

4

Cover Story

Truth on Trial

**Indian state continues to persecute
a disabled scholar known for standing
up for underdog**

Editorial

Dalit student's suicide calls for global awareness about caste-based oppression 2

Cover Story

Truth on Trial 4

Current Affairs

Sikh leaders who created unwanted controversy over Kathleen Wynne's homosexuality should be ashamed 12

Canada's shameful treatment of Inuit and Indigenous women 14

News 15

Gaurav's Goody Bag

Sharing other's pain 18

Radical history of the month

Remembering two non-Sikh Ghadar heroes who kissed the gallows with courage 19

Cover Picture : File photo of Prof. G.N. Saibaba in July 2015, at the Indian Spinal Injuries Centre in New Delhi.

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

Director: Gurpreet Singh

Design & Layout: Rajpreet Singh

Accounts: Rupinder Punia

Web designer: Bobby Bedi

RADICAL_{DESI}

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

Dalit student's suicide calls for global awareness about caste-based oppression

As the world gears up for the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination later this month, the recent suicide by Rohith Vemula, a student belonging to the so-called untouchable community of Dalits in India, calls for global awareness about caste-based oppression. Vemula, a PhD student at University of Hyderabad, was forced to take his own life on January 17 following his struggle against the orders that expelled him and five others from the hostel on the complaint of members of the student wing of ruling Hindu nationalist Bharitya Janata Party (BJP). Vemula was associated with the Ambedkar Students Association (ASA), named after Dr. Bhim Rao Ambedkar, the architect of the Indian constitution and a famous icon of the Dalit emancipation movement. The ASA's ideology and approach on social justice issues is in sharp conflict with BJP's right wing politics. The trouble arose when ASA decided to protest against the execution of Yakub Memon, a Muslim man who was hanged last year for his alleged involvement in the 1993 serial bombings of Bombay. The crime followed the demolition of an ancient mosque in 1992 by Hindu fanatics in the presence of BJP leaders. The bombings were blamed on Islamic extremists. Memon had maintained his innocence in the incident, yet he was hanged in July 2015 in spite of stiff opposition from civil society. Obviously, the BJP supporters were opposed to ASA's protest. The story did not end there. ASA also supported the screening of a documentary film that exposed the BJP's involvement in violence against Muslims. Following unfounded allegations of intimidation and physical violence by the members of the BJP's student wing, Vemula and five other members of the ASA were expelled from the hostel. As if this was not enough, his fellowship was stopped. There are indications that the BJP government had a direct hand in the whole affair. Finding these circumstances unbearable, Vemula committed suicide, sparking outrage worldwide. A demonstration was also held in Surrey to protest against his death, which was termed by many as "institutional murder". Vemula was not the first Dalit

to fall victim to such high-handedness. The Dalit community has endured oppression and systemic discrimination in the caste ridden society of India for centuries. They are on the lowest ladder of the inhuman caste system that is divided in four groups. The topmost space is occupied by the priest class, followed by rulers and artisans, and the fourth being Dalits, who are forced to engage in menial jobs for a living. There is a famous legend of Eklavya, a tribal child who wanted to be an archer, the space that was reserved for the affluent warrior class. Since he was denied admission in the school of archery, he learnt the skill on his own. When this was revealed to the teacher of the royal family, Eklavya was tricked into parting with his thumb as a fee for acquiring the skill. This was done under a design to make him disabled to shoot arrows. Vemula's story resonates with that of Eklavya in many ways. His activism and intellect had become a threat to the upper caste and right wing student leaders, who had the backing of the powerful state behind them. How could they tolerate his growing popularity, or for that matter the growing influence of ASA in the university? Baseless allegations were slapped against Vemula and his comrades to get them expelled and later to stop his fellowship, to discourage him from completing his PhD. Those who think this is an isolated incident can refer to a Human Rights Watch report, "They Say We're Dirty", that gives a detailed account of how Dalit students continue to be mistreated in schools. Often they are served their meals separately and made to sit in the back rows. Besides, untouchability is still practiced in many parts of India in spite of laws banning it. There are temples that do not allow entry of Dalits. As long as this structure is not completely dismantled, the problem will continue to haunt Indian society, and people like Vemula will be forced to give up their lives. Only a strong political will can bring an end to the caste-based oppression. Unfortunately, under the BJP government this problem is only likely to grow. After all, the BJP insiders wish to transform India into a Hindu nation, further legitimizing the caste system. The international bodies need to recognize caste-based oppression as the worst form of racism. Vemula's death is just another reminder of how Dalits continue to be treated in a country that is widely known as world's largest democracy.

-Editors

SUBSCRIPTION FORM

___ \$40 for 1 year ___ \$ 80 for 2 years ___ \$ 120 for 3 years

Outside Canada: \$ 55 US or \$ 60 Cnd for 1 year

Name _____

Address _____

_____ Postal Code _____

Please make cheque payable to Radical Desi Publications Ltd.
7426, Barrymore Drive
Delta, BC, V4C 6X4, Canada

Truth on Trial

Indian state continues to persecute a disabled scholar known for standing up for underdog

There is lots to learn from courage & spirit of persons with disabilities. I salute them on International Day of Persons with Disabilities", tweeted Narendra Modi, the Prime Minister of India on December 3, 2015. The statement was posted on the occasion when Modi's government launched the "Accessible India Campaign" for people with disabilities, promising to make fifty percent of all government buildings fully accessible.

RADICAL DESI

That these gestures from the leader of the world's so-called largest democracy were hollow became apparent within three weeks of the United Nations International Day of Persons with Disabilities, when a wheelchair bound social justice activist, Delhi University Professor G.N. Saibaba, was sent to jail.

