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Cover Picture: Jaswant Singh Khalra was a prominent human rights activist who was abducted and murdered by the Punjab police 20 years ago. This portrait was made by Surrey-based artist Jarnail Singh..

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

Director: Gurpreet Singh

Design & Layout: Rajpreet Singh

**RADICAL**  
DESI

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

~ Desmond Tutu

## Remembering a human rights defender

This September marks 20 years of the disappearance and murder of Jaswant Singh Khalra, a human rights activist who was silenced by the Indian police for investigating the extra-judicial killings of political activists and suspects. Khalra was trying to document cases of those who were abducted and then killed by the Punjab police during the height of Sikh militancy from 1984 to 1994. The Sikh militants were seeking to carve a separate homeland out of India through armed struggle. Undoubtedly, the Sikh extremists killed many innocent Hindus and their political opponents, but the police were given extra constitutional rights to deal with the militancy. In the name of a so-called "war against terrorism" and "national interest", the police routinely rounded up Sikhs and then killed them in staged shootouts with impunity. One may disagree with the Sikh separatists and their political ideology, but the state has no authority to take away human lives. The political extremists, after all, function outside the constitutional and legal boundaries, so anything can be expected from them. But the Indian state, whose constitution guarantees democracy and civil liberties, cannot be pardoned for following the same path. And that's exactly what happened during those dark days. The police became a tool in the hands of the ruling classes and systematically killed anyone they thought was a "threat to the nation". As a result of repressive policies to restore so-called peace in Punjab, even ordinary Sikhs practicing their religion were seen as potential suspects, in spite of the fact that the constitution ensures religious freedom. Leave aside killing hardcore militants involved in violence, even political activists working peacefully were not spared. So much so, lawyers defending the legal rights of the militants were kidnapped and killed by the police officers. Any voice of political dissent was crushed with the help of state violence. In return, police officers who indulged in state-sponsored terrorism were given gallantry awards and out of turn promotions. The law and civility demanded that those arrested should have been presented in the courts, which alone had the right to decide who was guilty. However, with the backing of the Indian state, the police became judges, deciding who was the criminal, and executing suspects in fake encounters to pocket the awards. As part of cover-ups to destroy evidence, those killed this way would be declared "unidentified", and their corpses often unceremoniously cremated as unclaimed. Khalra was trying to document these cases to expose the truth. He had gathered solid evidence of such practices at different crematoriums, and launched a petition seeking action against those involved in more than 2,000 murders. Since the government was not even listening to moderate voices within the Sikh community seeking to settle issues at the bottom of the insurgency, why would it tolerate the work being done by Khalra? He was abducted on September 6, 1995, and then killed by the police. Following an outcry and legal battle, the Central Bureau of Investigation came into the picture. This investigation led to the convictions of six police officers in 2005. Although 20 years have passed, there seems to be no possibility of convictions of topmost police officers, or any political leader who gave sanction to this murder. The full investigation of disappearances and murders by the police remains a distant dream. Without an honest and transparent investigation, there is almost no chance to punish officers involved in systemic violence. Ironically, Khalra was associated with the ruling Akali Dal in Punjab, which has dashed all hopes of closure and justice by appointing Sumedh Singh Saini as Director General of Police. Saini is widely blamed for human rights abuses during the militancy in the state. Akali Dal, which has always projected itself as the custodian of Sikh interests, is running the state government in partnership with the Hindu nationalist Bhartiya Janata Party, which has always stonewalled attempts to bring closure to such cases. Akali Dal has never fulfilled its promise to hold a judicial probe into police officers involved in human rights violations. Rather, controversial officers continue to enjoy

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protection under the present government led by Chief Minister Parkash Singh Badal. Interestingly, Badal himself was in power back in 1970 when ultra-leftist activists were killed in similar fashion by the police in Punjab. The chances of justice are therefore grim. On Khalra's 20th death anniversary, those who care for human rights must resolve to keep his legacy alive. Those at the top level of government who ordered his killing must be prosecuted, and his mission of investigating the cases of unceremonious cremations should continue. More importantly, this trend was not confined to Punjab. Wherever there has been political dissent in India, be it Kashmir, where mass graves have been found, or North East and central India where a Maoist insurgency goes on, the security forces have killed people without fear. Custodial tortures, rapes and extra-judicial killings have become an ugly reality in the lives of religious minorities and oppressed groups. The brazen trampling by police of political dissent and public demonstrations has become a convention in India. State-sponsored vigilante groups also continue to terrorize political activists with the help of police. An honest inquiry into many mysterious killings in Punjab during the disturbances was never done. Killings were conveniently blamed on the militants, without looking into other possibilities, such as involvement of state vigilante groups or vested interests. Another important dimension of the whole episode is that it reveals a pattern where the police unfairly treat religious minorities. We rarely hear stories of Hindu extremists getting killed in staged encounters. Seeking to turn India into a Hindu theocracy, these extremists also indulge in violence, but it's mostly Sikh and Muslim extremists who die at the hands of the police or are subjected to vigilante justice. This reflects very badly on a secularist state like India. Sustained efforts to make the police and security agencies accountable for attacking the rights of citizens must continue as a real tribute to Khalra, whom activist and author Ram Narayan Kumar rightly described as a "martyr for human rights".

-Editors

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## Body Count 2,098

**How an activist who refused to seek asylum in Canada was killed by the Indian state**

In 1995, Sikhs in Toronto advised a human rights activist visiting Canada to remain here, since his life was in danger in India. Jaswant Singh Khalra had launched a petition seeking prosecution of Indian police officers accused of murdering at least 2,097 people from 1984-1994. This was the time when an armed struggle for a separate Sikh homeland was at its peak in Punjab. To curb the movement, police were given special powers and protection. Thousands of Sikhs were murdered in staged shootouts, and their bodies were routinely cremated as unclaimed. Khalra had started his investigation despite police threats of turning him into another unclaimed corpse. While he was in Canada to make the South Asian Diaspora aware of the gravity of the situation, local supporters wanted him to stay and seek political asylum. But Khalra was determined to return and continue his fight. His resolve led to his abduction on September 6, 1995 from outside his home in Amritsar. He became another number. His body was never found, and he was added to his list of unclaimed cremations, taking the toll to 2,098.

Twenty years have passed, but many questions remain

unanswered behind his murder.

