

CONTENTS

5

COVER STORY

Mahatma's murder to Modi's Mahabharata

Breaking silence over the existence of Hindutva terrorism

Editorial

Celebrating 350 years of the birth anniversary of Guru Gobind Singh 2

Cover Story

Mahatma's murder to Modi's Mahabharata 5

Current Affairs

Standing up for Bollywood star Kareena Kapoor 15

Last chance for Leonard Peltier? 17

Radical History of the Month

Remembering Hussein Rahim 18

Radical Narrative

Books 20

Cover Picture : Cover illustration by Jarnail Singh Artist.

Editorial Team : Kimball Cariou and Gurpreet Singh

Director: Gurpreet Singh

Design & Layout: Jagdish 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

Celebrating 350 years of the birth anniversary of Guru Gobind Singh

This month, the Sikhs across the world are celebrating 350 years of the birth of their tenth master. Born to father Teg Bahadar and mother Mata Gujri in Patna, Bihar state of India in 1666, Guru Gobind Singh struggled all his life for an egalitarian society. He lost his father, mother and four sons while fighting back against repression. His father was the ninth Guru of the Sikh faith that was founded by Guru Nanak. Based on the principles of equality, Sikhism challenged both the orthodox and brutal caste system in Hindu society, and the religious persecution of non-Muslims under Islamic rule. Sikhism is one of the progressive religions of the world that denounces gender discrimination and blind faith. When Guru Gobind Singh was born, his father was touring Assam to educate masses about the virtues of Sikhism. Though Sikhism was born in Punjab, by the time Teg Bahadar became the Guru it had spread far and wide.

Guru Gobind Singh

Sikhism had a big following in Bihar and Assam. Under those circumstances, Mata Gujri was blessed with a son in Patna, where Hindus and Muslims both rejoiced in the birth of young Gobind, who was known as Gobind Rai. Guru Teg Bahadar was not just a spiritual leader. Keeping with the tradition set by Guru Nanak, he remained deeply involved with the political side of the Sikhism that encouraged its followers to question the power. At a young age, Teg Bahadar had participated in a few battles his father Guru Hargobind had fought against the Islamic rulers. Guru Hargobind was the sixth master of the Sikhs, who encouraged his followers to carry arms to

Editorial

resist state violence. Teg Bahadar made sure that his son grew up learning military skills. Gobind Rai also showed early aptitude for war games. When the family returned to Anandpur Sahib in Punjab, one of the major centers of the Sikh religion, Gobind Rai learnt different languages, apart from taking military lessons. He was also a poet and encouraged literature among the followers of Sikhism. When persecution against Hindus in Kashmir grew under the tyrant Muslim emperor Aurangzeb, Guru Teg Bahadar was approached by the victims for help. They complained that the Hindus were being forced to embrace Islam. Guru Teg Bahadar announced that if Aurangzeb could convert him to Islam, all the Hindus would willingly become Muslims. Following this, Guru Teg Bahadar was arrested and beheaded in Delhi. To instill fear in his mind, some of his disciples were tortured to death before his eyes, but Guru Teg

Mata Gujri with the younger sons of Guru Gobind Singh in detention.

Bahadar never compromised, and laid down his life for the human rights of another community. Gobind Rai led the Sikhs as their tenth master following his father's death. He had realised a need to raise an army of devout Sikhs to fight back against repression. In 1699, he laid the foundation of the Khalsa panth, a force of baptized Sikhs chosen from different communities, including the oppressed groups that were ostracised by the Hindu priests. The idea was both to eradicate the caste system and to challenge the state power. The caste system did not allow the so-called low caste people to carry or use weapons, but Gobind Rai gave them this right. Thus, a martial community was raised. Notably, these baptized men were asked to denounce the caste system, and were given the common last name of Singh. Gobind Rai then got baptized himself and came to be known as Gobind Singh. Since then a baptized Sikh is supposed to keep long hair, carry a sword and wear three other articles of faith: the breeches, an iron bracelet and a comb. A

