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Cover Picture : Buta Singh standing next to the column built in memory of Bujha Singh at Chak Mai Dass village in Punjab. Bujha Singh was a revolutionary who was killed by the police in a staged shootout in post-British India. Buta Singh runs the Bujha Singh Memorial Foundation that tries to keep his struggle for a just society alive.

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RADICAL
DESI

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

Black Lives Matter

Recent months have been very difficult and challenging for Afro Americans. In a spate of incidents, black people, mostly men, have been killed at the hands of the police, sparking angry protests across the US, but also in Canada. Under these unfortunate circumstances, the Black Lives Matter campaign was started. All this goes on while the second and final term of first Black US President, Barack Obama, is nearing its end. While Obama first ran for office, many doubted that he would be elected, considering widespread prejudices against Blacks in the US. Yet he made history. Later, there were more speculations among skeptical observers that he might not be elected for a second term, but he crossed that bridge as well. Though on the face of it the US has changed, structural violence against Blacks has been going on for years, even though the country elected its first Black President. Obama's election reflects some change in collective attitudes, but institutional racism against Blacks refuses to die. They continue to face discrimination at the hands of the police and over-represent their population in jails. Blacks make 12 percent of the US population, but 35 percent of jail inmates. White supremacists who are active in the US continue to instill fear in the minds of the Black population. Some of these groups reportedly threatened Obama and tried to assassinate him. Last year, nine people were killed by a white supremacist in a Charleston church that played an important role in the Afro-American civil rights movement. The emergence of political figures like Donald Trump – the Republican nominee for US president - has further complicated the matter. His racist outbursts are giving legitimacy to those who want to keep the US a "white man's country". If he is elected it would certainly send a wrong message that racism is something acceptable. It's a shame that some apologists of the system have started a parallel campaign in the name of All Lives Matter rather than standing up for Blacks. Of course, every life matters, but the Black Lives Matter movement is about educating people against racism and making them understand the seriousness of the issue. During these crucial times, any such parallel campaign should be seen as an attempt to undermine the real cause and be opposed vehemently. It is encouraging to see that some Asians have come out in support of the Black Lives Matter campaign. Letters in various Asian languages have been drafted to outreach Asian-American and Asian-Canadian communities with a message to stand up for Blacks. It was necessary because these communities have endured discrimination in North America, but also because they have internalized racism via colonialism of the Asian countries in the past, when parts of India and China were under British occupation. Whiteness is sometimes seen as a sign of superiority in these regions, partly because of the colonial history. Not long ago, a detergent advertisement in China sparked controversy for showing how it can transform a black man into a white male. In India, beauty products that help in whitening the skin have always been popular. So much so, blatant racism against African foreign students in India continues to exist. Many of these students had been attacked physically. Some Indian politicians have been in the news for spewing venom against Blacks. A Punjabi film produced in Canada mocked a female Black character, but nobody bothered. This month marks the 53rd anniversary of Martin Luther King Jr.'s famous speech *I have a dream*. A towering leader of the Afro-American Civil Rights Movement, King had condemned the systemic racism against Blacks in the US and expressed his hope that one day this injustice will end. Going by his speech, which has become an important historical document, it seems that the fight is not finished yet. Rather than celebrating tokenistic victories of people like Obama, and assuming that racism is a thing of the past, we need to stand up against oppression of Blacks in the US and elsewhere. Never forget that white supremacy is at the root of the problem. We all need to join hands to fight back against this threat to Afro Americans, but also to the Indigenous communities, Asians, Jews, Muslims, women, the LGBT community and also the white liberals.

-Editors

Killer Republic

Indian state continues to use violence against its citizens to suppress voice of dissent under the garb of democracy

As August 15, the day India gained its official independence from British occupation in 1947 draws near, New Delhi, the national capital of the country, bears a fortified look. After all, it's time to celebrate freedom and pay fitting homage to the martyrs of the liberation struggle. But the challenge is to keep potential enemies away to ensure peace so that the national day can pass without incident. Frisking and police presence intensify, and the entire city turns into a military cantonment before the Prime Minister unfurls the national flag on the final day. While this remains the state ritual in New Delhi every year before the Independence Day celebrations, almost 350 kilometers away, at an obscure memorial site in Punjab, activists gather to remember a radical hero of the liberation movement who was killed at the behest of the country's ruling class that enjoys the fruits of freedom. Comrade Bujha Singh was a member of the Ghadar Party that believed in armed resistance against foreign occupation and wanted to establish an egalitarian society in post-British India.

Dissatisfied with the transfer of power when the British officially left, Bujha Singh and

many others continued their fight for real independence for everyone, including those on the margins of society. In order to bring a revolution, he later joined the ranks of an ultra-leftist movement that was crushed violently by the Indian establishment.

On July 28, 1970 barely a fortnight before India marked its 23rd Independence Day, the 82-year-old Bujha Singh, who deserved a 21-gun salute and state honours, was instead killed by the police in a staged shootout. Far from the practicing of the national anthem and police drills, Bujha Singh's followers hoist a red communist flag on a column built in his memory at Chak Mai Dass village annually without

fail, and vow to keep his struggle alive.

The barbaric death of an elderly freedom fighter remains an ugly reminder of the brutal character of the world's so called largest democracy. The message conveyed through his death was loud and clear - that anyone who questions the status quo will face consequences.

Since the time of Bujha Singh's killing, the script has remained the same. With some changes in the setting and the characters, repression continues decades after the British are gone and a government elected for the people and by the people functions. Those on the

receiving end are not only political activists, but also innocent civilians belonging to the oppressed groups and religious minorities.

A demonized hero

Bujha Singh hailed from the present day Shaheed Bhagat Singh Nagar district of Punjab. Earlier known as Nawanshehar, the district was renamed after the towering Indian revolutionary who was hanged for assassinating a British police officer and waging war against the crown. Bhagat Singh was executed alongside two more comrades in 1931. His ancestors also hailed from the same area. On the occasion of his birth centenary in 2007, the Punjab government decided to rename the district after him. Incidentally, he was influenced by the Ghadar Party and the radicals of the generation of Bujha Singh.