Khalra was no ordinary man. His grandfather Harnam Singh was aboard the *Komagata Maru* which was forced to return by the Canadian government in 1914. The government now acknowledges that it was an act of discrimination

against over 300 South Asian immigrants aboard the Japanese vessel. The Canadian authorities wanted to discourage South Asians from permanent settlement in BC as part of a racist policy of keeping Canada a "white man's country". Harnam Singh and others on the

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ship had travelled to Vancouver as British subjects to earn a better livelihood. After all, India was a British colony back then, and BC was part of the British Empire. But these men were not allowed to disembark. The incident transformed many of the passengers into political activists when they returned after remaining stranded in Burrard Inlet for two months. They were convinced that the root cause of this discriminatory attitude was the foreign occupation of their home country. Harnam Singh became a part of the Ghadar Party, a group of South Asian radicals formed in North America, which believed in an armed rebellion against the British rulers in India and fought against racism in the foreign land. He was arrested and charged for conspiracy against the British Empire, but acquitted. He was later interned in his own house until 1922. Afterwards he went to Shanghai, where he continued his revolutionary activities and never returned. Almost a century later, an opportunity came for Harnam Singh's grandson to settle down in Canada to escape death. He refused to grab it, preferring to go back and pursue the struggle for social justice so greatly cherished by the Ghadar Party, whose activists continued their activities for social equality even after India gained official independence in 1947. Some even rejected this independence as a "mere transfer of power" between foreign and native rulers. The Ghadar Party had a vision to establish a secular and egalitarian

society in post-British India.

That Khalra inherited a sense of activism from his grandfather is very much visible from his own record. Born in 1952 in Amritsar, Khalra was also influenced by Sikh traditions of resistance from his ancestors, followers of Banda Singh Bahadur, a seventeenth century Sikh warrior. He joined the radical left movement during the late 1960s. Inspired by the ideology of his grandfather, he started taking interest in political activism in his college days. He became a spokesman for the Punjab Student Union, a leftist student body. He was in the forefront of many campaigns against corruption and abuse of power by the police. He once organized an action against the in-charge of a police station of his native village of Khalra for his involvement in molestation of a woman from an oppressed caste. He also opened a library in his village, and an office of Naujawan Bharat Sabha, a youth association launched by revolutionaries who followed the Ghadar ideology. He was inclined towards the ultra-leftist Naxalite movement that started in the village of Naxalbari in West Bengal, an uprising by land tillers that gradually spread to different parts of India, including Punjab. Its supporters believed in class change through armed resistance. Bujha Singh, a former Ghadar Party activist, was one of the leaders of the Naxalite movement in Punjab. Incidentally, he was killed in 1970 in a staged shootout by the

Punjab police, at the age of 82, a fate met by Khalra many years later. Punjab's current Chief Minister Parkash Singh Badal was governing the state back then, and is widely blamed for the extra-judicial killings of Naxalites.

Worried about the safety of his son, Khalra's father suggested that if he really wanted to be a leader, he should join the Akali Dal or the Congress, the two parties which traditionally dominate the political landscape of Punjab. That happened years later, when Khalra became the leader of the human rights wing of Akali Dal, the party led by Badal, whose government was accused of eliminating Naxalites in the 1970s. This ironic development can be partly attributed to his strong cultural ties with the Sikh faith that came under assault from the Indian government following Akali agitation. Another possible explanation of the change of heart is the active participation by Akali Dal in an uprising against the

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emergency imposed by the Indian government in 1975. The era of emergency saw press censorship and harsh measures to curb civil liberties. Khalra was impressed by the challenge thrown by the Akali Dal to these dictatorial ways of the government.

During the late 1970s, the Akali Dal, which claims to be the custodian of Sikh interests, was seeking some extra rights for Punjab and the Sikh religious minority in India. The central government under the Congress party remained adamant. Instead of resolving the crisis through dialogue, it propped up a militant faction of the Sikhs as a counterweight to Akali Dal. This led to start of a violent campaign parallel to the peaceful agitation of Akali Dal. All this turned the political situation in Punjab ugly. The Golden Temple Complex in Amritsar, the holiest shrine of the Sikhs, was turned into a fortress by the militants. Due to the compulsions of theocratic politics, the Akali Dal found it hard to distance itself from the militants and started appeasing them. The Akali Dal controlled the body that governs the Golden Temple Complex, and allowed the extremists to turn the place of worship into a nerve centre of their activities. Slowly the militant movement got out of hand. Following a spate of killings of Hindus in Punjab, the government of India ordered a military attack on the Golden Temple Complex in June 1984, leading to deaths and massive

destruction of the buildings inside. This enraged the Sikh community and galvanized a movement for a separate Sikh state, which was not a popular demand until then. The separatist militants began indulging in large scale violence. In this charged political environment, Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi was assassinated by her Sikh bodyguards on October 31, 1984. Adding insult to injury, the Congress government organized anti-Sikh pogroms across India following



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Indira Gandhi's murder. All hopes of peace and normalcy died with these mass murders. Air India Flight 182 was bombed mid-air above the west coast of Ireland on June 23, 1985, a year after the bloody events of 1984. All 329 passengers aboard died in the crime blamed on Sikh separatists seeking revenge. The bomb used in the incident originated from Vancouver, where one Sikh separatist leader, Talwinder Singh Parmar, the alleged mastermind behind the bombing, was based. In the light of these incidents, police and security agencies were given extra powers to deal with extremism. The intensity of abductions and staged shootouts grew out of proportion. Thousands of Sikhs were routinely rounded up and killed without fair trials. Parmar, a potential Air India bombing suspect, was mysteriously killed by the Punjab police in 1992. He had by then returned to Punjab to pursue his campaign for a separate homeland. Lawyers defending the legal rights of the militants also became targets of police violence. Punjab remained under central rule during most of these years, in the absence of popular government. Then the Congress government came to power in Punjab under Beant Singh in 1992. Unlike previous Akali Dal governments of Punjab, the Congress was in no mood to compromise with the militants. Complaints of police brutality grew in numbers under Beant Singh's regime.

Undeterred by fear and intimidation, Khalra launched an investigation into the disappearances and murders by the police. He was playing with fire, since a Congress government was in power in Punjab and extra-judicial killings were the order of the day. Although Khalra committed himself to keep a watch on the police and security agencies that were targeting Sikhs, he never supported the methods of extremists who had

fortified the Golden Temple Complex, and once went on a hunger strike to protest against the killings of Hindus by the militants. He was opposed to oppression in any form, and established the Anti-Repression Front with a mandate to challenge violence by both state and non-state actors.

The turning point came into Khalra's life in 1994. When his personal friend Dara Singh was killed in a fake encounter by the police, and branded as an unidentified militant. The deceased was cremated in a temple crematorium in Amritsar. During his investigation of the case, Khalra stumbled over records showing that in 1992 alone, the police had cremated 300 unclaimed bodies. Eventually, he found how people were killed with impunity. The rules clearly said that it was the duty of the government to keep the pictures and personal belongings of an unclaimed body before

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cremation, for future identification by a relative of the deceased. However, these rules were largely ignored. Reports of disappearances kept pouring in, with many relatives still wondering what happened to those who went missing. Khalra then tried to gather more information from other crematoriums in the Amritsar district. After making these discoveries, he held a press conference in January 1995, giving the details of mass cremations in three municipalities to the media. It was estimated that more than 2,000 people were mysteriously killed in Amritsar district. If the investigation was stretched beyond Amritsar, the figure was likely to go up.

