





## CONTENTS

4

### Cover Story

## Road to Rakab Ganj

Continuous resistance against repression and religious bigotry

### Editorial

Sarabha is still relevant 2

### Cover Story

Road to Rakab Ganj 4

Tale of two trees 13

### Current Affairs

Interview with Shehank Kela 17

What does the federal election mean for Aboriginal peoples? 18

Five turbaned Sikh MPs make historic entry into Canadian Parliament 19

News 20

### Radical Narrative

Insaaf 26

Cover Picture : Kartar Singh Sarabha, whose 100th martyrdom day falls this November, was one of the founders of the Ghadar Party. This portrait was made by Surrey-based painter Jarnail Singh in commemoration of the Ghadar movement centenary.

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**RADICAL**  
DESI

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

## Sarabha is still relevant

This month marks 100 years since the execution of Kartar Singh Sarabha, one of the founders of the Ghadar Party, a group of radicals who wanted to rid India from British occupation through armed rebellion and establish a secular and egalitarian republic. Sarabha was born on May 23, 1896 in Punjab. Since his early life he had witnessed the affects of the foreign occupation of his home country. The British rulers plundered India's wealth and imposed heavy taxes on farmers and small industry. As he grew older, Sarabha was exposed to the activities of revolutionaries who wanted to see India liberated. He was influenced by a farmers' agitation of 1907. Later when he went for schooling to Orissa, his understanding of the importance of freedom widened. Orissa at that time was fertile ground for radical activism. In 1912, he migrated to the US to study Chemical Sciences at Berkley University. Upon reaching the US, he experienced racial hostility both at the hands of immigration officials and others. But he was not alone to endure it. Other migrants from India had similar stories to tell. They soon realized that the root cause of their sufferings abroad was the colonization of India. At university, Sarabha came in contact with the ideologues of the freedom movement. Gradually, men like Sarabha turned into political activists and established a radical group called Hindi Pacific Association in 1913. The association believed in an armed revolt to overthrow the British regime. They had a very clear mandate to establish a secular republic in post-British India. While most members and supporters of the association were Punjabi Sikhs, they resolved to keep religion and politics apart, emphasising people's unity. Caste-based discrimination and religious and lingual divisions had no place in the group. The office bearers belonged to different religious backgrounds. The association started publishing a radical newsletter called *Ghadar*, which means mutiny. It became so popular due to its fiery content that the association became to be known as the Ghadar Party. Sarabha was instrumental behind the launching of *Ghadar*, and was the editor of its Punjabi edition. The paper encouraged its readers to join the struggle for freedom and published poetry that had a secular appeal. It repeatedly asked Indians to set aside religious divisions and work together to overthrow British officials in their homeland. The Ghadar Party had planned to send its members to India at the right time, to encourage Indian soldiers working for the British army to revolt and join a mass movement. The opportunity came in 1914, when Britain and Germany got locked into a war. The Ghadar activists thought that this was the right time to strike, and decided to travel back home for revolution. Determined to die for the sake of freedom, Sarabha returned to India. While many Ghadar activists were arrested as soon as they entered their home country, he managed to escape the police dragnet, and worked underground to organize rebellion in the army cantonments. He also established contact with Bengali revolutionaries. But the Indian masses were not prepared for revolution. The popular leadership believed in passive resistance, while the community leadership, particularly the clergy, was largely pro-British. The Sikh priests ostracized these activists and described them as apostates. Lacking enough funds to buy weapons, they were forced to commit political robberies that turned many Indians against the Ghadar activists. Due to the penetration of British spies, the Ghadar planning was foiled, and activists, including Sarabha, were arrested. On November 16, 1915, Sarabha was hanged for sedition. He was executed alongside Vishnu Ganesh Pingle, a Maratha Hindu. They were together in their death as well as part of their commitment towards secularism. Today when we remember Sarabha and commemorate the centenary of his martyrdom, we need to recognize that his legacy of secularism is still relevant. In India, the country Sarabha belonged to, the Hindu right-wing forces have become emboldened over the years and are threatening religious minorities. Under the current Hindu nationalist Bhartiya Janata Party government, the Indian constitution that guarantees religious freedom and secularism also remains under threat. Attacks on the Muslim minority have grown, and religious intolerance has increased manifold. Prime Minister Narendra Modi is widely blamed for the massacre of Muslims in Gujarat, where he was Chief Minister of the state when the tragedy happened in 2002. It is a separate matter that he was never convicted for those crimes. But it would be unfair to single out Modi. The previous Congress government also had skeletons in its cupboard. While the Congress claims to be secular, it was involved in the anti-Sikh pogrom of 1984. Ironically, the anti-Sikh violence

## EDITORIAL

was engineered on November 1, the day the *Ghadar* newspaper was launched in 1913. These mass murders were clearly an assault on the Ghadar ideology of secularism. Since men like Sarabha were larger than life, attempts to appropriate him by sectarian forces also continue. The Sikh separatists active in Canada and elsewhere leave no opportunity to portray Sarabha and other Ghadar activists as Sikh heroes. The separatists often display their images at community events alongside the pictures of militants seeking a theocratic Sikh homeland, to justify their own struggle. Sometime ago, a book authored with the intention of portraying Ghadar activists as Sikhs was released by the Sikh clergy, which back in 1914 ostracised the Ghadar heroes. Make no mistake: there are no parallels between the reactionary movements and a secularist Ghadar movement. It is pertinent to mention that when India and Pakistan were divided on religious lines in 1947, Ghadar activists formed peace committees to save Muslims from the fury of Hindu and Sikh fanatics. Thus, neither Hindu nationalists, nor Sikh separatists have right to distort the Ghadar history and appropriate it for their narrow political interests. If we really want to pay a fitting tribute to Sarabha, it is time to stand up against divisive forces both in India and elsewhere. In US and Canada too, white supremacy continues to prevail, as right-wing politicians whip up emotions against immigrants and people of colour. Do not forget that circumstances like these forced men like Sarabha to form the Ghadar party. Incidentally, Louis Riel was also executed on November 16 in 1885. The hero of the Métis rebellion, Riel had also fought against colonialism in Canada. The two men were executed in different parts of the world and at different times, but their fight against racism and occupation unites them. And that fight still goes on as repression of indigenous communities continues both in India and Canada in the name of progress and development. As long as racism, religious discrimination and oppression continue, Sarabha will remain relevant

-Editors

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## **Road to Rakab Ganj**

**Continuous resistance against repression and religious bigotry**

*"Rich Sikh gentlemen have organized a congregation in Amritsar regarding the demolition of the wall of Gurdwara Rakab Ganj by oppressive Englishmen in Delhi. Sunder Singh of Majitha had a resolution passed to urge the government to reconstruct the wall. And if not, then land should be allotted to compensate for the loss. What is the point making an appeal to the government? Are we asking for a church from the government in London?.....This only shows the weakness of rich Sikh gentlemen and their slave mentality. It's a shame those handfuls of British have come from across the seas and are looting our country..."*

The passage goes on in the *Ghadar* newspaper dated June 26, 1914. The mouthpiece of the South Asian radicals in the US seeking liberation of India from British occupation through armed revolt, the newspaper was reacting to the demolition of an outer wall of Rakab Ganj, a historical Sikh temple in New Delhi. The British government had not realised that this seemingly negligible act of sacrilege would galvanize the freedom movement and give ammunition to extremists. The wall that was knocked down to build a road became a turning point particularly in Punjab, the home state of the Sikh community. Those enraged by the demolition joined the bands of hot-headed revolutionaries returning from North America to launch an armed struggle against British rule.

## COVER STORY

However, the community was divided between the pro-British rich Sikh gentlemen (including Sunder Singh) who believed in lobbying, and militant Sikhs like Kartar Singh Sarabha, who edited *Ghadar*.

Seventy years later, the same temple came under a much more barbaric assault in free India, this time by the government elected by its own people, leading to well-orchestrated murders of the Sikhs. While the foreign rulers had merely broken a wall, those representing a democratically elected government went many steps further and organized a pogrom against a single community.

Separated by a span of more than half a century, these two scenarios speak volumes about the Indian state becoming more brutal to its own people since the days of the freedom struggle. Even as the post-independence Indian state celebrates the legacy of the Ghadar Party, it has proved itself to be the biggest deceiver of its philosophy of secularism.

### Rakab Ganj

Historically, Rakab Ganj is an important gurdwara for the Sikhs. Their ninth master, Guru Teg Bahadur, was beheaded in Delhi by the Islamic government on November 11, 1675. He had opposed the sectarian policies of the government, which was forcibly converting Hindus to Islam. A delegation of Kashmiri Brahmins had approached him for protection following large scale persecution of the Hindus. The policy of religious conversion was particularly ruthless in Kashmir, where the Islamic rulers

were taking advantage of large scale poverty in the region. Taxes were imposed on non-Muslims to encourage volunteer conversion, while forcible conversions were also common. On listening to the woes of Kashmiri Brahmins, Guru Teg Bahadur challenged the rulers in Delhi. He announced that if they succeeded in converting him, the Kashmiri Brahmins would willingly embrace Islam. He was arrested in Agra and brought to Delhi, where he bravely faced his execution. After his arrest, his followers were subjected to torture before his eyes, but he remained determined to face death.