Bujha Singh, like many other Punjabis, had migrated abroad to earn a better livelihood under British India. In 1913, the Indian immigrants in North America established the Ghadar Party that believed in armed struggle against the foreign occupation. The party not only fought for the liberation of India, but also against racism abroad. It wanted to establish a secular and egalitarian republic in post-British India. Later it spread its wings to other parts of the world. Bujha Singh, who lived in Argentina, was instrumental

in forming a wing of the Ghadar Party in that country. In the years to come, the Ghadar activists started leaving for India to pursue armed struggle. Many of them were arrested upon return and hanged, while others were given long imprisonments. Those who escaped the police dragnet continued their activities underground.

Bujha Singh also returned to India and became a Communist. Many like him rejected the official freedom of India when it came in 1947. They saw it as mere transfer of power between the ruling classes of Britain and India. For them real revolution was still a distant dream. Bhagat Singh's prophecy was proven right. He had predicted that once the foreigners left, the power might come into the hands of the native rulers. For him, radical change will only come when the human exploitation ends completely.

Disillusioned by growing disparity between the rich and the poor and other structural problems in the society under a new regime, men like Bujha Singh continued to participate in people's struggles. A major turn came into his life following a 1967 uprising by landless tillers in Naxabari village of West Bengal state. The die-hard communists broke away from the Communist Party of India (Marxists) that was sharing power with the Congress party

in the wake of state repression on the land defenders. This marked the beginning of the ultra-leftist Naxalite movement that got its name from the village Naxalbari.

Naxalites launched an armed class struggle across India. Bujha Singh became an active participant in Punjab, where the Akali Dal, a party that represents Sikh farmers, was in power. The current Chief Minister of Punjab, Parkash Singh Badal, was heading the state government back then. Under Badal's government many Naxalites were arrested and killed, and Bujha Singh was one of them. Ironically, while Badal's party has always been critical of the killings of Sikh militants in staged shootouts by the police when the movement for a separate Sikh state was at its peak between 1980s-1990s, his government was responsible for the death of Bujha Singh and his comrades much earlier. During the initial years after Bujha Singh's death, there were challenges before those who wanted to keep his legacy alive. Intelligence agencies kept a close watch on the people who used to gather in his memory at his native village. As the Naxalite movement ceased to exist in Punjab, that challenge is gone, but his followers do not fail to gather in his memory to hoist the red communist flag, raise revolutionary slogans and make vows to keep his

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struggle alive. Buta Singh, who runs the Bujha Singh Memorial Foundation in Punjab, is one of the organizers of this annual event. He is a vocal critic of state violence and feels Bujha Singh is still relevant as state repression continues in India.

Era of staged shootouts

Not very long after the Naxalite movement was crushed, the Punjab witnessed an emergence of Sikh militancy. The Sikh activists wanted some extra political rights for the state. It all started with a charter of demands by the Akali Dal, that remains an influential regional party of the Punjabi Sikhs, especially the landlords and farmers. Out of power, the Akali Dal resorted to agitation in support of some religious concessions and political demands during the early 1980s. Parallel to their struggle, an armed resistance by the Sikh extremists also began. Things turned ugly when the Hindus and critics of extremists came under violent attacks in Punjab, and the Golden Temple Complex, the holiest shrine of the Sikhs in Amritsar, was allowed to become a nerve center of the militant activities.

In June 1984, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi ordered a military attack that left many people dead and some important buildings inside the temple complex heavily destroyed. The timing of the attack was also debatable.

Pilgrims had gathered inside the shrine to commemorate the martyrdom day of their Guru, and did not get sufficient time to leave. Many of them died in the cross fire between the militants and the army. This operation alienated the Sikhs and laid the foundation of the demand for a separate Sikh homeland. During the military attack on the temple and afterwards, the Indian army committed atrocities on ordinary Sikhs. Particularly the baptized Sikhs were treated as potential suspects and frequently harassed by the security forces. In October that year Indira Gandhi was assassinated by her Sikh bodyguards. Following this, anti-Sikh massacres were engineered by her Congress party across India.

These ugly political events galvanized the Sikh militancy both in India and abroad. In June 1985, Air India Flight 182 was bombed, killing all 329 people aboard above the Irish Sea. The crime is blamed on Sikh separatists active in Canada. The Indian state responded violently to the Sikh militancy. The staged shootouts of the suspects became a common occurrence and draconian anti-terror laws were passed. In the name of national security, those who killed political prisoners were given promotions and gallantry awards.

Talwinder Singh Parmar, a Canada-based Sikh militant

leader, who was believed to be involved in the Air India bombing, was killed by the Indian police in 1992. He had gone to India to pursue his struggle for a Sikh homeland when police arrested and eliminated him in a staged shootout.

Not only the militants, but human rights activists and community leaders also suffered police brutality. Among them was Kuljit Singh Dhatt, who was abducted and killed by the police in 1989. Dhatt was related to the sister of Bhagat Singh, the revolutionary who fought against British empire.

Dhatt was a community leader who often stood against police repression. As a result, he was detained and killed in a staged shootout after being branded as a militant. Bhagat Singh's sister, the late Parkash Kaur, pursued the matter through the courts, bringing conviction of three Punjab police officers in 2014. Dhatt was the brother of Parkash Kaur's son-in-law. She died the same year in Canada at the age of 94. She lived to witness the predictions of her brother who always suspected the intentions of the native rulers after the British were gone.

One of the human rights lawyers, Kulwant Singh, along with his wife and a two-year-old son, were abducted and murdered by the police in 1993. Singh's sister lives in Toronto. In 2012, four police

officers allegedly involved in the crime were acquitted.