Khalra filed a petition in the Punjab and Haryana High Court seeking an investigation into the disappearances and murders. However, the court rejected the petition, saying he had no *locus standi* for filing it.

Obviously, the police did not take this lightly. Punjab Police Chief K.P.S. Gill came out with a very strong statement against these allegations. He obliquely accused human rights activists of working in the interest of militants aided and abetted by foreign agencies. If this was not enough, Khalra began receiving threats from police officers. One of them, Ajit Singh Sandhu, reportedly threatened to turn him into another unclaimed body. A highly controversial officer, Sandhu was blamed in many cases

of human rights abuses. He received an out-of-turn promotion during the militancy. The spate of litigations against Sandhu led to his arrest much later, and his high profile suicide in 1997.

In the light of these threats, Khalra made an appeal to the public and press, that if anything happened to him, only Gill and Beant Singh should be held responsible for his death, rather than blaming any junior police officer.

In June 1995 Khalra visited Toronto on the invitation of the World Sikh Organisation (WSO) to attend an annual parliamentary dinner in commemoration of the anniversary of the 1984 military invasion on the Golden Temple Complex. During this visit he made Canadian Sikhs aware of his research. According to one WSO leader, Prem Singh Vinning, around that time they began receiving calls from India suggesting that Khalra should remain in Canada, as his life would be in danger once he returned. Vinning, who was well connected with the Canadian government, recalls that a number of Sikhs pleaded with Khalra to apply for political asylum, but he remained determined to go back. This was despite the fact that the WSO is a strong lobby group. Back home, Khalra ignored suggestions to leave his home and shift elsewhere. He wanted to continue his work. Apprehensive about the danger to his life, he once asked his wife Paramjit Kaur whether she

would be able to raise their two children on her own if anything went wrong.

Three months after his return, he was washing his car outside his home near the Guru Nanak Dev University, where Paramjit Kaur was a librarian, when some men came in a van and picked him up on the pretext of seeking directions. An eyewitness called to tell her about the abduction. According to this account, Khalra was called by the occupants of the van to help them to locate an address on a paper slip. As he tried to read the slip he was forcibly pulled inside the vehicle and taken away to an unknown destination. When Paramjit Kaur returned, the water was still flowing from the hose he was using to wash the car. On her way to work that morning, she had noticed some men moving around under suspicious circumstances.

The abduction came shortly after the assassination of Chief Minister Beant Singh in a bomb blast on August 31. The Sikh militants behind the murder blamed him for gross human rights violations in Punjab and called his regime "most repressive". Khalra had a feeling that the police might take advantage of this high profile attack to go after human rights activists. His father Kartar Singh had also been cautioned by a friend in police department to ask Khalra to be careful.

Immediately after the abduction, Paramjit Kaur and other

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activists swung into action. A telegram was sent to the Supreme Court by Gurcharan Singh Tohra, a towering Akali Dal leader and the then President of Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC), the apex religious body of the Sikh faith. The Supreme Court served notice to the government seeking a reply. The Punjab police became defensive, claiming that Khalra was neither wanted by them nor arrested. In November, the Punjab Advocate General requested the court to hand over the matter to the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), a premier investigating agency of India. The CBI investigation culminated in the identification of police officers who abducted Khalra, and the revelation of his murder in October 1995. Kuldeep Singh, a former Special Police officer, testified that Khalra was shot to death, and his body was dismembered and thrown into a river. He also claimed that K.P.S. Gill himself interrogated Khalra. Ajit Singh Sandhu was prosecuted, but released on bail in November 1996. The CBI also submitted in December 1996 that 2,097 bodies were cremated illegally in Amritsar. In a significant development with far reaching impact, the Supreme Court directed the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) to examine the matter and determine all the issues. But following governmental pressure, the NHRC limited its scope of enquiry to the illegal cremations in Amritsar. Ten years later, six junior police officers were convicted for the abduction and murder of Khalra

in 2005. Gill was never summoned, while Sandhu had died in 1997.

For Paramajit Kaur, the battle still goes on, as the full investigation of the disappearances across Punjab never started, despite promises from the ruling Akali Dal. She strongly believes that the Akali Dal lacks the political will to investigate and punish senior police officers behind the murder of her husband and others killed in staged shootouts. She had approached

Badal for justice, but was told to forgive and forget. Ironically, Khalra's portrait is installed at the Sikh museum in the Golden Temple Complex, and he is considered a martyr in Sikh circles, yet the officers who had tainted records during the militancy enjoy patronage under the Badal government. Her only hope on Kuldeep Singh, the key witness in Khalra's murder, died with his sudden death due to cardiac arrest in 2011. She suspects conspiracy behind his passing away.

The political opportunism of Akali Dal turned Paramajit Kaur away from the party. She ran unsuccessfully in the 1999 parliamentary election, nominated by a breakaway Akali Dal faction led by Tohra, who had by then parted ways from Badal following serious ideological differences. She was offered support by Sikh hardliners who were disillusioned by the mainstream Akali Dal because of its ties with the Hindu nationalist Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP), which has time and again opposed action against police officers who were engaged in the "war on terror". Paramjit Kaur feels that the Akali Dal, under pressure from Hindu nationalists, is reluctant to pursue justice for the victims of police violence. The installation of Khalra's portrait at the Sikh museum in Amritsar was done at the behest of Tohra, who according to Paramjit Kaur was much more dedicated to the interests of the Sikh community. If the appointment of Sumedh Singh Saini as the Director General

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of Police in Punjab was any indication, the Badal government had lost interest in cases of disappearances and murders by the police. Saini was widely blamed for human rights abuse by the activists, even though he was never convicted.

The reversal of roles saw Paramjit Kaur walking into the political territory of radical Sikhs, whereas the Akali Dal wanted to nominate ex-police officer Izhar Alam, another controversial figure, as its party candidate in the 2012 assembly election. Alam's name appeared in the Wikileaks cables, according to which he was behind a vigilante group formed to weaken the Sikh militants in Punjab. In the

past, Akali Dal was highly critical about such officers. However, following this criticism, the Akali Dal later changed its mind and instead nominated his wife as a candidate. Former Punjab Police Chief Paramdeep Singh Gill was also an Akali Dal candidate in this election. Gill's father was gunned down by the militants. The Akali Dal during those days openly glorified extremists, yet Gill saw no harm in fighting the election as their candidate. It is a different matter that he lost the election.

With hopes of getting justice one day, she continues to live in Amritsar, at the same house from where Khalra was abducted, while her son and daughter now live in

North America. Her son Janmeet Singh lives in Alberta. The fight, she claims, still goes on. Whether or not there will be closure in these cases only time will tell, but efforts to keep Khalra's struggle alive in Canada continue. In 2013, the New Democratic Party, Canada's official Parliamentary opposition, passed a historic resolution recognizing Khalra as "Defender of Human Rights". The resolution was adopted amidst thunderous applause at the NDP convention in Montreal. For the followers of Khalra it was a great day, as his own party in power back home failed to give justice to Khalra family, while here an official opposition recognized him as a hero.