Known for standing up for the oppressed and marginalized, Saibaba suffers 90 percent disability below the waist. He was out on bail on medical

grounds after being arrested in May 2014. He was rounded up after being branded as a Maoist. Released in the summer of 2015 following an international outcry, Saibaba was re-arrested on December 25, after his bail was cancelled. Since then he remains incarcerated in Nagpur Central Jail, under inhuman conditions in contravention of not only the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, but also the Indian constitution, which guarantees the

right to dignity to a prisoner with disability.

His family and well wishers believe that Saibaba is being punished for speaking the truth and to suppress voices of dissent through fear and intimidation. Some feel that it is an attempt to kill him legally. So far, the demand for his release has fallen on deaf ears, as the campaign seeking his liberation by democratic forces goes on both in India and Canada. On New Year's Day, various progressive groups came together in Surrey, BC, where Saibaba's immediate release was

demanding and the participants resolved to continue their fight till he gains freedom.

Story of Saibaba

Born and raised in the South Indian state of Andhra Pradesh, Saibaba, who is in his late 40s, was diagnosed with polio at the age of five. This paralyzed his lower limbs and made him wheelchair bound permanently. Apart from physical disability, economical hardship was another big challenge he had to go through. He comes from a poor family, which had meagre

resources, yet he overcame these hurdles and completed his graduation. In 2013, he did his Ph. D and has been teaching English in Ram Lal Anand College of Delhi University.

During his college days in the early 1990s he became involved in political activism and people's struggles. He joined the All India People's Resistance Forum (AIPRF) and became the state secretary of Andhra Pradesh Committee in 1992. Three years later, he rose to the position of all India General Secretary of the AIPRF and moved to

Delhi.

Saibaba has been writing, giving lectures and organizing demonstrations against globalization and imperialism. He also became a part of the International League of People's Struggles (ILPS). More importantly, he has been highlighting issues of the indigenous peoples and those considered as untouchables in the caste-ridden Indian society.

As a teacher, he brought to life voices of historically marginalized people into classroom through discussions.

In later years, he opposed draconian laws used to suppress struggles for the right to self-determination, and systemic violence against religious minorities and oppressed classes. He actively participated in the campaigns against anti-terror laws that gave sweeping powers to police and security agencies, and fought for the rights of political prisoners. He has been advocating for the repeal of the controversial Armed Forces Special Power Act, which gives extra-judicial powers to the security forces in certain areas where armed insurgency has been going on.

Saibaba associated himself with resistance against oppression in the tribal areas of India which are rich with natural resources. Both the government and the corporate houses have an eye on these belts, which are seen as areas with the potential of establishing extraction industry. Fearing eviction, and in the light of ongoing exploitation, many among the indigenous population in these pockets have become

supporters of Maoist insurgents who wish to bring a fundamental political change in India through armed rebellion. Many of them look at Maoists for support to resist occupation of their traditional land.

The Indian government claims that more than 200 districts spread across the tribal belts are hotbeds of Maoist rebels. Not only they are seen as the "biggest internal security threat", the area where they remain active is frequently described as a "red corridor". To deal with Maoist guerrillas, the authorities launched the infamous Operation Green Hunt, which witnessed enormous state violence against Indigenous peoples between 2010 and 2011. Adding fuel to the fire was the creation of state sponsored vigilante groups that are also accused of large scale human rights abuse and sexual assaults on tribal women.

Saibaba has been opposing Operation Green Hunt and activities of pro-establishment militias under the banner of the Forum Against War on People, and through the Revolutionary Democratic Forum (RDF). He had mobilized campaigns against the operation in urban areas. Since then, it is believed that he became a marked man, and authorities treated him as a Maoist ideologue. His association with RDF was particularly seen with suspicion. RDF is a banned organization in the states of Orissa and Andhra Pradesh, and is suspected to be a Maoist front.

According to a statement issued by the Defense Committee formed in support of Saibaba; "His tireless

efforts to bring every conscientious individual to address the plight of the Adivasis (Indigenous peoples of India) ravaged by the monstrous violence of Operation Green Hunt initiated by the Indian state, also brought him into the cross-hairs of the government."

The authorities started tightening their noose around Saibaba in September 2013, when his home was raided by the police, who took away his laptop, hard disks and pen drives. They produced search warrants for stolen property. A public meeting was organized in his support. In January 2014, he was interrogated for several hours. During this period Saibaba remained cooperative to the police and gave them the passwords to access his hard disks in their possession. Eventually, he was picked up by the Maharashtra police in May 2014 from Delhi. His supporters allege that he was "abducted" by the plainclothes men who blindfolded him and his driver when he was on his way home. He was not given any warrant, and was flown to Nagpur in Maharashtra state. His wife Vasantha was only informed later about his arrest, after his cell phone did not respond and she filed a missing person's report with the police. Ironically, he was held under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, the law which he opposed for its harshness towards political prisoners.

The police alleged that he had links with the banned Communist Party of India (Maoist).

The arrest sparked outrage across the world. A picket was held

outside Indian consulate in Vancouver, while a protest rally was organized in Surrey.

The issue lingered on for months. Notably, Saibaba was arrested several days before Narendra Modi was elected to power with a brute majority in the 2014 general election. His arrest came when the Congress-led coalition government under Manmohan Singh was still in the office. Singh, a big supporter of the neoliberal economic model, had described Maoists as "the single largest internal security threat". However, the approach of Modi's Hindu nationalist Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) government towards ultra-leftist movements is no different from that of Singh's administration. The current government has even widened the mandate of the police unit dealing with left-wing extremism.

It is not surprising that right-wing Hindu nationalist groups also organized parallel rallies against Saibaba on different occasions. They clashed with his supporters, and tried to disrupt meetings organized in solidarity with Saibaba. That the Congress and the BJP share the ideology of neoliberal economic policies favouring corporate world is not hidden either. Maoism remains opposed to such policies, therefore is a common enemy of the two political rivals.

No wonder that Saibaba and his family had been facing the heat from the right wing forces, both under the Singh administration and Modi's government. His family had great difficulty in finding rented

accommodation at different times, mainly due to pressure from the authorities, who found Saibaba's political views "seditious".