After his execution, at first nobody dared to pick up his head and decapitated body. But one of his followers, Lakhi Banjara, ran away with his headless body to cremate it in a dignified manner. Another took the severed head to Guru Teg Bahadur's family in Punjab. While the government soldiers were looking for the missing body, Banjara hid it in his house and then burnt the whole building. Gurdwara Rakab Ganj was later built at the place where Guru Teg Bahadur's body was cremated, while Gurdwara Sis Ganj was built at the site of his execution.

Years later, after the end of the Islamic empire, when British rulers took over and decided to turn Delhi into the capital, they usurped the land belonging to Rakab Ganj in 1912. Resentment was already brewing within the Sikh masses and only needed a spark to turn it into an uprising. The opportunity came in 1914, when the wall of the

gurdwara was demolished. The passive Sikh leadership wanted to resolve the issue through negotiations and pleaded for compensation. But the radicals were not satisfied; they were, after all, seeking complete freedom from the British occupation.

In post-British India, the two shrines came under attack in November 1984 by Hindu mobs, even though Guru Teg Bahadur came to be known as protector of the Hindus after his death. Interestingly, the founder of the Sikh faith, Guru Nanak, had refused to follow Hindu rituals, despite being born in a Hindu family; Guru Teg Bahadur did not shy from giving his life for the sake of religious freedom of Hindus.

The attacks on the two temples came after the assassination of Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi on October 31, 1984. The same year, she had ordered a military invasion on the Golden Temple Complex, the holiest shrine of the Sikhs in Amritsar, to flush out religious extremists who had stockpiled weapons inside the place of worship. The army operation had left many people dead and buildings inside the temple complex heavily destroyed, sparking angry protests from Sikhs across the world. In a fit of rage, her Sikh bodyguards murdered the Prime Minister at her residence. Ironically, Indira Gandhi was a Kashmiri Brahmin, a community that feels indebted to Guru Teg Bahadur.

Rakab Ganj therefore holds a special place in the history of

## COVER STORY

repression and resistance, not only under foreign occupation by Islamic and British rulers, but in independent India. As luck would have it, the *Ghadar* newspaper was started in 1913 on November 1, the fateful date when Rakab Ganj was attacked by mobs in the presence of police 71 years later. Another striking coincidence is that both Guru Teg Bahadur and the Ghadar hero Kartar Singh Sarabha were executed in the month of November.

### Ghadar connection

A year before the Rakab Ganj wall was demolished, the Ghadar Party was established in the US. The party was formed by South Asian immigrants who wanted to liberate their homeland through an armed uprising. Although the majority of Ghadar activists were Punjabi Sikhs, the party was secular in character and wanted to establish an egalitarian society in free India. Formed as the Hindi Pacific Association, the group came to be known as the Ghadar Party after its newsletter *Ghadar* became popular. The name *Ghadar*, which means mutiny in English, was purposely appropriated by the radicals for its newsletter launched on November 1, 1913. The term was used by the British to refer to the first uprising in India in 1857, which brought all classes and religious groups together against the foreign occupation. The mutiny was crushed with an iron fist, and the Ghadar Party members wanted to revive it through their newsletter. They were partly influenced by a booklet written by Veer Savarkar, another ideologue of the freedom

struggle in London. He had glorified the participants of the first uprising to counter the British propaganda against them, laying the ground for the formation of the Ghadar Party. It is a separate matter that Savarkar later gave up his fight against British rule and became a supporter of Hindu supremacy. His organization, Hindu Mahasabha, wanted to see India turned into a Hindu nation, and instigated violence against Muslims.

Among the members of the Ghadar Party and its office bearers were people belonging to Hindu and Muslim communities as well. One of the Ghadar Party founders, and the editor of the Punjabi edition of *Ghadar*, Kartar Singh Sarabha was born in a Sikh family in Punjab. But he pulled no punches while condemning Sikh priests and leaders who were influenced by the British government. The priest class was totally aligned with the British Empire and encouraged people to pray for its long life. Reacting to the Rakab Ganj episode, Sarabha attacked both the British Empire and its Sikh apologists, one of whom, Sunder Singh, tried to buy peace. Sarabha situated the incident in the broader context of plunder and exploitation under the British regime.

Sarabha migrated to the US in 1912 at the age of 17 to study chemical sciences, but decided to dedicate himself to the cause of liberation movement after coming in contact with the ideologues of the freedom struggle. He was already exposed to the affects of British occupation in India, but its

impact on the Indian Diaspora transformed him into a real activist. He saw the foreign occupation of India as the root cause of rampant racism against Indians in the US. As a result, the Ghadar Party was formed to fight against racism abroad and colonialism in India. The *Ghadar* was started to educate people and prepare them for revolution.

The Rakab Ganj incident was strategically used by Sarabha and his comrades to incite the Sikhs to sever ties with the British authorities and jump into the freedom movement. It was never a one-point agenda of the Ghadar Party, which encouraged Hindus and Muslims to come out openly against foreign rule. The idea of secularism and people's unity was never lost.

In 1914, when Britain got locked in war with Germany, the Ghadar activists decided to return to India to start an uprising with the help of the public and Indian soldiers working in British armies. They wanted to take advantage of a situation where Britain was engrossed with its own problems. Their calculations failed, as they did not get public support. The priest class was aligned with the establishment, and the leaders of the pacifist camp were not eager for revolution. The priest class went to the extent of ostracising Ghadar activists to please their masters. Still men like Sarabha continued to work underground. He was able to get support from devout Sikhs who were agitated at the demolition of Rakab Ganj wall. One of them, Randhir Singh, a highly religious



## COVER STORY

person, gave him strong backing.

The attempts to launch a rebellion failed due to penetration of spies into their movement. Sarabha was subsequently arrested and hanged for sedition on November 16, 1915. True to their commitment to secularism, the Ghadar activists from different faith groups had learned to fight and die together. Sarabha was hanged alongside Vishnu Ganesh Pingle, a Maratha Hindu.

Though Ghadar activists failed in their attempted mutiny, the movement later entered another phase. Many former Ghadar activists became a part of the movement aimed at liberating Sikh temples from the clutches of corrupt, pro-British priests, and bring them under the control of Sikh congregations. The clergy around that time played the role of custodians who worked in cooperation with British officials. In 1919, the British army fired indiscriminately at a gathering of peaceful demonstrators at Jallianwala Bagh Public Park in Amritsar, leaving more than 300 people dead. The custodians of the Akal Takht - the highest temporal seat of the Sikhs, located very close

to the Jallianwala Bagh - had honoured a General who was responsible for the massacre. These circumstances led to a Sikh militant movement that was launched to liberate temples through armed struggle. Not surprisingly, many former Ghadar activists became part of this new agitation. Among them was Karam Singh Daulatpur, who lived near Vancouver and returned

for rebellion on the call given by the Ghadar Party. He was one of the key leaders of the new militant movement. Although it was a religious movement, it was the part of the larger freedom struggle as its ultimate goal was to liberate India.

Their sacrifices finally resulted in the transfer of power between the British and the Indian rulers in 1947. But official

independence came with a heavy price. India was divided on religious lines and a Muslim Pakistan came into being. The partition stirred large scale religious riots. Muslims were slaughtered by Hindu and Sikh fanatics on the Indian side, while Hindus and Sikhs were murdered by Islamic extremists on the other side of the border.

The Ghadar Party activists

## COVER STORY

who survived persecution at the hands of the British government came into action and tried to save Muslims from the Hindu and Sikh fundamentalists. The party president, Sohan Singh Bhakna, risked his life and saved Muslims in spite of threats from his Sikh compatriots. Disturbed by these killings, he described the partition as murder of their dreams. The violence can be partly attributed to the deliberate policy of divide and rule practiced by the British to keep India under subjugation. The Muslim League wanted Pakistan and Muslim-dominated states to be separated from India, and the Hindu Mahasabha wanted to see India turned into a Hindu state. Both extremes were propped up by the British, to weaken the bargaining power of the Congress Party, the leading force behind the passive resistance movement for independence. That the Sikh clergy was also aligned with the British Empire explains how polarisation of different religious communities worked in favour of foreign occupation. The seeds of hatred sown by the British showed their ugly signs during the crisis caused by partition. Bhakna may not have visualised that the story would not end in 1947, or that their dreams would be murdered many times once India was free. The opportunistic leadership of free India continued to keep the British policy to ensure its control over the masses, and the Congress party was not an exception.

### Year 1984

1984 was the worst year for

the Sikh community. Their holiest shrine, the Golden Temple Complex in Amritsar, came under army attack after religious extremists turned it into a fortress. An anti-Sikh pogrom was organized across India following the murder of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi by her Sikh bodyguards. These incidents were the culmination of a dangerous mix of politics and religion, something that was strongly detested by the Ghadar activists.

By the late 1970s, divisions between Hindus and Sikhs had grown in India. The Sikh separatists were seeking a homeland in Punjab, and Hindu chauvinists were asking for revenge in other states. All this happened when the Congress Party with secular credentials was in power. The Congress, which has always tried to appropriate the freedom movement by claiming to have achieved independence without spilling blood, came in conflict with the Sikh leadership on some regional issues which had their origin in the partition of India.

