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Cover Picture : Canada's first Sikh Defence Minister Harjit Singh Sajjan. He raised his hand in support of the Raise Your Hands Against Racism campaign launched by Spice Radio early this year.

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**RADICAL**  
DESI

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

~ Desmond Tutu

## **Paris tragedy should not be used to divide people**

**T**he recent terror attacks in Paris and Beirut were heinous crimes against humanity. The November 13 attack by Islamic State, or IS (widely known in the Arabic world as Daesh) that left 129 people dead should be condemned by everyone. Nobody has any right to take away innocent lives in the name of religion or ideology. But this particular attack, like many previous terrorist acts, has invited knee jerk reactions from around the world. The French government has declared a state of emergency, and the newly elected Liberal government in Canada is being pressured to continue to use warplanes against Daesh in Syria and Iraq and to put on hold the election promise of accommodating 25,000 Syrian refugees by the end of this year. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has announced that he is bringing back warplanes from Syria and Iraq. However, he faces pressure not only from right wing forces, but also hawks belonging to his own party. A mosque in Ontario was attacked, and petitions have been started to force Trudeau to rethink his decision about accepting Syrian refugees. Many Canadians altered their profile pictures on facebook to synchronize with the French flag to show their solidarity. Interestingly, these individuals include some leftists.

First of all, the IS does not represent the Muslim community. So why should Muslims be forced to prove their loyalty and patriotism anytime there is an attack against any Western democracy? Why should Syrian refugees suffer because of IS? Why such a racist backlash against the Islamic community? It seems that hostilities against Muslims since 9/11 refuse to die. If it is not racism, then what?

Secondly, Western democracies should also take blame for terrorism. By bombing Syria and Iraq and killing innocent people, and blindly supporting repression of Palestinians by Israel, western democracies are creating enemies and putting their own people in harm's way. How many times have privileged people in Canada or elsewhere shown similar empathy toward the victims of aggression in Syria, Iraq or Palestine? Why such selective empathy only for France? Let's not forget the IS attack which left more than 40 people dead in Beirut just two days before the Paris tragedy. Were those who died in Beirut unworthy victims?

Trudeau should not succumb to any domestic or foreign pressure. He should be given a chance to fulfill his promises made during the campaign. Let him give peace a chance rather than falling into the trap being laid by the extreme right wing forces, who are licking their wounds after a humiliating defeat in the October 19 election. Canadian voters have already rejected them for their anti-Muslim rhetoric and for turning Canada into a country at war. By buckling under pressure of such forces and creating divisions, nothing will be achieved except strengthening the hands of IS, which needs to be isolated politically and wisely by taking along Muslim community and not humiliating them.

**-Editors**

## Tolerance Triumphs

**From Canada to Indian state of Bihar, the voters dump divisive forces**

**W**hen Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and ex-Canadian PM Stephen Harper entered the Vancouver Sikh temple last April amidst angry demonstrations, they probably never imagined that they would be sailing in the same boat when winter season kicks in.

The two leaders were greeted by protesters who had gathered to display their anger against right wing policies. Modi represents the Hindu nationalist Bhartiya Janata

Party (BJP), while Harper was the Conservative leader. Although based in different countries, the two parties share many things in common, especially the social conservative ideology which was vehemently rejected by voters in both parts of the world in recent elections.

Harper had a humiliating defeat in the October 19 federal election, and the BJP is also licking its wounds after losing the assembly election in the Bihar state of India to a secularist alliance. While the

Canadian election ended the decade-long rule of Harper, Modi's term will continue until 2019, though the Bihar results might change the political winds in India.

The election campaigns in both Bihar and Canada were marked with anti-Muslim rhetoric aimed at polarizing communities, and if the defeats of the BJP and Conservatives are any indication, voters in both societies dumped divisive forces.

### Canada elections

The day Harjit Singh Sajjan was sworn in as the first turbaned Sikh



Defence Minister of Canada last month added a new chapter in the history of resistance against racism and intolerance. His election as Liberal MP from Vancouver South was the culmination of the struggle over anti-niqab (veil) politics under the previous Conservative government. The Conservatives, who banned the niqab during citizenship oath ceremonies, had never guessed that the move would backfire, or that Canadians would elect five turbaned Sikh MPs, including Sajjan, in the October 19

The election of these turbaned MPs was a clear mandate against the Conservatives' anti-niqab stance. Among those elected were

close to 20 South Asians, and at least ten indigenous MPs, most from the Liberal Party which bagged 184 out of the total 338 seats in the House of Commons.

The Conservatives under the past Prime Minister Stephen Harper were adamant about the niqab during citizenship oath ceremonies, in spite of the Federal Court of Appeal ruling against such a ban. Former Minister Chris Alexander went to the extent of saying that they would appeal to the Supreme Court of Canada, while Harper announced that they would consider banning the niqab in public offices as well. Their turbaned Sikh Minister Tim Uppal also supported the ban, insisting that

wearing niqab at a citizenship oath ceremony is against Canadian values. His party had long ago opposed the recruitment of turbaned Sikhs in the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), but Uppal argued that that turban cannot be equated with the niqab which some Muslim women wear to cover the face. Uppal was defeated by Liberal candidate Amarjeet Sohi, who is now the Infrastructure minister and one of four Punjabi ministers in the Justin Trudeau's government. They include two turbaned Sikhs, Navdeep Singh Bains and Sajjan, and one female Punjabi MP, Bardish Chagger. The other three turbaned Sikh MPs - Randeep Singh Sarai, Darshan Singh

Kang and Raj Grewal - are also Liberals.

Throughout campaign Trudeau had warned voters that the Conservatives were trying to divide communities by creating fear. Within two weeks after taking charge, Trudeau's government dropped the previous government's niqab ruling appeal to the Supreme Court. His message resonated with voters, who some observers believe were convinced that the Conservatives were arousing fear against Muslims to get votes from the majority community. Notably, fliers distributed by Conservative supporters in Surrey and White Rock cautioned people against threats from Islamic extremists. Harper had been highly critical of "jihadists". His government's anti-terror bills and legislation aimed to tighten immigration did not sit well with the visible minority groups either.

The Harper regime's lack of political will to accommodate refugees from war-torn areas including Syria also strengthened beliefs that the government was trying to please the "white vote-bank". If that was not enough, Lynton Crosby was engaged as a political strategist by Harper. A controversial figure from Australia, Crosby is highly unpopular among immigrants and the Indigenous communities for his alleged reactionary views.

Obviously, the Sikhs being traditional supporters of federal Liberal Party, and active in politics for many years, have gained

proportionately higher representation in the new government. But Maryam Monsef, an Afghan-born woman who came to this country as a refugee twenty years ago, also made the history after being sworn in as the cabinet minister for Democratic Institutions.

According to newly elected Surrey Center MP Randeep Singh Sarai, a practising Sikh, this election was clearly a referendum against "divisive politics" of the Conservatives. "The Canadian voters have proved that diversity is in their DNA and they can't accept such intolerance", he noted. His own riding is culturally diverse and has a significant population of Sikhs and Muslims.