Editorial

baptized Sikh is not supposed to be superstitious either. For challenging the caste system, Guru Gobind Singh gained the animosity of the Hindu kings of the neighbouring princely states. They felt intimidated by a revolution that was going to come from the oppressed groups. Partly because of this fear and partly due to the growing popularity of Guru Gobind Singh, they launched battles against him, only to suffer humiliating defeat. Not only that, they started instigating Aurangzeb against Guru Gobind Singh. This resulted in bloody conflicts between Guru Gobind Singh and the Islamic rulers. As a result, he lost two of his elder sons, Ajit Singh and Jujhar Singh, in the battle of Chamkaur, while two of his younger sons, Zorawar Singh and Fateh Singh, were executed after being arrested. This was despite the fact that a Muslim chief of Malerkotla and some other good Muslims objected to punishing the sons of Guru Gobind Singh. During this time, a Hindu servant of Guru Gobind Singh turned treacherous, and got Zorawar Singh and Fateh Singh arrested along with their grandmother Mata Gujri. Upon hearing news of the deaths of her younger grandsons, she too died of shock while under detention. On the other hand, some Muslims tried to help Guru Gobind Singh to escape the dragnet of the Islamic empire. He wrote a very powerful letter called *Zafarnama* (Declaration of Victory) to Aurangzeb, confronting him with the oppressions he committed. After Aurangzeb died, Guru Gobind Singh had cordial relations with his son Bahadur Shah. It is believed that Guru Gobind Singh wanted Shah to prosecute those who were responsible for the deaths of his younger sons. During the final years of his life he went to Nanded where he discovered a guerilla warrior named Banda Singh Bahadar to carry forward his mission. Fearing reprisal for the deaths of Zorawar Singh and Fateh Singh, those responsible for executing them sent mercenaries to Nanded to assassinate Guru Gobind Singh. The two men who were sent there attacked the Guru, but the latter survived. Both men were killed by the Guru and his disciples. However, Guru Gobind Singh succumbed to his injuries after several days in 1708. Before his death, he ordered the Sikhs to follow Guru Granth Sahib as their guiding light in future. The scriptures include the hymns of both Hindu and Muslim saints, besides those composed by the Sikh gurus. Since then Sikhs strictly follow the Granth Sahib as their living master. Banda Singh Bahadar, who was deputed to Punjab, punished those who were instrumental behind the execution of Zorawar Singh and Fateh Singh, and established a Sikh kingdom that introduced land reforms and worked to uplift the poor and marginalized. He took land from the rich and redistributed it among the landless tillers. This brief history of Guru Gobind Singh shows that he was an unparalleled revolutionary, whose legacy is still relevant. Especially today when religious intolerance continues to grow under a Hindu right wing government in India, his teachings give us strength and vision to fight back against sectarianism. That the ugly caste system refuses to die and the gap between the rich and the poor continues to widen reminds us that his struggle should be kept alive. Also, the ongoing state repression that is affecting women and children in areas that are witnessing people's struggles shows that his mission for a just society has not really ended. It's a shame that those who oppose his ideology are trying to appropriate him. Among them are the Hindu nationalists who are not only trying to portray Guru Gobind Singh as a defender of Hinduism, but are trying to distort the historical facts for their narrow interests. They have been trying to depict him as someone who stood up against Islamic rule, whereas his fight was against the state, in which some Muslims were on his side and some Hindus were in the Aurangzeb's camp. Likewise, the Sikh fundamentalists who claim to be followers of Guru Gobind Singh's ideology need to look hard at themselves. Often, they spew venom against Bihari migrant workers who come to Punjab for better livelihood. They should be ashamed that their Guru spent his childhood in Bihar, where his 350th birth anniversary was celebrated on a massive scale. Their hatred for outsiders or any other non-Sikh community goes against the tenets of Sikhism. Such forces need to be challenged with the simple historical facts that speak for themselves. Under no circumstances should this glorious history be allowed to be misinterpreted by those who have nefarious designs to divide people.