At the time of partition, the popular Sikh leadership chose to align with India instead of opting for Pakistan; as a result, a major part of their home state of Punjab went to Pakistan. Not in a formidable majority anywhere, the Sikhs had limited bargaining power to seek a separate homeland. The Sikh leadership felt assured to live in India, which chose to remain a secular state in spite of pressure from Hindu chauvinists to turn the country into a Hindu nation. Pakistan on the other hand was to become an Islamic republic.

Following the partition, Sikhs had to leave behind fertile lands, property and important historical shrines in Pakistan. They were promised that in an independent India, they would be given an autonomous region in the north where they could enjoy the glow of freedom. But the Indian Punjab remained Hindu-dominated, and the Sikh leadership began to feel irrelevant. Thus arose the demand for a Punjabi speaking state. The Sikh leadership felt that by using the Punjabi card, they could get a state reorganized on a linguistic basis, where Sikhs would be in the majority and they could enjoy political power unchallenged. From their perspective, the Punjabi language was associated with the Sikh religion, which brought its own problems, dividing Punjabi-speaking Hindus and the Sikhs. Following a sustained campaign by the Sikh leadership, the Indian Punjab was reorganised in 1966. The current Punjab came into being, but many Punjabi-speaking areas went to other states. The Sikh leadership alleged a conspiracy, as Hindu chauvinists encouraged Punjabi Hindus to register Hindi and not Punjabi as their mother tongue during the census before the reorganization of Punjab. A new agitation started for the merger of Punjabi-speaking areas that went to other states. The Sikh leadership under the Akali Dal, a party with a strong base in the Sikh community, also included several religious demands in their charter and sought political autonomy for Punjab. The Congress government in New Delhi

## COVER STORY

saw this as a threat to national unity. Instead of trying to resolve the crisis through political initiatives, it played tactics to divided Hindus and Sikhs. Sikh extremists were allegedly propped up to weaken the Akali Dal, and anti-Sikh emotions were whipped up outside Punjab to please the Hindu majority.

The Sikh fundamentalism gradually grew into a threat to both the Congress and the Akali Dal. The opportunistic Akali Dal also let the Golden Temple Complex to be turned into a sanctuary for the extremists, who began killing Hindus in Punjab.

Both the so-called moderate Akali Dal leaders and the extremists frequently listed the sacrifices of the Sikhs during the freedom struggle to show their disillusionment with the Indian state. Comparisons were frequently drawn between the Ghadar activists and the Sikh militants, as a propaganda tool to justify agitation for extra rights to the Sikhs and to Punjab, where the community was in the majority. The violence against Hindus in Punjab often sparked anti-Sikh violence in other states. As the situation got out of hand, the army was ordered to invade the Golden Temple Complex in the first week of June in 1984. The army operation left many buildings inside the temple complex heavily damaged and many people dead. The Sikh community was enraged across the world. There were angry protests in Vancouver. Even reasonable and nationalist Sikhs were offended by the army operation, which they felt was aimed at teaching the Sikh minority a lesson to win the

confidence of the Hindu majority in the forthcoming general election. One indicator was that the right-wing Hindu organizations also commended Indira Gandhi for launching the attack.

In a fit of rage, two Sikh bodyguards of Indira Gandhi shot her dead on October 31, 1984. The assassination was followed by a well organized anti-Sikh massacre by leaders of the Congress party. All this started while Indira Gandhi's body lay in state at the Teen Murti building, which is close to the Rakab Ganj gurdwara. The mobs were seen on state run TV raising slogans, "We will avenge blood with blood".

On November 1, the mobs attacked both Rakab Ganj and Sis Ganj. Rumours were spread that the Sikhs had taken Hindus hostage inside the Rakab Ganj gurdwara, probably the first historical Sikh temple to come under attack after the murder of the Prime Minister. The gurdwara was attacked in the presence of police and at least one senior Congress party leader, Kamal Nath, who later became a minister in the Congress-led government headed by the first Sikh Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh. At least two Sikhs were brutally murdered by the killers as the state machinery looked the other way. In contrast, the Sis Ganj gurdwara was saved by the efforts of a Christian police officer. His threat to fire and kill anyone who dared to attack the temple worked.

Delhi, the national capital of the world's so-called largest secular democracy, became unsafe for Sikhs as they were slaughtered in

thousands. Electoral rolls were used to identify their homes, and kerosene and tyres were provided to burn them to death. While the government made it appear to be a reaction to the murder of a popular leader, it was clearly a state organized violent pogrom. Many Hindus and secular activists risked their lives by trying to protect Sikhs from the mobs. A billboard at the Rakab Ganj gurdwara expresses gratitude to those who saved the lives of Sikhs during the pogrom.

The anticipations of the Sikh leadership about calculations behind the army invasion of the Golden Temple Complex were proven right, as Indira Gandhi's son Rajiv Gandhi was elected to power with a brute majority in the general election held in the wake of his mother's demise. The Congress party's slogan of national unity paid dividends. The Congress leaders seen leading the mobs were duly rewarded with ministerial posts in the new government. Many saw this victory as sign of growing ties between the Congress and the Hindu right. Rajiv Gandhi's government in later years tried to appease the Hindu majority through gestures such as starting television serials based on Hindu scriptures.

Thirty years have passed as the victims of the massacre continue to fight for justice. Only token victories have been achieved. Years later, the same Congress appointed Manmohan Singh as the first Sikh Prime Minister. Taking advantage of public memory which is short, Congress supporters tried to convince the Sikhs that it was time to forgive and forget and move

## COVER STORY

on. But they had no explanation for why the anti-Sikh pogrom was allowed to happen in the first place, while another Sikh, Zail Singh, was the President of India. Similarly, a strong explanation was missing when the Congress-led government issued a postal stamp to commemorate 100 years of the Ghadar Party in 2013, despite its baggage of inciting sectarian violence.

The religious card was therefore played by all sides, including the secularist Congress and the Akali Dal, a party with a strong pro-Sikh stance. This whole experiment led to a decade-long violence in Punjab, where Sikh separatists ran a parallel administration until the early 1990s. They wanted to establish Khalistan, an imaginary theocratic Sikh state, and killed Hindus and their critics within the Sikh community. They almost Talibanized Punjab by imposing their values on people, and killing whoever resisted. However, both the state repression and the disillusionment of the masses with the Sikh extremists finally brought an end to the militancy.

During these years each side tried to appropriate the Ghadar history to its advantage. Sikh extremists tried to convince people that they were repeating history by taking to arms like Ghadar activists, while the state and its apologists tried to appropriate Ghadar history in the name of patriotism. The spirit of secularism and social justice remained missing on both ends. The real progressive forces which tried to keep this legacy alive were sandwiched between the two. Sikh extremists were

killing Hindus and confusing history with their communal politics, while the Congress in particular and the state in general were complementing separatists by targeting Sikhs and using force and police violence to crush genuine voices of dissent in the name of national unity. The Ghadarites saw both religious fanaticism and repression as challenges in post-independent India, but this was not part of the agenda of any of these camps.

### History repeats

One of the prominent leaders of the Khalistan movement, Simranjit Singh Mann, always complained that although the Sikhs have done a lot for the freedom of India, they are treated as second class citizens. But he was once at pains to explain why his maternal grandfather Aroor Singh, the head priest of the Akal Takht, had honoured the British General responsible for the massacre of passive resistance movement supporters at the Jallianwala Bagh Public Park. After being confronted by the media, he not only

condemned the action of Aroor Singh, but also apologized for it. Mann, who is still adamant about his demand for a sovereign Sikh state, is not alone. Others who support the demand keep reminding the Sikhs how they contributed to the freedom movement, but never got what they deserved. On the occasion of the Ghadar Party centenary in 2013, the separatists in Canada and US started portraying the Ghadar movement as a Sikh movement. Not long ago, a book that portrays Ghadar activists as Sikh heroes was released by the Sikh clergy, the same section of the community that once played into the hands of the British Empire and ostracized Ghadarites.

One might think that this is a change of heart and an effort to correct historical wrongs, but it is a repetition of history and an attempt to keep Sikhs and Hindus divided. This again goes to the advantage of the ruling classes. Underlying these statements is a clear effort to convey that the Sikhs made more sacrifices in the freedom struggle than the

## COVER STORY

Hindus. The whole idea is to dilute secularism. Recently, when the remains of participants of the 1857 rebellion who were slaughtered by the British were found in Amritsar, the Sikh priests had said that they were people from distant provinces, not Sikhs. These remains are now being preserved at a Ghadar museum maintained by secularists in Jalandhar. While the Ghadarites embraced people of different faith groups and tried to borrow best from all the philosophies ranging from the Sikhism to Socialism in their struggle for social justice, the Sikh priests wanted to disassociate themselves from the broader national movement. The reaction was no different from that of those who pleased the British generals.

If that is not enough, the present day Sikh clergy patronised by the Akali Dal in Punjab also remain silent over the growing influence of the Hindu nationalist Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) in the public space. The Akali Dal, which has always tried to exploit Sikh sentiments and isolate the Congress by repeatedly raising the issue of the anti-Sikh violence of 1984, is running the government in Punjab in partnership with the BJP which was responsible for an anti-Muslim pogrom in 2002.