Fears and apprehensions

"I believe the government wants to finish him off legally", said Vasantha during an interview with RDNB in 2015 when her husband was still imprisoned. She was apprehensive for the life of Saibaba, who according to her was suffering from a heart ailment and other medical conditions. She complained that his wheelchair was broken while Saibaba was in police custody, because of which he was forced to crawl around his cell. All this badly affected his spine, as a result of which his left arm had stopped functioning. With no one to assist him in jail, his condition deteriorated. He received neither proper medication, nor his special diet. On one occasion he went on a hunger strike to protest against high handedness.

Her fears were widely shared by Saibaba's supporters. As the stories of atrocious jail conditions started coming out, the protests intensified not only in India, but in other parts of the world. A defense committee was formed in India. In Vancouver, ILPS, the South Asian Network for Secularism and Democracy (SANSAD) and the East Indian Defence Committee (EIDC) came together to hold a picket outside Indian Consulate.

Many activists and scholars pointed out that despite India being a signatory to international covenants on disability rights, Saibaba was being denied bail by the courts. At least one representation addressed to the

Indian President mentioned that under the Provision of Section 437 of the Indian Code of Criminal Procedure, the court can direct a person who is sick or infirm to be released on bail. The representation signed by numerous groups and individuals, including eminent writer and Booker Prize winner Arundhati Roy, said "Dr. GN Saibaba has developed swelling and excruciating pain in his paralyzed limbs, several cervical and lower lumbar spondylitis, multiple muscle cramps in the upper arms due to fragile muscles, widely fluctuating blood pressure with a history of cardiac arrest, with every such coordinate aggravating by the day."

Besides, Article 21 of the Indian Constitution specifically guarantees right to dignity to a person with disability.

Finally, Vasantha and Saibaba's comrades had a temporary victory when he was granted interim bail on medical grounds in July 2015, after a bench of Bombay High Court decided to treat an email seeking his release on account of deteriorating health as Public Interest Litigation.

Saibaba was then shifted to a hospital in New Delhi that specializes in treating people with spinal injuries. In an interview with RDNB at the hospital where he was recovering, Saibaba revealed how because of lack of facilities in the jail, he had great difficulty in moving around in his cell even for using toilet.

He acknowledged that he was a free man because of the public pressure. He noted that he was being held because of his political

views. "The government takes political dissent more seriously than heinous crime," he said. Citing his own example, he stated that the courts did not give him bail in spite of his bad health, while professional and dangerous criminals detained in the same jail were getting bails more frequently.

Even as Saibaba's condition began improving, his bail was cancelled. On December 23, the Nagpur bench of the Bombay High Court ordered him to surrender within 48 hours, despite the fact that the interim bail allowed him to receive treatment until December 31. The relief of Saibaba's family was short lived as he was moved back to Nagpur jail.

Vasantha told RDNB that with Saibaba going back to the same environment, whatever little signs of improvement he had started showing in the hospital have begun receding. "It's back to square one. His left arm has once again stopped functioning."

On February 13, Vasantha issued a letter on denial of basic medical facilities in the jail. According to the letter, G. Ramadevudu, brother of Saibaba, met him in the Nagpur Central Jail recently and witnessed "torturous conditions" in which he was struggling for life. The letter claims that he was being denied basic medical facilities and Saibaba looked very tired and weak. "Since the medical treatment is stopped, the shooting pain of his left shoulder [has] increased. Three muscles of the left shoulder, which responded to the treatment at Delhi are [sic] now stopped responding and going back to old condition. The improvement in the lateral

movements of left hand due to the medical treatment is now coming to a stop due to lack of further medical management [sic]. The damage of nerves on the left hand shoulder [has] worsen[ed] and may lead [to] permanent impairment if the treatment is not continued."

Assault on free expression

The decision of the Nagpur Bench of the Bombay High Court did not just affect Saibaba and his family. The court also issued a notice of criminal contempt to a world renowned author Arundhati Roy for her 2015 article on Saibaba, "Professor, POW", published by *Outlook* magazine. Also reproduced by *Radical Desi*, the article gave a detailed account of Saibaba's arrest and his medical condition. Roy had argued that the Indian judicial system was mistreating a physically disabled professor by denying him

bail, while at the same time giving bail to those involved in the 2002 anti-Muslim pogrom in Gujarat. Narendra Modi was the Chief Minister of Gujarat back then, when anti-Muslim massacres broke out following the burning of a train carrying Hindu pilgrims. More than 50 passengers had died in the incident that was blamed on Muslim fundamentalists by the Modi government, followed by well-orchestrated anti-Muslim violence. Human rights activists continue to allege complicity of the Modi government in the crime. Roy mentioned the names of Hindu leaders who had received bail on medical grounds in spite of their involvement in mass murders.

In fact, Saibaba had endorsed Roy's views during an interview with RDNB. He noted that even in Nagpur Jail, most prisoners were Muslims,

COVER STORY

Indigenous peoples and so-called untouchables. He believed that the Indian state machinery was biased against religious minorities and the marginalised sections of the society. During his stay in the Nagpur Jail, he had an interaction with Yakub Memon, a Muslim man who was hanged on July 30, 2015 after Saibaba's release. Memon was accused of being involved in 1993 bombings in Bombay, although he claimed his innocence. The bombings were blamed on Islamic extremists. The incident followed the demolition of an ancient mosque by Hindu fanatics in December 1992, in the presence of BJP leaders. This whole episode had created tension between Hindus and Muslims and culminated into serial bombings in Bombay. Saibaba believed that Memon was not involved and was merely punished for being a Muslim to instill fear in the minds of the minority community by the BJP government.

Incidentally, Roy was vindicated by an incident that was reported on January 21. A journalist named Revati Laul was attacked by Suresh Chhara, convicted for his involvement in the Gujarat anti-Muslim pogrom. Chhara was out on parole when the incident happened. Laul, who is writing a book on the Gujarat massacre, was punched and slapped by Chhara when she went to ask him some questions.