Some prominent turbaned Sikhs who fought against racism in the past also opposed the ban during the election. One of them, war veteran Col. Pritam Singh Jauhal, was once denied entry into a Canadian Legion in Surrey on the occasion of Remembrance Day. He was told to remove his turban as condition to go inside the Legion. Following his struggle against this high-handedness, the decision was revoked. Jauhal had categorically opposed the ban on niqab. Interestingly, Baltej Singh Dhillon, a senior RCMP officer who faced a racist backlash upon his recruitment years ago, was not allowed to speak about this controversy to the media, according to sources.

Sajjan has also been vocal on the issue and articulated strongly against the ban on niqab. Ironically, he served in the Canadian Armed

Forces, and headed the regiment that was responsible for forcing the Komagata Maru to leave in 1914. The Japanese vessel carrying over 300 Indian passengers, the majority of whom were turbaned Sikhs, was forced to return under the then discriminatory continuous journey law that was enacted to discourage permanent settlement of Indians in Canada. Sajjan supported the anti-racism campaign launched by Spice Radio early this year.

Apart from immigrant groups, Harper had also annoyed the Indigenous communities. He remained adamant about refusing to order a national inquiry into the missing and murdered aboriginal women in Canada, even during the campaign. He had reportedly remarked that this was not even on his radar. His government's resolve to push oil pipelines through their traditional lands and indirectly threatening to prosecute the supporters of civil disobedience movement against such projects as potential terrorists had also enraged the First Nations. As a result, Indigenous leaders gave a call to vote for change. At a Vancouver rally in memory of the missing and murdered aboriginal women held on October 4, two weeks before Election Day, Assembly of First Nations Grand Chief Perry Bellegarde asked everyone in the crowd to vote for change. Those present included relatives of the missing and murdered women. Speakers were unanimous in their criticism of Harper. This was a major development as Indigenous



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communities have largely stayed away from the electoral process since the time when Canada was built as a nation state on their occupied territories. This federal election saw heavy polling in the Indigenous communities.

Trudeau had promised to order a national inquiry, and his minister for Indigenous and Northern Affairs, Carolyn Bennett, has announced that the process is underway.

It is pertinent to mention that Jody Wilson-Raybould, the new Justice Minister, is the daughter of Bill Wilson, a towering Indigenous leader who was highly critical of Justin Trudeau's father, the late Pierre Trudeau. Though Trudeau senior was always known as a respectable figure for his progressive politics among women and immigrant communities, his relationship with Indigenous communities was never cordial. His attempt to extinguish the Indian Act and assimilate Indigenous peoples was strongly repulsed by people like Bill Wilson.

Parallel to the election campaign, the Stop Harper campaign initiated by grassroots level activists received cross sectional support. Many of the speakers at Stop Harper rallies openly accused the Harper government of indulging in racism. Thus, an anti-Harper wave gripped the general mood of the voters

across Canada and benefited Trudeau.

### Beef Dip for BJP in Bihar

In another part of the world, the Hindu nationalist Bharitya Janata Party (BJP) met the same fate as the Conservatives in a provincial assembly election shortly after Trudeau's cabinet was sworn in. The election was held in Bihar state of

India, and the final results on November 8 came as a big shock to the Canada-based supporters of BJP, which got only 58 seats out of a total 243 in the legislature. A secularist alliance of Janata Dal (United) and Rashtriya Janata Dal had a spectacular win, bagging 178 seats. The state has a special connection with Sikhs, whose tenth



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Master Guru Gobind Singh was born there. Guru Gobind Singh tried to eradicate the caste system and build an egalitarian society, and fought against state repression. Like other Indo-Canadians, Sikhs in Canada keenly followed the Bihar provincial election, which jolted the BJP that enjoys a brute majority in the Indian parliament. Only last year, the BJP came to power with a huge majority under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who emerged as a popular leader despite his controversial background. Modi was the Chief Minister of Gujarat in 2002 when an anti-Muslim pogrom broke out in that province. Human rights activists and survivors continue to allege his complicity in the violence. Though he was never convicted, he had allegedly asked police to look the other way in an event of violent protests by Hindus following the deaths of more than 50 Hindu pilgrims when a train was burnt. The Modi government claimed that the train was burnt by Muslim extremists, but one commission of inquiry found that it was an accident. Modi was denied visas by western countries in the past for the large scale violence against Muslims. But for the BJP, he is an undisputed leader and was the party's poster boy in the Bihar election. He himself visited Bihar for

the campaign. But in the end, Modi's magic failed and secularists won. The two leaders of the secularist alliance, Nitish Kumar and Lalu Yadav, are vocal critics of Hindu extremism. Kumar was part of the BJP-led alliance in the past, but

refused to work with Modi as Prime Minister. He broke his ties with the BJP when it was announced that Modi would be the Prime Ministerial candidate. Likewise, Yadav as former Chief Minister of Bihar, has been blocking efforts by the Hindu

extremists to get organized in his state.

Like in Canada, the politics of polarization was clearly visible in Bihar. BJP leaders were accused by the opposition of trying to create divisions between Hindus and Muslims. Some BJP leaders suggested that if they lost, there would be celebrations in Pakistan, a neighbouring Muslim country. Many saw the statement as highly offensive with an underlying message against Indian Muslims and an attempt to woo the Hindu majority. In the meantime, a Muslim man was murdered in the neighbouring state of Uttar Pradesh after being accused of consuming beef. For many devout Hindus, the cow is a sacred animal, and fanatical Hindus can go to the extent of using violence to stop beef consumption. After the incident, a debate over religious intolerance began across India, with many BJP supporters openly justifying the murder. Secularist scholars who spoke against the killing came under attack on social media. Popular film star Shahrukh Khan was also vilified for speaking out against growing religious intolerance. His nationalism was questioned by a section of the BJP leaders. All this resulted in a defeat for the BJP which was hoping to win Bihar by playing the religious card.

Shiv Inder Singh, an independent journalist in India, observed that the voters in Bihar showed the BJP that they can go to heaven by holding on to a cow, but definitely can't make it

to a legislature. Not surprisingly, the BJP had a humiliating defeat last February in New Delhi, the national capital of India, where the Aam Aadmi Party swept to power by taking 67 out of total 70 assembly seats under similar circumstances. Around that time there were many incidents of violence targeting minorities by Hindu extremists who many feel have become emboldened under Modi government.

Clearly, voters in both Bihar and Canada rejected the politics of Modi and Harper. Interestingly, when Modi came to Canada on his first official visit in April 2015, the *Toronto Star* had speculated that sticking close to Modi might cost Harper. The right wing leaders tried to woo each other to strengthen trade relations between the two countries. They both emphasized the diversity of India and Canada, yet both faced accusations of attacking it. When the leaders visited the Vancouver Sikh temple together, they were both greeted by angry demonstrators. An alliance of community activists from different groups came together to show their resistance to the policies of the two leaders. Those against Modi were from religious minorities which feel threatened under a BJP government in India, whereas Indigenous activists joined the demonstration to display their anger against Harper.

