikhism, Islam, Christianity, Buddhism or Judaism is one thing. But by targeting the scriptures and religious figures in a non-serious manner, such media actually push even the moderates of these religious groups to the wall. Those moderate voices are important if we really want to isolate and silence the voices of intolerance and sectarianism in any religious community. In the post 9/11 environment, the western powers are themselves seeking allies in the Muslim world. Such actions will only make matters worse.

In this case, *Charlie Hebdo* and its apologists must also share some blame. Their office was also targeted earlier for printing cartoons depicting the prophet Mohammad. Determined to continue criticizing religion even after the Paris attack, the latest edition with another cartoon of the Prophet hit the news stand a week later. Some magazines in Canada and other countries have reproduced these caricatures to show their solidarity with the dead, as is their right. But in our view, media outlets should instead go after the corrupt and powerful who have made the lives of working class difficult, rather than hurting sentiments of the public.

In this debate, the contradictions and even double standards of free expression must be kept in mind. For example, while the western corporate media proudly flies the free speech flag, they should be asked: why does the mass killing of Palestinian children or Latin American journalists by forces backed by U.S. and Canadian governments receive so little attention compared to the murders of the *Charlie Hebdo* staff?

Those who question the Jewish holocaust are often justly accused of anti-Semitism and hate speech,

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since their utterly disproven claims are usually a cover for spreading bigotry which is highly offensive to Jews and many other victims of fascism. But some civil libertarians defend the right to express such views in the name of free expression. Similarly, some argue that it is wrong to offend the feelings of the Muslim community, for which publishing images of the Prophet is a taboo. Others maintain that the priority is the defence of free speech, a value embedded in the western liberal outlook, sometimes to the point of imposing this perspective on a community whose frame of reference has its origins in a different social environment. Let the liberal Muslim scholars handle this question within their community. Give them enough space and time to evolve.

Even within the South Asian community, many non-Muslims have shown their double standards. Some are quick to jump on the pro-*Charlie Hebdo* bandwagon, but show little sign of tolerance when it comes to their own beliefs. The Hindu right-wingers who get agitated by films "showing the Hindu religion in bad light" are eager to condemn the Paris incident. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, whose Hindu nationalist Bhartiya Janata Party has been widely blamed for its anti-Muslim stance, was among the first world leaders to react strongly to the *Charlie Hebdo* attack. Only recently, the Hindu fanatics were upset at "PK", a film that takes a dig at Hindu fanaticism and superstition. Many Sikh leaders in Canada who condemned the Paris killings were also up in arms against a sect leader who had dressed up like their tenth Guru. A recent film depicting that controversial sect leader has raised many eyebrows in Punjab. It's hypocritical on the part of these groups to enthusiastically show support to *Charlie Hebdo* and mimic the language of powerful governments, including the Canadian establishment who are spreading Islamophobia.

Lastly, we all need to be vigilant against the way this tragedy is being used by governments around the world to scapegoat entire religions and racialized communities, bringing in more stringent laws in the name of the "war against terror" and increasing security and surveillance.

-Editors

Holi War

South Asian radio station declares “festival of colours” fight against racism

A big white banner with coloured hand prints is rolled out on the table in a small meeting room at Burnaby-based Spice Radio station (AM 1200 band) these days. With Holi – a famous Indian festival of colours - around the corner, the excitement in the staff is understandable. Both the members and guests keep coming in to dip their hands in colour and

leave behind their palm prints. But it is more than Holi, an occasion when people throw colours at each other, feast and dance. The team behind this prominent South Asian radio channel is gearing up for an unusual war: a war against racism. These hand prints continue to grow as we approach Holi in the first week of March. On seventh of that month these prints will be on display at public places along with

a statement, “Raise Your Hands Against Racism”.

Shushma Datt, the veteran broadcaster and leader of the Spice Radio team, formally announced this initiative on January 15, the birth anniversary of Martin Luther King Jr. King was the towering Black leader of the U.S. civil rights movement, which fought against racism that was blatantly practiced

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by privileged White society against people of colour.

Datt, a Punjabi woman who comes from Africa, hosts a morning talk show on Monday through Friday, covering issues such as racism and gender discrimination. Being a woman of colour and a seasoned journalist, she has a deep understanding of these inconvenient topics. She has seen racism both in Africa and Canada, and when she dipped her hands in colours and raised them for a photo op, she knew exactly how important it is to challenge racial prejudice.

"The story won't end here. I will be asking people to call in every day and make suggestions how to eradicate racism. Their suggestions will then be forwarded to the Prime Minister's Office. We want the Canadian government to act and stop this."

A week before she announced the initiative, she had on air Harman Singh Kandola, a leader of the Edmonton Sikh temple that was vandalized. The attackers had spray painted racist phrases like, "Leave Canada" and "F***k Indians". The police hate crime unit is investigating that incident. "We need to continue our fight against racism in all its forms."

Datt believes that Holi can be used as an occasion to unite everyone, both within the South Asian community and outside it. "We also need to use this occasion to eradicate caste-based hatred and religious divisions within our own community." She is also encouraging listeners to share their own stories of experience with

racism and provide solutions.

Municipal governments in Vancouver, Burnaby and Surrey have also agreed to be part of this initiative, which will continue until March 21, the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. On that day, an annual community march will be held on Commercial Drive in Vancouver, and the Spice Radio contingent will be joining the parade. In the meantime, city halls will have watercolours available on March 7, and people can just walk in and place their handprints on banners for the March 21 Walk Against Racism. The local governments are also likely to make proclamations on Holi.

Datt believes that Holi can be used as an occasion to unite everyone, both within the South Asian community and outside it.

Interestingly, the idea of linking the festival of Holi with the campaign against racism first

came to Bernie Merkl, a Caucasian who is General Manager of Spice Radio. He believes that using a festival of colours as an event to fight against "colour barriers" makes sense. "Once everyone is coloured with water colours we are all the same."

Despite being a member of the dominant culture, Merkl has seen his father, who was struggling with disability, discriminated against. He has been passionate about the issue since then. "Racism breeds discrimination and discrimination affects everyone one way or the other. We need to bring everyone together." He has long term plans to take this campaign beyond March 21, and thinks about showing up with banners carrying hand prints at other major community events, like the Vaisakhi parade in April and the Pride parade in early August. "We also need to engage well known public figures, including ministers from the federal government."

Merkl has been busy making allies both inside and outside the

South Asian community. So far he has succeeded in roping in the support of *The Province* and *Vancouver Desi*. These publications ran a series on racism in the past and were prompt to join the initiative. As a partner of the initiative, *Vancouver Desi* through its website is encouraging readers to raise their hands against racism and send selfies for publication.

Following the announcement, the publication received over 30 pictures the very first day. Among those who sent in their picture is Ujjal Dosanjh, the first Indo-Canadian Premier of British Columbia. Dosanjh made history on becoming the premier of a province where Indian immigrants were disfranchised in 1907 as part of a policy to discourage permanent settlement of South Asian immigrants.

“Once everyone is coloured with water colours we are all the same.”

Last year, the centenary of the Komagata Maru episode was celebrated across Canada. The Japanese vessel carrying over 300 South Asian passengers was forced to return under the racist immigration policies in 1914. Prime Minister Stephen Harper publicly apologized for the incident in 2008. The initiative also coincides with the centenary of Mewa Singh's hanging. Mewa Singh was hung in January 1915, for assassinating controversial immigration inspector William Hopkinson. Hopkinson was instrumental behind discriminatory policies and for penetrating spies in the South Asian community to

counter radical political activists who fought against racism. Many believe that Mewa Singh's action was an act of resistance against racism.

Welcoming the campaign, Dosanjh noted that colour has significance both in Canada and the Indian society, and therefore launching an initiative on the festival of colours has a special meaning. “Racism is a reality. No matter whatever campaigns you do they cannot be too many.”

Almas Meherally, the web editor of *Vancouver Desi*, feels that the initiative will go a long way in raising awareness not only against racism but also other forms of discrimination, such as casteism and gender discrimination. “We need to open dialogue both against racism and reverse racism, as we

have seen parents discouraging their kids from marrying outside their community and race." She also shared her personal experience with racism in Dutt's show. Being a woman of colour she was once harassed by a non-Asian passenger during a train ride in Vancouver.

Other non-media allies to join the campaign are No One Is Illegal, a grassroots level immigrants' rights movement, and MOSAIC, an immigrants' settlement agency. Neenu Kang of MOSAIC has also submitted her picture to *Vancouver Desi*. She was with Datt in the Spice Radio studio when the announcement was made. She revealed how her father, a first generation immigrant from India, had to endure racism while working as a taxi driver. Kang, a staunch feminist, feels encouraged to be a part of the campaign that can raise awareness about the issue on a massive scale. "Creating forums where people can participate in activities that are fun and educational at the same time is always the best way to create long term impact in the community. By combining a celebration from a

culture and country from the other side of the globe delivers the message that Canadian culture is a mosaic of cultures."

Harsha Walia of NOII is equally excited. She believes that such initiatives create a necessary dialogue about ongoing racism in all its forms, from interpersonal to institutional and from local to global. "Because most dialogue in Canada is shaped by powerful myths of multiculturalism and diversity, it is actually hard to even bring up racism. A lot of people think racism is in the past or a rare occurrence, so broaching the subject in mainstream media is a brave intervention."

Kang and Walia are on the same page as they acknowledge that systemic racism against the indigenous peoples of Canada continues to exist since the days of colonialism. They find it necessary to involve the indigenous communities in the campaign and recognize that this land actually belongs to the First Nations. "Racism is not just people using derogatory language. It is also embedded in the fabric of this

country. What is happening to indigenous peoples is colonialism, which is informed by racism," according to Walia.