Jaswant Singh Khalra, a prominent human rights activist whose son now lives in Alberta, took upon himself the task of investigating the forced disappearances, murders and unceremonious cremations of the bodies of the slain suspects. He was formerly associated with the Naxalite movement, but later joined the Sikh politics. In fact, many other former Naxalites had joined the Sikh militant ranks. Khalra had documented thousands of cases of human rights abuse. He also met the same fate after a police party kidnapped and murdered him in 1995. His body was never found, but the investigation that followed a public outcry resulted in the convictions of six policemen in 2005.

The Akali Dal at that time cursed not only the police, but also the Congress government. It repeatedly promised to punish those guilty of state violence if they came to power. But when they returned to power in 1997, rather than going after the killer officers, they backtracked on their promise to order a judicial enquiry into these murders. So much so, they refused to enlarge the scope of inquiry in the Khalra murder case, even though the party considers him a martyr. By that time militancy was wiped out partly because of police repression. Badal had

started saying that it would be unwise to open old wounds. He now shared power with the Hindu nationalist Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) that supported police actions. Under his government the controversial officers continued to enjoy state patronage. In the previous assembly election, his party roped in a former officer who was instrumental behind staged shootouts during the 1980s. Mohamad Izhar Alam, as a policeman, had also reportedly patronized a vigilante group that worked underground to liquidate militants. Badal's government also appointed Sumedh Singh Saini as the state police chief. Saini has been named in several cases of human rights abuse by the activists and some former police officers.

The state violence against Sikhs was not confined to Punjab. Outside Punjab too, Sikhs because of their turbans and facial hair became vulnerable to police repression during that time period. Notably, ten Sikh pilgrims were kidnapped and killed by the police in Uttar Pradesh in 1991. They were all branded as Sikh terrorists by the police and killed in staged shootouts. The BJP was in power in Uttar Pradesh at the time of this mass murder. 47 of the cops involved were convicted this year after a long struggle for justice by the families of the deceased men.

All the governments led by parties ranging from the Congress to the Akali Dal and the BJP were directly or indirectly complicit in the state violence against Sikhs during militancy.

Whether it was the Naxalite movement or the Sikh struggle for a separate homeland, in both situations the police had similar explanations: that the police were engaged in a gun fight by the armed insurgents, leading to a fierce battle leaving the militants dead. In most cases, no injuries or deaths were suffered by the cops. Human rights activists who have followed such controversial police operations for years see a pattern behind these killings that are meant to send a message to the political extremists; either give up or die. The excuse generally given to justify such killings is that it is hard to establish the guilt of the extremists in the courts, hence staged shootouts or extra judicial killings become necessary evil. Besides physical violence, legislated violence was also used through draconian laws to deal with extremists. These laws gave sweeping powers to the police and security forces to detain people at will.

Killing fields of Kashmir

Punjab was not the only state to bear the state violence, and nor was the Naxalite movement the last political agitation in India to face police brutality. States like Kashmir,

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Manipur and Nagaland, where struggles for right to self-determination have been going on for years, have witnessed large scale state violence. Forced disappearances, tortures, custodial deaths, rapes and staged shootouts have been daily occurrences in the lives of the people in these regions.

Kashmir flared up once again last month following the killing of Burhan Wani in an alleged staged shootout by the Indian army. Over 40 protesters have been killed for demonstrating against the death of Wani by the security forces. As if this was not enough, more troops have been deployed in the region to deal with the uprising.

The situation in that state is a culmination of years of suppression of demands for self-determination. Kashmiri leaders have been seeking a plebiscite to decide their political future. Kashmir, a Muslim majority state, shares a border with Islamic Pakistan that was separated from India in 1947. The country was divided on religious lines following demands from both Hindu and Muslim separatists. Kashmir, a princely state back then, had chosen to be independent. When Pakistan tried to bring it under its occupation, the Hindu emperor of Kashmir sought India's intervention and agreed to sign a document of accession with India. But this compromise

was not acceptable to the masses. The Indian leadership promised to hold a plebiscite to let the people of Kashmir decide their future once stability was restored, but that promise was never fulfilled.

In later years, the Kashmir struggle became violent and Hindus were forced to leave the region. The militants asking for complete freedom, and those who want to go with Pakistan, have been active since then. In the absence of meaningful political initiatives and excessive use of force, the situation has worsened. The Indian forces have been given extra powers to deal with the militants who are frequently eliminated in staged shootouts. Even those who protest are attacked mercilessly. Unmarked graves of those abducted over the years have been discovered. This goes on despite the fact that the BJP currently shares power with the People's Democratic Party (PDP) in the state. The PDP has often been accused of harbouring a soft corner for the Muslim militants, much as the BJP's alliance partner Akali Dal in Punjab is blamed for being sympathetic to Sikh extremists. It is a separate matter that the two regional parties have compromised their known political positions a number of times to keep their alliance with Hindu nationalists intact.

One outstanding episode

showcasing the barbarity of the Indian forces against both Muslims and Sikhs in Kashmir is the Chattisinghpora massacre and the staged killings of alleged extremists afterwards.

In 2000, 34 Sikhs were shot and killed in Chattisinghpora village. The attackers wore Indian army uniforms. According to some eyewitnesses, the killers raised Hindu religious slogans of victory after finishing the task and left. The incident coincided with the visit of then US President Bill Clinton to India. The Indian government blamed Pakistan-based Islamic extremists for the incident. But the militant groups active in Kashmir contested this. The most startling statement came from the former US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, who wrote in her book that this was a handiwork of Hindu extremists. Following protests by the Hindu nationalist lobby, the publishers were forced to expunge those remarks. Those who believe in conspiracy theories think that the Indian agencies got the job done to give a bad name to Pakistan during Clinton's visit. Indeed, India has always been blaming Pakistan for sponsoring terrorism in Punjab and Kashmir.

What gave credence to these theories was the elimination of five alleged extremists by the Indian forces. The state machinery claimed that they

were Pakistani militants who had killed the Sikhs in Chattisinghpora. Following protests by local residents, the bodies of these so-called militants were exhumed, and DNA tests proved in 2002 that they were civilians of Kashmir, not foreign militants. It is believed that these individuals were picked and killed to cover up the Sikh massacre.