In an apparent bid to kill two birds with one stone, the Nagpur Bench of the Bombay High Court issued notice to Roy on a plea that accused her of interference with the administration of justice, while at the same time cancelled the bail of

Saibaba. Obviously, this did not sit well with many democratic and progressive groups. They saw this as an attack on free expression of not only men like Saibaba, but also writers like Roy. In a strongly worded statement, Vancouver-based SANSAD described these court orders as nothing but a "judicial assault" on democracy. A protest meeting was called by EIDC in Surrey on January 1, where speakers unanimously condemned the court decision targeting Saibaba and Roy.

In India, public rallies were organized in different parts of the country to condemn the decision of the Nagpur Bench. At a public convention held on January 24 in Ludhiana, Punjab by the Democratic Front Against Operation Green Hunt, the Punjabi translation of Roy's article was circulated. The speakers included Vasantha, who vowed to continue her fight for the sake of all political prisoners in India. She travelled all the way to Punjab to attend the convention in spite of foggy weather. At the time of filing of this story, Vasantha was still struggling for bail to her ailing husband.

Prof. Jagmohan Singh, the nephew of Bhagat Singh, a towering Indian revolutionary who was hanged in 1931 for killing a British police officer during freedom movement, also spoke on the occasion.

Uncertainty prevails

"The collective conscience of the society will be satisfied only if the death penalty is awarded to Afzal Guru." This controversial Supreme Court statement in relation to an

alleged Kashmiri militant who was executed in February 2013 is still etched in the memory of social justice activists who have become cynical over the way Indian courts deal with political dissent.

Guru was convicted for a terror attack on the Indian parliament in New Delhi in 2001. The attack was blamed by the Indian government on Pakistan-sponsored Kashmiri separatists. The attack had almost brought India and Pakistan close to a war-like situation. It is a separate matter that the impending war threat was averted. Although evidence against Guru's involvement in the incident was weak, the Supreme Court of India chose to give him a death sentence. Almost all the mainstream political parties were on the same page in supporting the court's decision for the sake of "national interest".

Roy had back then written a very critical essay about the execution of Guru, and other social justice activists also denounced the death sentence. In an interview with RDNB, Roy maintained that Guru was taken out of line and executed. Referring to the judgment that stated that he was being executed to satisfy the collective conscience of the society, she observed, "It was clearly done to send a message to people of Kashmir that do whatever you can we can do anything." It is pertinent to mention that Roy was slapped with charges of sedition in 2010 for speaking in support of the people of Kashmir, particularly those fighting for the right to self-determination. The activists now find the shades of collective conscience statement in the court

orders cancelling Saibaba's bail and contempt notice issued to Roy. For them the court orders are politically motivated, and represent the same collective conscience that took the life of Guru in order to send a message to the Kashmiri leaders seeking right to self determination.

A Delhi-based Jamia Milia Islamia University teacher, Manisha Sethi, writes: "The order will be remembered for its naked display of contempt for civil rights, partisanship and renunciation of judicial independence." She was expected to speak at the Ludhiana convention but couldn't make it.

In the light of the Supreme Court verdict leading to the execution of Guru, the supporters of Saibaba are becoming increasingly apprehensive about the possibility of his freedom in the near future. With the growing rhetoric over nationalism under the Modi government, chances are bleak.

On February 12, following tension at the Jawaharlal Nehru University in Delhi where a demonstration was organized in solidarity with the struggle of people of Kashmir and in commemoration of Guru, a leftist student leader, Kanhaiya Kumar, was arrested for sedition. He was accused of shouting anti-India slogans, but video recording of the demonstration shows otherwise. The slogans were raised against Hindu nationalism, religious sectarianism, hunger, capitalism and other challenges to which the left has been opposed. In the meantime, former Delhi University Professor SAR Geelani was also arrested on sedition charges in connection with a separate event organised in commemoration of Guru. Geelani, a Kashmiri Muslim has been mobilizing support for political prisoners. He had also

spoken at the Ludhiana event for Saibaba and Roy. To make matters worse, the students along with some journalists were assaulted after being accused by BJP supporters of siding with anti-nationals. The same Hindu nationalist groups that opposed rallies in solidarity with Saibaba came in sharp conflict with the supporters of Kumar and Geelani. Apart from Kumar, other student leaders being targeted by the police are Umar Khalid, Anirban Bhattacharya, Ashutosh Kumar, Anant Prakash Narayan and Rama Naga. All these individuals have been consistently mobilizing people against repression of Kashmiris, Dalits and tribals, besides Operation Green Hunt, persecution of Saibaba and other political prisoners.

The growing jingoism has also been noticed by the Human Rights Watch in its World Report 2015:

“Despite commitments to protect freedom of speech, the government has not taken decisive action against militant groups that threaten and attack people over views they do not like”

The whole Indian nation is polarised and divided on the debate of sedition versus nationalism. Interestingly, the ruling BJP - an offshoot of the ultra Hindu nationalist Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh - always becomes defensive when confronted with inconvenient questions over its own patriotism. RSS had never been part of the freedom movement against the British occupation of India. Rather, RSS ideologues wanted to establish

a Hindu nation. One of their supporters, Nathuram Godse, assassinated Mahatma Gandhi, the towering leader of the passive resistance movement against the British Empire, for standing up against violence against Muslims. Under the Modi government demands for installation of Godse's statues have grown, but no one has been charged for sedition for glorifying the killer of the “Father of Nation”. RSS supporters have not only repeatedly denounced hoisting of the national flag that symbolizes unity of all faith groups, but also the constitution that guarantees secularism. If this is not all, the BJP is

also at pains to explain its alliance with Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) in Kashmir. The PDP has always been opposed to the execution of Guru. This has given handle to the BJP opponents to criticize them for being “hypocritical”, while condemning those celebrating Guru as “anti-nationals” and at the same time maintaining an alliance with a party that looks at Guru's case with the same lens. Sedition has now become a synonym for anything that is against Hindu nationalism that excludes Communists, Muslims, Kashmiris and so called untouchables. The ideas of Saibaba definitely do not fit into that discourse.