Notably, a section within the pro-India and self-proclaimed moderate Sikh group helped the Conservative incumbent in

Vancouver South against Sajjan. They were infuriated at his nomination as the Liberal candidate as against Barj Dhahan, a prominent businessman. They had alleged that the Liberal Party ousted Dhahan under the influence of the World Sikh Organization (WSO), which according to them supported the demand for a separate Sikh state. Their accusation was strongly denied by both WSO and the Liberals. Sajjan's father used to be with the WSO. Part of the group of these opponents of Sajjan had welcomed Modi when he visited the Vancouver Sikh temple.

Whether sticking close to Modi contributed to Harper's defeat in swing ridings cannot be said, but the news of their defeats around the same time period has certainly enthralled secularist and progressive groups. Obviously, these electoral defeats do not mean permanent rejection of divisive politics, systemic racism or religious bigotry, but they have brought relief to those who wanted to get rid of extreme right wing forces in power. Whether Trudeau or the secularist alliances in Canada and India respectively will be able to isolate such forces completely, or to withstand pressure from reactionary elements both within the minority groups and the dominant society, only time will tell. For now, the tide of change has swept the sand castles of intolerance.

-RDNB



## Positive news for murdered and missing women inquiry, but the clock is ticking

**A**fter a decade of denial under the previous federal government, swift progress is now underway to launch a national inquiry into the tragedy of missing and murdered indigenous women and girls. For family members, grassroots activists and Aboriginal organizations which have campaigned since the 1990s for such an inquiry, this reversal is breathtaking, even among those who remain wary of the Trudeau government's intentions. The new situation also compels everyone involved to think carefully about what comes next. The hunger for immediate answers and genuine justice is tempered with the realization that conducting this inquiry in a comprehensive and respectful manner may take several years.

A key part of the problem is the enormous scope of this issue. After years of sharing stories and researching statistics, most family members and activists who have led this struggle agree that over 1200 indigenous women and girls have been killed or gone missing across Canada since 1980, and more in recent months. This will likely be the general period addressed in most detail by the inquiry, in part because shortcomings in data collection make it increasingly difficult to arrive at precise numbers for earlier periods of time.

But indigenous peoples and their allies are painfully aware that

the past 35 years are only a fraction of the historical era of colonization of the Americas.

In 1534, Jacques Cartier "claimed" the Gulf of St. Lawrence for France, and the pace of land grabs and genocide soon accelerated, including the extermination of the Beothuk people on Newfoundland. Other forms of genocide were a deadly consequence of colonization, such as the 1639 smallpox epidemic which killed half of the Hurons. Everywhere throughout the hemisphere, indigenous peoples died in huge numbers as European empires and then the newly independent settler-capitalist states expanded into their territories. Resistance was continuous, but as in the 1864 Tsilhqot'in War in central BC or the 1885 Metis Rebellion in Saskatchewan, was usually overcome by superior firepower and brutal repression.

For First Nations, Metis and Inuit peoples, the events of the last 35 years can only be viewed through the prism of stolen lands, broken treaties, residential schools, the "60s scoop," and shocking crimes committed by police and other state institutions. From this perspective, the 1200 murdered and missing women are not an exception; they are part of an ongoing pattern which weaves together complementary policies of extermination and assimilation. Even today, with a federal government which includes Justice

Minister Jody Wilson-Raybould, the daughter of iconic First Nations leader Bill Wilson, the Canadian corporate elite remains deeply committed to the destructive extraction of tar sands and other resources from traditional aboriginal territories.

All this background hints at the complex issues around the convening of the national inquiry, especially to understand fears that the terms of reference could be set up to limit participation or to pre-determine an outcome favoured by the government.

It comes as welcome news that Indigenous Affairs Minister Carolyn Bennett has already started pre-inquiry consultations with families of the missing and murdered indigenous women and girls. Unlike her Conservative predecessors, Bennett has stated her intention to listen closely to the families, who are determined to be at the forefront of the inquiry process.

Bennett is also carrying out "engagements" with provincial and territorial governments, aboriginal organizations, and civil society groups. She wants an inquiry which will be culturally sensitive, not simply token attention to indigenous practices. So far, the Liberals have committed to spending \$40 million over two years, and they have not finalized the scope of the inquiry. Bennett is aware, for example, that the systemic racism of the residential



school system, which aimed to “take the Indian out of the child”, also had a terrible impact on boys, and that many indigenous men have been murdered or gone missing.

None of this is any guarantee that the outcome will satisfy the families or others who have been deeply involved in this issue, or that the inquiry’s final recommendations will be implemented by governments and other bodies. The Canadian state will still be in the hands of corporate interests determined to squeeze maximum profits from the exploitation of human beings and nature. The police, armed forces, the courts and prisons, spy agencies etc. will remain instruments of force to maintain the rule of the wealthy as long as they hold power.

Even if the inquiry exposes the

systemic roots of violence against indigenous peoples, it will not by itself bring a final end to the legacy of centuries of colonial oppression and racism. As Buffy Sainte-Marie sang in *Now That The Buffalo’s Gone*, “oh it’s all in the past you can say / but it’s still going on here today.”

What might change, however, is something even more profound. Despite setbacks, the struggle to overcome the legacy of racism is gaining momentum. The Mohawk struggle at Oka, the Caledonia land reclamation by the Six Nations, the Idle No More movement, resistance against fracking and pipeline projects, and the demand for the national inquiry, have all won growing support across Canada. The Conservatives refused to accept the Truth and Reconciliation

Commission’s 94 recommendations - including the definition of cultural genocide - and were voted out of office less than four months later.

The fact that this inquiry is about to happen reflects a dramatic shift in public opinion, which the new Liberal government has chosen not to ignore. The Liberals must establish broad terms of reference and ensure that the inquiry will allow people to speak truth to power. But they must also act quickly. Justice delayed is justice denied, and the clock has already been ticking for nearly five hundred years.

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

## Leap Manifesto supporters want to hold Trudeau's feet to the fire

The Leap Manifesto was released last month by an unprecedented coalition of Canadian authors, artists, national leaders and activists in the midst of a federal election. Over 30,000 people across the country have signed this bold plan to improve the lives of working Canadians, to make the political system and economic system more just and fair, and to deal with the climate crisis.

### The Leap Manifesto

We start from the premise that Canada is facing the deepest crisis in recent memory.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission has acknowledged shocking details about the violence of Canada's near past. Deepening poverty and inequality are a scar on the country's present. And Canada's record on climate change is a crime against humanity's future.

These facts are all the more jarring because they depart so dramatically from our stated values: respect for Indigenous rights, internationalism, human rights, diversity, and environmental stewardship.

**Canada is not this place today—but it could be.**

We could live in a country powered entirely by renewable energy, woven together by accessible public transit, in which the jobs and opportunities of

this transition are designed to systematically eliminate racial and gender inequality. Caring for one another and caring for the planet could be the economy's fastest growing sectors. Many more people could have higher wage jobs with fewer work hours, leaving us ample time to enjoy our loved ones and flourish in our communities.

We know that the time for this great transition is short. Climate scientists have told us that this is the decade to take decisive action to prevent catastrophic global warming. That means small steps will no longer get us where we need to go.