-RDNB

## Opinion

### When a dead man spoke

It was the year 1998. I worked as a staff reporter with the *Indian Express* in Ropar district of Punjab, India. A Sikh militant named Gurnam Singh Bandala surfaced after being allegedly killed in a police shootout years earlier. The news was bizarre. The authorities had arrested Bandala, and in order to set the record straight, an enquiry was ordered when it was found that he was previously claimed to have been killed in an encounter with the police in Ropar in 1994.

I immediately started working on this unusual story. Bandala was a supporter of the armed insurgency launched by Sikh separatists seeking a homeland in northern India. They were blamed for indulging in large scale violence against Hindus and their moderate critics within the Sikh community, besides security forces and politicians. To curb the militant violence, the Indian government gave police extra powers which were widely misused both against potential suspects and innocent Sikhs. By the time I started working with the *Indian Express*, the militant violence had started receding, both on account of large scale state terrorism and declining popular

support for the extremists. Bandala's story appeared at a time when the police faced allegations of massive human rights abuses.

One thing was clear: the police claimed in 1994 that they had killed Bandala, a wanted extremist, in a shootout in Ropar. So if he had now surfaced after four years, there was little doubt that someone was killed in his place. But who? Thus, the quest for the story began. I first phoned some sources in the police department and some human rights activists for a clue. I was suggested to go and check post-mortem reports at the local civil hospital from the time period during which Bandala had reportedly died. I tracked the date of the so-called police encounter and went to search for the reports. After spending several hours, I finally got what I was looking for. The post-mortem report on Bandala was right in front of my eyes. It stated that there was no one to claim his body, so as per law, five individuals came forward to testify that he was unidentified. Subsequently his corpse was cremated as unclaimed. Interestingly though, his name was written on the top. A first question came to my mind: if he was unidentified, how come his name

appeared on the report? In fact, during the search for this particular post-mortem report, I stumbled on many similar reports, with names of the deceased militants on the top, but cremated as unidentified. Even more interesting, the names of their outfits were also written alongside. Bandala's case was therefore not unusual, if these post-mortem reports indicated anything. The medical officer who accompanied me to the room where this record was stored pointed out that as per rules, if these bodies were at all identified, they should have been handed over to the relatives, whose signatures should have been present on these documents - not the signatures of others. And in case they were really unidentified, why did these reports identify them by names? In such circumstances, the pictures and personal belongings of the deceased are preserved for future identification, but in these cases those elements were absent. Clearly, the rules were flouted and people were being killed with impunity. It was certain that somebody was killed instead of Bandala. Whether he was a militant with a different name or a complete innocent, who knows, but it wasn't certainly a case of mistaken identity. And it wasn't the job of the police to

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decide who was guilty or who was not. In a civilized and democratic society, only a court has authority to decide the fate of anyone caught for any criminal offence. Someone must have also claimed the reward for killing a wanted militant.

Before I went to the press with these details, I wanted a copy of the report. But I was told to go to the court to get permission. So I rushed to the local courts and requested a lawyer friend, the late Khushwant Rai Joshi, to help me in getting permission. Indeed, Joshi was very helpful. We submitted an application to a judge. To my surprise, the court clerk tried to discourage us by expressing his reservations, but Joshi was determined and we succeeded in getting the orders. After obtaining the copy of the report, I filed a story that raised further questions: which officers in the police department were responsible for the killing, and who would have pocketed a reward for doing so? After all, the state was offering rewards to those who were liquidating wanted militants during the disturbances. Years later, some other journalists exposed the names of police officials who had been rewarded for killing Bandala.

Interestingly, it was the Akali Dal which was in power in Punjab during those days. A veteran Akali leader, Parkash Singh Badal, had been elected the Chief Minister a year before. To send a message to the public about the accountability of the new government, he held a swearing-in ceremony at a stadium. I

had a chance to cover that event. There was lot of enthusiasm among the people. Everywhere there was a flood of blue and saffron turbans. People raised religious slogans of victory, a practice very common in the Sikh community at times of celebration. Nothing surprising, as the Akali Dal always claims to be the custodian of the Sikh faith. The Sikh community had high expectations from this government that followed the Congress regime led by Beant Singh, who was assassinated in 1995 in a bomb blast. For the Congress supporters, he was a messiah of peace who had crushed the militancy, whereas for his critics he was responsible for police brutality in the state. The Akali Dal had promised during their campaign to order a judicial probe against those who indulged in extra-judicial murders. But that never happened. Badal turned a volte face on this issue. During a quick chat with reporters, including myself, he clearly said that such an investigation was not needed. Instead, many senior police officers, who enjoyed impunity under Beant Singh's government, continued to enjoy protection under Badal. In fact, the police high-handedness continued for some time even under Badal, who was sharing power with the Hindu nationalist Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) that generally sided with the police during the militancy. The BJP was dead against prosecution of police officers, who in their view were fighting a "national war".

It is a separate matter that following a spate of litigations by

human rights activists, many junior police officers who were in the forefront of the so-called campaign against terrorism became easy targets. They started getting summons and some got arrested. They were complaining that they had become scapegoats for following the orders of their seniors who wanted them to crush enemies in the "proxy war" against Pakistan. They alleged that the Akali Dal-led government was giving amnesty to former Sikh militants, but not paying attention to their concerns. The Indian government has always accused neighbouring Pakistan of aiding and abetting terrorism in their country from across the border. Punjab being a border state became vulnerable to seasoned assassins, trained in Pakistan and then coming back to India to kill their own people. The Sikh militants were definitely getting help from Pakistan, but the causes that led to militancy were purely domestic. Pakistan was only taking advantage of the crisis within. One of the junior officers, Ajit Singh Sandhu, who was given out of turn promotion and was involved in many cases of human rights abuse, also faced litigations. This had brought his morale down, forcing him to commit suicide in 1997. He was assaulted in jail by a militant sometime before being released on bail. He had jumped before a train near Chandigarh to kill himself. I was sent to his home that evening to get some inputs for a bigger story being followed by my senior colleague. The home environment was very tense, and as

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some of his relatives came to know that I was a journalist, they turned furious, and blamed the media for his death. They accused reporters like me of exaggerating stories against him, compelling him to take his own life. Due to a hostile atmosphere, I had to take leave.