As the campaign picks up it has generated interest outside the South Asian community. Tony McAleer, a former neo-Nazi has welcomed the idea and wishes to endorse it. He was involved in activities like cross-burning in the past, and held racist and offensive views against people of colour. "Back then we used to think that white people are like endangered species and people of colour are taking away our jobs." A Jewish psychologist helped him to abandon his racist ideology and today he is a motivational speaker for youth. He is now part of an initiative called Life After Hate, that helps in reforming former white supremacists. McAleer believes that racism is born out of ignorance and a campaign like "Raise Your Hands Against Racism" can help in overcoming lack of knowledge.

-RDNB

Alternative history Revolutionary side of Holi

The festival of Holi is not just about throwing colours and feasting. It is also an ugly reminder of the hangings of six radical political activists who died for the freedom of India from unjust British rule.

These six men were part of the Babbar Akali movement, the militant struggle to liberate the historical Sikh temples from corrupt priests, who were patronized by the British rulers. Among those executed on February 27, 1926 was Kishen Singh Gargaj, one of the founders of the Babbar Akali movement. Their hangings coincided with Holi that year.

The Babbar Akali movement sprouted out of the Ghadar Party, a group of South Asian political activists formed in North America in 1913. The party was floated by revolutionaries who immigrated to the US and Canada to earn their livelihood. These people came to this part of the world as British subjects. Canada too was a British colony back then. Many actually believed in the fairness of the British justice system. But this myth was broken following encounters with rampant racism and anti-immigration policies in an alien land. In situations of racial violence, the British diplomats never came to their rescue. They soon discovered that the root cause of their sufferings was their slavery back home. These hardships transformed many into activists and they joined the Ghadar

Party, which believed in an armed struggle against the British Empire and was secular in character. The party fought both against racism abroad and colonialism in India. In 1914, many die-hard Ghadar activists returned to India to launch an uprising with the help of the masses. A significant number were arrested and executed, while others were given long term imprisonments.

By the time the Ghadar movement had phased out, another armed struggle to free the historical Sikh temples from the priest class which enjoyed the backing of the British officers was picking up. The British government was using the priest class to keep Sikhs away from the freedom movement, as Punjab was a garrison state that provided recruits to the British armies. The priest class was not only licking the shoes of their British masters, but also violated the principles of Sikhism. They shamelessly practised the caste system in Sikh temples, even though the Sikh religion denounces casteism and untouchability. A peaceful movement to liberate the temple was started by Akali Dal that followed the pacifist ways of Mahatma Gandhi. But this did not deter the police from using high handedness, or the priests from using vigilante violence to suppress the campaign. So much so, the priests at the Akal Takht – the highest temporal seat of the Sikhs - had honoured R.E.H. Dyer, a general who was responsible for the massacre of passive resistance movement supporters in April 1919. Scores of people died in the indiscriminate firing on a crowd of people who had gathered in Amritsar to protest against the detention of their leaders. The site of the massacre is not far from the Akal Takht. The dead included people from the Hindu and Muslim communities. The honouring of

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Dyer was not appreciated by ordinary Sikhs.

Some prominent Ghadar activists in their new avatar had a fresh mission, which was not to let Sikhs become ready recruits for the British. They started a militant newspaper that laid the foundation of the Babbar Akali movement, which indulged in armed resistance against the British agents and corrupt priests. Though the immediate objective was to liberate Sikh temples, the whole campaign was a part of the bigger freedom struggle.

The massacre of February 21, 1921 galvanized the Akali movement. Over 100 Akali activists were brutally murdered by goons hired by the priest of Nankana Sahib gurdwara, the birthplace of Guru Nanak, founder of the Sikh faith. These men had marched to the temple peacefully. The militant Sikhs renounced the pacifist movement, and that's how the foundation stone of the Babbar Akali movement was laid. Karam Singh Daulatpur, a former Ghadar activist from Canada, started a newspaper named *Babbar Akali Doaba*. In the meantime, another militant group, Chakarvarti Jatha, continued its activities. Gargaj was the leader of this second group. Both factions later merged to establish the Babbar Akali Party and ran a parallel administration in the Doaba region of Punjab. Daulatpur died in an exchange of fire with the police in 1923, while Gargaj was hanged three years later.

The Babbar Akalis inherited the legacy of secularism and patriotism from their previous party. They strongly believed that after liberating their temples, they would continue the struggle until the much bigger temple (their homeland) was

freed. Keeping the spirit of secularism alive, many Babbar Akali supporters saved the lives of Muslims following the religious partition of India. In 1947, when India gained official independence it was divided on sectarian lines, with Muslim-dominated Pakistan separated from it. During the religious strife, the Babbar Akali activists tried to protect Muslims from Hindu and Sikh fanatics.

The sacrifices of the six activists on Holi therefore also

symbolize the special significance of the festival for social justice activists. In fact, Bhagat Singh, a towering leader of the militant camp, wrote a passionate piece dedicated to these heroes. Titled *Blood Sprinkled on the Day of Holi*, it gives a detailed account of the circumstances under which these men were executed and the background of the Babbar Akali movement. Bhagat Singh was hanged in 1931 for assassinating a British police officer.

-RDNB

On the occasion of International Mother Language Day on February 21

Time to recognize Canadian stories written in foreign languages

When Harpreet Singh Sekha drove taxi for a living, his everyday experiences with passengers and coworkers in Greater Vancouver culminated in a famous Punjabi book *Taxinama*. A collection of short fiction and non-fiction has been widely read within the Punjabi community. Although Punjabi remains a foreign language in this country, the stories Sekha chose to write were Canadian, with local settings and characters and Canadian content.

Sekha is a prominent progressive author who has been writing short stories for a number of years. His first collection of short stories, *Beeji Muskra Paye*, had stories on issues like racism, which remains a Canadian reality. His third book *Taxinama* is based on his own and coworkers' experiences in the taxi industry with racial zealots, pesky passengers and authorities. Partly inspired by his uncle Jarnail Singh Sekha, another prominent novelist in the community, Sekha is not the only one who writes Canadian content in Punjabi. There are many others, including his uncle, who has authored *Duniya Kaisi Hoyi*, a novel based on the lives and hardships of Canadian farm workers.

Sadhu Binning, Sukhwant Hundal, Amanpal Sara are some other well known authors who have given their dues. Their stories are mainly Canadian. The translated version of Binning's story on

relationships between Indo-Canadian males and aboriginal women in Canada was reproduced by *Radical Desi* last month in recognition of Idle No More, a grassroots level movement of the indigenous communities.

The late Darshan Gill had gone extra miles by translating English-Canadian literature into Punjabi.

In spite of these efforts, Sekha and others feel that their language of communication still remains foreign in a country they have made home. Binning in particular is more vocal about it. As a member of the Punjabi Language Education Association (PLEA), Binning has been demanding Canadian language status for

Punjabi. The point he often makes is that Punjabi is being spoken in this country for the past hundred years, and the first Punjabi newspaper launched outside India, *Swadesh Sewak*, started in Vancouver in 1910. In fact, PLEA has been lobbying for teaching Punjabi language in public schools. Their sustained campaign has led to Punjabi being accepted as part of the curriculum in schools with a sizable number of South Asian students. Binning feels that it is time to accept Punjabi as a Canadian language, and this recognition is over-due for his mother tongue which is no more foreign in this country.

-RDNB

The broken window

After the weatherman had finished the forecast, Harnam Singh switched the TV off. Daya Kaur slowly stood up, supporting herself with her hands on her knees, and went straight to her bed. She knew that her husband would take a few more minutes to come to the bedroom. Harnam Singh walked up to the large window of the living room, lifted the side of the curtain, and looked out at the tranquil street. It had been raining all day. Even now, a slow drizzle was visible under the streetlights. It was the middle of October and the nights were cold. The old couple lived on a quiet street in East Vancouver. There was hardly any traffic at night. The tall lampposts stood still, all by themselves, as though having taken a vow of silence.

Harnam Singh stood by the window for a few seconds, scrutinizing the houses across the street. Then he went into the washroom; he cleared his throat and nostrils, making loud noises. He made them deliberately, as though to frighten away the stillness in the house. After he had got into bed and switched the small table lamp off, Daya Kaur complained in her usual manner, "Sleep doesn't come easily to old people."

Harnam Singh adjusted his pillow in silence. Daya Kaur spoke

again, "It was so nice to have the Gill family in the basement. At night, their child got up and cried, and the house sounded so alive."

Harnam Singh took a deep sigh and thought about the Gills, which he didn't like to do, but Daya Kaur reminded him every night. They had rented out the place mainly to feel less lonely, but the extra money came in handy to buy special gifts for their own grandchildren. However, it was an illegal suite, a jealous neighbour had complained, and the city forced the Gills out.

After a long while, just to break the stillness, he asked, "How long did they stay in our basement?"

"For two and a half years. Their son Gurmail was only six months old when they moved in during the summer of 1973. And the little girl Ruby was born a year later in '74." Daya Kaur was very fond of remembering and repeating dates. She remembered the day she left her village to come to Canada and the exact date and time she landed in Vancouver's small airport at the time.

"They were such lovely children. The girl looked exactly like our Sunita when she was born," said Harnam Singh.

Silence again.

They both thought about their children—a son and a daughter—now married and living in their own homes. Their son Dave, soon after

getting married, moved to Toronto where he found a job with the Immigration Department. He visited them once or twice a year. Their daughter Sunita lived in Richmond with her husband and two children, and came to see them once a week. She and the grandchildren were the centre of their lives. Harnam Singh had retired from the sawmill where he had worked for more than twenty-five years as a green-chain-puller. For a few summers after retirement he had worked in the Fraser Valley farms; now he was too old to work.