That the Indian army can go to any extent of covering up the crimes committed by its soldiers in Kashmir can be understood by their handling of a case of mass rapes in 1991. During a crackdown in the twin villages of Kunan Poshpora, army officials had raped 20 women. According to some estimates, close to one hundred women were gang-raped by the army officials. Members of the civil society have been fighting for justice since then, while six of the victims have died. Only recently, the Indian army approached the Supreme Court against the orders of the lower court asking for investigation & compensation, alleging that the case is a "hoax" and "orchestrated by the militant groups to discredit the counter terrorism operation".

This is not the first time that the Indian state has responded aggressively to any attempt for justice to the victims of repression. In Punjab too, such arguments have been used to counter human rights groups.

The most common rhetoric used to silence the civil society is that such allegations demoralize forces involved in national war.

But such tactics have failed to break the will of the people. The people from Kunan Poshpara, including women, also marched in Kashmir to break the siege in the aftermath of the killing of Wani and the deaths of protesters at the hands of security forces. The resilience of people in the face of state violence was best displayed by women in Manipur, another conflict ridden state, in 2004. Following a custodial rape and murder of a woman, at least two dozen women marched naked before an Army headquarters screaming, "Indian army rape us too."

Medal of shame

In 2012, when the Indian government presented a gallantry award to a police officer named Ankit Garg, many women activists were up in arms. Garg is a Chattisgarh cadre police officer under whose supervision a tribal activist Soni Sori was stripped naked and tortured. What added insult to the injury was that Garg was given the award on the occasion of Republic Day. Sori was suspected to be a supporter of Maoist insurgents who are active in the region. They have a big support base among the tribal people whose lands are being appropriated

by the extraction industry with the help of the government. Many tribal people who feel threatened see Maoists as protectors. For them, the police and paramilitary forces are the tools of violence used by the state and corporates who are eyeing their traditional lands for minerals and want to evict them forcibly.

Sori is a teacher who was picked up and given electric shocks. Stones were pushed into her private parts. Since her release in 2013 she has been advocating for the rights of other tribal women like her, who continue to face the wrath of the police and security forces. Early this year, she raised the issue of young women who were being compelled by the security forces to squeeze their breasts to take out milk to prove that they were married. This was done to identify unmarried women, who are seen as potential Maoist insurgents by the authorities. The Maoist fighters have among them a significant number of tribal women who prefer not to marry for the sake of their cause.

In February, Sori was attacked with a chemical that nearly burnt her face.

Her story represents the overall situation of tribal women who are frequently assaulted by the security forces and pro-state vigilante groups in areas where Maoists are engaged in an armed

conflict with the government. Madkam Hidme was abducted by the paramilitary forces on June 13 and killed under mysterious circumstances. The police claimed that she was a Maoist and had died in an exchange of fire between the insurgents and the police. But a fact finding team of activists contested these claims and found that she was raped and killed. The team established that she was abducted in front of her parents. Afterwards the police seem to have created a crime scene where her body was shown to be recovered following a fight with the insurgents. She was dressed in a guerilla outfit that many observers found to be new and unwrinkled. They believe that the gun reportedly found next to her body was planted on her. The picture of her corpse has been widely shared online and has raised many doubts among those who follow social media. When the body was handed over by the police to her relatives after post-mortem, her parents found bruises on her body that suggested rape and torture. Notably, Soni Sori was prevented from going to Hidme's village by the police. She wanted to investigate the story first hand. She sat on a fast in protest against this. Sori has also filed a petition in the High Court seeking an impartial enquiry into the case. Like other minorities, tribals

too have faced structural violence and systemic discrimination. The state violence against tribal women and men in the name of war against Maoists indicates that the police and paramilitary forces enjoy a similar sanction given to their counterparts in Kashmir and elsewhere. Although this has been going on since the days when the so-called secularist Congress was in power in the past, such brutality has grown within the last two years under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who represents the BJP which has a mandate to turn India into a Hindu state. Modi came to power with a brute majority in 2014. For the record, Hindus make up almost 80 percent of the Indian population, while Muslims make up 14 percent, and Sikhs are less than two percent. The tribal groups make eight percent of the population. The growing religious intolerance of Hindu extremists under Modi is now reflected through the actions of the police and other security agencies. If the list of banned terror groups on the website of National Investigation Agency (NIA) is any indication, the Indian state in spite of being a secular democracy is biased against minorities. The list includes Maoists, Kashmiri and Sikh extremists, and other militant organizations representing some other nationality movements. But not a single Hindu nationalist

group is on the list, despite the fact that the NIA is investigating bomb blasts involving Hindu extremists.

Hindu extremists in uniforms

In November 2015, the police in Haryana state claimed that they killed a cow smuggler in a shootout. If the police version is to be believed, the smugglers opened fire on a police party, resulting in a fierce battle that led to the death of Abid, a Muslim man. The police also claimed that his accomplice Ashraf was injured in the incident. Though a police vehicle was damaged, no policeman got injured. Other smugglers, according to the police, managed to escape. The details of the story match similar tales of police shootouts involving terrorists. The development came shortly after the BJP government in Haryana banned cow smuggling. Cow protection has always been a pet subject of the BJP. Since Hindus consider the cow as a sacred animal, the BJP has taken upon itself to ensure that cows are not slaughtered in India. Obviously, this has created animosity between the cow-eating Muslims and Hindus. The killing of Abid by the police indicates the strong will of a BJP government to protect cows in the country. Under Modi, the police are expected to act more aggressively to implement this will. Only recently, four men belonging to the so-called

lower caste were beaten in Gujarat state by Hindu hardliners for skinning a dead cow. The incident stirred angry protests. Like Haryana, Gujarat is also ruled by the BJP. Modi was earlier the Chief Minister of the state that witnessed an anti-Muslim massacre in 2002. The police had not only helped the mobs targeting Muslims by looking the other way, but in some cases they actively participated in the violence. The massacre followed the burning of a train carrying Hindu pilgrims. The Modi government had blamed the incident on Muslim fundamentalists, after which large scale violence against Muslims started all over Gujarat.