Thousands of Muslims were murdered in Gujarat after a train carrying Hindu pilgrims was burnt, killing over 50 passengers. The BJP government in Gujarat blamed Islamic fundamentalists for the incident and asked the police to look the other way during violent protests by Hindus. The current

Prime Minister Narendra Modi was the Chief Minister of Gujarat at that time. He continues to enjoy unconditional support from the Akali Dal, which has a minister in his government. The Sikh clergy never reprimanded the Akali Dal for rubbing shoulders with the BJP, despite the fact that the BJP repeated 1984 tactics in Gujarat.

Interestingly, when the foundation stone for the memorial dedicated to victims of the 1984 violence was laid at Rakab Ganj, BJP leaders joined the ceremony. These connections did not help the victims' families at all. Although the BJP have been in power in the past and Akali Dal ministers were part of their government, no senior Congress leader was ever convicted.

During the 2014 general election, human rights lawyer H.S. Phoolka, who has been fighting for justice to the victims of 1984, was a candidate from Ludhiana, the birthplace of Sarabha. But he never

got any support from the Akali Dal, which fielded its own candidate against him. Phoolka was a candidate of the fledgling Aam Aadmi Party. Instead of supporting him, the Akali Dal with the help of the BJP gave him a direct fight. As a result, the constituency was won by the Congress, which defeated Phoolka with a small margin of over 19,000 votes. During the campaign, the Akali Dal constantly attacked Phoolka, even though he has been contesting the cases of the victims of 1984 since day one.

This was not the first time, Phoolka was let down by his own people. The opportunistic Sikh leadership of Delhi had shown signs of weaknesses a number of times, and did not even shy from conniving with the Congress on several occasions. In 2004, the Delhi Gurdwara Management Committee President Prehlad Singh Chandok honoured senior Congress leader Jagdish Tytler, who according to eye-witnesses was one of the instigators of violence against the Sikhs. Confronted by journalists, Chandok insisted that he only honoured Tytler in his capacity as a minister in the government. Chandok and others like him at that time were telling Sikhs that it is time to bury the past and look forward. Some viewed the BJP as a bigger threat to the minorities. Nevertheless, men like Chandok who were eager to see the Sikhs forget the 1984 events, asked the minority commission in 2004 to force the Indian government to return the Rakab Ganj gurdwara land seized by the British government in 1912.

## COVER STORY

There may be many different ways to look at the story of Gurdwara Rakab Ganj, but all these stories represent the broader picture of repression in India against its people since the days of tyrant foreign rulers. The key to a powerful resistance has always been people's unity, which has always been seen by those in power as the greater danger to their existence and the status quo. The Ghadar legacy will always be problematic for the rich and powerful, who cannot easily let go their privilege. With both the power of the state machinery and help from religious reactionaries, it is easier to maintain that privilege. But as long as repression goes on, resistance will also be there in different forms.

Even 100 years after Sarabha's hanging by the British rulers, his fight for secularism remains relevant. Barring a change in the nature of the ruling class, the tactics of the policy makers and social conditions remain the same. That the Indian constitution guarantees religious freedom does not stop the political leadership from using every means at its disposal to create a wedge between the communities to retain power. Religious fundamentalism has grown manifold under the Modi government. Forced conversions of Muslims to the Hindu religion were widely reported and evoked sharp criticism. The attacks on Christians also shot up. If this was not enough, secularist intellectuals came under attacks in different parts of India.

Hindu extremists have been openly questioning the nationalism of Muslims. But while many Muslim revolutionaries laid down their lives during the freedom struggle, ultra

Hindu nationalist groups like the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh (RSS), of which the BJP is a part, sided with the British. Only recently, a Muslim man was lynched near Delhi by a mob after being accused of consuming beef. The Hindu extremists who have become emboldened over the past one year justified the act. This depressing incident, which left many secularists disheartened, became a turning point when dozens of authors and poets starting returning their awards to the Indian establishment in protest against communal violence. Among them was Toronto-based Punjabi scholar Waryam Singh Sandhu, who has written extensively on Sarabha and Ghadar history. He got a literary award back in 2000. After the Indian authors began returning awards to express their outrage over increased attacks on secularists and minorities, Sandhu decided to join the caravan. He has been spearheading a campaign for the past two years against the attempts to

appropriate Ghadar heroes by the Sikh fundamentalists. What could be a better tribute to Sarabha on the centenary of his execution than the authors showing resistance to the assault on his legacy, asks Gurwinder Singh Dhaliwal, whose Abbotsford based Punjabi Sahit Sabha (Original), a literary club, passed a resolution to appreciate these scholars. Indeed, Dhaliwal has a point, especially in light of the fact that Sarabha was an exceptional editor who died fighting for a just society. One of the many poems published by *Ghadar* says it all when it comes to the question of religious divisions that need to be cemented:

*you keep fighting against each other  
over Islam and Hinduism  
they have ruined the glory of India  
by creating a wedge of Quran and  
Vedas  
beef or pork cause you pain  
Whites eat all of them without shame.*

-RDNB

## Opinion

### Tale of two trees

*"When a big tree falls, earth around it shakes a bit."*

Those words still echo in my memory from my teens. That was the first public reaction of Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi to the anti-Sikh massacre following the assassination of his mother Indira Gandhi on October 31, 1984.

I still remember the TV footage of Rajiv Gandhi making the offensive statement at a huge public gathering. His mother was the Prime Minister when she fell to the bullets of her Sikh bodyguards at her official residence. In June that year, she had ordered the military attack on the Golden Temple Complex, the holiest shrine of the Sikhs in Amritsar. The operation was launched to flush out religious extremists who had stockpiled weapons inside the place of worship, and had been running death squads which frequently targeted Hindus in Punjab. The crisis was the result of a conflict between the Sikh leadership and the central government headed by Indira Gandhi over some political and religious demands of the former.

The invasion had left many people dead and the buildings inside the shrine heavily destroyed. This had enraged the Sikhs across the world. Community leaders accused the government of not using other peaceful alternatives to avoid the situation, as part of a

design to win the forthcoming general election by whipping up anti-Sikh emotions to garner Hindu majority votes. Even moderate and patriotic Sikhs felt alienated after the attack. Under these circumstances, two of her Sikh bodyguards shot Indira Gandhi. The high profile murder was followed by well organized anti-Sikh pogrom in different parts of India. Easily identifiable due to their turbans and beards, the Sikhs became vulnerable to violence instigated by leaders of Indira Gandhi's Congress party that claims to be secular. One of the killers of Indira Gandhi was shot to death immediately after her assassination, the other was hanged later.

Amidst the chaos, her son Rajiv Gandhi was sworn in as the next Prime Minister and later won the general election with a brute majority. The slogan of national unity paid dividends to the Congress. Those involved in the violence were awarded with ministerial positions. The apprehensions of those who saw the army invasion on the Golden Temple Complex as a political conspiracy were proven correct. While the victims of violence were still in shock and struggling for justice, Rajiv Gandhi used the metaphor of a falling tree to justify the bloodshed following criticism over the anti-Sikh massacre. His statement had a clear message that the Sikhs would not get justice. Indeed, thirty years have passed and

Sikhs continue to await justice.

For those who are completely detached from the tragedy, it is time to move on and forgive and forget everything. Some are still convinced by Rajiv Gandhi's statement and think that it was a natural reaction to the murder of a towering leader.

However, the comment was not just insensitive, but an attempt to mislead the public and make the anti-Sikh violence appear as a reaction of the majority community. It was not an emotional or angry outburst of a son who had lost his mother, but a well calculated speech to cover up the complicity of the state in the massacre of Sikhs.

The eyewitnesses and the activists who documented these cases clearly point out that the police remained a mute spectator to the killings. The electoral rolls were used to identify houses where Sikhs lived. Congress leaders were seen leading the mobs, who were provided with tyres and kerosene to burn Sikhs alive. Women were raped and the mobs who were involved in sexual violence were seen having fun. There were no signs of mourning or anger as claimed by the apologists of the establishment. All this implies that the criminal bands were hired for the job by those in power.

Another indication of state complicity is that there was hardly any violence of great magnitude in

Calcutta, the biggest city of West Bengal province, simply because the Communist government in the region had a will to prevent attacks on the Sikhs. The regions under Congress rule, however, including the national capital, became highly unsafe for the Sikhs. In New Delhi alone, thousands of Sikhs were murdered with impunity.

Going by Rajiv Gandhi's argument, there is no explanation as to why the earth did not shake in Calcutta, which had no shortage of Indira Gandhi's admirers. Was it not because the Communist government acted swiftly to prevent large scale violence, something the Congress government failed to do in Delhi and elsewhere? Or why did the earth not shake when "a much bigger tree" fell in Delhi on January 30, 1948? Mahatma Gandhi, a world renowned

peace icon and leader of the passive resistance movement, was certainly much more popular than Indira Gandhi in terms of his political stature. He too was assassinated, although by a Hindu extremist, a Maratha Brahmin. Why was there no large scale frenzy against Maratha Brahmins? It is true that there was a low scale reaction against Maratha Brahmins, but that cannot be compared with what was done to the Sikhs. Gandhi was murdered as he challenged the Hindu fundamentalists who wanted to see India transformed into a Hindu nation.