He yawned and said *waheguru*, looking up into the darkness. The words of prayer came out of his mouth spontaneously, without his permission or wish. Daya Kaur turned on her side and said it almost the same way as her husband, "True God, have mercy on all."

Having said these words, they silently waited for sleep. The house was serene and the only sound came from their old refrigerator that rumbled when the motor stopped, and droned when it started again.

They were both lying awake when they heard a crash of shattering glass followed by a heavy thud on their living-room floor. The sharp echoes of the shards hitting the hardwood floor pierced through the stillness of the

||| RADICAL NARRATIVE

night. They jumped with fright but knew exactly what had happened and were filled with anger. This was not the first time their window had been broken at night.

Harnam Singh, weak and shaken, got up, picked up the small stick that he kept by his bed, and started towards the door. Daya Kaur tried to stop him. "Dave's Dad, have you gone mad? We don't have the strength to stand up straight; how can we fight these devils? They could throw another rock and hurt us. Don't go into the living room. Let's go to the kitchen and call the police."

Harnam Singh, shaking with anger, said, "What is the use of calling the police? Have we not done so twice already this month? First time they came and asked us a whole bunch of useless questions and went away looking at us as if we were the troublemakers. The second time they didn't even come for two hours."

Together they walked to the kitchen and found the old cardboard on which they had written a few phone numbers. Harnam Singh dialed a number. A tired and hostile voice answered the phone, took his name and address, and promised to send help.

Daya Kaur went into the living room and lifted the curtain a little to look out. The street was as quiet as it was before they had gone to bed. She watched the homes on both sides of the street and saw no movement of any kind. "Surely they must have heard the sound of the window breaking," she thought, and felt lonely and scared. Momentarily, her mind travelled back to her village in the Punjab. "The whole neighbourhood would come to help

in time of need," she said to herself.

Then she remembered their neighbours George and Bernice. "If they were still living here they would definitely come out to help us." George and Bernice had been the nicest couple on the street. George had lived in India for a few years just before the Second World War, and later moved to Canada from his native England. A sudden heart attack killed him a year ago and Bernice moved to an apartment a few months later.

With these thoughts running through her head, Daya Kaur went and stood by her husband, who was mutely observing the broken pieces of glass on the living room floor. Then he too went to the window and stared out into the street. He knew that the culprits would have fled in seconds and there would be no one around. Still, he looked into the motionless street with an empty look in his eyes, not trying to see anything at all. He turned around, took a few heavy steps back, and slumped into the armchair.

Daya Kaur found the silence unbearable and started to mumble. "May God punish these devils. What have we done to them that they are hurting us like this? We have lived on this street for so long and have never said a harsh word to anyone . . ."

Harnam Singh interrupted her. "Why do you always go on talking like this. Who are you trying to tell all this to? These monkeys do not have enough sense to understand anything. They just like to amuse themselves by terrorizing old people after a few beers."

"Is this some kind of new beer

that they drink now? People have always had beer and nobody has ever done this kind of thing to us in the past," retorted Daya Kaur.

Harnam Singh got up once again, looked out the window, and returned, cursing the police. "These bastards take their sweet time don't they?"

"What could they do anyway? Who knows how many places they have to visit each night."

"Why don't you keep quiet, you seem to have a lot of sympathy for the cops." Harnam Singh was at a loss what to do. If Daya Kaur had not been saying something, he probably would have, since the stillness was eating away at him too.

After a couple of minutes, Daya Kaur spoke again, "I was saying that maybe we should call Sunita and her husband . . ."

Harnam Singh again interrupted her with, "What could they do in the middle of the night? Besides, they both have to go to work early in the morning."

They remained silent for a while. Then Daya Kaur started again, "I believe that the real reasons behind this window-breaking and calling us Hindus and Pakis on the street are these newcomers, these visitors. The young people who come straight from villages in Punjab have no idea how to live in a big city and to behave properly. Their stupid behavior is creating all these problems for everybody. We have lived here for so long and never before has any white man treated us like this."

This time Harnam Singh didn't interrupt her and she fell silent

||| RADICAL NARRATIVE

looking at him.

He was also trying to figure out why this was happening. Some workers in his mill had often talked about racism but he never paid any attention; it was something that was just there, part of life, no more no less. Like many other Punjabi workers, he thought it was the privilege of the white people to look down upon them. "We would never let the low-caste *chamaar* or *chuhrra* come near our kitchen back in the village," he would say, justifying the white people's right to discriminate.

But Harnam Singh couldn't understand why he was being victimized this way now. He considered himself a god-fearing and law-abiding man. He had always kept out of other people's ways. After much thinking, he came to the same conclusion as Daya Kaur; all this was because of the large number of newly arrived young people from Punjab. They entered the country as visitors and tried to become permanent immigrants by any means possible.

Then he remembered the last time their window was broken. Some young Punjabis had come to see him afterwards. They sat discussing the issues of racial hatred, politics, and the ups and downs of the economy, all of which he found strange. After they left, he had said to Daya Kaur, "These young people make no sense at all. Now that they have started to eat three full meals everyday, they think they already own this land. Can you believe it, they were saying that it was the police and the government that was directly responsible for these attacks on poor people like us. Listen to

these new, educated ones, eh!"

Harnam Singh was drowned in his thoughts. Daya Kaur repeated what she had said just a couple of minutes earlier, "Dave's Dad, phone them again. No one has come yet."

He was irritated even more. He knew that when the police came, it wouldn't make any difference. There was nothing else to do except wait.

The silence was agonizing. Daya Kaur started another of her tales, "When I went to the bank yesterday, there were dozens of policemen around. There must have been six or seven police cars with lights flashing. They had locked all the doors of the bank. The police were running back and forth with their pistols in their hands. Then after a while, everything was quiet. They opened all the doors. The cops went back to their cars chatting leisurely. A couple of them stood inside the bank, talking and laughing with that shameless, red-haired hussy who answers phone calls sitting at the table doing absolutely nothing all day long. I asked the teller what happened. She said that someone pushed the alarm button by mistake."

Harnam Singh heard Daya Kaur's story. He was angry. Those young Punjabis were saying precisely the same thing, he thought. Their exact words came to mind, "The government is there to protect the rich; they do not care about the average person."

He also remembered what his friend Mohan Singh had told him the other day: "The gurdwara committee people caught a few young white hooligans who were harassing worshippers on their way to the gurdwara, and handed them

to the police. The police let them go free right in front of the gurdwara and nobody could say a thing." Harnam Singh grew angrier as he remembered that.

They heard a car stop in front of their house. They waited for what seemed like a long time, then finally there was knocking on the door. Two white officers came into the house. They took off their hats and held them in their hands. One officer started to question them: "What time was the window broken? . . . who were they? . . . did you see anyone? . . . what were you doing at the time? . . . do you know anyone who would want to break your window?" He was taking notes in his small notebook as he spoke to them. The second cop looked aimlessly behind the curtains and under the sofa. With his huge black boots, he tipped over the rock that was still lying in the middle of the room. After a while, they left. On their way out the officer with the notebook said, "We are sorry for your troubles. We will try and find out who broke the window. In the meantime, call your insurance company and have the glass replaced."

Harnam Singh hurriedly closed the door behind them, as though he was afraid they might come back in.

Sadhu Binning is a progressive Punjabi author and poet. His collection of short stories 'Fauji Banta Singh and Other Stories' portrays the migrant Punjabi, Sikh community in vivid colours and vibrant voices with empathy and irony.

Dogs

these stray dogs in the
streets,
begging – an endowment
their only treat.
curses from others, are their
total effects,
abuses by the world, are their
only assets.
neither rest at night, nor joy in
the day,
filth is their abode, in gutters
do they lay.
if agitated, then turn them on
one another,
a piece of dry bread will do this
wonder.
expected to be kicked around
by every stranger,
accustomed to wither away
with lingering hunger.
if these poor beasts ever lift up
their heads,
mankind would, then, forget
all deeds of rebellion.
if they decide, they can own
the universe,
even chew down the bones of
their cruel masters.
just make them aware of their
degradation so deep
just make them move their tail
that has fallen asleep.

Faiz Ahmed Faiz was a famous progressive poet of Pakistan. Translated by Sain Sucha, Dogs was originally written in Urdu and has been reproduced here to mark the birth anniversary of Faiz on February 14.

Acts of violence against Indigenous women are motivated by racism

"The system and most Canadians don't give a shit about you, how strong and talented you are, how hard you've worked, or where you live. If you are an Indigenous woman, you are a prime target for colonial violence." – Tara Williamson, Anishinaabekwe /Nehayowak musician, writer, and college professor

Early in the new year, the horrifying story of an RCMP in Manitoba violating an Indigenous woman filled news stories. RCMP Constable Kevin Theriault arrested an intoxicated Indigenous woman near Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation, then released her from her cell and took her to his personal home. According to CBC, fellow officers teased and goaded him by text message to see "how far he would go" and a senior officer said "You arrested her, you can do whatever the f--k you want to do."

"It's a gross abuse of power," said Manitoba Grand Chief Derek Nepinak, who called the incident "appalling."

This is one of a long list of racist sexist assaults on Indigenous women, carried out by all segments of non-Indigenous society including often those in positions of power. Human Rights Watch in New York has documented serious misconduct and racism involving RCMP officers in northern B.C who take Indigenous women into custody and physically and sexually

assault them.

In another example, in 2004, a B.C judge David William Ramsay pled guilty to sexual assault, causing bodily harm, and breach of trust against young teenage girls in Prince George. When Ramsay was a provincial court judge, he assaulted young Indigenous girls aged 12-16 years old, over a nine-year period.

At least four of the young girls had actually appeared in front of him in court in Prince George and Ramsay was well aware of the young girl's vulnerable histories including histories of sexual abuse, thoughts of committing suicide, and life on the street. According to the statement in court, "He picked the girls up on the street on different occasions, drove them to a rural area near the jail and paid them for sex."