-RDNB

Sikh leaders who created unwanted controversy over Kathleen Wynne's homosexuality should be ashamed

When Ontario Premier Kathleen Wynne visited Amritsar, India recently, an unwanted controversy arose after Sikh leaders handling the affairs of the Golden Temple Complex, the holiest shrine of the Sikh religion, announced that they would not honour her.

The leaders of the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC), the apex religious body of the Sikhs, cited her homosexuality and support of same-sex marriage as reasons for denying her the robe of honour that is often given to dignitaries visiting the Golden Temple Complex.

According to the SGPC that handles the management and control of the Golden Temple Complex, the Sikh religion bars same-sex relationships. And therefore a robe of honour cannot be bestowed upon a lesbian political figure who supports same-sex marriages.

The statement made headlines across the world. However, conflicting reports emerged after Wynne paid her obeisance at the Golden Temple. Some reports claimed that she was given the robe of honour, while others indicated that she was only presented with a model of the Golden Temple and religious literature by the SGPC, away from the media glare.

Whether or not she was finally

presented with robe of honour remains unclear, but the statements by the SGPC leaders saying that they would not honour Wynne because of her sexual orientation already did the damage.

It's a shame that the SGPC leaders behaved in such a manner. The Golden Temple is open to all castes and communities. The daily Sikh prayer ends with a vow for the welfare of entire humankind. In a nutshell, Sikhism does not discriminate against anyone, but the so-called custodians of the Sikh faith did discriminate against Wynne very blatantly.

This was not the first time that the Sikh leadership stooped to such low level. In the past, Sikh priests had advised Canadian Sikh MPs not to vote for the bill that supported same-sex marriage rights in the Canadian parliament.

If the SGPC or the Sikh clergy is so concerned about values enshrined in the Sikh philosophy, they should first tell: what have they really done to ensure that Sikh politicians in India behave according to Sikh tenets?

The SGPC is an elected body that is currently under the control of the Akali Dal, which is running the government in Punjab with the support of the Hindu nationalist Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP). Akali Dal is often accused of distributing intoxicants during elections to get

votes. How does that sit well with the SGPC and the Sikh clergy? The Akali Dal, like other political parties, also indulges in corruption and political violence, against the ethics of the Sikh faith that preaches everyone to stand up against oppression. On top of that, the Sikh clergy has also honoured the Akali Dal Chief Minister of Punjab, Parkash Singh Badal, with an award on behalf of the entire Sikh nation, even though he was responsible for the extra-judicial killings of ultra-leftist extremists during the early 1970s, and also continues to patronize police officers involved in human rights abuses during the time period when Sikh separatists were active in Punjab.

How come Akali Dal's partnership with the BJP, which is widely known for its anti-minorities stance, has never been questioned by the SGPC or the Sikh priests? Notably, the current Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi was given the robe of honour when he visited the Golden Temple. Why? After all, he was the Chief Minister of Gujarat when the anti-Muslim pogrom happened in 2002. Eyewitnesses and human rights activists continue to allege his complicity in the well-organised violence against Muslims. If Wynne's homosexuality was a problem how come Modi's past was ignored?

During the 1980s, when the Sikh militants had fortified the

CURRENT AFFAIRS

Golden Temple complex and were running death squads from inside, the SGPC and the Sikh clergy remained mute spectators. Weren't those things against Sikhism?

And what about those involved in the Air India conspiracy? Air India Flight 182 was bombed mid-air on June 23, 1985 killing all 329 people aboard. The crime was blamed on Vancouver-based Sikh separatists seeking revenge against the Indian government for state repression of Sikhs during the early 1980s. The only person convicted for this act of terrorism, Inderjit Singh Reyat, is a baptized Sikh. He continues to hide the identity of a potential suspect in the crime and has never shown any genuine remorse. Why have the Sikh clergy, who frequently ostracise moderate Sikhs in Canada on the issue of religious code, never come out with any statement against Reyat? Why did they not find it necessary to excommunicate someone like him

for lying under oath and trying to help his terrorist friends?

Instead of doing moral policing on the Sikh community in Canada and trying to shame Canadian politicians, they should mind their own business in Punjab. By attacking the rights of gays and lesbians, the SGPC and the Sikh clergy are actually weakening the support base of the Sikhs in Canada. They are not realizing that the gays and lesbians have often stood behind religious minorities in Canada. A case in point is that of Svend Robinson, former MP. An open gay politician, Robinson always stood in support of the Sikh community and other minority groups. I still remember the passionate speech he once made in solidarity with Devinderpal Singh Bhullar, a convicted Sikh militant who was facing the death sentence in India.

Barjinder Singh, a well-respected Sikh activist in the South

Asian community in Vancouver, often mentions the sacrifice made by the tenth master of the Sikhs, Guru Teg Bahadur, as an illustration to allay fears about homosexuality. Guru Teg Bahadur did not support Hindu rituals, but when the Hindus were being persecuted by the Islamist rulers, he offered himself for the sacrifice and was executed in Delhi. Singh feels that the Sikhs should remember this part of the history to understand their social responsibility toward other oppressed communities. We certainly need more voices like him to save both humanity and Sikhism from politicians and clergy who divide people by creating fears for narrow ends.

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.

Canada's shameful treatment of Inuit and Indigenous women

Canadians often take deep pride in our country's reputation as a leader in the global movement to protect human rights. But while many significant gains have been won over the years, there are still many dirty secrets in Canada's closets. Perhaps most appalling is the deeply racist treatment of indigenous peoples within the Canadian state. As we near the long-awaited inquiry into murdered and missing aboriginal women, Canadians should get ready for some shocks, and not just about British Columbia, where police forces paid little attention as "Willie Pickton" murdered dozens of victims.