The current Akali Dal-BJP government in Punjab has appointed Sumedh Singh Saini as the state police chief, in spite of allegations of human rights abuse against him. Though never convicted, he was close to Ajit Singh Poohla, a highly controversial figure in the Sikh community and a leader of a state-sponsored vigilante group. Poohla was considered responsible for burning to death the relatives of a militant named Balwinder Singh Jatana, who was involved in an attack on Saini in 1991. It is believed that the attack on Jatana's house was in retaliation for the attempt to assassinate Saini. Poohla was burnt to death in jail by supporters of the militants in 2008. Poohla was jailed after being arrested on murder charges following the efforts of human rights activists who accused him of committing atrocities in a number of cases. I had an opportunity to interview Poohla in Chandigarh where he lived under heavy police protection. The centre of Poohla was highly fortified, and police officers often frequented the area. After all, he was helping them fight against militants. I once saw him walking around in downtown Chandigarh along with his armed gunmen, in a highly inebriated

condition. I have also visited the house of Balwinder Singh Jatana in Ropar. According to his relatives, those who came to attack their house were in jeeps belonging to the Chandigarh Police. Saini at that time was Senior Superintendent of Police in Chandigarh. Another controversial officer, Gurmeet Singh Pinky, was allegedly patronised by Saini. Pinky was a militant turned police officer who was convicted for the 2001 murder of Avtar Singh, a resident of Ludhiana. His father Amrik Singh says that Pinky still enjoys the patronage of the Punjab government, as he has been pardoned and set free. When I worked with *Radio India* in the past, we sponsored Amrik Singh's visit to Vancouver. We decided to honour him for bravely fighting against police brutality. He could not control his tears while showing us the pictures of his son.

During my posting in Ropar, the police had busted a conspiracy to free some jailed militants. A human rights lawyer, D.S. Rajput, was arrested in connection with this case. My lawyer friend Khushwant Rai Joshi, who was a Marxist, had commented that the character of the state never changes and remains the same whoever may be in power. He was one of few leftists in Punjab who were vocal both against the state repression and extremist violence. The traditional leftists were generally in agreement with the state that saw extremism as a threat to national security. Many of them enjoyed heavy police protection like other party leaders.

The district police Chief, Ranbir Singh Khatra, was accused of using excessive force against the suspects and other human rights activists rounded up in this connection. He was once denied a Canadian visa for his alleged involvement in a case of human rights abuse. Notably, he was very close to Gurcharan Singh Tohra, another veteran Akali Dal leader who later broke away with Badal and floated a separate Akali faction. Interestingly, Tohra became a self-styled crusader for human rights in his new avatar, in spite of the fact that he patronized men like Khatra. Khatra was transferred from Ropar following the Badal-Tohra feud. He had also hired a retired police officer, in whose custody a Sikh man had died, following which there were angry protests against the police in Ropar. Those involved were subsequently charged.

Ropar was not new to such developments. Much before I was posted there as a reporter, a human rights lawyer, Kulwant Singh, his wife and their young child were abducted and murdered by the police in 1993. But that was when Akali Dal wasn't in power. The lawyers had resorted to a strike, forcing the government to order an enquiry. From my own experience I can say that almost all the mainstream political parties, ranging from the Communists to the right-wing BJP and the Akali Dal, were on the same page on the question of retaining state power for the sake of political survival even at the cost of human rights.

## COVER STORY

We may not be able to get the full picture of what happened to the men abducted and killed in staged shootouts. There is a saying that dead men tell no tales, but their post-mortem reports tell a lot of stories. We must ask the apologists of the Indian state: why did these unknown people have to go through such trauma? Was it because they belonged to a religious minority? Why were they made scapegoats to deal with the separatist movement? Confronted with these questions, the police often argued that due to the lack of evidence on account of their inability to get witnesses, staged shootouts and vigilante justice became a necessity. Fine, but why then we have never heard of extremists belonging to the majority community being killed in a similar fashion? Those seeking to turn India into a Hindu state have also been involved in bombings and killing members of minority communities. But India's current BJP government has asked its National Investigation Agency to go soft on the pro-Hindu state extremists cooling their heels in

jails. For that matter, why weren't those involved in the massacre of Sikhs in 1984 following the assassination of Indira Gandhi by her Sikh bodyguards killed in staged shootouts due to lack of evidence? The Congress leaders involved in those mass murders were instead rewarded with important positions in the government. Why this selectivity? These questions need to be raised on behalf of those killed in Punjab and Kashmir, where mass graves of Muslims have been discovered.

The left also need to look into these question to provide a better alternative to the Congress or the rightwing BJP and the Akali Dal. Only recently, the Marxists in Punjab organized a rally to commemorate the 70 years of the Hiroshima and

Nagasaki bombings, which is fine, but the Marxists never organized such rallies for the sake of people killed in state violence domestically, including the anti-Sikh pogrom of 1984 or the Gujarat violence against Muslims in 2002. The BJP was complicit in the 2002 mass murders. Undoubtedly, the Communist government in West Bengal played a commendable role in providing protection to Sikhs during the 1984 carnage, but then repeatedly helped the Congress Party which was responsible for that massacre to stay in power, giving it the benefit of the doubt for being "secular" as against the BJP.

*Gurpreet Singh is a founder of Radical Desi*



## **Interview with Teesta Setalvad**

**“Efforts to give reprieve to pro-Hindu state terrorists will be challenged”**

A prominent human rights activist and the editor of *Communalism Combat*, Teesta Setalvad, warns that efforts are going on to give reprieve to pro-Hindu state terrorists in India.

In an interview with RDNB, Setalvad said that the National Investigation Agency (NIA) under the current Hindu nationalist Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) government has already been asked to go soft on those arrested in connection with bomb attacks on Muslim targets.

*Communalism Combat* has done a number of stories in the past exposing the involvement of pro-Hindu state terrorists in bomb blasts in different parts of India. Recently, the NIA indicated that it has no objection to bail being given to Swami Aseemanand, a key conspirator in the Samjhauta Rail explosion. Aseemanand is associated with pro-Hindu state terror network. Samjhauta Rail runs between India and Pakistan. In February 2007, the train was bombed, killing 68 people, mostly Pakistani passengers. Initially, the Indian government blamed

Pakistan-based Islamic terrorists, but later it emerged that the crime was committed by those seeking to establish a Hindu nation. Recently, Pakistan summoned the Indian envoy to register its protest over the NIA's statement to the government of India.

Setalvad said that under the current government the Hindu extremists charged for the bombings of other Muslim targets, including mosques in Maharashtra and Rajasthan, are also likely to receive some respite. Describing this approach as “one sided” and “biased”, she said that the human

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rights activists are contemplating to ask the Supreme Court to oversee these cases to ensure fair trials. "Efforts to give reprieve to such elements will be challenged."