One cannot deny some amount of disgust over Indira's murder, as she was killed by the very people she trusted. After the army attack on the Golden Temple complex she wanted to restore the confidence of Sikhs in her government. In spite of warnings about the presence of Sikh

bodyguards in her security detail, she wanted to retain the men who assassinated her. There was also some anger accumulating against the Sikhs on account of anti-Hindu violence in Punjab. This anger was clearly reflected in the heavy mandate in support of Rajiv Gandhi. But would it be appropriate to conclude that the well organized violence was a reaction? If that was the case, why did some Hindus risk their lives to save Sikhs from the mobs? If reaction to one high profile murder can be so natural and brutal, why then did anti-Hindu violence did not break out in Punjab, despite large scale massacres of Sikhs in Delhi and elsewhere.

All this illustrates that such violence would not have been possible without the involvement of the government. It is pertinent to



mention that Rajiv Gandhi, who tried to convince the world that the anti-Sikh violence was a reaction to the death of his larger than life mother, was also assassinated by a Tamil Hindu suicide bomber. If violent reaction is a reality in Indian politics, why was such violence missing against Tamil Hindus when Rajiv Gandhi was blown into pieces?

The most dangerous part of Rajiv Gandhi's "falling tree" metaphor is that it legitimizes violence against religious minorities in the world's so-called largest secular democracy. His speech set a precedent for the 2002 violence in Gujarat, where Muslims were slaughtered following the burning of a train carrying Hindu pilgrims. Over 50 passengers had died in the incident that was blamed on Islamic extremists by the ruling Hindu nationalist Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP). As a result, anti-Muslim violence broke out. The tactics used against Sikhs in

1984 were reapplied on Muslims in Gujarat by the BJP. The current Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi, who was the Chief Minister of Gujarat back then, had also tried to rationalize the killings by using the theory of each action resulting into an equal reaction. The Gujarat violence was rooted in the Hindu-Muslim conflict that started in 1992 after BJP supporters demolished an ancient Mosque claiming that the site where it stood belonged to a Hindu god. According to the BJP, the land was the birth place of Lord Rama where once a grand temple stood. They continue to claim that the temple was razed and a mosque was built by an Islamic ruler at the disputed site. The train that was allegedly torched in Gujarat was bringing devotees from this site where the BJP now wants to construct a big temple. The demolition of the mosque in 1992 was followed by well-orchestrated violence against Muslims in Mumbai. The Muslims had

opposed the celebrations over the demolition of the mosque, leading to tension between the two communities, as a result of which Hindu extremist groups slaughtered Muslims. The ugly events of 1992 therefore had vitiated the communal environment of the country, and culminated into the anti-Muslim massacre in 2002.

In 2008, anti-Christian violence in Orissa state captured the headlines. The massacre followed the murder of a fanatical Hindu leader, Swami Laxmanananda Saraswati. He belonged to the same group that was actively involved in anti-Muslim violence in Gujarat. Responsibility for the Swami's murder was claimed by Maoist insurgents, who targeted him for his anti-Maoist and anti-minority activities in Orissa. Yet the murder was blamed on Christians, and was avenged by Hindu fanatics who were determined to teach a lesson to

## COVER STORY

Christian missionaries whom they constantly accused of converting tribal Hindus into Christians. There has been series of attacks on Christians in various Indian provinces, including Gujarat.

All these incidents reflect very badly on the Indian state. Despite the constitution which guarantees secularism, there has always been a pattern behind attacks on religious minorities, which are mostly well organized and politically motivated. The idea is to please the majority by keeping minorities under the boot. Otherwise, why do such violent reactions never occur against the majority? The metaphors of falling trees or actions versus reactions are only a cover up tactic to fool the public and assure those who are ready to fearlessly commit such horrendous acts. India's leadership needs to be honest. Either it should openly acknowledge that India is a Hindu state hiding behind the mask of secularism, or it should set its record straight and treat those involved in violence against minority groups as terrorists, and deal with them like other terror groups.

Under the current Modi government, the Hindu extremists have become so emboldened that they openly ask for installation of statues of Nathuram Godse, the assassin of Mahatma Gandhi, who is considered the father of the Indian nation. Godse was associated with the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh (RSS), an ultra Hindu nationalist cultural outfit, of which the BJP is a part. The Congress government had banned the RSS after Mahatma Gandhi's murder, only to later revoke the ban. The Indian state has failed to recognize this campaign as an act of sedition. As

compared to the blatant glorification of Godse, any attempt to glorify the murderers of Indira Gandhi is seen as anti-national. For instance a Punjabi movie glorifying the killers of Indira Gandhi was promptly banned, while a play glorifying Godse has been openly enacted a number of times in Maharashtra. During a radio interview with me, a Godse supporter commented that he did not murder Mahatma Gandhi for personal reasons. The assassination, according to him, had a strong ideological basis, as Godse saw Mahatma Gandhi as pro-Muslim and anti-Hindu. Well, that can also be said for the killers of Indira

Gandhi. They never had a personal animosity with her either. How come then does cutting one tree become such a heinous crime that you go to the extent of punishing the entire community of the tree feller? And why just forgive everyone from the community of someone who axed a different tree? It is time to question this selective justice and secularism.

***Gurpreet Singh is the founder of Radical Desi. He is a newscaster and talk show host at Spice Radio in Burnaby and freelances for Georgia Straight, People's Voice and Hindustan Times.***

## **Interview with Shehank Kela**

### **“Conditions of Adivasis have worsened under Modi government”**

**T**he conditions of Adivasis, who have continued to fight for their rights since colonialism, have worsened under Modi government, according to Sheshank Kela.

A visiting author and activist from India, Kela was here in connection with the Climate Change Conference on October 17 and to speak at the annual Hari Sharma Foundation lecture.

Talking to RDNB, he said that the social conditions of Adivasis (the Indigenous Peoples) have worsened since the Hindu nationalist Bhartiya Janata Pary government came to power in India last year.

He expects the situation to deteriorate because of the BJP's extremeright wing policies.

He pointed out that the extraction industry continues to expand in the Adivasi areas with the patronage of the Modi government, which has a clear mandate to protect the interests of the corporate sector.

“The expansion of the extraction industry in the mineral rich areas has

marginalized Adivasis and pushed them to the wall,” Kela said. “Although the process of opening the traditional territories of the Adivasis to industry started during the previous governments, it has rather intensified under the current regime”.

He thinks that the Maoist insurgency which has made inroads in the Adivasi areas is a reflection of the fact that the Adivasis have continued to resist since British

colonialism. He equated the state repression against Adivasis in the name of war against Maoism with the Bush doctrine, according to which, “you are either with us or the terrorists” and there is no middle ground.

His book; *A Rogue and Peasant Slave, Adivasi Resistance, 1800-2000* is based on his study of Adivasi struggles and their culture as a trade union activist in the tribal areas in 1990s.

He noted that today when the world is grappling with environmental challenges, like climate change, there is much

to be learnt from the Adivasis, who have strong spiritual connections with nature. “Unfortunately, their languages and culture are under assault as they continue to lose control over land and forests.”

He also believes that the situation of Adivasis in India is not the same as the Indigenous Peoples in North America, where their land and treaty rights are recognized by the courts and governments.

### What does the federal election mean for Aboriginal peoples?

The October 19 federal election had many unique characteristics. It was the longest Canadian election since 1870s, and the most expensive in our history, thanks to electoral law changes which allowed the major parties to spend tens of millions. Interestingly, the voter turnout rose sharply, despite strategies by the ousted Conservatives to make it more difficult to cast a ballot. It remains to be seen whether the new Prime Minister will live up to his promise to reform the electoral system, but certainly on this occasion the mood for change among millions of people swept away the Harper government's attempts to entice their own base to vote while discouraging the rest of the population.

One factor in this outcome was an unprecedented level of participation by aboriginal voters, including First Nations, Metis and Inuit peoples. In some indigenous communities, ballots ran out on voting day, because Elections Canada underestimated the likely turnout. More First Nation, Métis and Inuit candidates ran for office than ever before - over 40 for the major parties, and many more for other parties. A record ten of these candidates were elected, including new Vancouver Granville Liberal MP Jody Wilson-Raybould, Regional Chief of the BC Assembly of First Nations, who may be named to Trudeau's cabinet.

One issue raised repeatedly during the campaign was the demand for a public inquiry into the tragedy of over 1200 murdered and missing aboriginal women and girls over the past 35 years. Stephen Harper stubbornly rejected this demand, which was backed by virtually every indigenous group in

Canada and backed by all other political parties, provincial governments, and even police chiefs.

Now, Justin Trudeau says he will launch such an inquiry within 100 days. In fact, he pledged to implement all of the 93 recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, such as full acceptance of the UN Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which states "Indigenous Peoples have the right to the lands, territories and resources which they have traditionally owned, occupied or otherwise used or acquired."

During the campaign, Trudeau spoke to the Assembly of First Nations, took part in APTN's "Virtual Town Hall" broadcast, and responded to questions from the Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres. He recognized the importance of the Two Row Wampum, the historic treaty signed by the Haudenosaunee (Iroquoian) people and the British colonizers.

During the campaign he promised to review all Harper-era legislation on First Nations, and repeal those which contravene Section 35 of the Constitution respecting aboriginal and treaty rights. If he follows through, this should mean an end to the Harper government's Indian Act amendments, and much more.