### So we need to leap.

This leap must begin by respecting the inherent rights and title of the original caretakers of this land. Indigenous communities have been at the forefront of protecting rivers, coasts, forests and lands from out-of-control industrial activity. We can bolster this role, and reset our relationship, by fully implementing the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

"Small steps will no longer get us where we need to go. So we need to leap". Moved by the treaties that form the legal basis of this country and bind us to share the land "for as long as the sun shines, the grass grows and the rivers flow," we want energy sources that will last for time immemorial and

never run out or poison the land. Technological breakthroughs have brought this dream within reach. The latest research shows it is feasible for Canada to get 100% of its electricity from renewable resources within two decades; by 2050 we could have a 100% clean economy.

We demand that this shift begin now.

There is no longer an excuse for building new infrastructure projects that lock us into increased extraction decades into the future. The new iron law of energy development must be: if you wouldn't want it in your backyard, then it doesn't belong in anyone's backyard. That applies equally to oil and gas pipelines; fracking in New Brunswick, Quebec and British Columbia; increased tanker traffic off our coasts; and to Canadian-owned mining projects the world over.

The time for energy democracy has come: we believe not just in changes to our energy sources, but that wherever possible communities should collectively control these new energy systems.

As an alternative to the profit-gouging of private companies and the remote bureaucracy of some centralized state ones, we can create innovative ownership structures: democratically run, paying living wages and keeping much-needed revenue in communities. And Indigenous Peoples should be first to receive public support



for their own clean energy projects. So should communities currently dealing with heavy health impacts of polluting industrial activity.

Power generated this way will not merely light our homes but redistribute wealth, deepen our democracy, strengthen our economy and start to heal the wounds that date back to this country's founding.

A leap to a non-polluting economy creates countless openings for similar multiple "wins." We want a universal program to build energy efficient homes, and retrofit existing housing, ensuring that the lowest income communities and neighbourhoods will benefit first and receive job training and opportunities that reduce poverty over the long term. We want training and other resources for workers in carbon-intensive jobs, ensuring they are fully able to take part in the clean energy economy. This transition should involve the democratic participation of workers themselves. High-speed rail powered by just renewables and affordable public transit can unite every community in this country – in place of more cars, pipelines and exploding trains that endanger and divide us.

And since we know this leap is beginning late, we need to invest in our decaying public infrastructure so that it can withstand increasingly frequent extreme weather events.

Moving to a far more localized and ecologically-based agricultural system would reduce reliance on fossil fuels, capture carbon in the soil, and absorb sudden shocks in the global supply – as well as produce healthier and more affordable food for everyone.

We call for an end to all trade deals that interfere with our attempts to rebuild local economies, regulate corporations and stop damaging extractive projects. Rebalancing the scales of justice, we should ensure immigration status and full protection for all workers. Recognizing Canada's contributions to military conflicts and climate change — primary drivers of the global refugee crisis — we must welcome refugees and migrants seeking safety and a better life.

Shifting to an economy in balance with the earth's limits also means expanding the sectors of our economy that are already low carbon: caregiving, teaching, social work, the arts and public-interest media. Following on Quebec's lead, a national childcare program is long past due. All this work, much of it performed by women, is the glue that builds humane, resilient communities – and we will need our communities to be as strong as possible in the face of the rocky future we have already locked in.

Since so much of the labour of caretaking – whether of people or the planet – is currently unpaid, we call for a vigorous debate about the introduction of a universal basic annual income. Pioneered in Manitoba in the 1970's, this sturdy safety net could help ensure that no one is forced to take work that threatens their children's tomorrow, just to feed those children today.

We declare that "austerity" – which has systematically attacked low-carbon sectors like education and healthcare, while starving public transit and forcing reckless energy privatizations – is a fossilized form of

thinking that has become a threat to life on earth.

The money we need to pay for this great transformation is available — we just need the right policies to release it. Like an end to fossil fuel subsidies. Financial transaction taxes. Increased resource royalties. Higher income taxes on corporations and wealthy people. A progressive carbon tax. Cuts to military spending. All of these are based on a simple "polluter pays" principle and hold enormous promise.

One thing is clear: public scarcity in times of unprecedented private wealth is a manufactured crisis, designed to extinguish our dreams before they have a chance to be born.

Those dreams go well beyond this document. "We call on all those seeking political office to seize this opportunity and embrace the urgent need for transformation". We call for town hall meetings across the country where residents can gather to democratically define what a genuine leap to the next economy means in their communities.

Inevitably, this bottom-up revival will lead to a renewal of democracy at every level of government, working swiftly towards a system in which every vote counts and corporate money is removed from political campaigns.

This is a great deal to take on all at once, but such are the times in which we live.

The drop in oil prices has temporarily relieved the pressure to dig up fossil fuels as rapidly as high-risk technologies will allow. This pause in frenetic expansion should not be viewed as a crisis, but as a



gift.

It has given us a rare moment to look at what we have become – and decide to change.

And so we call on all those seeking political office to seize this opportunity and embrace the urgent need for transformation. This is our sacred duty to those this country harmed in the past, to those suffering needlessly in the present, and to all who have a right to a bright and safe future.

Now is the time for boldness. Now is the time to leap.

**Is the LEAP Manifesto practical?**

Yes.

Economists at the Canadian Center for Policy Alternatives say that ending subsidies to the fossil fuel industry would recoup about \$350 million a year for the federal government (and more if provincial governments do likewise). A national financial transaction tax could raise \$5 billion a year. Ending special tax treatment for capital gains income would recoup \$7.5 billion a year (and more for provincial governments). Returning the corporate tax rate to where it was in 2006 would raise \$6 billion a year. Tackling tax havens would recoup \$2 billion a year. Scaling military spending back to pre-911 levels would save \$1-\$1.5 billion a year.

Much of what The Leap calls for is infrastructure (transit infrastructure, high speed rail, renewable energy infrastructure, carbon zero buildings, etc.), and traditionally we finance such capital expenditures through debt

spending (the selling of government bonds). Infrastructure is rightly understood as an investment, and thus it makes sense to amortize the cost over many years. Much of what is envisioned consists of shifting new infrastructure spending away from traditional projects (roads, bridges, port and energy infrastructure designed to facilitate the extraction and export of fossil fuels) and towards the green infrastructure we now need. It also means investing in our social infrastructure—health care, education, social housing, and

child-care—with their associated low-carbon jobs.

This is not about having the money; it is about having the political will to make this transition.

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

## Effigies of Evil

In October, when Indians were preparing for the Dussehra festival, two children, one aged two-and-a-half and the eleven months old, were burnt to death near New Delhi, the national capital of the world's so-called largest secular democracy.

The only fault of the slain brother and sister was that they were born in a family of Dalits or "Untouchables", an oppressed group within caste-ridden Indian society. Dalits have been the most persecuted community in India for centuries, and they continue to face systemic violence. Often they are denied equal rights by those claiming to be the members of "upper castes".

In this particular incident, the "upper caste" goons burnt their house following a dispute with the family, leaving the two tiny tots dead.