Setalvad has been facing challenges for raising such issues. She is currently facing charges of violating foreign funding laws. The Gujarat government accused her of misusing funds meant for building a memorial for victims of the anti-Muslim pogrom. In 2002, anti-Muslim violence broke out in Gujarat following the burning of a train which killed over 50 Hindu passengers. After the BJP government blamed Islamic extremists for the incident, anti-Muslim massacres rocked the state. The current Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi was Chief Minister of Gujarat at that time. Since then, Setalvad has been associated with the campaign for justice to the victims of Gujarat violence. The Central Bureau of Investigation, the premier investigating agency of India, recently described her as a "national threat". Responding to these allegations, she said that people like her are certainly a threat to a government whose policies are repressive, but not to the nation. She pointed out that it is the duty of activists to keep watch on secularism, one of the greatest values enshrined in the Indian constitution.

A great-granddaughter of Chiman Lal Setalvad, who raised tough questions to R.E.H. Dyer, a British army officer who ordered

indiscriminate firing on passive resistance movement supporters in Amritsar in 1919, killing more than 300 people, she said that the popular discourse of portraying activists like her as threats to the nation is very dangerous. She urged the public to be vigilant against any government that commits repression on its own people, whether it was the so-called secularist Congress government that was responsible for the 1984 anti-Sikh massacre, or the BJP government in Gujarat.

In the meantime, Sanjiv Bhatt,

a senior police officer who had testified against Modi, has been sacked from service. Bhatt was earlier suspended. He had claimed that following the burning of a train in Gujarat, Modi had asked police officers to let the Hindus vent their anger. He claims to have attended the meeting where Modi asked the police to look the other way. He was fired after a video recording emerged recently, showing a person who looks like Bhatt in the company of a woman other than his wife.

### Mount Polley toxic spill: Looking back one year

**E**nvironmentalists and indigenous rights activists gathered outside the Vancouver head office of Imperial Metals on August 4, to draw attention to the first anniversary of one of the largest toxic spills in world history. On that date in 2014, the Mount Polley Mining Corporation (MPMC, owned by Imperial) disaster began in the Cariboo region of central British Columbia, with a breach of MPMC's copper and gold mine tailings pond. As explained in the Wikipedia article on this disaster, the breach released 10 million cubic metres of water and 4.5 million cubic metres of mining slurry waste. The spill raised Polley

Lake 1.5 metres, and transformed Hazeltine Creek from a 2-metre-wide stream to a 50-metre-across "wasteland". From there, the toxic slurry of water and mud continued into Quesnel Lake, the cleanest deep water lake in the world. By August 8, the four square kilometres sized tailings pond was empty. Water tests showed elevated levels of selenium, arsenic and other metals similar to historical tests before the disaster.

MPMC began an interim erosion and sediment control plan to stop further flow from the tailings area, and to improve the quality of water flowing into Quesnel Lake. By September 2014, a

berm to prevent further spread of tailings was nearing completion, and the company and some of its 300 employees began seeking to reopen the mine.

Meanwhile, it was revealed that the company had a history of operating the pond beyond capacity since at least 2011. An official investigation led to a final report on January 31, 2015, covering many factors including whether piezometers (devices to measure water pressure on the dam walls) had been located correctly. The investigating panel blamed the dam collapse on its construction on underlying earth containing a layer of glacial till that had been

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unaccounted for by the company's original engineering plan.

But this report has not meant a satisfactory conclusion to the tragedy. Many area residents who depend on tourism for their livelihoods fear that the negative impact on this aspect of the local economy could be devastating. First Nations in the Cariboo area and along the entire Fraser River area stress the potential for long-term effects on the crucial salmon runs and other fisheries. Experts warn that the extent of the damage may remain unknown for years or even decades, as toxicants accumulate in the environment from grass to moose, or from fish, and then to people who depend on these sources for much of their food consumption.

Some former employees accused Imperial Metals of paying insufficient attention to safety concerns. In 2010, MPMC's engineering firm reported a 10 metre crack in the earthen dam while working to raise it. The firm also found that piezometers were broken, which MPMC later fixed. But questions over the devices still remain, and some workers say the company found it simpler to keep raising the height of the tailings pond beyond safe limits, enormously increasing water pressure levels.

There are also issues around provincial inspection and monitoring of tailings ponds and other mining operations. Former BC premier Gordon Campbell had cut

funding for seven ministries responsible for resource management, which were reorganized into a "single team" approach. Inspections across the province decreased from 22 in 2009 to 3 in 2010, two in 2011, and none in 2012. Mount Polley was inspected in 2013, but not 2011 or 2012. Yet Bill Bennett, Minister of Energy and Mines, said "there is no evidence that the government's missed inspections were related to the failure of the dam this year".

The Mount Polley disaster has far wider implications. Since the spill, Alaskan mine opponents including environmentalists, aboriginal peoples, and the fishing industry have raised alarms over several proposed B.C. mining projects involving major salmon-producing river systems that run downstream into Southeast Alaska. The large Red Chris gold and copper mine, owned by Imperial Metals, is nearing completion in the headwaters of the Iskut River, a major tributary of the Stikine River. The KSM project owned by Seabridge Gold Inc. has been approved by B.C. and awaits federal approval; this project is located near the Unuk River system which flows into Alaska and supports a large Chinook salmon population, although its tailings facility would be located in the Naas River watershed emptying into the Pacific in B.C. A third mine is slated to reopen and expand in the Taku River near Juneau.

And finally, there are serious

questions about connections between the company and the provincial Liberal government. The controlling shareholder of Imperial Metals is billionaire N. Murray Edwards, who has donated half a million dollars to the B.C. Liberal party since 2005. Edwards helped organize a \$1-million fundraiser for Premier Christy Clark's re-election campaign in 2013. Has the relaxation of provincial mining inspections simply been a coincidence? Many find this hard to believe.

For residents of the Lower Mainland, all these matters may seem quite distant. But this disaster has consequences for the entire province, not just for First Nations in the Cariboo region who have kept the issue in the news. The Mount Polley breach made it clear that the BC Liberals have no interest in effective environmental protection regulation or inspections, affecting all British Columbians. Nor will Premier Clark's Liberals enact meaningful restrictions to stop the influence of big corporate money in provincial or civic elections. For all the Premier's pretensions to speak for working people, Mount Polley showed that she is simply a puppet for corporations in the resource sector.

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

## “Yakub Memon was hanged to terrorise Muslims”

A social justice activist who is currently on bail believes that Yakub Memon was executed to terrorise the Muslim minority in India.

Prof. G.N. Saibaba has been vocal about repression on religious minorities and oppressed groups. He was arrested last year and thrown in jail after being branded as a supporter of the Maoist insurgency. He was given temporary bail only recently.

Reacting to the recent hanging of Memon in connection with the Mumbai blasts that claimed more than 200 lives in 1993, Saibaba told RDNB that this was done to instill fear in the minds of the Muslims.

According to him, Memon was framed in the Mumbai case. His brother Tiger Memon was involved

in the blasts. It is believed that Yakub Memon surrendered as part of some pact with Indian agents and travelled back to India after remaining outside the country for some time. In lieu of his “safe passage”, he had cooperated with authorities in their investigation. However, he was recently executed on charges of being involved in the bombings, in spite of wider opposition from human rights activists, former judges and ex-Indian agents.