A CBC news report wrote on the trial and described the following: "When one girl asked him to use a condom he slammed her head on the dashboard until she bled, then chased her when she ran away. He slapped her, sexually assaulted her, called her a whore and smiled. Another girl was left naked near the highway and threatened with death if she told anyone."

Violence Against Indigenous Women

"White supremacy, rape culture, and the real and symbolic

attack on gender, sexual identity and agency are very powerful tools of colonialism, settler colonialism and capitalism, primarily because they work very efficiently to remove Indigenous peoples from our territories and to prevent reclamation of those territories through mobilization. These forces have the intergenerational staying power to destroy generations of families, as they work to prevent us from intimately connecting to each other... They destroy the base of our nations and our political systems because they destroy our relationships to the land and to each other by fostering epidemic levels of anxiety, hopelessness, apathy, distrust and suicide... This colonial strategy is clearly working. We have more than 800 missing and murdered Indigenous women in Canada, a mass incarceration of Indigenous men, and we do not even have statistics about violence against Indigenous Two Spirit, LGBTTTQQA and gender non-conforming people. I think it's not enough to just recognize that violence against women occurs but that it is intrinsically tied to the creation and settlement of Canada. Gender violence is central to our ongoing dispossession, occupation and erasure and Indigenous families and communities have always resisted this." - Leanne Simpson is a writer and academic of Mississauga Nishnaabeg ancestry.

In her writings above,

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Leanne Simpson articulates, as many Indigenous feminists do, how violence against Indigenous women is part of the broader colonial strategy to destroy Indigenous nations and communities. Indigenous women have always been targeted by a colonizing state and settler society in order to dehumanize Indigenous peoples, rip apart the family and nation structure, and to inflict intergenerational trauma.

According to statistics by Amnesty International and Statistics Canada:

- Aboriginal women are nearly three times more likely than non-Aboriginal women to report being a victim of a violent crime;
- The national homicide rate for Indigenous women is at least seven times higher than for non-Indigenous women.

- Although Indigenous women make up only 6 per cent of the population of Saskatchewan, 60 per cent of its missing women are Indigenous.

- There are at least 1186 missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls in Canada over the past 30 years.

Furthermore, acts of violence against Indigenous women and girls are often motivated by racism, and are carried out in the expectation that society's indifference to the welfare and safety of these women will allow the perpetrators to escape justice.

In the provincial inquiry into the sexual assault and murder of 19-year old Cree student Helen Betty Osborne in Manitoba, it was found that the police had long been aware of white men sexually preying on Indigenous women and girls in the area but "did not feel that the

practice necessitated any particular vigilance.' The Manitoba Justice Inquiry further concluded: "There is one fundamental fact: her murder was a racist and sexist act. Betty Osborne would be alive today had she not been an Aboriginal woman."

Last year, the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women issued this statement: "Hundreds of cases involving aboriginal women who have gone missing or been murdered in the past two decades have neither been fully investigated nor attracted priority attention."

Family member Bridget Tolley from Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg First Nation and cofounder of Families of Sisters in Spirit says, "In my own mother's case, I have been petitioning the province and federal

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government for an 'independent investigation'; after 12 years I have gotten nowhere. So I did my own. The only way that I was going to find truth or answers about my mother's death was to find them myself. It is what so many families across Turtle Island have been forced to do because they don't have support from colonial agents in government, policy-making, media, police, and the legal systems. But as Indigenous women, the grief and trauma of experiencing crisis after crisis in our families and communities can overwhelm us; and the best we can do is just try to stay alive each day."

The Women's Memorial March

In January 1991 an Indigenous woman was murdered on Powell Street in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside. Out of this sense of

hopelessness and anger came an annual march on Valentine's Day to express compassion, community, and caring for all women in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, Coast Salish Territories. This march will be taking place, in its twenty-fifth year and the longest running march in recent Canadian history, this February 14, 2015 at noon at Main and Hastings.

Decades later, the march continues to honour the lives of missing and murdered women. This event is organized and led by women in the DTES because women, especially Indigenous women, face physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual violence on a daily basis. The heinous and unimaginable violence that have taken the lives of so many has left a deep void in our hearts. We gather each year to mourn and

remember our sisters by listening to their family members, by taking over the streets, and through spiritual ceremonies.

The February 14th Women's Memorial March is an opportunity to come together to grieve the loss of our beloved sisters, remember the women who are still missing, and to dedicate ourselves to justice. Please join us.

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.

Collective punishment - as Canadian as maple syrup?

As the global debate over the *Charlie Hebdo* killings descends into chest-thumping and finger-pointing, Canadians are being treated to the latest round of arguments over how to "defend our values." For me personally, the term "Canadian values" brings to mind maple syrup, three-down football, Hockey Night in Punjabi, the lyrics to "I'se the b'y that builds the boat", sugar-dipped fried bannock, and an odd medley of similar cultural constructs found only within the borders of Canada. But perhaps this simply reflects my own family and geographic background.

On the political level, the debate revolves around "protecting our cherished freedoms," and other noble-sounding phrases. Some argue that in these perilous times, we must keep a close eye on potential suicide bombers of a certain... well, let's be polite and not mention the characteristics shared by these wannabe terrorists, but we all know what we're talking about, nudge nudge, wink wink. Other more liberal-minded folks are utterly shocked by such talk. After all, Canada is the great land of multiculturalism, the destiny all people facing persecution; surely to engage in racial or religious profiling is to violate this sacred tradition. Well, perhaps its OK a

little bit, if we establish proper "safeguards" and "sunset clauses" to avoid "going overboard".

And so, the stage is set for the political drama when Parliament reconvenes in late January. Mr.

In the wake of the *Charlie Hebdo* killings, the threat to allow "preventive arrests" escalates the very real tradition of racist scapegoating to a new and dangerous level. And it revives a very old, well-established "Canadian value" - the belief that certain arbitrarily chosen sections of the population are by definition not truly Canadian.

Harper's Conservatives have pledged to expand police and spy agency powers, with explicit legislation to permit so-called "preventive arrests". They will speak as though this is something new in Canada, a sad necessity in the face of the "war against western values" waged by the so-called jihadists. The opposition parties will generally agree about the threat, while warning in grave tones about the need to be "careful". Perhaps Justin Trudeau and Thomas Mulcair will even speak in vague terms about the tense international climate of wars and inequality, while carefully avoiding any reference to "root

causes" of violence, since of course this phrase is deliberately misinterpreted by the Conservatives and the mass media to mean knee-jerk woolly-minded approval of any horrific massacre committed by the "enemies of liberty."

Unfortunately, the underlying assumptions which frame such debates in parliament and in the arena of public opinion are badly flawed. Most notably, the idea that Canada has always been a country based on protection of civil rights and democratic freedoms is quite contrary to historical reality. From this false starting point, the entire discussion is warped into fantasy land.

In fact, the "preventive arrest" concept echoes the doctrines used to criminalize entire sections of the population during previous periods of colonization, war and turmoil. Each time, the underlying strategy has been to justify suspending civil liberties and democracy to allow collective punishment of groups said to "threaten our Canadian values." Early in Canada's colonial history and again after 1867, the targets were Aboriginal peoples who inconveniently insisted that they were the true owners of their historic landbase. Treaties, reservations and residential schools were imposed to put an end to such

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"barbaric" notions by means of genocide. A similar fate befell the Metis people, twice driven off their lands after confronting the expansionist Canadian state in 1871 and 1885.

But other groups were also targetted at times, especially immigrants like Irish Catholics who were considered insufficiently loyal to the British Crown (imagine that!). Then other immigrants failed to pass the "keep Canada white" skin colour test - notably the Chinese, Japanese and south Asian migrant workers who began arriving on the west coast in large numbers in the late 19th century. Racist "collective punishment" was quickly meted out to these groups, in the form of Vancouver's anti-Asian riots of 1907, the discriminatory "continuous voyage" law which effectively limited the arrivals of south Asians, bans on family reunification, removal of voting rights, etc.

Other European immigrants also faced collective punishment. By the late 1800s, having exhausted the supply of farmers from the British Isles to populate the prairies stolen from the indigenous peoples and Metis, the Canadian state enticed hundreds of thousands from central and eastern Europe with promises of free land. Imagine the horror of the Anglophile Canadian ruling class when war broke out in 1914, pitting the mother country against "the Hun" - Germany and its allies. The colonial mentality assumed that recent immigrants from countries now at war with England would be loyal to their homelands rather than to Canada. Another "problem" was the lack of enthusiasm among Francophones for the prospect of

dying on the battlefields of Europe for the interests of the British Crown, which had after all conquered Quebec. As the slaughter decimated warring armies, one solution was to impose forced conscription on the white working class of Canada.

But another strategy was the War Measures Act, a federal statute adopted by Parliament in 1914, to maintain "security and order". The War Measures Act gave sweeping emergency powers to the federal Cabinet, allowing it to govern by decree when it perceived the existence of "war, invasion or insurrection, real or apprehended." During the First World War, the Act was used to imprison Canadians of German, Ukrainian and Slavic descent, i.e. perceived traitor populations. It was next in force from 1939 to 1945, to imprison Japanese Canadians and confiscate their property, and to jail over 200 communist and left-wing trade union leaders. The Act was dusted off again during the "October Crisis" of 1970, when a state of "apprehended insurrection" was declared to exist in Quebec, in response to two kidnappings by the Front de Liberation du Quebec. More than 450 people were arrested, including hundreds of left-wing and labour activists with no connections to the FLQ; most were later released without any charges. But it took until 1988 to repeal the War Measures Act, which was replaced by the Emergencies Act, giving more limited and specific security powers to the federal government.