Last April, Raymonde Saint-Germain was visiting detention cells in northern Quebec. She found seven Inuit women locked up in a tiny cell originally intended for one or two people. None of the women had slept all night: there was not enough room to lie on the floor. In some detention centers, she found suicidal detainees, held with those who were intoxicated.

Billions of dollars flow out of Quebec's north through natural resource exports like mining, but social conditions faced by indigenous communities are comparable to the Third World. This contradiction was revealed in February with the release of a report by Quebec's Protecteur du Citoyen or Ombudsperson in Nunavik. Located north of the 55th parallel, bordered by Labrador in the east and Hudson's Bay to the west, Nunavik is larger than California. The region includes communities which were subject to the forced High Arctic Relocation during the 1950s to assert Canada's arctic sovereignty. It is the homeland of the Inuit peoples who live in what is now Quebec.

Saint-Germain's report describes a

Nunavik judicial system which does not respect the fundamental rights of the accused. Cells are dirty and overcrowded with limited access to water, clean laundry, janitorial services and even fresh air. Seven or more detainees are often held in cells intended for two. In Puvirnituq police station, the stench can be smelled when you walk in, with traces of blood and excrement on the walls.

Saint-Germain said it reminded her of jails she had visited in Africa. The Quebec government has known about this probably for at least ten years, she said, yet appears to refuse to do anything. Two years ago a similar report into detention centers on Baffin Island, Nunavut territory, suggested they were likely non-compliant with the Charter of Rights.

The justice system shuttles Inuit from Nunavik detention centers south to Montreal for court, then back to the community, or to jail. According to the newspaper *Le Devoir*, Inuit represent 7.6 per cent of the First Nation population in Quebec, but 43 per cent of incarcerated indigenous people. The total number of Inuit in Quebec jails increased by 64 percent in the last five years.

Across Canada, violent crime rates are falling, yet prison populations are at an all-time high. Some observers are calling jails "the new residential schools." On the Prairies, the overwhelming majority of people in the criminal justice system are First Nations. Indigenous prisoners spend more time in segregation and isolation than other prisoners.

Overall, while indigenous people represent less than 4 per cent of the Canadian population, 36 per cent of female inmates are indigenous – up 109 per cent in recent years.

Last fall, a group of indigenous women told Radio-Canada's investigative program *Enquête* that provincial police officers in Val-d'Or routinely pick up women who appear to be intoxicated, drive them out of town and leave them to walk home in the cold. Some alleged they were physically and sexually assaulted.

An open letter signed by the Quebec Native Women's Federation, and twelve other groups including the CSN labour union central, calls the investigation into the allegations at Val-d'Or by the Montreal Police "fundamentally flawed". Instead of "police investigating police", the letter demands an independent investigation.

To the extent that it delves into such cases, the inquiry into murdered and missing aboriginal women will be incredibly important, but also deeply painful for everyone, indigenous and non-indigenous people, women and men alike. The inquiry will shake the naive belief of millions that Canada is a country based on justice and equality. But hopefully we can emerge from this experience better prepared to move from well-meaning platitudes to genuine reconciliation and full equality.

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

Johan Boyden is originally from British Columbia, and was a student at the University of Northern BC in Prince George. Currently he is a political organizer in Quebec, where he is also the Montreal correspondent for People's Voice newspaper.

Govind Pansare remembered

Comrade Govind Pansare, who was allegedly assassinated by Hindu extremists last year was remembered at an event held in Surrey on February 21.

In February 2015, Pansare was shot at in Maharashtra, India following threats to his life from the ultra Hindu nationalists. His wife was also injured in the attack that resulted in Pansare's death on February 20.

The slain leader was associated with the Communist Party of India. He had been in the forefront of the struggle against the growing threat of Hindu extremists who are seeking to turn India into a Hindu nation. The threat has increased under the current right wing Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) government.

His assassination followed the unsolved murder of Narendra Dahbolkar, another leftist activist who had been campaigning against caste system and superstition. Pansare had replaced Dahbolkar to carry on his unfinished work after his death in 2013. Like Pansare, Dahbolkar had also been on the hit list of Hindu extremists. Both murders remain unsolved.

Pansare had organized public discussions on a controversial book titled, "*Who Killed Karkare?*". The book is about the mysterious killing of Maharashtra police officer Hemant Karkare during a terror attack on Mumbai in 2008. Authored by former Inspector General of Police S.M. Mushriff, the book presents an alternative theory about his death.

Karkare had uncovered the network of Hindutva terrorism in Maharashtra. Mushriff believes that he was killed as part of a conspiracy to protect the Hindu nationalists.

Mushriff also thinks that Pansare might have been murdered for holding public discussions on his book as it exposes Hindu extremism.

Pansare had also challenged Hindu nationalists through his own book; "*Who was Shivaji?*" The book is about a Maratha King, who is often appropriated by right wing forces that portray him as a Hindu nationalist, whereas Pansare's book argues that he was a secularist who never attacked Islam. Rather, his army had many Muslim members. Certain Hindu nationalist groups had problems with his book. He had also received threats for questioning the patriotism of Nathuram Godse, who murdered Mahatma Gandhi in 1948. Gandhi was the leader of the passive resistance movement against the British occupation of India. He was opposed to untouchability and

promoted Hindu-Muslim unity, because of which he was assassinated by Hindu extremists. Godse was a part of the gang that hatched the conspiracy to kill Gandhi. Some Hindu nationalists consider him as their hero and often glorify him openly.