He committed to closing the gap between aboriginal and non-aboriginal peoples in education, and advancing housing, health, policing, and child welfare issues, through a renewed Kelowna Accord effort. Specific promises included clean drinking water for aboriginal communities, improved food security in northern areas, action to tackle the root causes of urban

homelessness, a rigorous environmental assessment process, addressing the economic and legal concerns of the Metis nation, and building the Freedom Road to Shoal Lake #40 in Manitoba.

But as many have pointed out, federal Liberal governments have often broken promises given to aboriginal peoples. Justin's late father Pierre Trudeau committed to a "just" new direction on Indian policy, but instead his government delivered the 1969 white paper aimed at assimilation. In 1993, the Jean Chretien Liberals campaigned for an Aboriginal rights platform, which was then completely dropped. While the Harper Tories were widely condemned for the funding cap which has reduced resources for aboriginal communities over the past two decades, this cap was first imposed by the Chretien government.

Given this history, aboriginal peoples across Canada are watching with great interest. Will the new Prime Minister act on his many promises, and engage in full and respectful consultation? Or will the Liberals find excuses to delay, water down and forget these statements?

One thing is certain: relying on Justin Trudeau's personal intentions and fine words is not enough. A combination of pressure from indigenous grassroots movements such as Idle No More and from the official organizations such as the AFN and the Metis National Council will be needed to hold the PM's feet to the fire.

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

### Five turbaned Sikh MPs make historic entry into Canadian Parliament

**T**hose who attacked the niqab are now licking their wounds after the historic election of five turbaned Sikh MPs on October 19th.

The 42nd federal election saw the spectacular win of the Liberal Party under the leadership of Justin Trudeau. After a gap of ten years, the Liberals won a majority with 184 seats out of 338 in the House of Commons. The Conservatives were defeated with 99 seats, leaving the New Democrats with 44, BQ with 10 and Green Party with only one.

The charismatic 43-year-old Liberal leader is the son of former Prime Minister late Pierre Trudeau, who was highly popular in the immigrant communities for his liberal immigration policies. Incidentally, it was Papa Trudeau's birth anniversary a day before the elections.

On the evening of October 19, it was almost the revival of Trudeaumania which had gripped Canadian politics years ago.

At least 20 South Asians of both Indian and Pakistani origins got elected, the majority of them from the Liberal Party. Significantly, five of them are turbaned Sikhs. If their election is any indication, this was a clear mandate against the previous Conservative government's anti-

niqab policies.

The Conservatives had banned wearing of niqab (veil) during citizenship oath ceremonies, a move which had enraged Muslim women and civil liberties groups. Interestingly, Alberta MP Tim Uppal, the first turbaned Sikh minister in the Conservative government, was adamant in support of the ban, despite the fact that the Conservatives had opposed the recruitment of turbaned Sikhs in the RCMP in the past. Uppal was one of the Conservatives who lost, defeated by Amarjit Sohi of Liberal Party.

Among the turbaned Sikh MPs who were elected are former Ontario MP Navdeep Singh Bains, and Raj Grewal from the same province, Darshan Singh Kang from Alberta, and British Columbia's Harjit Singh Sajjan and Randeep Singh Sarai. Notably, all of them are Liberals.

Sajjan, the new Vancouver South MP, has served the Canadian army. He headed the historic regiment that was responsible for forcing the Komagata Maru ship to leave in 1914, when the Japanese vessel

carrying over 300 South Asian passengers was forced to return under the discriminatory continuous journey law.

South Asian women also made an impact in these elections. At least four Indo-Canadian females were elected as Liberal MPs. They are Anju Dhillon, Ruby Sahota, Kamal Khera and Sonia Sidhu. Other Indo-Canadian Liberal MPs who got elected are Sukh Dhaliwal and Jati Sidhu from BC, and Ramesh Sangha, Raj Saini, and Gagan Sikand from Ontario. Dhaliwal, who has served in Parliament before, defeated incumbent New Democrat Jinny Sims by a huge margin.

It is pertinent to mention that while addressing his supporters at the victory party, Trudeau brought up the niqab issue. He narrated the story of a young Muslim woman who wanted to see him elected and ensure religious freedom to minorities in Canada. Throughout his campaign, Trudeau criticized Harper on the niqab issue, accusing him of dividing communities across the country.

-RDNB

## Sukh Dhaliwal attributes his comeback to Trudeau's legacy

The election signs of newly elected Liberal MP Sukh Dhaliwal are now slapped with "Thank You" stickers in different street corners of Surrey Newton, a riding with a sizable Indo-Canadian population.

On October 19, Dhaliwal topped his nearest rival, New Democrat incumbent Jinny Sims, by a margin of more than 12,000 votes. Dhaliwal bagged 24,369 votes, while Sims got 11,604 votes. The Conservative candidate Harpreet Singh trailed way behind with only 6,976 votes.

In spite of media predictions describing Surrey Newton as a battleground riding and a three-way-tight race, both Sims and Singh had embarrassing defeats.

Dhaliwal had served in Parliament before. In the 2011 federal election, he lost by a small margin to Sims, partly due to the "orange crush," a media coinage used to describe the popularity of her party in that campaign. This time around, the "orange crush" turned into "orange crash", paving way for the Liberals whose popularity surged on the eve of voting day.

The Liberals bagged 184 seats out of 338, leaving Conservatives with 99, New Democrats with 44, BQ with 10 and Greens with only one.

Dhaliwal, who is a committed Liberal, attributes his spectacular victory to the legacy of a former Prime Minister. The late Pierre Trudeau was the father of the current Liberal leader and Prime

Minister-elect, Justin Trudeau. Like his father, Trudeau is also a charismatic figure.

Papa Trudeau was highly popular among minority groups for his liberal immigration policies. His son also defended minority rights during the election campaign. He was very steadfast in his opposition to the ban on niqab by the previous Conservative government. Under his leadership, 15 Indo-Canadians were elected as members of parliament.

Dhaliwal, who has always considered Pierre Trudeau as his role model, believes that both the legacy of Trudeau senior and the effective campaign of Justin Trudeau contributed to the defeat of the Conservatives, "whose immigration policies did not sit well with visible minorities". Incidentally, it was Pierre Trudeau's birth anniversary a day before the election. Dhaliwal did not forget to remind voters about Pierre Trudeau's contributions to social justice during the final day of campaigning.

However, Dhaliwal's comeback was not easy. He faced numerous challenges. He was fined for the violation of the Income Tax Act, because of which he had to resign as a candidate for the BC Liberal Party (no connection with the federal

Liberals) in 2013. Back then, he was aspiring to run for the BC legislature. The New Democrats consistently ran attack ads targeting Dhaliwal for violating the Income Tax Act. Yet, he survived the contest.

Then he suffered a personal loss right in the middle of the campaign, when his father Hardial Singh Dhaliwal passed away on September 28. It was a big emotional loss, and Dhaliwal missed his father the most when the time of celebration came.

In the previous federal election, he was opposed by a section of the moderate Sikhs who were offended by his petition in the Canadian parliament seeking justice for victims of the 1984 anti-Sikh carnage. Accusing him of pandering to the Sikh fundamentalists, they worked hard to ensure his defeat in 2011. Later, Dhaliwal was also denied a visa by the Indian government. Though he never openly admitted it, he could not visit India.

Dhaliwal told RDNB during various interviews that he tried to raise a human rights issue that was really very important for his constituents. He has always maintained that he has been consistent in his position on human rights, demanding justice for the victims of the 1984 Bhopal gas tragedy, and opposing caste-based discrimination and violence against women. He never forgets to mention that he supported same-sex marriage rights in accordance with the "progressive ideology" of the Liberal Party.

## Victim of Gujarat violence welcomes Justin Trudeau

**P**rime Minister-elect Justin Trudeau has received applause for his position in support of minority rights from a victim of the Gujarat violence.

Nishrin Jafri Hussain, who lost her father in the anti-Muslim pogrom of 2002, has described Trudeau as "a true global leader." Her father Ehsan Jafri was a former MP, who was brutally murdered by the mob when anti-Muslim violence broke out in Gujarat. The current Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi was the Chief Minister back then. Human rights group allege his complicity in the bloodshed, although he was never convicted.

Hussain, who lives in Delaware, has posted her comments on facebook. To make a point, she has also posted Trudeau's victory speech

following his spectacular win in the October 19 federal election, alongside her own views.

Impressed by Trudeau's speech, she writes, "Here is a leader that I will be proud to take selfie with." Hussain has been to Canada in the past to speak at a public event about the Gujarat violence.

Trudeau had been critical about the ban on niqab during citizenship oath ceremonies by the previous Conservative government. Throughout the election campaign, he accused then-Prime Minister Stephen Harper of dividing Canadian society and creating fear of the Muslim community.

In his victory speech, Trudeau mentioned about a young Muslim mother he met during the campaign. According to him, she is a practicing Muslim and wears hijab, and had handed him her baby daughter and told him something that he won't forget. "She said she is voting for us because she wants to make sure that her little girl has the right to make her own choices in life."

-RDNB

## Election results big shock for moderate Sikh groups in Canada

**T**he spectacular win of Liberals in the recent federal elections wasn't only a jolt for the Conservatives but the results have also come down as a big shock to the moderate group within the local Sikh community.