There isn't enough space here to go into the resurgence of racism and Islamophobia which followed the 9-11 attacks in the USA,

except to note that from that time, Muslims and Arabs in Canada have been treated with grave suspicion, i.e. as "potential terrorists" subject to police monitoring of their organizations, much closer inspection at airports, etc.

In the wake of the *Charlie Hebdo* killings, the threat to allow "preventive arrests" escalates the very real tradition of racist scapegoating to a new and dangerous level. And it revives a very old, well-established "Canadian value" - the belief that certain arbitrarily chosen sections of the population are by definition not truly Canadian. That was the accusation levelled under the War Measures Act against people of German, Austrian, Ukrainian, Japanese and other national origins, as well as against many who were openly critical of corporations and governments. In none of these cases was there ever any proven attempt to attack the Canadian state. Similarly today, random violent acts by a tiny handful of individuals do not translate into any threat requiring governments to scrap democratic rights and civil liberties.

In fact, it could well be argued that one genuine Canadian value is the tradition of resisting arbitrary state attacks on the right to express dissent. That's a tradition which is well worth keeping alive in these dangerous and confusing times.

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

Christ, Muhammad & Gandhi 'offended' status quo to change the world!

Terrorism in the name of religion is at war with us. It is at war against reason. It wants to intimidate us back into the dark age of unreason and blind obeisance to religious authority; such authority as perceived legitimate by the terrorists. It uses an illegitimate and self induced sense of offendedness as an excuse for its attacks.

Theocratic fascists, the terrorists usually follow a literal interpretation or a distorted view of the scriptures not shared by their peace loving coreligionists. Nevertheless all the theocratic terrorists do claim to follow their respective religions. From the Toronto 18 to the 2014 shooting on Parliament Hill in Ottawa, Canada has witnessed its own share of attacks in which at least a version of Islam appears to have played a role. The Air India terrorists accused were all Sikhs. The one accused who was convicted of manufacturing the bombs used to destroy Flight 182 is from all appearances a practising Sikh. The terrorists of 9/11 in New York, 26/11 in Mumbai, 7/7 in London, *Charlie Hebdo* and the Jewish supermarket in Paris all followed a form of Islam. Mahatma Gandhi's killer Nathu Ram Godse and the suspects in the bombing of India/Pakistan Friendship (Samjhauta) Express

claimed to follow a form of Hinduism. Those that have targeted prochoice and antiabortion doctors and activists have been known to be right wing Christians.

Some have argued poverty, mental health or alienation from their surroundings play a part in the radicalisation of terrorists. In other

The terrorists of 9/11 in New York, 26/11 in Mumbai, 7/7 in London, *Charlie Hebdo* and the Jewish supermarket in Paris all followed a form of Islam. Mahatma Gandhi's killer Nathu Ram Godse and the suspects in the bombing of India/Pakistan Friendship (Samjhauta) Express claimed to follow a form of Hinduism. Those that have targeted prochoice and antiabortion doctors and activists have been known to be right wing Christians.

words if everyone was rich and integrated in society we might have been spared the terrorism we now face. If I remember correctly the 9/11 terrorists were mostly rich Saudis. The 7/11 Mumbai attackers were educated and Pakistan trained. I know for a fact the Air India terrorists were not penniless. The one who issued the fatwa

against Salman Rushdie was not some poor soul from the streets of Paris but the all powerful Ayatollah of Iran.

It is not their socio economic condition but their sense of being offended at some or the other perceived insult to their religion that seems to motivate these faith professing terrorists. They are easily offended. Some of them are anti-Semitic. Most do not like our view of history, our interpretation of events or what we write. They dislike our satire, despise our intellectual irreverence or our plainspoken disagreement with their desire to mould our world in their own medieval image.

These terrorists have apologists in the most unlikely places. One such is Tariq Ramadan. He is a professor of contemporary Islamic studies at the University of Oxford. He feels compelled to condemn the butchery at *Charlie Hebdo* but complains "we are reacting emotionally because 12 people were killed in Paris, but there are hundreds being killed day in, and day out in Syria and Iraq, and still we send more bombs." Last I read ISIS was butchering Shias, Kurds, Christians and any Sunis that stood in its way to establishing an Islamo-fascist state. The West and some Middle Eastern powers came together to stem the ISIS advance

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and butchery. That is what the bombs were for. Canada has sent its own men and women into harm's way to destroy ISIS. Ramadan poses moral equivalency where none exists between the despicable deed of Kouachi brothers and the attempt to degrade and destroy ISIS. I always knew Tariq Ramadan was an apologist for theocratic fascism. He remains true to his Islamic Brotherhood pedigree.

The easily offended need to be challenged by all other religionists on their easy proclivity for such offendedness. The 'offendedness' becomes an excuse for the violence of the 'offended' upon those the terrorists despise for their audacity to differ. Salman Rushdie says "respect for religion" has become a code for "fear of religion". The terrorist are merchants of that fear. With such fear they hope to make us dumb witnesses to their march backwards to medieval darkness.

Some of these terrorists and their sympathisers try to use the cover of multiculturalism to silence their critics. But multiculturalism can't be a substitute for shared values of freedom and democracy in our society. There can be no real democracy without freedom of expression. Freedom to satirise, write, speak and draw is fundamental to our way of life. No religion must be allowed to arrogate to itself the power and licence to kill or censor expression it may dislike. For those that want to kill satirists of free satire, satire that we have come to expect and accept, we must stand firm and continue to satirise them into the dustbin of history.

The theocratic terrorists must remember that tolerating a certain degree of offendedness is a price we all have to pay for our freedoms. All change is accompanied by a certain degree of offendedness. In their own time and in their own ways Christ, Muhammad, Gandhi and Martin Luther King offended the establishment and the status quo. It has always been so and it will always be thus.

That the barrels of the terrorists' guns will silence people is a pipedream. Theocratic totalitarianism won't long escape the inevitable fate of Hitler's

fascism. In the end free expression of the pen, pencil and the human heart will silence the guns. Peace shall reign! Freedom shall endure!! Jesuis libre!!!

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.

MP Jinny Sims sends Open Letter to CIC Minister Chris Alexander

Newton-North Delta Member of Parliament Jinny Sims, has sent an "Open Letter" to federal Citizenship and Immigration Canada Minister Chris Alexander, raising the problem of visa refusals to families during terminal illness or following the death of a loved one. *Radical Desi* reprints the text of this Open Letter, to help draw attention to this serious issue.

January 16, 2015

**Minister Chris Alexander,
Citizenship and Immigration
Canada**

**365 Laurier Avenue West,
Ottawa, ON, K1A 1L1**

Dear Minister Alexander,

I am writing on behalf of my constituents in order to express their frustration and sadness when confronted with the difficulty of visiting family members in Canada, particularly during times of illness

and death.

I have had to face many constituents frustrated with their inability to have close family members come to Canada for a final visit with parents, children or siblings. I do my best to help them with these applications by writing support letters and contacting staff at CIC, but, too often, these applications are denied.

In just the last month, I have seen a case of a daughter unable to visit her mother before her death and who was again refused when she applied for a TRV to attend the funeral. In the same month, a son was unable to visit his father in the hospital prior to his death and was, also, denied a visa to attend the funeral. While the rest of the community was celebrating Christmas and the New Year, these families were dealt the double blow of the death of a family member and the struggle with the Canadian

Immigration system.

These cases are neither unique nor rare. I have dealt with far too many grieving families who are given the further difficulty of visa refusals at such a difficult time. They approach my office upon receiving the news that a close family member will not be able to be present with them to share both their grief and support.

We must work together to create an immigration system that is compassionate and understanding. Too often those who have a genuine need to visit Canada are subject to regulations that are neither transparent nor consistent. I ask you to take on the important task of delivering compassionate, consistent and fair treatment of Canadian families in times of crisis and grief.

Sincerely,

**Jinny Sims, MP for Newton-North
Delta**

Immigration authorities accused of denying visas to relatives of Indo Canadians in the time of crisis

A tearful Harbhajan Kaur Binning sits in the office of opposition NDP MP from Surrey-Newton, Jinny Sims, with a hope to get her son in India a visa so that he can attend the funeral of his brother.

One of Binning's sons had died, and she has been running from pillar to post to get a visa for her second son, so he could come here and say a final goodbye to his sibling. "All I have been told that he might not return," she says as her voice chokes while talking to the media.

Binning is not alone in facing difficulty in bringing her son to Canada in an emergency situation. She was one of the families paraded before the press by Sims.

Gurpal Singh Kambo has lost her mother recently. While she was hospitalized, his brother in India had applied for a visa to visit her, but his application was declined. And after she passed away, the authorities once again refused to grant him a visa.

Their stories all have one common thread; either they have lost someone in the family or have somebody on the death bed. In spite of all this, Sims claims that immigration officials have shown no compassion toward the applicants. "Those making applications are being denied visas on the basis of lack of travel history or insufficient funds." She also

acknowledges that there have been a few cases where applicants had abused the privilege of visas in the past, but she strongly argues that the entire community cannot be painted with one brush. "Those

Their stories all have one common thread; either they have lost someone in the family or have somebody on the death bed. In spite of all this, Sims claims that immigration officials have shown no compassion toward the applicants. "Those making applications are being denied visas on the basis of lack of travel history or insufficient funds." She also acknowledges that there have been a few cases where applicants had abused the privilege of visas in the past, but she strongly argues that the entire community cannot be painted with one brush. "Those who abuse the system must be punished, but you cannot persecute everyone because of a few bad apples."

who abuse the system must be punished, but you cannot persecute everyone because of a few bad apples."