After the massacre, Gujarat witnessed a series of police shootouts that resulted in the deaths of Islamic extremists. The police started claiming that these Muslim extremists wanted to avenge the massacre. Under these circumstances, human rights groups came into action and found gaps in the police stories.

Ishrat Jahan's case in particular became an international story. She was among four people who were killed by the Gujarat police in 2004. The police claimed that the four terrorists wanted to kill Modi. The story was contested by Jahan's family, who claimed that she was

framed and then killed in a fake shootout. The subsequent investigation led to the arrest of some police officers. One of them is D.G. Vanzara, who came out on bail this year. Not only was he given a rousing welcome by Hindu fundamentalists, he also attended an event organized by the ultra-Hindu nationalist organization Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) of which BJP is a part. Last year, the Gujarat government was considering allowing government officials to join RSS on the pretext that it is a cultural organization.

While the police in India are frequently accused of acting under political pressure, the army too has come under question. Lt. Col. Prasad Sri Kant Purohit was arrested in 2008 in connection with bomb blasts targeting Muslim community. He was part of the Hindu extremist network that wants to establish a Hindu

nation by using violent means. He was the first serving Indian army officer to be arrested for terrorism. The Modi government is being accused of going soft on Hindu extremists, including Purohit. There are indications that the government is giving back door amnesties to these individuals and making grounds for their release.

The stories of Vanzara and Purohit only indicate how the Hindu nationalist ideology has penetrated into the security apparatus of the country.

Looking beyond the Congress versus BJP debate, the Indian state has generally been ruthless in dealing with dissent. Hindu extremists represent the majority community and in that sense have no such grouses of systemic discrimination; they are more privileged than the minority and leftist extremists who have a long list of complaints against the state.

For this reason the extremist groups representing the left and the oppressed communities are seen as dissenting against the state, and thus treated as potential terrorists. The Hindu extremists only terrorize minority communities, but pose no challenge to the state, and that could be one pragmatic explanation why they are not being hounded by the authorities in a similar fashion. That the pro-Hindu bias also prevails within the security agencies cannot be denied either. Under Modi this threat has rather grown rapidly.

Bujha Singh was not eliminated for being a Sikh. He was killed for being a Naxalite. He was simply punished for being a part of the movement that wanted to bring a fundamental change and threatened the state directly. In contrast to Bujha Singh, Bal Thackrey, a towering Hindu extremist leader, was given a state honour when he died in 2012. A condolence motion was even passed in the Indian parliament while the Congress party, and not the BJP, was in power. Thackrey was the founder of Shiv Sena, a right wing Hindu organization that openly terrorized Muslims. It was also responsible for anti-Muslim riots in 1993. Not only that, Thackrey had also given a call for Hindu suicide squads. Yet his body was covered with India's national flag and was given a 21-gun salute, an honour denied to Bujha Singh, who had not only participated

in the freedom movement, but also stood for secularism which is enshrined in the Indian constitution. When India was divided on religious lines in 1947, sectarian riots broke out everywhere, following which Muslims were targeted by Hindu and Sikh mobs on the Indian side. During those dangerous times, Bujha Singh helped the Muslims from the Hindu and Sikh fanatics.

While leftist activists like Bujha Singh have been under constant threat of state violence for their strong anti-establishment stance, members of the minority groups have been targets of such violence due to majoritarian prejudices among those who dominate the power structure of the country. As against Sikh and Muslim extremists, Hindu extremists have never died in fake shootouts. One cannot

overlook the crimes against humanity committed by political extremists, who either support Maoist ideology or the demand for an independent Kashmir or Sikh homeland, but the system at large continues to overlook similar crimes committed by Hindu extremists. Instead of contextualizing the reasons behind the alienation among the minorities and the oppressed communities in India, the state has been trying to eradicate the problem by using violence. In response to violence by these groups,, which in most cases is an act of resistance, the state has committed more bloodshed in the name of national interest. This becomes another tool to stonewall legitimate questions to any republic that kills citizens by trampling its own constitutional guarantees of free expression and right to life.

-RDNB

Why Indian security forces can't look the other way when Kashmiris protest

Remember when an Indian police officer swore under oath that prime minister Narendra Modi once allowed Hindu mobs to vent their anger following the burning of a train carrying Hindu pilgrims in 2002?

The setting was the state of Gujarat where Modi was chief minister at the time. The train was allegedly torched by the Muslim fundamentalists, killing more than 50 passengers. Modi's Hindu nationalist Bhartiya Janata Party, which held power in the state, blamed Pakistan-based extremists for the incident. It culminated into a well-organized anti Muslim pogrom throughout the state.

According to the police officer, Modi said the night before the riots that the Muslim community needed to be taught a lesson.

What followed has become a history. Thousands of Muslims were lynched, burned alive, and their women were raped by mobs belonging to the Hindu right-wing groups. The police not only looked away in most cases, but also helped the mobs in killing Muslims. Though Modi was never criminally charged, he continues to face criticism for allowing the pogrom of the

minority community.

His controversial remarks can be interpreted in different ways. His supporters can take the comments as a signal to police not to obstruct people from protesting killings of fellow countrymen.

If that is the case, Modi in his more recent role as India's prime minister, must take blame for not conveying a similar message to security forces under him across the country that claims to be the world's largest democracy. At least, that message was never conveyed for the sake of people living in the northern Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir.

Last month, Indian-controlled Kashmir has witnessed angry protests against the army's killing of a popular militant leader, Burhan Wani. Some allege he was killed in a staged shootout; others are claiming it was a genuine encounter. As a result of his death, people came out on streets to vent out their anger.

The security forces, instead of looking the other way, killed more than 40 of them.

This is not the first time that protesters were killed by Indian forces in Kashmir for exercising their democratic right to assemble and show their anger against state violence. In Kashmir, there has

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been a struggle for the right to self-determination since India gained its independence in 1947.

Protests over tortures, forced disappearances, unmarked graves, and rapes elicit more state-sponsored violence.