Saibaba, who met Memon during his detention in Nagpur jail, said that he was a soft spoken person and very friendly. He learned to speak Urdu from Memon after spending a year in the same jail. After their conversations, Saibaba was convinced that he was not involved in the crime. “He was certainly framed and then executed for being a Muslim.” Saibaba says there is a pattern behind the way Muslims are being treated by the Indian police. “They over-represent their actual population in the Indian prisons, which speaks about the systemic prejudices against them.”

## Punjabi couple whose wedding was rejected by the Immigration department gets justice

The federal court has accepted the wedding of Surrey resident Harpreet Sandhu and her husband Harpreet Singh, paving way for the latter's immigration to Canada. The couple had tied the knot in India back in 2010. But the Immigration and Citizenship department rejected their wedding, declining to accept it as a genuine marriage. As a result Harpreet Singh was unable to make it to Canada for the past five years, despite the fact that the couple have two children and were forced to live separately.

Finally the family had to move legitimacy to the marriage. According to Harpreet Sandhu's mother, the family had to spend close to \$50,000 on the legal battle. "My daughter had gone into depression due to the adamant attitude of the government," says Paramjit Kaur Sandhu. The Sandhu family also brought this issue to public attention at a forum on immigration held in Surrey. This is one of the many cases of family reunions being affected on account of allegations of sham marriages and immigration frauds.

-RDNB

## Sikhs for Justice Facebook page continues to be blocked in India

A New York-based Sikh advocacy group is complaining that their Facebook page continues to be blocked in India.

Sikhs for Justice had participated in a campaign to protest against Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to US last year. Its legal adviser, Gurpatwant Singh Pannun, told RDNB that their Facebook page has been blocked in that part of the world since then.

SFJ has been campaigning for

justice to the victims of the 1984 anti-Sikh pogrom. Thousands of Sikhs were murdered across India following the assassination of the then Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi by her Sikh bodyguards. The group had also protested against Modi for similar reasons. Modi is widely blamed for an anti-Muslim pogrom in Gujarat in 2002, when he was Chief Minister of the state, but he was never convicted for those crimes. During his first official visit to US last September he was greeted by angry protesters.

According to Pannun, their

Facebook page has been blocked in India under pressure from the Modi government. He says that this reflects badly on a country which is known as world's largest democracy. "It only reflects the dictatorial mindset of the Indian government."

Notably, the SFJ has been organizing protests against visiting politicians from India. It has asked the Canadian Prime Minister to intervene and check those politicians who come here to raise funds and then transfer them to India through "illegal channels".

## **BJP leader's statement on Muslims should be taken seriously**

**T**he recent statement of Subramaniam Swamy, a visiting leader associated with the ruling Hindu nationalist Bhartiya Janata Party of India, needs to be taken seriously.

Swamy was in Vancouver close to India's Independence Day on August 15. During an interview with a local Punjabi radio station, he suggested that Muslims in India should be disfranchised. He asserted that unless Indian Muslims acknowledge that their ancestors were Hindus, they should not be allowed to vote.

The statement has evoked sharp reaction within the local Indo-Canadian community, with some seeking action against him under the hate crime laws.

Swamy's statement has again brought the real agenda of the BJP government into question. The BJP is the political wing of the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh (RSS), an ultra-nationalist organization of volunteers dedicated to establish a Hindu state. Both the BJP and the RSS are widely accused of terrorising religious minorities. The BJP was responsible for the 1992 demolition of the ancient Babri Masjid mosque in India, and for the anti-Muslim pogrom in Gujarat in 2002. Current Prime Minister Narendra Modi was the Chief Minister of Gujarat during the massacre and is accused of being complicit in the violence. However, he was never convicted.

The BJP is also facing criticism for distorting Indian history and school texts with the help of scholars who have a strong Hindu nationalist bias. Emboldened by the Modi government, the Hindu

extremists have increased verbal and physical threats against Muslims and Christians.

With Swamy's statement in Vancouver, the intentions of Modi's government have once again become doubtful. During election campaign Modi gave the slogan "Sabh Kaa Saat, Sabh Kaa Vikaas" (everyone's support and everyone's progress). However, if the statement of Swamy and other incidents are any indication, the Modi government is not behaving like a real inclusive government. If Modi really wants to take everybody along then he must reprimand bigots like Swamy. It has been noticed that he continues to remain silent over the continued hate speeches by supporters of Hindu nationalism. So much so, the Vancouver-based secularists and so-called moderate Sikhs who have been very vocal against Sikh separatists in the past have also maintained a studied silence to Swamy's speech.

How can Swamy be allowed to get away with his statement? It does not auger well for India or the Indian

Diaspora. Respecting the neutrality of laws, Indian officials must step in to check this or they should accept that India has become a Hindu state.

Ironically, all this happened when Swamy was here to attend a series of events organized to celebrate India's Independence. That the Indian constitution guarantees religious freedom and secularism is not something unknown. Interestingly, he also visited the temple that celebrates the legacy of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, the architect of the Indian constitution. If that was not enough, elected officials were also present at some of these events. Surrey Newton MP Jinny Sims, who was supported by self-styled moderates and secularists in the previous election, was at some of these events. How come her secularist supporters are quiet? They were all up in arms against Sukh Dhaliwal, former Liberal MP, when he accepted a gold medal from supporters of a separate Sikh homeland for presenting a petition seeking recognition of Sikh genocide in India. They resolutely supported Sims last time to ensure Dhaliwal's defeat. She had also attended an Independence Day event organized by the BJP in Surrey last year, but no questions were ever raised over her presence at a function held by theocratic forces. The selectivity of apologists for the Indian state in Vancouver is equally problematic, as they are not seeing the signs of danger to India's unity and integrity from the Hindu nationalists.

-RDNB

## RADICAL HISTORY OF THE MONTH

### Karam Singh Daulatpur's sacrifice will remain unforgettable

September 1 is the martyrdom day of Karam Singh Daulatpur, a selfless freedom fighter who died in a shootout with the British police in 1923.

Born at the village of Daulatpur, Punjab in British India in 1880, Karam Singh had served in the army for eight years before migrating to Canada in 1907. That year Indians were disfranchised in Canada. Karam Singh lived near Abbotsford, where he started taking a keen interest in political activism. He was pained by racism and discrimination against the South Asian immigrants and soon realised that the root cause of their sufferings abroad was the foreign occupation of their home country. He was influenced by socialists who were active in BC. When South Asian radicals formed the Ghadar Party in 1913, Karam Singh became a member.

The party believed in an armed revolt against the British Empire and also fought against racism in North America.