-Editors with illustrations by Jarnail Singh Artist.

Mahatma's murder to Modi's Mahabharata

Breaking silence over the existence of Hindutva terrorism

It was the year 2009, when then Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper stopped at a Mahatma Gandhi memorial at Rajghat in New Delhi, during his first official visit to India. It is the place where Gandhi was cremated after being murdered on January 30, 1948.

Harper not only laid a wreath at the memorial, but also made an entry into the visitor's book. He was not an exception, as many world leaders have been there a number of times. Among them is outgoing US President Barack Obama. After all, Gandhi still inspires many international political figures.

What did not catch Harper's attention, as in the case of most politicians from outside India, was that Gandhi died after being shot by a religious terrorist. This was despite the fact that before arriving in Delhi, Harper had landed in the city of Mumbai, where he visited sites that came under attack from Islamic terrorists in November 2008. The attacks that left more than 150 people dead were blamed on the Pakistan-based extremist group Lashkar-e-Taiba. If the Indian government is to be believed, the assailants came from Pakistan by boat using the sea route. Harper paid tributes to

the victims of violence, but also spoke candidly against terrorism, with an enthusiasm that was missing when a

moment to remember Gandhi came.

This silence may be because Gandhi was not killed by the

COVER STORY

Islamic extremists who haunt the Indian state and the western powers more than the Hindu extremists who pulled the trigger at Gandhi, or maybe because the terrorism of Hindu extremists continues to gain legitimacy in a Hindu dominated India that is often seen as a potential market, and any reference to it might upset business deals, but this deafening silence has surely existed since Gandhi's death.

Mahatma's murder

The Birla House located at Tees January Lane in the national capital of India continues to draw crowds of people who revere Gandhi, the towering leader of the passive resistance movement against the British occupation of India. A world-renowned figure who preached non-violence, Gandhi was shot to death at this very place. The date of his assassination, January 30 or Tees January in Hindi, was picked to rename the street leading to the venue which is now a permanent memorial. A moment of silence is held on this day every year in Indian schools, as part of a ritual to remember the departed soul. Thus, the death of Gandhi is etched on the collective memory of Indian citizens.

Inside the building, the pathway that led to the site of his murder is marked with his artificial footsteps. This is the path Gandhi walked for the last time before he was fatally shot. Some foreign tourists

can be seen, either strolling or lying on the ground near the pathway. If the upkeep of the setting that witnessed the murder of a Mahatma and the number of visitors are any indication, the world is familiar with this unusual killing, which was no less than a terrorist act that includes political murders to instill fear. Yet, the political leadership both in India and outside remains unconcerned with the ideology behind Gandhi's murder. That may be the reason why lists of terror groups not only in India, but also in Canada and the US, do not include a single organization that subscribes to the views of his killers.

Gandhi was killed for denouncing the partition of India on religious lines, and opposing an attempt to turn the country into a Hindu theocracy when the British left in 1947. He believed in the coexistence of Hindus and Muslims, whereas the Hindu nationalist groups, including the Rashtriya Swayam sewak Sangh (RSS) and Hindu Maha Sabha (HMS) propagated the two-nation theory and believed that Hindus and Muslims could not live together in a unified India. With a mission to form a Hindu state, they remained aloof to the freedom movement led by Gandhi and the Indian National Congress, and continued to work for the establishment of a separate Hindu nation.

The Muslim League also

wanted a homeland of Pakistan for Muslims, which they wanted to be carved out of India by separating Muslim dominated provinces. As a result of sustained pressure from both the Hindu and Muslim fundamentalists, Pakistan was separated when India gained official independence on August 15, 1947. Pakistan chose to become an Islamic state, while India chose to remain secular. Nevertheless, innocent Hindus and Muslims were slaughtered on both sides of the border by religious extremists following the division of India, which resulted in large scale migration of members of minority communities for safe refuge. While Hindus and Sikhs left their ancestral homes and lands in Pakistan to live in India, Muslims were also forced to migrate to Pakistan fearing religious persecution at the hands of the Hindu fundamentalists.