Notably, Modi's party is sharing power with Kashmir People's Democratic Party. Yet protesters in Kashmir, unlike those in Gujarat in 2002, were not given the privilege of being overlooked by the state machinery during the course of their demonstrations.

Kashmir is not an exception. Not very long ago two Sikh protesters were killed in a police shooting in Punjab when they were demonstrating against the alleged sacrilege of their holy scriptures in October 2015.

Modi's party is sharing power in Punjab with a regional party, Akali Dal. But like Kashmiri Muslims, Punjabi Sikhs who wanted to vent their anger were not given a concession similar to the one given Hindu mobs in 2002.

What emerges out of these episodes is the noticeable difference in the state response to protests and demonstrations by those associated with the majority community and two minority groups. Hindus form 80 percent of the Indian population, whereas Muslims account for 14 percent and Sikhs are merely two percent.

One only needs to look at these numbers to understand the psychology behind such violent state responses in dealing with dissent.

Dalits, or the so-called Hindu "untouchable" caste, are 16 percent of the population and continue to suffer structural violence. In 1997, a police action killed 10 Dalits who were protesting the desecration of the statue of a towering Dalit icon, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, in Bombay (now known as Mumbai). The BJP was sharing power with a regional party called Shiv Sena in the state of Maharashtra, which included Bombay, but police did not look the other way.

This has gone on even though police can use various other means to control a mob without causing death, such as water cannons, sticks, or if need be, firing on nonvital organs of those resorting to violence.

But teaching minority groups a "lesson" to send across a message to win the support of majority community pays a dividend in elections. Why wouldn't opportunistic political leadership allow such high-handedness?

Modi was returned to power with an even larger majority in Gujarat following the 2002 massacre of Muslims.

Eighteen years earlier, the so-called secularist Congress party won the general election in India in December 1984 in the aftermath of anti-Sikh

pogrom that followed the assassination of the Indian prime minister Indira Gandhi by her Sikh bodyguards. Congress leaders instigated mobs to kill innocent Sikhs, and the subsequent election was fought on the slogan of national unity. Police at that time remained a mute spectator to the carnage or helped the mobs.

Whether Wani was killed in a staged shootout or not is irrelevant. The real issue is how the state is responding to the people's reaction in Kashmir. Even if one believes that Wani was killed in a genuine shootout, then a question arises why Hindu extremists who've been arrested in recent years for planting bombs and taking innocent lives never met the same fate? Rather, the Modi administration is pressuring investigators and prosecutors to go slow against them.

That Sikh and Muslim extremists or ultra-leftist activists from oppressed communities have been frequently killed in staged shootouts, while Hindu extremists continue to cool their heels in jails, itself explains the bias of the Indian state that remains secular on paper, but in reality remains a tyrant toward religious minorities.

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 and People's Voice.

Housing crisis hits immigrants and poor in Burnaby

With public anger growing against the escalating housing crisis in Metro Vancouver, the recent occupation of a walk-up apartment in the Metrotown area of Burnaby has taken the struggle up another notch.

On July 9, activists from the Stop Demovictions Burnaby Campaign, the Alliance Against Displacement and allied groups occupied an apartment slated for demolition at 5025 Imperial Street, near Metrotown Mall. At 5 am on July 20, about 20-25 RCMP officers smashed windows to enter the building and remove the occupiers. No charges were laid, but the participants were ordered not to enter buildings on that block, which is being flattened for new condo towers. The organizers, who have been working with tenants in the area for the past two years, say the same tactic will be used at another nearby building as part of an ongoing campaign to resist the destruction of relatively affordable housing units.

Most of those affected are poor and working class people, including many from recent immigrant communities.

One woman who spoke out at

a news conference after the RCMP raid is originally from China. Coming to Canada, she told the media, she assumed that her human right to a life with dignity and a place to live would be protected. Instead, she was shocked to find bureaucratic and political indifference to the fate of people like herself.

Another resident, from Nicaragua, said the time has come for people who face eviction to use tactics similar to those they learned in their home countries. Instead of backing down in the face of state power, he said, they need to stand up for their rights and refuse to be pushed out of their homes.

In recent years, similar struggles have taken place in Vancouver, particularly in and around the Downtown Eastside neighbourhood which is undergoing massive gentrification.

Housing prices - and profits for developers - have skyrocketed, and the tide of demolitions and condo towers is now sweeping east into Burnaby and beyond.

Both cities have councils dominated by NDP supporters. Vision Vancouver, and the Burnaby Citizens Association have different outlooks on how to address the housing

crisis in the region, but both receive huge donations from developers for their election campaigns.

Governments at all levels are looking for easy scapegoats for this situation, with foreign speculators a favourite target. Fingers are usually pointed at investors from China, reviving an old racist tactic in this part of the world - the threat of the so-called "yellow peril" - even to the point of making assumptions than anyone with a Chinese-sounding name must be an immigrant, rather than a member of a family which could have been in this province for over a century.

Often we hear that the government should stop allowing refugees from Syria to "take housing away from our own people" - even though the people stealing our homes are actually the big developers busy demolishing apartment buildings, not refugees fleeing wars and conflicts.

Another aspect to this situation is that provincial government and municipalities gain huge revenues from the housing boom, making them reluctant to take action, especially since any decline in the housing price bubble could have negative impacts on the economy of British Columbia and even Canada. Detached

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houses now sell for an average of nearly \$1.3 million in east Vancouver, and over \$3 million on the upper-income west side, far beyond the reach of most people.

But the real crisis is hitting those who could never afford the deposit on a \$400,000 condo, let alone a house. Ground zero for this social disaster is now the Metrotown area, where the mega-mall is surrounded by blocks and blocks of relatively affordable walk-up apartments. Many of these decades-old buildings are falling into disrepair, but could easily be upgraded. Instead, the bulldozers are knocking down one after another, with the cranes putting up new high-rises visible in every direction.