Sims recently wrote an open letter to Minister of Immigration and Citizenship Chris Alexander, seeking his intervention in such matters. "Too often those who have a genuine need to visit Canada are

subject to regulations that are neither transparent nor consistent. I ask you to take on the important task of delivering compassionate, consistent and fair treatment of Canadian families in times of crisis and grief," she noted.

The office of the Minister did not respond to an email that was sent for his comment. The issue has emerged as Indo-Canadians commemorate the centenary of the hanging of Mewa Singh. Mewa Singh was executed in January 1915 for assassinating controversial immigration inspector William Hopkinson, who was instrumental behind anti-immigrant policies. Back then, Indian immigrants were not allowed to bring in their families, and in 1914, the Komagata Maru vessel carrying over 300 passengers was forced to return under the discriminatory immigration laws designed to discourage permanent settlement of Indians in this part of the world. Interestingly, Prime Minister Stephen Harper apologized for the Komagata Maru incident in 2008.

Surinder Singh Takhar whose sister was denied a visa, bluntly described the government as "garbage". He questioned, "What wrong we did?" His sister had applied for a visa so that she could look after her sister-in-law, who was suffering from a brain tumor.

-RDNB

Mewa Singh's 100th martyrdom day observed

Braving cold weather and drizzling, close to 1,000 people participated in a commemorative walk organized to mark 100 years of the martyrdom of Bhai Mewa Singh – the first Indian revolutionary to be hanged in Canada on January 11, 1915.

The walk was held under the aegis of Sukh Sagar Gurdwara in the city of New Westminster- where Mewa Singh was executed for assassinating a controversial Immigration Inspector William Hopkinson.

Children and women, besides seniors joined the march. All along the walk that started from the Anvil Center that is close to the site where Mewa Singh was hanged to the Quay market, participants chanted hymns from the Sikh scriptures. To make it more spectacular, the organizers picked hymns that were actually chanted by Mewa Singh before being hanged.

Mewa Singh had avenged the

sacrilege of the Sikh temple and the cold blooded murder of Bhai Bhaag Singh – who was the towering leader of the Ghadar Party in Vancouver. The bloody event was the culmination of the Komagata Maru episode. The Japanese vessel carrying over 300 South Asian passengers was forced to return in July, 1914 under the discriminatory immigration laws. The current Prime Minister Stephen Harper has already apologized for that incident. Following the Komagata Maru affair, a fight between the pro establishment faction of the South Asians and the radical political activists intensified. As a result, Hopkinson's mole in the community, Bela Singh went inside the Vancouver Sikh temple and fatally shot Bhaag Singh and Badan Singh. Bhaag Singh had left behind two orphaned children as his wife had died sometime ago. Mewa Singh was deeply pained by the tragedy and took upon himself the task of murdering Hopkinson in October, 2014. He had no regrets for doing so

and admitted his action in the court. Being a devout Sikh he chanted prayers while being taken to the scaffold.

The historic walk symbolically covered the route from where his body was taken for cremation. Those who attended the event included Raj Toor – whose maternal grandfather Puran Singh Janetpura was aboard the Komagata Maru. Manjit Singh Dhillon – whose grandfather was a Ghadar Party activist, was also in attendance.

In the meantime, series of events were held in commemoration of Mewa Singh in other parts of the lower mainland. Special prayers were held at Gurdwara Dashmesh Darbar in Surrey and Ross Street Sikh temple in Vancouver. Prof. Mohan Singh Memorial Foundation held a ceremony at the site of the hanging that morning. A moment of silence was observed at 7:45 am – the time of Mewa Singh's hanging.

-RDNB

Dosanjh receives civil courage award

Former BC Premier Ujjal Dosanjh has received a bravery award from the Wallenberg-Sugihara Civil Courage Society (WSCCS) for standing up against terrorism and violence.

Lt. Governor Judith Guichan presented Dosanjh with the Civil Courage Award on the occasion of Raoul Wallenberg Day at a well attended event held at Wosk Auditorium on January 18. Dosanjh is the first recipient of the award established in the name of Raoul Wallenberg and Chiune Sugihara - two men who risked their lives by saving the lives of Jews during World War II.

According to WSCCS Director Deborah Ross-Grayman, Dosanjh was selected for his outspokenness against Sikh extremists during the

1980s. Dosanjh was physically assaulted for criticizing the violent activities of the supporters of Khalistan, an imaginary Sikh homeland. There were a few prominent moderate Sikhs in attendance. Dosanjh's wife and their grandchildren were also present.

Addressing the gathering, Dosanjh said that he was accepting this award in the name of the victims of recent attacks on the offices of *Charlie Hebdo* magazine and a Jewish supermarket in Paris. The incident which is blamed on Islamic extremists left at least 12 people dead. Earlier, a moment of silence was also observed in memory of the victims of Paris attacks. Citing the Air India bombings that left 331 people dead

in 1985, and recent attacks that left two soldiers dead in Ottawa and Quebec, Dosanjh said that Canada has not been a stranger to terrorism. "Terrorism in the name of religion is at war with us. It's a war with reason," he warned. Describing the religious extremists as "infidels", he added, "They may be loyal to the distorted version of their professed faith. They are certainly not loyal to common humanity."

Dosanjh has been criticizing religious fanaticism through his blog these days. He was in the news for condemning the growing activities of Hindu fundamentalists under the Modi government in India.

-RDNB

End of an era

India suffered a great loss on its Republic Day when renowned cartoonist R.K. Laxman passed away at the age of 94 after suffering from organ failure. Laxman was known for creating "The Common Man", a cartoon character who appeared on the pages of *The Times of India*. His comic strip "You Said It" appeared in the reputed daily since 1951. The Common Man acted as silent witness to political and economical events and represented the ordinary masses of India. As a cartoonist, Laxman never shied from hitting at issues, like social ills, inequality, poverty, corruption or tyranny of the state. He made a hard hitting cartoon depicting the sense of victory among the Hindu fundamentalists after the current Prime Minister Narendra Modi won the provincial election in Gujarat in the aftermath of the anti-Muslim pogrom in 2002. Modi was the Chief Minister of the state when anti-Muslim violence broke out after a train carrying Hindu pilgrims was burnt leaving over 50 people dead. After the Gujarat police blamed Muslim extremists for the incident, a well-organized massacre of Muslims began allegedly at the behest of the Modi government, which was re-elected to power after the violence. However, Modi remarked on Laxman's death, "India will miss you." In 2002, when Laxman was given a lifetime achievement award, he said, "The common man has not changed in the last five decades, and will not change. If he does, then he will become a terrorist.... He represents the silent majority of India, who have no choice." Ironically, he breathed his last on January 26, while India was celebrating Republic Day, as the gap between the rich and the poor continues to grow, and the secularism enshrined in the Indian constitution remains under threat from the Hindu right. As a tribute to Laxman, *Radical Desi* has decided to publish some of his selected cartoons on these pages.

R.K.Laxman, nation's uncrowned conscience keeper

R.K. Laxman, considered by many as one of the world's greatest cartoonists, was an institution unto himself, indisputably the uncrowned conscience keeper of the nation. No politician or minister, however high or mighty, escaped his pointed satire, conveyed through a few deft strokes of his brush, especially if they committed an act of impropriety or indiscretion.

Laxman's Common Man, who graced the front pages of *The Times of India* for more than five decades, under "You Said It" acquired an iconic stature of its own. These pocket cartoons not only conveyed the pulse of a nation, but also unfailingly delivered powerful messages. At the same time they mirrored the hopes and aspirations, follies and foibles of a society in transition.

The cartoons of Laxman, who died on Jan. 26, became the defining moments in nation's history, as for instance, the one on Aryabhata, India's first satellite. A couple of middle-aged office-goers are waiting at a bus stop. One of them wants to know the time. As soon as the other looks at his watch and answers, the questioner looks skywards, exclaims: "Aryabhata must have completed one orbit by now."

His huge canvas spanned local, national and global personalities and issues, born out of his deep understanding of the cross currents shaping the world. His take on Angolan crisis in which both the super powers fought through proxies, at the height of the Cold

War, shall remain among his many innovative idea each day," he said. unforgettable cartoons.

The three-column illustration depicts Leonid Brezhnev and Jimmy Carter, presidents of erstwhile USSR and US, who are stealthily stepping across the coast of Angola, both armed and in the guise of burglars. Carter cries "thief-thief" as soon as he spots his burly opposite number. It exposes their double-speak and evokes laughter at the irony. These cartoons speak volumes about Laxman's capacity to convey complex geopolitical realities in his characteristic style.

Laxman's cartoons, undoubtedly the outcome of a brilliant mind, also entailed sheer hard work. It meant isolating himself for six hour daily, neither speaking nor listening to anyone during the period. "Searching for new ideas is an endless process. You have to come up with new and

Some of the tomes showcasing Laxman's perspective also include the one which appeared just after the 1971 India-Pakistan war, in three columns, in his inimitable style. General Yayha Khan, pointing to the stack of destroyed Pakistani tanks and planes in the background, tells Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, with a smile: "Have I not made it seem like a thousand-year war," (which only lasted 14 days). Bhutto often boasted about waging a millennial war against India.

Laxman, the youngest of six siblings, was born Oct 24, 1921, in Mysore. He showed promise very early in life. The illustrations in *The Strand*, *Punch*, *Bystander* and *Tit-Bits*, reputed British magazines, spurred his innate talent which found an outlet in his own house. He drew on its floor, walls and doors,

sketched caricatures of his school teachers. Sir David Low, the world-famous cartoonist whose sketches also appeared in *The Hindu*, also influenced him.

Laxman lost his father, a headmaster, in childhood to the after-effects of a paralytic stroke, which he suffered a year earlier. The family elders stepped in and took responsibility for his children's upbringing and schooling.