Since my childhood days in India, I have grown up learning from my elders and teachers that Dussehra is an occasion to celebrate the victory of good over evil. Lord Rama, one of the most revered gods in Hindu society, had killed Ravana, who was a villain, according to Hindu scriptures - though some alternative historians challenge this and see Ravana as a defender of his nation. To celebrate Rama's victory, every year effigies of Ravana are burnt across India. However, this year's Dussehra was unusual. We saw how two living human bodies were set on

fire by people who subscribe to an orthodox and a brutal caste system which has its roots in Hinduism. We saw how the custodians of good actually burnt innocent creatures, instead of effigies of evil.

The gory incident sent shock waves around the world. What added fuel to the fire was an insensitive remark coming from V.K. Singh, a minister in the Hindu nationalist Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) government. He had said that the government cannot be held responsible if someone throws a stone at a dog. This rightfully enraged an already oppressed community.

But such a barbaric crime against humanity, especially against Dalits, is not a rare occurrence. There have been many instances where Dalits and religious minorities have been targeted in a similar fashion. For many years now, the self-styled defenders of good and morality have been burning people alive, and not just the effigies of evil. And most of the time they have enjoyed political patronage. They might have come after their targets in different forms but they are essentially the same.

The BJP was responsible for burning alive innocent Muslims in 2002 in Gujarat. The mass murders followed the burning of a train carrying Hindu pilgrims. At least 50 passengers died. The BJP government in Gujarat blamed the incident on

Islamic extremists, as a result of which an anti-Muslim pogrom started in the state. The current Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi was the Chief Minister of Gujarat back then. Though he was never convicted, survivors of the Gujarat violence continue to allege his complicity.

In 1999, Christian missionary Graham Staines and his two sons, aged ten and six, were burnt to death in Orissa by Hindu fundamentalists. Christian missionaries have been repeatedly targeted by BJP supporters, who frequently accuse them of converting poor Hindus.

Religious conversion has always been a very sensitive issue in India. Though Hindu fanatics accuse Christians of converting poor and gullible Hindus by using charity, nobody is addressing the root cause behind conversion, which is actually caste-based discrimination against the Dalit community. Since Hindu clergy do not give them equal freedom, they are forced to adopt other religions. It is a separate matter that their social conditions do not change even after converting to other faith groups, including Sikhism that is supposed to be a modernist religion.

In 1984, Sikhs were burnt alive in different parts of India following the assassination of then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi by her Sikh bodyguards. The perpetrators were not officially



aligned with the BJP, but were members of the self-proclaimed secularist Congress party.

Then there have been many stories of burning brides by their in-laws for not bringing enough dowry. Women also have been victims of constant physical violence in the patriarchal Indian society.

Our leaders do not forget to congratulate citizens on Dussehra, and remind them of their moral duty to always stand up against evil. But in reality they are the ones who let their goons burn human beings alive, so that they can retain power by instilling fear and pandering to the dominant society among the weak. Following the massacres of 1984 and 2002, both the Congress and the BJP respectively made major electoral gains.

The trend has not changed, and the minorities continue to face violence. The situation has rather worsened under Modi government. Not so long ago, a Muslim man was murdered after being accused of eating beef by the Hindu extremists. In Punjab, two Sikh protestors were killed by police bullets while staging a peaceful demonstration against the alleged desecration of their holy scriptures. Dalits continue to endure discrimination in their everyday life. There is a feeling that not only have Hindu fanatics become emboldened under Modi's administration, but the state has also become increasingly partisan. The murders of two Dalit children should therefore not be seen in isolation. There is obviously a pattern behind the series of violent incidents involving minorities and the oppressed sections.

The selectivity of the authorities

while dealing with fanatics belonging to the majority Hindu community and those from minority groups is also visible. Notably, Modi had reportedly asked the police in Gujarat to look the other way if there were angry protests against Muslims after the train carrying Hindu pilgrims was torched, but in Punjab, the police shot at peaceful protesters. It is pertinent to mention that BJP shares power with the Akali Dal in Punjab.

Some BJP leaders justified the killing of a Muslim for eating beef, but were never charged for sedition. For devout Hindus, the cow is a sacred animal. The BJP supports a ban on beef. But any provocative statement inciting such violence should have been dealt with sternly, which never actually happened. In contrast, some Sikh activists face charges of sedition for organizing demonstrations in Punjab. This is not to defend Sikh fanatics, who also try to make political mileage out of alleged sacrilegious acts. Some have intensified their campaign for a separate Sikh state and are trying to sow seeds of hatred.

Following the acts of alleged desecration of their holy book, the Sikh clergy gave a call for black

Deewali, a festival of lights. Many Sikhs in Canada also boycotted the Deewali festival. But the clergy never observed black Deewali for the sake of Dalits and other oppressed groups who have been the victims of structural violence

It is sad that our leaders and clergy men remain indifferent toward human lives. For them, the slaughter of a cow or burning of a holy book are much bigger crimes. For them, it seems human life is less important than religious symbols. Is your faith so weak that it cannot withstand any act of sacrilege? Certainly those who indulge in such acts on purpose to divide people and create civil unrest must be charged. They must be exposed and the conspirators behind them need to be punished. The need of the hour is to eliminate real and powerful evil, which is patronized by political and religious leaders, rather than burning harmless and powerless effigies in the name of faith.

***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.***



## **Hang Ujjal Dosanjh For Treason Before Charging Aamir Khan With Sedition!**

**S**ome people were critical of Aamir's sharing of his innermost fears for India, the country of his birth, love and life; a country or the critics he has no intention of fleeing. Amir shared his pain and anxiety about the "disquiet...despondency" abroad the land of India. For that he has been charged with sedition. It is shocking that in today's Indian democracy an Indian - be it Amir, Shah Rukh or Girish Karnad - can't freely discuss their feelings and ideas without being threatened bodily harm and death, told to leave the country or charged with sedition.

No Indian - Modi, Aamir or any other- need prove his/her patriotism. Being concerned about the state of peace and harmony in India isn't

unpatriotic. Sharing his wife's intimate fears and insecurities about their child's future can't be treasonous. I know thousands, if not millions, of Indian families talk daily about leaving or at least sending their children away from India for better economic opportunities or for a better quality of life-as they say. Indians are omnipresent in the world. For various reasons they have been leaving India for centuries. I admire the billion plus Indians who have stayed and continue to fight for a better India. Aamir is one of those billion plus who have no intention of leaving; come hell or high water they are there to stay.

That is why the hue and cry about Aamir's important but less than earth shaking expression of the anxieties and insecurities felt by many Indians is beyond comprehension. Sharing one's soul's angst with the people of one's country shouldn't be a capital offence. I wish the leaders of India and the so called "guardians of patriotism" more often and honestly shared their truths and fears with Indians. If they genuinely did so India and the world of Indians will be a better place than the exceedingly corrupt polity and society bedevilled by poverty, caste, and religious tensions. In the current malaise engulfing India the top leadership of all major political parties has been silent and largely missing in action except to score political points against each other. When they do speak they tend to denigrate as did the home minister Rajnath Singh when he invoked the iconic Dr.

Ambedkar to take a swipe at Aamir arguing "Dr. Ambedkar never said he will leave India". Otherwise a deafening silence reigns even in face of gruesome Dalit murders, Dadri lynching and killing of rationalists.