The bloodshed in the name of religion saddened Gandhi, who had been fighting against British occupation by taking along members of all the communities. In post-British India, he was forced to fight against religious violence from both Hindu and Muslim fanatics. He started challenging the bigots through fasting. He raised his voice against the persecution of Hindus in Muslim dominated areas, and also opposed the violence against Muslims by

COVER STORY

Hindu and Sikh fundamentalists elsewhere.

Being a practicing Hindu himself, his passion for the Muslim victims of this madness enraged the Hindu chauvinists, who saw his stance as a sign of appeasement toward Muslims. Under these circumstances, Nathuram Godse, who had ties with both the RSS and the HMS, assassinated him while he was heading for prayers at the Birla House on the fateful day.

Often HMS would argue that Gandhi was an apologist of the Muslims, and was killed for advocating to give money to Pakistan from the treasury of the Indian government as part of an understanding for dividing the assets of a divided nation. But this was not the first attack when Gandhi died of bullet wounds. In all, there were six attempts on Gandhi's life, with first one made in 1934 in Pune, more than a decade before his death. A bomb was thrown at a car that was part of a motorcade carrying Gandhi to a speaking venue. While he escaped the attack, another car was hit, leaving ten people injured.

Two more attempts were made in 1944, one in 1946 and two in the month of January 1948, including the fatal one. Godse was directly involved in some of these attacks.

Not long before the January 30 attack, there was a bomb

blast at the Birla House on January 20. Fortunately, Gandhi survived and mentioned the attempt in his diary. His January 21 diary entry acknowledged that the attempt was made by those who perceived him as an enemy of Hinduism.

That Gandhi was a devout Hindu and still opposed the designs of the RSS and HMS was enough to provoke the anger of Godse and his associates. It is pertinent to mention that the first attempt was made while Gandhi was leading a march against untouchability. It is a separate matter that Gandhi believed in the caste-system, but he was opposed to the practice of untouchability against so-called low caste people by the Hindus. His outspokenness against it infuriated Hindu zealots, who believe in the brutal caste system which has its roots in Hinduism. Significantly, the first attempt came long before the partition of India and the question of dividing assets rightfully between the two nations arose. Apparently, Gandhi became a challenge for the ideology of Godse and his associates, who wanted to consolidate the support of Hindus.

Not surprisingly, the Hindu chauvinists celebrated the death of Gandhi. The investigation revealed that it was not a lone wolf attack. Godse was helped by others in

the conspiracy, among them leaders of the RSS and HMS. The Indian government banned the RSS, acknowledging that it was involved in terrorist methods, though the ban was later lifted. Those arrested and charged in connection with the conspiracy and murder included Godse's brother Gopal Godse and HMS leader V.D. Savarkar. The RSS however denies its involvement in the assassination, and rather condemned it officially.

As the trial progressed, Godse took upon himself the whole responsibility of the crime. While Savarkar was acquitted for want of evidence, Nathuram Godse was hanged in 1949. Gopal Godse was sentenced to 18 years in jail for participating in the conspiracy. In 1994, he told a journalist that both he and Nathuram were part of the RSS. He also revealed that his brother was associated with HMS as well. While he acknowledged that the RSS did not pass any resolution asking to go and kill Gandhi, his brother gave a statement that he had left the RSS much earlier to save others from trouble. He also admitted that whereas RSS disowned his brother for obvious reasons, the HMS never abandoned him. True to its commitment to Godse, the HMS continues to glorify him even today even as India accepts Gandhi as its

COVER STORY

father of the nation.

Roots of Hindutva terrorism

Apart from the murder of Gandhi, the HMS and the RSS have a long history of being involved in political violence.