Refused admission to the J.J. School of Art in Mumbai, on the grounds that he lacked requisite talent, Laxman joined the Maharaja's College in Mysore. While doing his graduation in arts, he began to illustrate the stories of elder sibling R.K. Narayan, which appeared in *The*

Hindu. He contributed cartoons to *Swatantra*, a local daily. Later, he worked for *Swarajya* and *Blitz*. Laxman also drew cartoons for *Koravanji*, the Kannada humour magazine.

But his stint with the *Free Press Journal*, where he worked with Bal Thackeray, happened to be his first full-time job. In 1951 Laxman joined *The Times of India*, Mumbai, which he served for more than 50 years, until a stroke in September 2003 left him partially paralyzed.

While receiving the Lifetime Achievement Award in Bangalore in February 2002, Laxman observed, "The 'Common Man' has not changed in the last five decades, and will not change. If he does, then he will

become a terrorist... He represents the silent majority of India, who have no voice."

Ajit Ninan, who worked for *India Today* and *Outlook* as a cartoonist, in an interview with the 'Star of Mysore' in July 2012 rated Laxman the best in India, "because he was a typical South Indian genius. He was a big crowd-puller and by nature he was funny, sharp and witty".

Laxman was married to Bharatanatyam exponent and actress Kumari Kamala Laxman, whom he divorced. Later, he married Kamala Laxman, who wrote children's books. They moved to Pune where he breathed his last.

Courtesy : IANS

Tale of two trains

The month of February brings to me two ugly memories: the burning of the Sabarmati Express train in 2002, and the bombing of Samjhauta Rail in 2007. Both incidents happened at different times and locations, but had one thing in common. They occurred during the month of February and resulted in heavy loss of human lives. Apart from the commonality of human tragedy in both stories, other startling facts behind these incidents reflect very badly on the Indian establishment.

On February 27, 2002, the Sabarmati Express train carrying Hindu pilgrims was allegedly torched by Muslim fundamentalists at Godhra station in Gujarat, India. This resulted in the deaths of 59 passengers. Although one commission of enquiry found that it was an accident, the Gujarat government led by the Hindu nationalist Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) blamed Pakistan-supported Islamic extremists. The incident was followed by a well orchestrated anti-Muslim pogrom across the state. Years later, 31 people said to be involved in attacking the Sabarmati Express were convicted after being tried for terrorism. That was not the case with the Hindu fundamentalists accused of engineering violence against Muslims.

On February 18, 2007, Samjhauta rail, carrying passengers

to Pakistan, was bombed near Panipat, Haryana. As a result 68 people died, most of them Pakistanis. The rail service connects the two neighbouring countries which have fought at least two wars. The Indian authorities prematurely blamed Pakistan-based Islamic extremists for carrying out the attack. However, much to the embarrassment of the Indian government, it later emerged during an unrelated investigation that this was the handiwork of extremists who want to establish a Hindu state in India. The authorities had jumped the gun without honestly looking into all possible angles of investigation. After all, the Hindu fanatics have always opposed bus or rail links with Pakistan. Thanks to the honesty and integrity of police officers, who were not influenced by the prejudices of the dominant society, the Hindu extremists involved in the crime now face charges.

The consequences of these two unrelated tragic events represent the strong anti-Muslim bias which is deeply entrenched in the psyche behind the political system and law enforcement agencies of a country which is otherwise known as world's largest secular democracy. In the first instance, the entire Muslim community was punished for an incident blamed on Islamic extremists. So much so, the police were seen helping the goons

involved in anti-Muslim violence. And later, those blamed for torching the train were tried for terrorism, while those involved in post-Godhra violence were never seen as terrorists. In the second instance, the bombing was blamed on Islamic extremists without looking into other possibilities. The "Hindu state" supporters were given free run by the intelligence apparatus that has continued to stereotype the Muslim community over the years. It has now been revealed that the Hindu extremists wanted to avenge the bombings done by Muslim fundamentalists by indulging in similar tactics.

The apologists of the BJP often bring up the Godhra incident to justify or rationalize the anti-Muslim massacre in Gujarat. In that case, would it have been justified if Hindus were murdered in Pakistan to avenge the deaths of Pakistani passengers in the Samjhauta incident?

They also go to the extent of denying that Hindus can ever indulge in terrorism, as if terrorism is only associated with Islam. Despite revelations of involvement by ultra-Hindu nationalists in bomb making and terror activities since the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi by a Hindu fascist in 1948, Indian authorities have been in a state of deliberate denial. Gandhi was murdered by Nathuram Godse, a supporter of the ultra Hindu nationalist body Rashtriya Swayam

COMMENT

Sewak Sangh (RSS). He has a big following among many Hindu nationalists. Though Gandhi was a practicing Hindu, he was opposed to Hindu theocracy and that's the reason why he was murdered.

The fact remains that human lives were lost in both the Sabarmati incident and Samjhauta blast. The way Hindu nationalists have tried to capitalize on one tragedy and committed the other for narrow political ends is certainly problematic. But more troublesome is the response of the so-called secular state, which did not play a pro-active impartial role in protecting the Muslim minority and punishing the Hindu right. Recently when a Pakistani court gave bail to one of the potential suspects behind the 2008 terror attack on Mumbai, the Indian government reacted strongly. The attackers came from Pakistan by sea and attacked Mumbai on November 26,

2008, killing over 100 people. What about the 68 deaths in the Samjhauta blast? Is the Indian government serious about dealing with the pro-Hindu state terrorists? If the Pakistani establishment is patronizing anti-India Islamic terrorists, it can be argued that the Indian establishment is feeding that demon across the border by allowing the mass murderers of Indian Muslims to go scot free, and ignoring the activities of pro-Hindu nation terror networks. And if this was not enough, the police in Gujarat recently did a drill against terrorism by making the mock terrorists wear Muslim caps. If the police are really unbiased, why were the mock terrorists not made to wear Khaki shorts which are an important part of the uniform of the RSS cadre?

World leaders must wake up to recognize this ugly reality. All the tough talking against terrorism is

meaningless if it is selective and targeted at just one community. If the western powers are really serious about tackling terrorism, their list must expand to include those indulging in terrorism in the name of a Hindu state. Western leaders visiting India never miss an opportunity to recognize Gandhi. How can they be so naïve about the killers of Gandhi? It's time to wake up and deal with terrorism with an open mind rather than confining the "war on terror" to a particular region and targeting one particular religious community, with eyes on natural resources and an urge to expand free market. When the acts of terrorism committed in the name of a Hindu state or Zionism will enter their collective consciousness, only time will tell.

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

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Remembering unsung Muslim heroes of the Ghadar movement

This February marks 100 years of a mutiny in the British army that took place under the influence of the Ghadar Party.

The majority of those who participated in the rebellion that rocked Singapore were Muslim soldiers. The uprising took place on February 15, 1915. Two Muslim platoons, Fifth Light Infantry and Malay Guide, were posted in Singapore around that time.

However, the British government never came to their aid in a situation of racial violence from white supremacists. They soon realized that the root cause of their sufferings abroad was the British occupation of India. As a result they started getting organized to fight back against racism and colonialism. Thus, the Ghadar Party was formed with a mandate to go to India and launch an armed rebellion with the help of Indian soldiers in the British

was not ready for a radical movement. Thus, the attempted rebellion was suppressed by the authorities. Many Ghadar activists were arrested and hanged, while others had to serve life imprisonments.

On way to India, many halted in Singapore and propagated against the British Empire, encouraging the Indian soldiers to leave their jobs and join the revolution. They had already

The Ghadar Party, a group of South Asian radical political activists, was established in the US in 1913. The party came into being in response to racism against the South Asian immigrants who had moved to North America for a better livelihood. These immigrants had come to the US and Canada as British subjects. Many had previously served in the British army and not surprisingly believed in the fairness of the British Empire.

army. Although the majority of the Ghadar activists were Sikhs, the party believed in secularism and wanted to establish an egalitarian society in post-British India.

In 1914, when the British were locked in war with Germany, these activists thought that it was the right time to return and launch a revolt with the help of the masses and those serving in the army. The political situation in India was not that encouraging, and the public

built connections in the Muslim platoons, and Ghadar literature was being distributed among the soldiers. In the meantime, Turkey's opposition to Britain had also influenced these Muslim soldiers, and the Ghadar Party took advantage of that.

Unfortunately, the British army came to know about the plan and transferred the Malay Guide to Penang. But the authorities somehow could not figure out that

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the Fifth Light Infantry had already fixed February 15 as the date for rebellion. The platoon was informed that they had to leave for Hong Kong the next morning. As the soldiers were being asked to deposit their ammunition that evening they revolted, killing one officer. This led to indiscriminate killings of white officers. The mutineers occupied the barracks and formed three groups, one of which marched to the German prisoners' camp, while the second headed to the headquarters, and a third party went into the city. But the German prisoners refused to join the uprising. In the end, the British government was able to suppress the rebellion and 44 mutineers were executed. Out of these, 41 were shot to death publicly.

The British documents acknowledge that these mutineers were influenced by the Ghadar Party.

The centenary of the Singapore mutiny is a reminder of the Muslims' participation in the freedom movement, something that the Hindu right deliberately denies. These days, when Hindu fundamentalists are emboldened by the election of the Hindu nationalist Bhartiya Janata Party government with a brute majority, the assaults on Muslims have increased, in the form of religious conversion campaigns designed to bring them into the Hindu fold. Often Muslims are branded as traitors and terrorists, and their loyalties are questioned. That the Muslims were part of the Ghadar movement needs to be recognized

to dispel this myth. The story also has lessons for supporters of the imaginary Sikh homeland of Khalistan, who continue to distort the image of the Ghadar movement. Because the majority of Ghadar activists were Sikhs, the Khalistanis are determined to present the Ghadar movement as a Sikh struggle. The secular image of the Ghadar Party is therefore constantly under attack from both Hindu and Sikh religious extremists. The party had many prominent non-Sikh faces, reflecting its humanist and inclusive character, something that remains missing in theocratic, exclusionist and counter-revolutionary movements.