A section of moderates openly supported the Conservatives in the Vancouver South riding which has a sizable Sikh population. Instead of supporting Harjit Singh Sajjan, the newly elected Liberal MP, they supported the outgoing Conservative MP Wai Young. This is despite the fact that Sajjan is a practicing Sikh, whereas Young is of Chinese origin. Sajjan is the son of a former World Sikh Organization (WSO) leader.

WSO is a lobby group that once supported the demand for a Sikh homeland.

The moderates were upset over the nomination of Sajjan as a Liberal candidate. They were rallying behind Barj Dhahan, a prominent business tycoon whose nomination was rejected. After accusing the Liberal Party of favouring Sajjan under WSO pressure, they publicly announced their disassociation with the Liberals. However, both the Liberal Party and

WSO denied these allegations. Ironically, the Sikh fundamentalists had supported Young in the 2011 election to defeat the then Liberal MP Ujjal Dosanjh- who is a known critic of religious extremism.

In Surrey Newton too, a section of moderates supported the outgoing New Democrat MP Jinny Sims over Liberal candidate Sukh Dhailwal, who was defeated by Sims in the previous election. But Dhailwal defeated Sims with a big margin.

The moderates had turned against Dhailwal before the previous election for supporting a petition seeking justice for the victims of anti Sikh pogrom of 1984. The moderate group had accused Dhailwal of pandering Sikh fundamentalists, an allegation Dhailwal had vehemently denied.

-RDNB

## Vigil held in commemoration of Jaswant Singh Khalra

**H**undreds joined a candle light vigil in commemoration of Jaswant Singh Khalra, a human rights activist who was kidnapped and murdered by the Punjab police twenty years ago.

The event was organized by the World Sikh Organization (WSO) at Holland Park in Surrey on the evening of Oct. 27.

At least eight Sikh temples sponsored the vigil that was well attended by people belonging to different age groups. Prayers were held on the occasion, while speakers gave a call for justice to the victims of "state repression" in Punjab.

Khalra had documented the cases of people who were abducted and liquidated by the Punjab police in alleged fake encounters during Sikh militancy. He came to Canada on the

WSO's invitation in 1995, the same year he was later abducted in the month of September from outside his Amritsar home. According to an eyewitness he was murdered on October 27, which has been marked by his supporters as his martyrdom day. A video clip of his last speech in Canada was also played.

Among those who attended the event was newly elected Liberal MP Randeep Singh Sarai.

Khalra's son Janmeet Singh was the guest speaker. One of the organizers of the event, Tegbir Singh, told RDNB that the program was part of a series of events held across Canada to mark the 20th martyrdom day of Khalra. He pointed out that Khalra was offered to stay back in Canada, as there were apprehensions about a conspiracy to murder him. "Although he could have stayed and

would have got refugee status, yet he was determined to return and continue his work. This shows his bravery in the face of death."

WSO President Dr. Amritpal Singh Shergill urged the gathering to get united to pursue for justice. "We are not the only people who suffered holocaust," he said. He listed various communities that suffered holocaust over centuries. Referring to the First Nations and Jews, he emphasized, "We need to outreach them and walk with them."

Notably, Khalra's grandfather Harnam Singh was aboard the Komagata Maru, the Japanese vessel carrying over 300 Indian passengers which was forced to return in 1914 by the Canadian government under the discriminatory laws of that period.



## Book on Ghadar hero Rehmat Ali Wajidke released

**A** Punjabi book on Rehmat Ali Wajidke, a Ghadar Party activist who was hanged in 1915, was released at a public event held in Surrey on October 11.

Authored by Sarwan Singh Aujla, a retired school principal from Barnala, India, the book is written in the form of a long poem and throws light on Wajidke and his struggle.

Wajidke was hanged for sedition by the British government in March 1915. He was among the Ghadar Party members who had returned from foreign countries to India to launch an armed rebellion against the British occupation. This year marks the centenary of Wajidke's martyrdom.

Aujla is a freelance writer who has authored many books. He served at the government public school in Wajidke, the native village of Rehmat Ali. He was instrumental behind getting the school renamed after the Ghadar hero, and traced his descendants in Pakistan and brought them to India where they were duly honoured by the Punjab government in the 1970s.

Wajidke's relatives had migrated to Pakistan after the partition of India in

1947. Muslims were forced to leave their homes behind and shift to Pakistan, an Islamic republic carved out of India the year it gained official independence.

Aujla has been highlighting the story of Wajidke through his columns in local newspapers. He told RDNB that Wajidke's story needs to be amplified to challenge the communal forces which are inimical to peace and people's unity.

"Today when the Hindu nationalists

are in power in India, we need to remind our younger generation that men like Wajidke and not the Hindu right-wing played a significant role during the freedom movement. This has become important as the Hindutva forces continue to question the patriotism of Muslims."

He added that he purposely decided to write it in a poetry form so that ordinary folks can understand it, and his book can be used to produce ballad singing for a wider reach.

Among those who attended the book launch were former BC Premier Ujjal Dosanjh and the Progressive Intercultural Community Services CEO Charanpal Gill. Dosanjh's maternal grandfather Moola Singh was a

freedom fighter, while Gill's maternal grandfather Dulla Singh was also a member of the Ghadar party.

Addressing the gathering, Dosanjh insisted that Indians need to keep alive the legacy of secularism preached and practiced by the Ghadar heroes. He pointed out that caste based discrimination and religious intolerance continue to pose a challenge to modern day society.

## First ever memorial for farm workers in Canada unveiled

The Golden Tree, a first ever memorial of its kind dedicated to farm workers in Canada, was unveiled in Abbotsford on October 3.

Built in memory of three Punjabi women farm workers who died in a road accident in March 2007, the monument was unveiled at Friendship Garden by the relatives of the victims.

Amarjit Kaur Bal (52), Sukhwinder Kaur Punia (41) and Sarabjit Kaur Sidhu (31) died when an overloaded van carrying farm workers flipped near the highway. The monument, designed by Dean and Christina Lauze, has three faces of women embedded in it.

The relatives of the slain women were present at the unveiling. Sarabjit Kaur Sidhu's husband Jagjit Singh Sidhu was among the speakers who addressed the gathering. He announced that his struggle for the improvement of working conditions in the farming industry will continue.

"The monument is the culmination of our struggle for justice. However, this journey isn't over and I will continue my fight." He mentioned how he was often discouraged by others from pursuing justice, but he never gave up.

Sidhu separately told RDNB that

women working in the farming industry still face exploitation due to their vulnerability. "Although things have improved with more checks and road side inspections since the time of my wife's death, more needs to be done."

His daughter Avneet Kaur also spoke on the occasion.

Following a public outcry, a coroner's investigation was held into the accident in 2009. The inquest found that the vehicle was unsafe and poorly maintained, and that there were not enough seat belts. The inquiry resulted in 18 recommendations to improve working conditions of farm workers.

The project was funded by the BC Federation of Labour (BCFED), Progressive Intercultural Community Services, Canadian Farmworkers

Union (CFU) and Indian Rationalist Society, while the land was given by the City of Abbotsford.

Others who spoke at the event included former BC Federation of Labour President Jim Sinclair and MLA Raj Chouhan, who is also the former president of the Canadian Farmworkers Union. Chouhan reminded that there have been many other deaths in the farming industry in the past before the 2007 accident.

Among those present were former BC Human Rights Commissioner Harinder Mahil, Indian Rationalist Society Leader Avtar Gill, Director of Vancity Lily Grewal, and MLAs Bruce Ralston and Shane Simpson.

Balbir Singh Paras and party sang a dhadhi waar (ballad) dedicated to the victims.

## Punjabi writers in Canada welcome returning of awards by Indian authors

**T**wo prominent South Asian writers visiting Canada have welcomed the returning of awards by the Indian authors and poets. Darshan Singh of India and Khalid Mehmood of Pakistan were here to receive the prestigious Dhahan Prize for Punjabi literature.

Applauding more than a dozen authors and poets who have returned their awards in India in protest against ongoing violence against minorities, free thinkers and rationalists, Darshan Singh said it would go long way in building a movement against repression. "What more can authors do except return awards to register their protest? Howsoever small gesture it may seem, it has the power to mobilise public opinion," said the man who has written 11 novels, including *Lota*; a work based on political opportunism that fetched him the Dhahan Prize.

He said it was "important to challenge a right-wing government in India that has gone to the extent of distorting history and attacking the secularist values of the Constitution of India". Khalid Mehmood, popular by his pen name, Nain Sukh, feels the same. "Living in a theocratic environment in Pakistan, we always looked at India with hope. It is disheartening

to hear disturbing stories of attacks on minorities and people's liberty by religious forces in the neighbouring country known for its pluralism." He was disturbed particularly by the recent actions of the Shiv Sena that forced the cancellation of the Indian concert tour of Pakistani ghazal maestro Ghulam Ali.

However, both writers are hopeful that initiatives such as the one launched by Dhahan Prize Foundation in Canada will help make bridges to bring the two disputing countries closer. After receiving the award on Oct. 24 in Surrey, Darshan Singh, amidst huge applause, noted during his brief speech that the prize could "eradicate false lines dividing the

two nations".