In such frightening silence the screaming anguish emanating from Amir's interview was a breath of fresh air; it should have prompted some serious soul searching in India; instead charges of sedition were slapped against him. Yes, sedition while on the other hand the governments of all stripes have been lionising forever the NRIs- usually Non Resident Indians- the Not Returning Indians except to visit the motherland every now and then. Though India hasn't left most of us - certainly it hasn't left me - we have left India. Most of us have relinquished our Indian citizenship. We have become citizens of the lands where we live. We have abandoned India. Legally we have turned our backs on it. Where is the Indian rebuke for us? Why don't Amir's critics turn their Twitter missiles and rhetorical bombs upon us?

In fact India does the opposite for the NRIs. It showers praise upon us which I dare say we like. In fact in the year 2000 the people of India celebrated me as the first 'son of the soil' for achieving the high office of the premier of the province of British Columbia- the first Indian to do so anywhere in the western world. The Vajpayee government even bestowed upon me the inaugural Pravasi Bharatiya Award in 2003.

And I had left India in 1964 while millions of others chose to stay and fight the billion battles. I fled. Amir didn't. I am your culprit. He is not. I am the one that should be charged with betraying India and the legacy of my own ancestors who fought valiantly like millions of others to free India from the British. I must be charged not just with sedition but more. The charge of sedition is meant to punish only those simply encouraging disaffection/disobedience against the government of the day. Heck, I didn't even do that though I should have because no government is the country and as a Gandhian it is a fundamental tenet of my belief to be permanently seditious against all bad governments.

Aamir's only offence is one of being a true patriot. His critics are wrong in targeting him. I should be the one charged with treason for being a fugitive from the battles against fanaticism, caste, corruption and poverty. I say: hang Ujjal Dosanjh for treason before charging Aamir with sedition!

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



## Vigil held for two Dalit children brutally murdered in India

**E**lected officials and activists gathered at Holland Park in Surrey to protest against the recent brutal murders of Dalit children in India.

A candle light vigil was held under the aegis of We Are All Untouchables on October 30 to remember two-and-half-year-old Vaibhav and eleven-month-old Divya, whose house was attacked allegedly by so-called upper caste goons, leaving the two children dead and their mother seriously injured. The incident occurred near New Delhi, the national capital of India.

Among those who attended the vigil were two MPs, Sukh Dhaliwal and Randeep Singh Sarai, besides MLA Harry Bains.

Others who addressed the gathering included Barjinder Singh of Sikh Nation; Parminder Swaich and Harbhajan Cheema of Ghadar Centenary Committee; Chetna Association leader Jai Birdi; Ambedkar Society leaders Ratan Paul, Manjit Bains, Kamlesh Ahir, and Ravidas Sabha; Sikh temple leaders, Amarjeet Lealh and Shital Kler; and the grandson of former Ghadar Party leader Manguram Muggowal, Tejvir Gangar.

A moment of silence was observed for the slain children. All the speakers unanimously condemned

the murders and agreed that attacks on religious minorities and oppressed groups have grown under the right-wing government in India. They also denounced recent attacks on Muslims, Christians and Sikhs by Hindu extremists and the police force. They demanded action against the assailants behind the attack, and asked for an end to systemic violence against Dalits in the caste-ridden Indian society.

A protest rally was also organized outside Vancouver Art Gallery on November 15 by the Indo-Canadian Ravidassia Community Against Caste Based Atrocities. The event was attended by close to 100 people. In spite of poor weather, people showed up to express their outrage. Among the speakers was former BC

Premier Ujjal Dosanjh, who thinks that atrocities against so-called untouchables have grown under the Modi government. He challenged Modi to break his silence over increasing attacks on religious minorities and oppressed groups.

On October 25, special prayers were also held in memory of the slain Dalit children at Ravidas Sikh temple in Burnaby. The speakers also demanded action against the Indian Union Minister V.K. Singh, who had made some controversial remarks about the tragedy. Singh had said that the government cannot be held responsible if someone throws a stone at a dog. His remarks were widely condemned in India.

-RDNB

## Protest against Modi government in Brampton

**B**raving cold weather, members of the Indo-Canadian Workers Association along with four other progressive organizations staged a protest against the Modi government at the BLS India International Centre in Brampton on November 21.

Members and leaders of the North American Rationalist Society, Canadian Punjabi Sahitya Sabha, Kalma Da Kafila and Punabi Sabhiachar Manch came together to express their deep anguish over growing intolerance in every sphere of Indian life, ever since Modi came to power last year. Most participants agreed that political dissent is being crushed under the current right wing government.

They expressed their solidarity

with writers, scientists, historians, filmmakers and artists, who recently returned their awards in protest against fascist actions of Hindu extremists emboldened under Modi's administration. They also expressed deep concern over continuous attacks on religious minorities, Dalits and rationalist activists. They drew attention to the murders of at least three rationalists - Narendra Dobhalkar, Govind Pansare and Prof. M.M. Kulbargi - allegedly by Hindu extremists. They observed that the Modi regime is invoking divisive policies to distract people from real issues like Inflation and growing unemployment. Ghar Vapsi, Love Jihad and cow protection are the emotional issues being excessively used to exploit religious sentiments of the people to divert public attention. They also

expressed support to the ongoing farmers' agitation in Punjab. Some of the speakers pointed out that the state of farmers continues to deteriorate, as they commit suicides at an alarming rate across India.

All five organizations tried to hand over a memorandum of demands, addressed to the President of India through Indian consulate. But this could not materialize, so the memorandum was sent by post. It was unanimously resolved to make a joint effort to generate mass awareness in the south Asian community by holding more protests and seminars in the future, according to one of the main organizers, Shamshad Elahee Shams.

-RDNB



## People donate blood in memory of Sikh genocide victims

**B**raving cold weather and heavy rain, hundreds of people showed up at different venues across the Lower Mainland on November 8, for the annual blood donation camps organized in memory of Sikh genocide victims.

Held every year in the first week of November by Sikh Nation, the blood drive has always remained a crowd puller.

The camp organized in Surrey alone drew 237 donors that day, in spite of soggy weather. There were big line ups and at least an hour long wait for donors at another camp in

Vancouver. Youngsters from the Indo-Canadian community were seen volunteering at different camps, while gurdwaras offered free food for both volunteers and donors.

According to Sunil Sharma, one of the volunteers associated with Sikh Nation, the campaign that started way back in 1999 has saved more than 100,000 lives as of last year.

Thousands of Sikhs were murdered in November 1984, following the assassination of then Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi by her Sikh bodyguards. Sikh Nation has been consistently highlighting the plight of the survivors of the

large scale violence. The blood drive was started with an idea of saving human lives alongside bringing international attention to the sufferings of anti-Sikh violence.

Sukhdeep Singh, another volunteer, thinks that this campaign has helped in making people understand the mindset behind genocide. He said that systemic violence against minorities and oppressed groups has been going on in India for many years, but 1984 was the time when a pattern of orchestrating massacres of a single community by a secularist state began.