The speakers at the February 21 event organized by *Radical Desi* were unanimous in their demand for a speedy investigation into Pansare's murder. The victims of the Samjhauta Rail blast were also remembered on the occasion. The train carrying mostly Pakistanis was targeted by Hindu extremists on February 18, 2007. The bombing left 68

people dead. Karkare was one of the police officers whose investigation led to the arrest of those involved. The speakers also expressed their apprehensions over the growing interference in the case by the BJP government that might lead to acquittals of the suspects. A moment of silence was also observed in memory of Pansare and blast victims. Those who spoke on the occasion included South Asian Network For Secularism and Democracy leader Chinmoy Banerjee, *Miracle* newspaper Editor Mohammed Naseer Peerzada, Marxist activist Hardev Singh, Dashmesh Darbar Gurdwara spokesman Gian Singh Gill, Sikh Nation activist Sunil Kumar, Fraser Valley Peace Council leader Minakshi Sidhu, Taraksheel leader Parminder Swaich and poet Amrit Deewana.

-RDNB

Rally for JNU students held in Surrey

Braving cold weather, South Asian activists gathered at Holland Park in Surrey on the evening of February 21 to show solidarity with the Delhi-based Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) students and journalists assaulted by the police and the right wing activists.

Organized by the former students of colleges and universities in Punjab, the rally was attended by the supporters of various progressive groups. The speakers were unanimous in their demand for immediate release of Kanhaiya Kumar, the student leader arrested for allegedly raising anti-national slogans and urging repeal of the

controversial sedition law. Those who spoke on the occasion included former Student Federation of India leader and Marxist activist Hardev Singh, Fraser Valley Peace Council leader Minakshi Sidhu, Taraksheel Sabha leader Parminder Swaich, Aam Aadmi Party leaders, Bhagwant Singh Toor and Kanwar Harinder Singh, prominent poet Amrit Diwana and Dalit activist Rushpal Bhardawaj. The main organizer, Hardev Singh, said that the current right wing government in India has been trying to polarize the atmosphere at JNU by either trying direct influence or through indirect penetration of student bodies aligned with the

ruling Hindu nationalist Bhartiya Janata Party. "The crisis there is a culmination of this sectarian politics."

Bhagwant Singh Toor also insisted that the BJP government has been trying to Talibanize Indian society and academic bodies. Bhardawaj warned that the developments at JNU are a continuation of the crisis at Hyderabad University, where a Dalit PhD student, Rohit Vemula, committed suicide because of the growing influence of Hindutva forces which are now precipitating problems in JNU.

-RDNB

Tearful adieu to a dedicated Ambedkarite

Vancouver-based Dalit activist Lachman Das Birdi passed away on February 5, leaving behind a legacy of struggle for equality and social justice.

Birdi was 75-years-old when he died. He was the father of Jai Birdi, one of the founders of *Radical Desi* and the Chetna Association; a progressive group dedicated to the cause of social equality. He is survived by a wife, four sons and two daughters. His son Dev Birdi is a city councillor in Fort Saint James. He had migrated from India to Canada in the early 1970s. Being a Dalit, born and brought up in

Punjab, he had not only endured caste-based oppression in his home country, but also from within his own Indian community in BC. He never gave up his fight against injustice and was a dedicated follower of Dr. Bhim Rao Ambedkar, the architect of the Indian constitution and an icon of the Dalit emancipation movement. He was an active supporter of Ambedkar's Republican Party of India (RPI). He was opposed to all forms of discrimination and believed in gender equality. He openly criticised religious intolerance, racism and even superstition. As a true

Ambedkarite, he encouraged people to get educated and organized to fight back against racism and the caste system. He was a big force behind efforts to get Ambedkar recognized in BC.

He was also instrumental in opening a school in Punjab for needy children. He was given a tearful adieu by relatives and comrades on February 14. Two MLAs, Harry Bains and Bruce Ralston, were present at his funeral. As a mark of respect to his ideology, his body was draped in an RPI flag before his cremation.

-RDNB

Sharing other's pain

Life is so precious. But only for those who care for others, rather than themselves.

Well, that is easier said than done. Yet, there are few people who do not care about the results and have dedicated their lives for the service of others.

This month I am going to share two stories that were reported by the thebetterindia.com where some individuals tried to minimize the pains of others by putting aside their own problems.

An unusual beggar

Something incredible took place in the Indian state of Gujarat.

A beggar, Khimjibhai Prajapati, took upon himself a mission to educate girls in a male dominated society. Every year he donates school supplies to girls from poor families. However, the real surprise came recently when he gave away ten jewellery boxes to them. And he bought all this with the money he made from begging.

This time around, he had informed the anganwadi school that he wanted to gift earrings to the needy girls. So the teachers chose girls whose parents work as daily labourers and blacksmiths.

Khimjibhai bought the earrings for Rs. 10,000 from a jeweler named Deepak Shah, who also gave him a discount upon learning that these were being purchased for a noble cause.

Over the last decade, Khimjibhai has spent Rs. 80,000 in his cause to help the girls become self-reliant.

Once he is done with charity work, he returns to his usual begging spot in the city of Mehsana, with empty pockets but a heart full of love and generosity.

82,000 child labourers walk free

Bachpan Bachao Andolan (BBA)

was started by Nobel Prize winner Kailash Satyarthi and others in 1980 with a vision to end the problem of child labour in the world's so-called largest democracy.

It soon became a mass movement that identified, liberated, rehabilitated, and educated child labourers across the country.

Years ago, when Satyarthi and his colleagues raided an illegal stone quarry to rescue bonded labourers, he probably never imagined how the whole experience was going to change the course of his life. While Satyarthi was driving the children to safety, he asked them to look under their seats for bananas and eat them. The confused children asked him; "Is it an onion or a potato?" He realized that these kids had never seen a banana. The incident continues to haunt him even today after he received Nobel Prize in 2014.

His organization has liberated 82,000 child labourers and continues to work to rehabilitate them.

When people ask whether he has ever thought of giving up the mission, he says "I ask them if they would expect me to wait even for a day if my son or daughter was kidnapped, before swinging into action. How can I ignore the pleas of a mother who has asked me to rescue her child?"

But the mission had its own challenges. Over the years, BBA members have faced brutal physical attacks. Some of them have even been assassinated. After all, they have to deal with powerful people who own anything from factories to brothels.