Former Pakistani MP Rai Azizullah Khan, a strong advocate of India-Pakistan friendship, was also in attendance. Instituted last year, the Dhahan Prize is given to the writers of both West and East Punjab. Darshan Singh was given the first prize, while Nain Sukh has received the second for his novel *Lahore Di Vel*. Harjeet Atwal, another second-prize winner from London, did not show up. He is reported to be annoyed for being nominated for the second prize; but the chair of the advisory committee for the prize, Raghbir Singh, told the gathering that the recipients were selected through a transparent process.

-RDNB

**Insaaf  
(Justice)**

"Is anyone there?"

"Is anyone there to listen to my story?"

"Is anyone there who can give me justice?"

"I'm Gursewak Singh."

"I'm the grandson of a famous freedom fighter who had served a life sentence for fighting against the British invaders who had ruled our country."

"I've been on this wheelchair for the last 25 years."

"We were a happy family too. I had a hard-working father who drove a taxi so that we could eat. I had a loving mother who took good care of us. I had a brother who was recruited by the army. He wanted to serve his country. I had a sister who was going to be married. But everything is gone now. My family, my home, my limbs, everything is lost."

"Is anyone listening?"

"I want justice."

"Why are you yelling?"

"What do you want?"

"Who are you?"

"Don't you know me?"

"I'm the leader of this country?"

"Tell me what I can do for you."

"Oh! So you are the leader of the ruling party."

"You cannot give me justice."

"Well, I have the power."

"Tell me. What's your problem?"

"My family was murdered 25 years ago."

"My father was a taxi-driver. My mother was a simple housewife. My brother was recruited by the army. He wanted to serve his nation. My sister was going to be married. All of them were murdered one by one."

"Why were they murdered?"

"Because of their identity."

"I don't get it."

"My father and my brother wore turbans. They were easy to identify."

"But why would anyone kill them for wearing turbans?"

"This is what happened to them, sir."

"The killers were targeting anyone who wore a turban."

"Why?"

"Because two turbaned men had killed the prime minister. Her followers came screaming – you have killed our mother! They dragged my father out of our house and roasted him alive. My father kept pleading for his life. He reminded the crowd how our religious gurus had sacrificed their lives so that others could practise their faith. He had tried to reason that his father was imprisoned for fighting against the British empire. But no one cared. They stripped my mother and sister and burnt them too. My brother showed them his identity card but they did not listen. He took out his sword but he was overpowered by the goons and lynched. Even the policemen did not come to rescue us."

"Oh I see. You are talking about those two treacherous bodyguards who killed our leader. Hmm... This was bound to happen. After all, they had deceived the person they were supposed to protect."

"Ha!!! That's why I said that you can't give me justice."

"You are biased."

"Excuse me! Your leaders are biased too."

"Excuse me! Who are my leaders?"

"Those leaders who celebrated her death. They had distributed sweets. This had angered the supporters of my party."

"But that was not my fault. That was not the fault of my family. Why did we have to pay the price?"

"It was collateral damage. My sympathies are with you."

"No. I don't need them. I don't need anyone's mercy. I want justice."

"Well... It's an old issue. Our prime minister is dead. Her killers were hanged. People have forgotten and forgiven everything that happened in the past."

"Sorry. But I have not. I have lost everything. So how can I?"

"That's history."

"So why do you remember this dead leader of yours? Why do you waste public money on her memorial

## RADICAL NARRATIVE

service every year?"

"Let's be fair. She was a prime minister."

"Her killers were hanged. But the killers of my family are still moving around. Is that fair?"

"Stop sulking! Now our party has appointed a turbaned prime minister. What else do you need?"

"When my people were targeted, the country had a turbaned president. What difference did it make? Your party has failed us."

"You cannot blame my party for that. We believe in secularism. It was a natural reaction of the people on the street."

"No, it was not. Why did this madness happen only in the territories governed by your party then? What more evidence do you need to prove the complicity of the authorities?"

"Why did your people kill our leader?"

"They were not my people. My family had nothing to do with their ideology. Your leader had ordered an army attack on our holy shrine. Her bodyguards had avenged that military operation. She herself was responsible for her death."

"After all, your people were spreading terrorism from that shrine. They were killing innocents too because of their identity. What choice did she have?"

"Why the hell are you trying to prove that they were my people? My family had nothing to do with terrorism. My grandfather was a true patriot. My father had always voted

for your party. My brother wanted to serve the nation. But your people killed both for no fault of theirs!"

"How come you are alive?"

"I was the youngest in the family. My mother had hidden me in a room from where I could see them being burnt alive and lynched helplessly. I wish I had died too. They burnt the house later. The lower part of my body was roasted. My neighbours saved me and sent me to the refugee camp. Since then, my lower limbs don't work any more."

"Okay. Let's settle this. What do you want? You want money? You want a job?"

"I want justice."

"That's what I am trying to do."

"Can you bring back my family?"

"That's impossible."

"Can you hang the people who had killed my family?"

"Evidence?"

"Can you punish your party colleagues who had incited the goons?"

"Prove that."

"Can you give me a gun?"

"What do you mean?"

"I want to kill all those men who had destroyed my family."

"I am talking peace and you are talking like a terrorist."

"Then don't let me become one. If you can't do justice then let me get instant justice. Your government can call me whatever it feels like later, terrorist, criminal or anything like that."

"It's no use talking to you. I better

take my leave."

"Yeah. That's better. You leave right now."

"I want justice."

"Is anyone listening?"

"Why are you beating your head against a wall?"

"Who is it?"

"I'm the leader of your community."

"I'm here to help you."

"Very brave of you! You want instant justice, eh? We'll give you whatever you want."

"How?"

"You want an AK-47? Or would you like to become a suicide bomber?"

"It's no use begging for justice from the people who have killed your relatives."

"Are you a separatist?"

"I am surprised that you are calling me that. I'm a freedom fighter like your grandfather. We want a homeland for people like us. We want a place on this earth where all the turbaned people can live with dignity without any fear of the majority community."

"No, you are not like him! You want a theocratic state. My grandfather fought for a secular country. His organisation wanted the people to set aside religious differences to fight against foreign rule."

"Ha!!! What a secular country it is where your parents and siblings were murdered just because of their identity! Wow!"

"If my country has gone to the

## RADICAL NARRATIVE

dogs, it's not because of my grandfather. It's because of the wrong policies of our leaders."

"How naïve you are! Despite losing everything at the hands of the state machinery you are still calling it your country."

"I am not dumb. I only want justice."

"Justice from whom? You are counting on people who have murdered your family. The majority community that killed your dad, your mom, your brother and sister will never give you justice. Come on, wake up."

"I am awake. You cannot blame a group of people for this. It was the people next door who had helped me. I wouldn't have been alive without the support of the majority community."

"You are a moron. You are just seeing who had helped you reach the relief camp but you are forgetting who destroyed your family."

"Of course I am not. Why did this not happen to the people of our community in the states that were not ruled by a particular political party?"

"I am clearer on the subject than you are. You want to make it appear as an us versus them conflict whereas it was a state-sponsored massacre."

"Well... The state belongs to the majority community."

"If you want justice then you have to fight for a homeland where you can live in peace."

"You are saying this because you have not lost anything like me. You are just taking advantage of the issue

to justify your cause."

"Who forced us to seek a homeland? We have been victimised since 1947 when our country got freedom. While most of the freedom fighters belonged to our community, including your grandfather, we were treated like second-class citizens."

"You must check your facts before making such statements. People from other communities had also participated in the freedom struggle. Barring what happened to us 25 years ago, we have never lived like second-class citizens. We have many success stories to tell. We have been better placed despite the small size of our population, compared to the large number of poor belonging to the majority community."

"You sound very pro-establishment. Why were we not given a separate homeland at the time of independence? The Hindus have got India and the Muslims have got Pakistan; what have we got, sir?"

"You can see for yourself what is happening in Pakistan. The Muslims are fighting among themselves now because of sectarian divisions. I do agree that the Hindu extremists are trying to turn India into a Hindu state but they are also targeting their own Hindu brothers in the name of language and caste."

"But the police never go after the Hindus; they only target the minorities for any damn terrorist incident. They had stormed our holiest shrine. Why?"

"Given my experience, I can say that certainly the state is biased

somewhere but why did you people fortify a place of worship? Why did you kill innocent Hindus? Those killings have made us vulnerable in other parts of the country."

"Oh, come on. We never killed innocents. The Indian agents did all the bad things to defame our movement. As far as fortifying the temple is concerned, our guru taught us to use the sword when all other means to get justice fail. I am just reminding you of your duty as his follower."

"Our guru also sent his sons to the battlefield whereas you people have sent your children abroad. Why don't you use your kids to kill your political enemies instead of asking others to risk their lives?"

"I think there's no point in arguing with you. If you have chosen to live like a slave, that's fine. I better take my leave."

"Yes please. You leave and let me handle this struggle myself."

"I am not a separatist and I don't want to be one. But I need justice and the state is not listening. Those who are promising justice in the name of freedom are enemies of the people's unity. I neither want to become a terrorist nor can I take this continued humiliation anymore. More than symbolic gestures and alms, I need dignified closure. I want the state to punish the guilty. If not now then when?"

*This short fiction has been borrowed from Communalism Combat (Nov. 2009) in recognition of the anti-Sikh carnage of 1984.*