-RDNB

## Shushma Datt honoured for raising awareness against caste-based oppression

**S**pice Radio team leader Shushma Datt was honoured on October 29 by Chetna Association, a group dedicated to the cause of social justice, for her outspokenness against caste-based oppression.

She was presented with a human rights award named after Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, a great Indian thinker and the architect of the Indian constitution, for launching a campaign against racism and caste-based discrimination early this year.

Not only did she launch the Raise Your Hands Against Racism campaign on the occasion of Martin Luther King's birthday in January, she also

wrote a blog against the caste system within the Indian community.

Thanking the organizers of the event held in Surrey, Shushma Datt

assured that her team will continue to highlight the plight of the marginalized communities.

-RDNB

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## Daljit Thind offers seven units to Syrian refugees

**D**aljit Thind, a prominent developer, has become the first Indo-Canadian businessman to offer accommodation to Syrian refugees heading to this part of the world.

Thind confirmed to the RDNB that his company has decided to offer seven units to the refugees who are likely to arrive soon in Canada. He said that being an immigrant himself he understands the necessity to open doors and hearts for refugees.

Thind came to Canada from India in 1993. Like other immigrants, he had to struggle hard to make a place for himself in an alien land, beginning his career as a construction worker. Today he owns many properties and is one of the successful and influential businessmen in the local Punjabi community.

Since the Liberals came to power after the October 19 federal election, Canada has opened its doors for refugees from war-torn Syria. Trudeau has announced that he is going to take 25,000 Syrian refugees by the end of this year. In spite of hostilities running high following recent Paris attack that left 129 people dead, Trudeau and the BC government are gearing up to receive refugees. BC alone is likely to receive 3,000 refugees.

Trudeau is facing pressure from

right wing groups to put on hold his election promise. They have launched petitions seeking to block entry of the refugees, while human rights groups like No One is Illegal have launched a petition in support of refugees.

Thind made the announcement in response to a call given out by a not-for-profit service provider and immigration settlement agency,

Progressive Intercultural Community Services, and Spice Radio. The two groups have jointly started an awareness campaign to encourage people to offer basement suites for refugees. Thind is the first Indo-Canadian businessman to come forward with a concrete offer.

### Remembering Bhakna

This December marks 47th death anniversary of the cause of social justice. Bhakna was born in Amritsar, Punjab in 1870 when India was under British occupation. The first towering Indian revolutionary who dedicated almost his entire life to war of independence that brought people of different faith groups and classes together had been suppressed in 1857. The British government had named this first uprising "Ghadar", an Urdu



expression that means mutiny.

Bhakna's father Karam Singh was a well to do landlord, but known for his kindness. As a true philanthropist, he often helped destitutes during calamities. As a practising Sikh, he believed that serving the poor is like serving the god.

Bhakna was born to Ram Kaur, Karam Singh's second wife. His first wife Har Kaur could not conceive a child. And that's why Karam Singh married Ram Kaur. Har Kaur was a compassionate woman who never discriminated against the so-called untouchables in the caste ridden society.

Bhakna lost his father at the age of one, and was brought up by the two widows. Bhakna always considered Har Kaur as his godmother and was greatly influenced by her love for humanity.

The family environment must have shaped his ideas as Bhakna grew.

He completed his primary education at the village seminary at the age of 15-and-a-half years. Though he scored well, there was no high school nearby where he could pursue higher studies. From his early experience he must have sensed the grand design of the British government to keep Punjab backward. Punjab was a garrison state for the British army that depended heavily on Sikh soldiers. Obviously keeping the state

backward suited their imperialist interests.

In accordance with the orthodox traditions of those times, Bhakna's family got him married while he was studying in grade two. As he stepped into teenhood, he came under the influence of bad company and became alcoholic. He also began visiting a prostitute.

The year 1896 became a major turning point in his life when he came in contact with Kesar Singh, a leader of the Namdhari sect that believed in the progressive values of Sikhism and denounced social degeneration within the Sikh community. As reformists, the Namdhari leaders opposed the caste system, which was renounced by the Sikh gurus but had penetrated into the Sikh community. The Namdhari movement also encouraged the people to oppose foreign occupation and boycott British goods and services, and launched a parallel postal system. In 1872, 49 Namdhari activists were blown up with cannons by the British authorities. Their leader Ram Singh was arrested and exiled to Rangoon, where he died in 1885. Under the influence of the Namdhari sect, Bhakna gave up alcohol.

In 1907, when farmers launched their agitation against taxes and levies imposed by the British, Bhakna, being a farmer, was also influenced by the campaign. This

agitation coincided with the 50th anniversary of the first uprising of 1857. The British government was anxious about its repercussions, and sent some of the leaders of the agitation into exile.

The British policies that favoured industry in England had left Indian farmers and the local cottage industry suffering. The farmers in particular were driven into debt. Under these circumstances, many Punjabi farmers began migrating to other parts of the world for better livelihoods, and Bhakna was not an exception. He migrated to the US in 1909 under a politically charged environment. On the way, he met four Russian migrants who were fleeing from the Tsar. These men left quite an impression on him.

Upon reaching Seattle, he came in contact with Harnam Singh Kahri Sahri, a well known ideologue of the Indian liberation movement abroad.

Bhakna had been an ambivalent supporter of the freedom struggle, influenced by Namdharis and the farmers' agitation, but immigration and subsequent exposure to racism transformed him into a radical activist. His interaction with Russians and people from other nationalities gradually broadened his understanding of social justice issues.

Bhakna worked at a sawmill in Portland. But life was not smooth for Indian migrants. The social environment was very hostile to the



## RADICAL HISTORY OF THE MONTH

people of colour. The year 1907 witnessed anti-Asian riots. The Sikhs, easily identifiable because of their turbans and facial hair, were more vulnerable to racist violence. This had forced many to cut their hair. Bhakna too cut his hair for the time being. On one occasion, a restaurant owner refused to serve lunch to Bhakna and his friend. Since Indians came to the US as British subjects they often approached British consulates for help in any event of racial violence. But the British officials never came to their rescue. They soon realized that the root cause of their sufferings in the US was foreign occupation back home. They gradually started getting organized and fought back against racism. In 1913, the Ghadar Party was launched by advocates of armed rebellion against the British Empire. The party got its name from the Ghadar of 1857. The party believed in secularism and wished to establish an egalitarian society in post-British India. While Bhakna became its president, Har Dayal, a Hindu, became its General Secretary. The party had members from different faith groups and had zero tolerance for religious and caste-based discrimination. The Ghadar Party worked in coordination with activists of other nationalities, such as Irish and Russians, who were also fighting against repression in their home countries.

In 1914, when Britain was locked in a war with Germany, the Ghadar party decided to send its volunteers to India to launch an uprising with the help of the masses and Indian soldiers working for the British army. They thought this was the right moment to strike, while the British were occupied with war. They also believed that Germany would help them in their mission. In fact, they had developed contacts with Germans for future help.