In 1914, when the Ghadar Party gave a call to its supporters to return to India to launch a rebellion, Karam Singh joined the bands of activists who were willing to do or die. He was so determined that

when he left Canada, he asked his relatives and friends that in case he did not return his agricultural land share should be donated to the community to build a gurdwara (Sikh temple). The new Sikh temple opposite the heritage gurdwara in Abbotsford was built on the land donated by Karam Singh.

However, Karam Singh was

arrested upon reaching India and was interned at his village until 1918. Later he joined the Congress which was leading the passive resistance movement against the British government.

Then in February 1921, an incident happened that changed the course of his life completely. The

gurdwaras were under the control



## RADICAL HISTORY OF THE MONTH

of corrupt priests who had the backing of the British officials. These priests misused temple funds and also allowed practices, such as caste based discrimination against so-called untouchables, which were barred in Sikhism. The Sikh leaders had launched a non-violent movement to liberate their temples from the control of such priests. One of them, Narayan Das, ordered the killings of the Sikh activists when they came to liberate the birthplace of Guru Nanak, the founder of the Sikh faith. The massacre enraged the Sikhs, and men like Karam Singh decided to join the gurdwara liberation movement. Although a religious movement, it was a part of the larger freedom struggle. The supporters of this movement often said that once their gurdwaras were liberated they were going to fight for the liberation of the much bigger gurdwara or the nation. Mahatma Gandhi, the towering leader of the pacifist movement, was highly impressed by the agitation.

Seeing that the peaceful agitation wasn't working, men like Karam Singh decided to form a militant group to fight with the priests and the government. They were convinced that temples can only be freed from the clutches of well connected priests through an armed struggle. Karam Singh founded a group of radical Sikh activists which used to organize public meetings. He later launched a newspaper called *Babbar Akali Doaba*, through which the group encouraged people to join their

movement. The inspiration to launch a newspaper came from the Ghadar Party, which became popular through the newsletter named Ghadar.

*Babbar Akali Doaba* became so popular that the militants decided to name their group as Babbar Akali Jatha, bringing all the Sikh radicals working underground on one platform.

The British government announced a reward of Rs. 1,000 to anyone who helped to get Karam Singh arrested. By this time, the Babbar Akali Jatha was running a parallel administration in the Doaba region of Punjab. Its members killed informers and indulged in political robberies. They also gave a call that everyone, including the poor, had a right to take free fruits from the trees planted along the roads, and warned government contractors to stay away from them. They believed that the state had no right to take control of these trees and sell fruits for revenue. The police did not take this lightly. They started harassing people in an event of violence or militant attack. Karam Singh decided to take responsibility for the political murders to save people from repression. An open letter to the Governor was written to take full responsibility for the murders.

On August 8, 1923 the government raised the bounty on Karam Singh's head to Rs. 3,000. A month later, he found himself surrounded by the police after an

informer leaked the information of his whereabouts. In a fierce battle with the police, Karam Singh died like a true hero.

Though Karam Singh is physically dead, his legacy remains alive. And it will remain relevant while the state and the church continue to connive and work against the public interest. As long as the exploitation of the poor and the oppressed classes continues and people are subjected to repression, Karam Singh's sacrifice will remain unforgettable. A school in Daulatpur built in his memory is keeping that legacy alive by naming classrooms after the Babbar Akali Jatha activists. The underground room once used by Karam Singh is still preserved in the school complex, where visitors can find the parts of the press he used for publishing *Babbar Akali Doaba*. A statue of Karam Singh near the school gate has a folded newspaper copy in one hand. Every September 1 his martyrdom day is celebrated at the school with enthusiasm.

-RDNB



## **When they came for me**

**f**irst they came for the Communists,  
but i was not a Communist so i  
did not speak out.  
then they came for the Socialists and  
the Trade Unionists,  
but i was neither,  
so i did not speak out.  
then they came for the Jews,  
but i was not a Jew so i did not speak  
out.  
and when they came for me,  
there was no one left to speak out  
for me.

*Martin Niemoller was a pacifist and a Protestant pastor. He opposed the Nazis and was critical about the failure of Germans to speak out against them. This poem has been reproduced here in commemoration of Jaswant Singh Khalra and other human rights activists who have been murdered for speaking out against repression across the world.*

## IN MEMORIAM

### Red Salute to Comrade Canadian

**T**his September marks 29 years of the assassination of Comrade Darshan Singh Canadian, a dedicated communist who spent 10 years in Canada before returning to India in 1947. While working in Canada he organized for the International Woodworkers union within the local South Asian community, and fought for the right to vote. Disenfranchised in 1907, the Indians were given back this right after a long struggle in 1947. Canadian was a staunch secularist who was highly critical of religious extremism. He was murdered by Sikh separatists on September 25, 1986. Since this is an election year, it's time to remember the man because of whom Indo-Canadian MPs are in Parliament. The following pictures were recently taken by RDNB at his native village of Langeri in Punjab, and have been published here as a tribute to him.

## **IN MEMORIAM**

## Meet Netanyahu's Democratic Party

**A**s the federal election day of October 19 draws near, the contentious Israel-Palestine issue has taken its toll on the New Democratic Party, the official opposition in Canada's Parliament.

Nova Scotia NDP candidate Morgan Wheeldon had to resign for accusing Israel of indulging in "ethnic cleansing" on Facebook, and another potential NDP candidate from Edmonton, Syed Hyder Ali, was turned down for accusing Israel of "war crimes".

Despite the fact that Israel sits on the occupied land of Palestinians and has been indulging in large scale repression on the people of Palestine, the Facebook comments of the two individuals have not been appreciated by the NDP, which claims to be socially and politically progressive. Significantly, outgoing NDP MP Libby Davies, who is not running this time, was forced to apologize for calling spade a spade in 2010. She supported the Palestinian position back then, but party leader late Jack Layton distanced himself from her position and said that she made a mistake. He also said that his party would never deny that Israel has a right to exist.

Political observers say the NDP's position on this issue has changed over the years, to virtually being on the same page with

Liberals and Conservatives, leaving pro-Palestinian activists out in the cold. They mainly attribute this shift to the growing influence of the Israeli lobby in Canada. Whatever may be the case, the NDP will have to look hard at itself on this question. By not doing so, the NDP will gradually alienate itself from progressive forces in Canada. However progressive the NDP's positions may be on many other issues, the cause of the Palestinian people will always remain dear to the hearts of social justice activists, whose support cannot be taken for granted by the NDP. If the NDP thinks that by taking a middle of the

road position on the Israel-Palestine issue it will be able to get extra right-wing votes, it is mistaken. When it is known that Palestine is a victim and the Israeli state an aggressor, what is the point of maintaining so-called balance?

With such positions the NDP has literally become an apologist of the Israeli state. The trend of muzzling pro-Palestinian voices also reflects badly on the NDP's claim to cherish democratic values. If it goes on like this, the party should better change its name to Netanyahu's Democratic Party.

-RDNB