On May 16, the Stop Demovictions Burnaby Campaign presented Burnaby City Council with a detailed report on the demovictions crisis. "A Community Under Attack" documents the effects of displacement on renters facing eviction.

Three of those buildings are being "demovicted" by corporate developer Amacon in order to build a 30 storey condo tower. The tenants were understandably terrified for their futures, and that fear has been intensified by the subsequent evictions and cut-off of hydro and water services. The Stop Demovictions Burnaby Campaign presentation was based on a door-to-door survey of households in fifteen buildings being demovicted

from the square block north-east of Dunblane and Imperial Streets in Metrotown.

The survey found that about 73% of apartments were one-bedrooms, but 28% of units had three or four occupants. With an average of two people per apartment, nearly five hundred people will lose their homes in the Dunblane demovictions. Currently, in Metrotown, 684 apartment units are scheduled to be demolished, affecting about 1,400 people. The survey found that 55% of tenants pay more than 30% of their incomes to rent, an indicator of being at-risk of homelessness. About one-quarter of residents have only lived in their apartment for one or two years, and these uprooted tenants tend to come from other demolished or renovicted buildings. One-quarter are long-term residents who have lived in their apartments for five to ten years. Largely seniors or people on pensions or disability, they will be hard-hit by a forced move into a much more expensive housing market. Those evicted residents who had found a new place in the Metrotown area were going to be paying 25% more for rent (about \$250 more per month). But 62% had still not found a place to live, only two or three weeks prior to eviction day. Most planned to crash on friends' couches, live in a camper, or move in with family or with a partner with who they would otherwise not

cohabitate. Some were filing BC Housing applications, despite waitlists as long as ten-years for social housing. The survey found "not one single person who reported receiving support, a visit, or any contact from representatives of the City of Burnaby, an advocate, or service provider."

In response, Mayor Corrigan said "Thanks for the report, we'll send it to staff for their consideration, and they will engage Council in a conversation and a report will be issued, which we'll pass along to you."

Not surprisingly, such comments by the Mayor and the BCA have been viewed as dismissive and even hostile by residents facing evictions. It has been pointed out that voting turnout is low in this particular neighbourhood, a phenomenon which may be related to the high percentage of new immigrant residents. But this should not excuse politicians from making it a priority to defend the most precarious people in their cities. After all, housing is included in the UN Declaration of Human Rights. It's just not good enough to welcome people to this country, and then tell them to cough up \$80,000 for the down payment on a condo so that they can have a decent place to live.

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

Remembering an unsung hero who laid down his life fighting against occupation

This month marks the 61st death anniversary of Karnail Singh Isru, who laid down his life while fighting against foreign occupation of an Indian territory.

Isru was a native of Punjab state of India. Born to father Sunder Singh and mother Harnam Kaur in 1930 under British occupied India, he was influenced by the freedom movement at a very young age.

His uncle Jawahar Singh was a die-hard activist who had dedicated his life to the liberation struggle. He had been to jail for participating in political agitations against British rule. Jawahar Singh supported the Ghadar Party that believed in an armed resistance against foreign occupation and wanted to create a just society. Isru grew up under his shadow.

After doing his matriculation, Isru began taking interest in political activism and progressive movements. Once he opposed the decree of the village council which had wrongly slapped a fine on a poor shop keeper. He protested against this and forced the village council to revoke its decision.

As he grew he became a Communist. He read Marx and believed in an egalitarian

society. He chose to become a teacher for a living, and also joined the teachers' union to continue his work as a leftist activist.

Though he got married under family pressure, he spent more time on fighting for social justice. A few months after his marriage in May 1955, he joined the movement to liberate Goa. While the British had quit India in 1947

following years-long liberation struggle by the revolutionaries like Jawahar Singh, Goa, located on the western coastline of present day India, still remained under Portuguese occupation.

A movement for the liberation of Goa had picked up locally, and Indian activists also decided to drive out the Portuguese by supporting the domestic struggle. For the

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communists it was a question of Indian sovereignty, and they saw the continued Portuguese "infringement" on Indian land as colonialism. Post-British Indian governments had also pressured the Portuguese to leave Goa.

On August 15, 1955, the Indian activists decided to march to Goa with a national flag. The Portuguese forces opened fire on demonstrators who tried to enter their territory, killing 20 of them. Among the dead was Isru.

Goa was finally annexed by the Indian government in 1961.

Whether or not the annexation of Goa by the Indian army was appropriate is a separate question. But the people's struggle for the liberation of Goa was a fight against colonialism and occupation. Isru's legacy to fight against it remains relevant both nationally and internationally. As long as the occupation of Palestine or any other territory in the world continues, this legacy will remain relevant. Even on the domestic front, the Indian establishment continues to persecute the people of Kashmir and other regions where the fight for right to self-determination has been going on. Instead of redressing their grievances, the Indian forces continue to act aggressively on the people in those areas in the name of

national security and peace, going against the ideology of men like Isru who believed in freedom and justice. One should not forget that the Ghadar party members and towering Indian revolutionaries like Bhagat Singh had clarified that their struggle will continue until human exploitation ends completely. They had rightfully predicted that in post-British India, the power might come into the hands of the native ruling class, making

it important to continue struggle for a real revolution. Instead of paying symbolic tributes to Isru and celebrating jingoism, the Indian government also needs to be made accountable for using repressive means to silence voice of dissent and killing its own citizens. It will be hypocritical to celebrate the independence of Goa and remain indifferent towards the atrocities committed by the Indian government on its people.

-RDNB

I have a dream

I am happy to join with you today in what will go down in history as the greatest demonstration for freedom in the history of our nation.

Five score years ago, a great American, in whose symbolic shadow we stand today, signed the Emancipation Proclamation. This momentous decree came as a great beacon light of hope to millions of Negro slaves who had been seared in the flames of withering injustice. It came as a joyous daybreak to end the long night of captivity.

But one hundred years later, the Negro still is not free. One hundred years later, the life of the Negro is still sadly crippled by the manacles of segregation and the chains of discrimination. One hundred years later, the Negro lives on a lonely island of poverty in the midst of a vast ocean of material prosperity. One hundred years later, the Negro is still languished in the corners of American society and finds himself in exile in his own land. So we have come here today to dramatize an shameful condition.