However, these incidents only strengthened Satyarthi's resolve to continue with his work.

In 1991, BBA established the Mukti Ashram, a rescue home for bonded labourers in New Delhi where children get

food, clothing and medical aid. In 1998, Bal Ashram was set up in Rajasthan to ensure long-term assistance to victims of child labour.

Apart from rehabilitating victims, the organisation also spreads awareness on the importance of education. For this purpose, it has encouraged the establishment of Bal Mitra Grams or child-friendly villages. The organisation has created as many as 151 Bal Mitra Grams since 2001. This model requires that children be withdrawn from factories and sent to school. In these villages, children are also encouraged to form Bal Panchayats to make decisions on behalf of the children through a democratic process.

BBA's efforts also led to the framing and implementation of very important legislation on the issue of child labour in India and abroad.

It held a mass demonstration outside the Parliament demanding a ban on child labour till 14 years of age, through amendments to The Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act of 1986. It also helped in coordinating the historic Global March Against Child Labour in 1998. The march took place across 103 countries and culminated in an international ban on child labour.

In 2008, the organisation developed a database on child labour. It contains information on over 1,300 child labourers and 2,800 offenders. This resource has become a treasure trove for research and has proven to be a reliable source of data for lawyers, activists, and the authorities.

To listen to Gaurav Shah's good story every morning Monday thru Friday, tune in Spice Radio 1200 AM Band at 8:45 am. Also listen to his entertainment program Spicy Chah With Shah from 10-12 pm on the same frequency.

Remembering two non-Sikh Ghadar heroes who kissed the gallows with courage

This month marks the 101st anniversary of the hangings of at least two non-Sikh Ghadar heroes, who kissed the gallows with courage and conviction.

Kanshi Ram Marauli and Rehmat Ali Wajidke were die-hard members of the Ghadar Party that was formed in US in 1913 by South Asian radical political activists who wanted to overthrow the British regime in India. The Ghadar Party believed in an armed rebellion to liberate India from foreign occupation and desired to establish a secular and egalitarian republic once the British were ousted.

These radicals were mainly Indian immigrants who had come to the US for better livelihoods. Since their homeland was under British occupation they obviously came to this part of the world as British subjects. The social environment at that time was very hostile to people of colour. In an event of racial violence, these immigrants never got help from the British consulates. They soon realized that the root cause of their sufferings abroad was foreign rule in India, and that's why they were treated contemptuously. They started getting organized to fight both against racism and British rule in India. These efforts culminated in the formation of Ghadar Party that gradually gained influence over Indian immigrants in

other continents as well.

Although a majority of the members of the Ghadar Party were Punjabi Sikhs, it strictly kept religion and politics apart and emphasised people's unity. The party denounced all forms of discrimination and had members from different faith groups. Marauli, one of the founding leaders of the group, was a Hindu Brahmin, whereas Wajidke was a Muslim. These two individuals were also from Punjab.

Marauli was the treasurer of the Ghadar Party. He lived in the US when the party was formed, while Wajidke was in Manila and joined the Ghadar movement later on.

In 1914, when the Britain entered into war with Germany, the

Ghadar activists decided to return to India to launch an armed uprising with the help of Indian soldiers working for the British troops. Their calculation was that since Britain was occupied by war, it would be easier to encourage their compatriots in the British army to revolt. Also they thought that Germany would give them strategic support to defeat British troops.

Both Marauli and Wajidke returned to India along with many Ghadar activists with this objective. But the political environment in India was not conducive. The popular leadership of the freedom movement believed in passive resistance and was opposed to any idea of armed insurgency. The masses were not ready either for revolution. The Ghadar activists did not therefore get necessary help and were forced to resort to political robberies to raise funds for buying weapons.

Nevertheless, they continued to approach the Indian soldiers for support. As part of this mission, Marauli and Wajidke along with other comrades gathered near Ferozepore in November 1914. The Ghadar Party had planned to attack a cantonment in the area with the help of Indian soldiers and capture the ammunition. For some reason, the plan did not work out and they had to retreat. Unfortunately, they missed a train and rented horse

RADICAL HISTORY OF THE MONTH

carriages to reach another town. While on the way to Moga they were stopped by a police party. Following an argument, a police officer slapped Wajidke, which provoked the activists to pull the trigger. The incident led to a shootout which resulted in the killings of two officials and an equal number of Ghadar activists. In all, seven Ghadar activists were held. Among them were Marauli and Wajidke. The other five were Jagat Singh, Lal Singh, Jeewan Singh, Bakshish Singh and Dhian Singh.

The police tried hard to break Wajidke. He was advised by the Muslim policemen to turn approver against "infidels" in the Ghadar Party, to receive amnesty. But Wajidke was a true secularist who did not buckle under any pressure.

All the arrested Ghadar activists were tried and later hanged in March, 1915. Wajidke was executed on March 25, and Marauli a day later. That those executed belonged to different faith groups clearly indicates that the Ghadar activists practised what they preached. True to their commitment towards secularism they were together in death. Any attempt to separate them, particularly the offer made to Wajidke, did not succeed.

It is unfortunate that the Sikh separatists wrongly try to appropriate the Ghadar history as Sikh history, in spite of the sacrifices made by non-Sikh martyrs like Marauli and Wajidke. The stories of men like them need to be amplified to challenge the propaganda of the Sikh fundamentalists in Canada. Likewise, the current Indian

RADICAL DESI

portraying Muslims as anti-nationals and less patriotic, through stories of freedom fighters like Wajidke.

Today, when religious intolerance continues to grow in India and politicians are trying to divide people, there is a need to keep the secularist legacy of the Ghadar movement alive for a better future and to defeat the nefarious designs of sectarian forces. As long as racism and occupation of various nationalities continue across the world, the legacy of Ghadar Party will remain relevant.

-RDNB

government led by the Hindu nationalist Bhartiya Janata Party also needs to be challenged for