-RDNB

Return mockery with mockery

On a recent appearance on Real Time With Bill Maher, Salman Rushdie called them "the Butt Brigade", I just use the vernacular: hypocrites. You know who I mean, the ones who say "well of course freedom of speech is essential, butt..." or "sure you have the right to mock religion, butt..." A friend recently said it should not be "but" but "and". "Freedom of speech is important, and, we should be careful of what we say". That is a distinction without a difference, a semantic trick that gets us nowhere. Now apparently we can add The Vicar of Christ to the list. In a recent interview Pope Francis is quoted, "there are limits to freedom of speech, especially when it insults or ridicules someone's faith." He compared insulting one's faith to insulting one's mother. Where to begin?

Never mind that your mother is real and the god of Catholicism has yet to be proved, never mind that if this god exists he surly does not need a meek Jesuit from Argentina to defend him, after all god has all the aces in this card game we call life. He can play his trump card any time he likes and win us heathen over, and at the risk of overextending the metaphor I am calling the Pope's bluff and asking him to let his god speak for himself, and... Crickets.

The Butt Brigade seems to have morphed into two camps. On the one hand there are the secularist who should know better but cow tow to religion, "we are afraid of 'offending'" they say when what they appear to be doing is just being afraid. The other camp, the ones we might expect to be offended, are the faithful.

It seems to me that the religious, upon hearing their deity has been mocked should be all; "hey, the man upstairs has my back, watch out for lighting bolts asshole". But they don't, they appoint themselves defenders of the god they trust in and just as the god of monotheism is a jealous and vengeful god, so too are its defenders. The tragic thing about the holy books is that there is no end of scripture to fall back on when justifying violence. "My god is down with some good old-time smitin', I am just doin' the lords work." And they do.

If the phrase "fight fire with fire" has any meaning it should be in the fight over freedom of speech. Ricky Gervais in a Facebook meme said it best (I paraphrase): "I am going to get on a crowded subway, unbutton my jacket and unleash a large dose of reason. People will be offended". In other words, the best reply to offensive speech is more speech. Irony and satire are not in

the theists quiver. Intimidation and censorship are the tools of the faithful, because they are cowardly; only a coward hides behind an ancient text to justify their intolerance. Only a coward answers clever with clout. I would love to see Hitches or Dawkins the subject of cartoons. Maybe they could be eating babies, or stuffing Origin Of Species in an unsuspecting child, priest-style, if that image isn't too offensive. Or how about offending Sam Harris with an attack on his recent foray into secular meditation. Picture the cartoon: Harris in lotus position, deep in his practice, a look of Buddhist-like calm on his face and the thought bubble "Maybe a pre-emptive nuclear strike... ohmmmm."

That is what decent civilized people should do, return mockery with mockery but that is not what we get. Instead they throw all their toys out of the pram and unleash a stream of indignation and petulance backed up with the underlying threat of violence. Few come out and say it but what else does "well you should have known better" or "what did you expect?" mean if not, "you had it coming"?

Speaking of which, what about those who should know better? What about my friends and associates in the atheist and secular world, many of whom owe their

||| VOICES FROM THE MARGINS

livelihood to the concept of free speech, a right they seem to let bend at the first indication of real world pain, under the guise of using restraint. What is their excuse? There is only one defense they seem to be able to mount and it always turns the blame back on those who exercise their free speech. Apparently we who mock religion are responsible for being attacked.

We live in societies that have flourished at the expense of the oppressed. That is true. It is also true that some in our society are systemically marginalized and shut out of the decision making process. So, what is the best way to integrate into the mainstream and become part of the process, where you have a real voice capable of legitimately putting forth grievances? Those are the questions that need to be answered if we are going to move forward and I don't pretend to have the answers, those will have to come from within the religious community and we should be there to help (see my last article). But what if forward is not where they want to go? What if their GPS is set on the 7th century? What do we do then? What do we do when the end game is not integration but subjugation? Or Submission?

Now I have to do the thing I hate to do but always needs doing so bear with me while I repeat again what I have said ad nauseam. Not all Muslims are seeking a 7th century Caliphate. There, now can we dispense with that useless rhetoric?

The fact is, an Imam in Yemen who calls for the death of cartoonists to avenge the prophet is

doing just that. To read more into it is to create a self-fulfilling prophecy, that we deserve violence rained down on us for being, well, western. Whatever that means. When an Islamist group calls itself "Books Forbidden" (the translation of Boko Haram), when young girls have acid is thrown in their faces and children of both sexes are murdered for the crime of seeking an education then we know we are dealing with people to whom free speech and education are truly the most fearful things in their small

petty world. They are not looking for an invitation into the comity of the civilized world; they want their prejudice and hate to become the norm. Their motivation has nothing to do with oppression or marginalization. Their motivation is to spread their religious ideology like a virus to all parts of the globe, unfortunately, infecting those who may actually be in dire circumstances beyond their control and sadly, they see comfort in the false certainty this infection provides.

■■■■ VOICES FROM THE MARGINS

So what do we do with persons who do not have reason and freedom in their lexicon? How do we get them "on our side"? I don't believe we can. We can only continue to use our freedom to speak as we like, using the dialectical approach, we resist the urge to spiral into an eye for an eye mentality. If they commit crimes they need to be apprehended and given due process. If they will not be taken alive, that is a choice we should honour. My only regret is they will never know the irony of dying needlessly, not that they would recognize the irony anyway.

I will end with the question I have not addressed. Can speech go too far? At what point is the curtaining of speech in the best interests of society, if ever? A careful reading of hate speech laws should answer that. No one has the right to incite violence against any person

or group of people. Libel and defamation laws protect persons, not ideas. Ideas should never have protection from speech. Ideas live or die by their merits. You do not deserve to die for having hateful or unpopular ideas, but your ideas can and in some circumstances should die, we might be richer for it.

Alors, Je suis pas Charlie I am not Charlie, instead, J'espere que je suis Charlie, I wish I was Charlie, I hope to be Charlie. I hope that if the circumstances presented themselves that I would have the courage and principals To Be Charlie, to put my life on the line for what I believe. I hope we come to the realization that slogans and marches are not going to end religious bullying and I hope those who belong to The Butt Brigade will realize that capitulation and deference to bad ideas will not win this war of ideas versus tyranny. Let

us use the pen, unreservedly and fearlessly as our first line of defense, and the sword, alas, only as a last line of defense.

We may not Be Charlie. But we should aspire to be. Too much is at stake.

Pat O'Brien has been a skeptic since he was 10 and an Atheist since he was 13 but it was not till he was in his 40's that he became active in the movement. Pat was the president of The Humanist Association of B.C., the president of Humanist Canada, an ambassador for Atheist Alliance International and is now on the board of Center For Inquiry Canada. Pat's day job is being Props Master in the film and television industry, he is married and lives in Vancouver.

Growing Godseism, not the naming of beer after Gandhi, should bother us

The Connecticut-based New England Brewery Company recently stirred a controversy after launching a beer named after Mahatma Gandhi, a towering leader of the pacifist movement in India. "Gandhi-Bot" sparked angry reaction from followers of his ideology both in India and other parts of the world. After all, Gandhi abhorred alcohol, which is prohibited in his birthplace of Gujarat. Those upset include Gandhi's descendants, who contemplated legal action.

It is true that Gandhi was opposed to alcoholism, but he was also opposed to many other things, such as violence, untouchability and religious intolerance. Those who are really upset with "Gandhi-Bot" should worry about much bigger challenges to the ideology of Gandhi in India. A beer bottle cannot actually harm Gandhi's philosophy or his stature which is larger than life. It may be a ridiculous or offensive idea to some, but it isn't as harmful to the society as problems like growing religious intolerance in India. Instead of focusing on these symbolic issues, the followers of Gandhi should use their collective energy to fight against those serious issues which can destabilize peace in the South Asian region.

Gandhi was murdered by

Nathuram Godse, a diehard Hindu fascist, for opposing violence against Muslims following India's partition in 1947. That year, when India gained independence from the British Empire, the country was divided on religious lines, as a result of which Muslim Pakistan came into being. Hindu fanatics began targeting Muslims on the Indian side of the border, while Hindus and Sikhs were targeted on the Pakistani side by Islamic fundamentalists.

Godse and his associates wanted to see India transformed into a Hindu state. Thanks to men like Gandhi, India chose to become a secularist state. Godse killed Gandhi for this reason. However, the matter did not end there, as the followers of Godse's doctrine of intolerance have grown over the years. The anti-Muslim pogrom that rocked Gujarat in 2002 was engineered by those who consider Godse a hero. Those who led the mobs were supporters

of the ruling Hindu nationalist Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP). The current Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi, was the Gujarat Chief Minister back then. The massacre followed the burning of a train carrying Hindu pilgrims, leaving over 50 dead. The incident was blamed on Islamic extremists. Ironically, Modi launched a hygiene campaign on Gandhi's birth anniversary last year. Recently, a BJP MP had described Godse as patriot, while a Hindu nationalist group has decided to install statue of Godse in Delhi.

If this was not enough, Hindu fundamentalists have started a campaign to forcibly convert Muslims and Christians into Hindus. Meanwhile, caste-based oppression against Dalits or so-called untouchables goes on unabated in different parts of India.

Right from the birth place of Gandhi to other parts of India, the threat of Godseism continues to grow. If the followers of Gandhi's ideology really care about what he preached, rather than wasting energy on trivial issues, they should get organized against the impending threat of ultra-Hindu nationalism, which has the potential to turn India into a theocracy where minorities will be unsafe.

-RDNB