Around this time, an incident in Canada galvanized the Ghadar movement. A Japanese vessel named Komagata Maru, carrying over 300 Indian migrants, was forced to return by the Canadian government in July 1914. The ship was forced to leave at gunpoint in accordance with a discriminatory immigration law that aimed to discourage permanent settlement of Indians in British Columbia. Thinking that those aboard could be recruited as potential rebels, the Ghadar party decided to send them arms and ammunition. Bhakna was deputed to Japan and contacted the passengers on their way back to India. He went all the way to connect with them and hand over weapons for a future rebellion. He also met a German Counselor in Japan to ensure the safety of the Komagata Maru. There were apprehensions that the vessel could be destroyed by Germans who were at war with Britain.

Like other Ghadar activists,

Bhakna went to India but was arrested upon reaching there. He was detained and sent to jail in Punjab. Being a true secularist, Bhakna did not fall into the trap of an investigator who tried to provoke him against his Hindu associates. It was suggested to him, that the authorities were sympathetic toward Sikhs, who were instigated by Hindus like Har Dayal to jump into the freedom struggle and if he became an approver he would be pardoned. Bhakna remained determined and resisted all attempts to break him.

In the meantime, the uprising failed to take off, as people were not ready to support the Ghadar activists. The popular Indian leadership was not prepared for revolution. The British also succeeded in penetrating their moles in the Ghadar party, and all their plans were leaked.

Bhakna faced trial on conspiracy charges. Twenty four of the suspects were awarded death sentences, and Bhakna was one of them. Following an appeal by the moderate leaders of the passive resistance movement, some were given a reprieve, and Bhakna's death sentence was commuted to transportation of life. However, Bhakna did not appeal for mercy. While he survived the death sentence, a very long and torturous struggle of jail life awaited him when he was sent to the Andaman Islands in December, 1915.



## RADICAL HISTORY OF THE MONTH

The Ghadar activists had to fight against inhuman and barbaric jail conditions in the Andaman Islands. The prisoners were forced to do very hard and undignified labour work and were given bad food. Defiance would invite physical punishments. Often the prisoners would commit suicides. Bhakna and other Ghadar activists resorted to hunger strikes against this injustice. This resulted in a public outcry and forced the government to order an inquiry into jail conditions. The commission of inquiry ordered reforms and it was decided not to transport political prisoners to the Andaman Islands in future. Seven Ghadar activists died during this struggle.

In 1921, Bhakna and others were shifted to different jails. Bhakna had to fight for his religious rights in Pune jail, where Sikh prisoners were forced to remove turbans and wear caps. For any practising Sikh with long hair, sporting a cap is an offensive act. When Bhakna and his fellow Sikh prisoners went on a hunger strike in protest, their Hindu associates also joined them in fasting in solidarity.

In 1927, when Bhakna was shifted to Lahore jail, he went on a hunger strike against segregation of so-called untouchable prisoners from others during meal time.

He was finally freed in 1930. Two decades later when he returned to his village, both his blood mother and godmother had died. Having

seen the sufferings of the two women, he decided to open a school for girls. Initially, he faced opposition from the orthodox village residents, who were against sending girls to school. He finally succeeded in convincing them and donated his village house for this purpose. Since he did not have a child of his own he adopted some children, including Veeran, an aged woman now who lives in British Columbia. She remembers that he bought her a bicycle when girls were largely confined to their homes on account of the conservative values that prevailed in Punjab. Bhakna also authored a book on the situation of women in India. So much so, he always took upon himself the blame for being childless, and never blamed his wife. He openly admitted that his bad habits in the past contributed to his inability to father a child. His wife passed away around 1961.

He became a supporter of the Kirti group, a movement of farmers and tillers that later integrated into the Communist Party of India. Even after India gained official independence in 1947, Bhakna continued his struggle for a just society. The first challenge came when India was divided on religious lines and Muslim Pakistan was separated from it. Bhakna tried to save Muslims from Hindu and Sikh fanatics during the riots in spite of death threats.

In 1948, the Communist Party of

India was banned and Communist activists, including Bhakna, were thrown in jails. The Communists saw official independence as mere transfer of power and threatened to wage war for real revolution. They believed that the power was now in the hands of the Indian bourgeois class, and that real independence could come only with the emancipation of the working class.

Bhakna had to resort to hunger strike once more in post-British India due to inhuman treatment of prisoners in jail. He felt that the bend in his back that was too visible at the fag end of his life was an outcome of this hunger strike. He was released after another Ghadar ideologue lodged his protest before Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru. Bhakna had made it clear that he would not shy from another struggle to oppose any kind of state repression. To prove his point, he did not accept a pension for freedom fighters. He passed away on December 21, 1968, leaving behind a legacy of social justice and activism that is still relevant in the contemporary world because of continued occupation of some nations by imperialist and fascist powers, systemic violence against women and oppressed groups, racism and violence by religious fundamentalists across the world.

-RDNB

## A thousand desires such

Mirza Ghalib

**T**housand desires such that at every desire occurs another death

Many of them I have realized, yet I yearn for more why should my killer (lover) be afraid? No one will hold her responsible

For the blood which drips from my eyes for my entire life

We have heard about Adam's dismissal from heaven

With humiliation, I am leaving the street on which you live

Your true nature will be known to all, you tyrant

If the curls of my hair slip through my turban

If someone wants to write a letter to her, make me write it

Because in the morning, I leave my house with a pen behind my ear

At this time, I turn to drinking  
And then comes the time, when my whole world is occupied by alcohol

From whom I expected praise for my weakness...

They are even more hurt with the same cruel sword

In love there is no difference between living and dying

We survive by looking at that infidel who we are willing to die for

Put some pressure on your heart to

remove the arrow of cruelty

For when the arrow comes out, so will your heart and your life

For God's sake, don't remove the shades from Kaaba

In case my infidel lover turns out to be behind them

Where is the door for the preacher and where is the door for the bar

But I know as much that he entered and I left

Thousand desires such that at every desire occurs another death

Many of them I have realized, yet I yearn for more...

*Mirza Ghalib was a progressive and secular Urdu poet from India. This poem was translated by Rabeya Jawaid and has been reproduced here in recognition of Ghalib's birth anniversary which falls on December 27.*

Mirza Ghalib



## READER'S CORNER

**R**adical Desi is pleased to announce the launching of Reader's Corner. We invite our readers to send in their ideas, criticism and pictures for publication in this column. Feel free to send your input at [radicaldesimagazine@gmail.com](mailto:radicaldesimagazine@gmail.com)

Hi Radical Desi Team,

Just wanted to congratulate on the launch of this new magazine. I was grateful to see your Dec 2014 issue with the cover story of Dr. Ambedkar. I've found the wider lower mainland Indian community he is not widely known or respected for his contributions to Indian society.

Just wanted to express my enthusiasm for seeing him on your cover and also learning about some other organizations involved with his message namely the Dr B.R Ambedkar Sikh Foundation , as he is not typically associated with Sikhism by the mainstream Punjabi society. His message needs to be continually shared with all.

Keep up the good work!

*Naveen Aujla*

I recently discovered Radical Desi online and knew I had to support this excellent progressive publication. Your commitment to social justice is not going unnoticed and I look forward to receiving future issues.

Halloween pictures taken by one of our supporters, Gurdev Singh Uppal.

**For more information : 604 259 2853**