In a sense we've come to our nation's Capital to cash a check. When the architects of our republic wrote the magnificent words of the

Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, they were signing a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir.

This note was a promise that all men, yes, black men as well as white men, would be guaranteed the unalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

It is obvious today that America has defaulted on this promissory note insofar as her citizens of color are concerned. Instead of honoring this sacred obligation, America has given the Negro people a bad check; a check which has come back marked "insufficient funds." But we refuse to believe that the bank of justice is bankrupt. We refuse to believe that there are insufficient funds in the great vaults of opportunity of this nation. So we have come to cash this check- a check that will give us upon demand the riches of freedom and the security of justice.

We have also come to this hallowed spot to remind America of the fierce urgency of now. This is no time to engage in the luxury of cooling off or to take the tranquilizing drug of gradualism.

Now is the time to make real

the promises of democracy. Now is the time to rise from the dark and desolate valley of segregation to the sunlit path of racial justice. Now is the time to lift our nation from the quicksands of racial injustice to the solid rock of brotherhood. Now is the time to make justice a reality for all of God's children.

It would be fatal for the nation to overlook the urgency of the moment. This sweltering summer of the Negro's legitimate discontent will not pass until there is an invigorating autumn of freedom and equality. Nineteen sixty-three is not an end, but a beginning. Those who hope that the Negro needed to blow off steam and will now be content will have a rude awakening if the nation returns to business as usual. There will be neither rest nor tranquility in America until the Negro is granted his citizenship rights. The whirlwinds of revolt will continue to shake the foundations of our nation until the bright day of justice emerges.

But there is something that I must say to my people who stand on the warm threshold which leads into the palace of justice. In the process of

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gaining our rightful place we must not be guilty of wrongful deeds. Let us not seek to satisfy our thirst for freedom by drinking from the cup of bitterness and hatred. We must forever conduct our struggle on the high plane of dignity and discipline. We must not allow our creative protest to degenerate into physical violence. Again and again we must rise to the majestic heights of meeting physical force with soul force. The marvelous new militancy which has engulfed the Negro community must not lead us to a distrust of all white people, for many of our white brothers, as evidenced by their presence here today, have come to realize that their destiny is tied up with our destiny. And they have come to realize that their freedom is inextricably bound to our freedom. We cannot walk alone. And as we walk, we must make the pledge that we shall march ahead. We cannot turn back. There are those who are asking the devotees of civil rights, "When will you be satisfied?"

We can never be satisfied as long as the Negro is the victim of the unspeakable horrors of police brutality.

We can never be satisfied as long as our bodies, heavy with the fatigue of travel, cannot gain lodging in the motels of the highways and the hotels of the cities.

We cannot be satisfied as long

as the Negro's basic mobility is from a smaller ghetto to a larger one.

We can never be satisfied as long as our children are stripped of their selfhood and robbed of their dignity by signs stating "for whites only."

We cannot be satisfied as long as a Negro in Mississippi cannot vote and a Negro in New York believes he has nothing for which to vote.

No, no, we are not satisfied, and we will not be satisfied until justice rolls down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream.

I am not unmindful that some of you have come here out of great trials and tribulations. Some of you have come fresh from narrow jail cells. Some of you have come from areas where your quest for freedom left you battered by the storms of persecution and staggered by the winds of police brutality. You have been the veterans of creative suffering. Continue to work with the faith that unearned suffering is redemptive.

Go back to Mississippi, go back to Alabama, go back to South Carolina, go back to Georgia, go back to Louisiana, go back to the slums and ghettos of our northern cities, knowing that somehow this situation can and will be changed. Let us not wallow in the valley of despair.

I say to you today, my friends, so even though we face the difficulties of today and

tomorrow, I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream.

I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: "We hold these truths to be self-evident; that all men are created equal."

I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood.

I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi, a state sweltering with the heat of injustice, sweltering with the heat of oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice.

I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.

I have a dream today.

I have a dream that one day down in Alabama, with its vicious racists, with its governor having his lips dripping with the words of interposition and nullification, that one day right down in Alabama little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers.

I have a dream today.

I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, every hill and mountain shall

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be made low, the rough places will be made plain, and the crooked places will be made straight, and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together.

This is our hope. This is the faith that I will go back to the South with. With this faith we will be able to hew out of the mountain of despair a stone of hope. With this faith we will be able to transform the jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood.

With this faith we will be able to work together, to pray together, to struggle together, to go to jail together, to stand up for freedom together, knowing that we will be free one day. This will be the day when all of God's children will be able to sing with new meaning, "My country 'tis of thee, sweet land of liberty, of

thee I sing. Land where my fathers died, land of the Pilgrims' pride, from every mountainside, let freedom ring."

And if America is to be a great nation, this must become true. So let freedom ring from the prodigious hilltops of New Hampshire. Let freedom ring from the mighty mountains of New York. Let freedom ring from the heightening Alleghenies of Pennsylvania.

Let freedom ring from the snow-capped Rockies of Colorado. Let freedom ring from the curvaceous slopes of California. But not only that; let freedom ring from the Stone Mountain of Georgia. Let freedom ring from Lookout Mountain of Tennessee. Let freedom ring from every hill and molehill of Mississippi. From every mountainside, let freedom ring.

And when this happens, and

when we allow freedom ring, when we let it ring from every village and every hamlet, from every state and every city, we will be able to speed up that day when all of God's children, black men and white men, Jews and gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual, "Free at last! Free at last! Thank God Almighty, we are free at last!"

Martin Luther King Jr. was the leader of the Afro-American civil rights movement. This historical speech was given by him at the Lincoln Memorial, Washington D.C. on August 28, 1963. It has been reproduced here to mark the 53rd anniversary of the speech and recognize the Black Lives Matter campaign. Courtesy: From Revolution to Reconstruction, University of Groningen.

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