The foundation of the RSS was laid in 1925 by Keshav Baliram Hegdewar in British India. He gave a call to the Hindus to get trained both physically and intellectually. The RSS volunteers have been holding physical drills by using sticks ever since. In later years, however, guns and swords were also added in the physical training.

Hegdewar and some of his close associates were influenced by the fascist regime of Italy. One of them, B.S. Moonje, visited Rome where he not only met Mussolini but also toured the Military Academy and Fascist Academy of Physical education in 1931. Taking a leaf from the structure of physical training in Fascist Italy, the RSS began reaching out to young boys for recruitment.

Likewise, the HMS leader Savarkar created the Hindu Rashtra Dal in 1942. The Dal members were to become the storm troopers of the HMS. Nathuram Godse had joined this Dal after he came under the influence of Savarkar at the age nineteen.

If Mussolini had influenced the founders of the RSS, Savarkar admired Hitler and believed in a final solution to get rid of

Muslims and Christians in Hindu India, on the lines of anti-Jewish pogroms. For both the HMS and the RSS, Islam and Christianity are foreign religions, while Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism are part of the Hindu fold.

In 1938, while Gandhi was focussed on liberating India from the British, HMS launched a march on the princely state of Hyderabad, ruled by Nizam, where Hindus were being intimidated. Godse participated in the march.

In 1944 Godse started *Agranee*, a rabid newspaper, with the blessings of Savarkar. The paper faced prosecution for its inflammatory content, resulting in a decision to rename it as *Hindu Rashtra*. Simultaneously, he joined the RSS as its intellectual worker. That Godse treated Savarkar as his godfather and had gone to see him before killing Gandhi was well known.

Ironically, Savarkar was previously associated with the freedom movement and was interned in an infamous jail cell far from the Indian mainland, but later changed his views after being released following mercy petitions by him. It is believed that Savarkar's politics suited the British interest. After all, they practiced a divide and rule policy to prolong their rule in India. Even if Savarkar did not have direct blessings from the British rulers, his politics came in handy for them to keep

Hindus and Muslims divided to weaken the freedom movement.

Once a supporter of united India, who admired the role of Muslims in the first uprising against British in 1857, it was Savarkar who coined the term *Hindutva* that includes the concept of an exclusionist Hindu state. His book *Essentials of Hindutva* attracted the attention of people like Hegdewar. Thus, Savarkar became popular within the grand coalition of ultra-Hindu nationalist groups encompassing the RSS and the HMS. The term remains popular among supporters of the ruling Hindu nationalist Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP). For the record, BJP is a political wing of the RSS. It is for this reason that the BJP leaders, including the current Prime Minister Narendra Modi, admire Savarkar. The BJP has been instrumental in getting an airport at Andaman Islands, where the cellular jail was located, renamed after Savarkar. So much so, his portrait now hangs in the Indian parliament alongside Gandhi's.

From rioting to bomb blasts

The late Bhisham Sahni was a well respected progressive author, who wrote *Tamas*, a novel based on the sectarian violence during the partition of India and Pakistan. The story of the novel represented an ugly reality of how RSS indoctrinated the youth to

COVER STORY

target Muslims. *Tamas* created huge controversy when it was adapted into a TV serial in 1988. The RSS and like-minded groups were up in arms against the serial when it went on air at *Doordarshan*, a state run TV channel. The imagery of the RSS men indulging in the murders of Muslims was too much to digest for the supporters of Hindutva. It did not matter to them that the serial was equally critical of the Muslim League. What mattered to them was that someone dared to show RSS in a bad light. Most of the time they would argue that the Muslim League and not the RSS started the violence, although the Muslim League passed a resolution for Pakistan only in 1940, three years after Savarkar floated the two-nation theory, insisting that the Hindus and Muslims are two separate nations within India.

That the RSS and HMS were involved in rioting during partition is a well-established fact, much as the Muslim League's hand in violence is widely acknowledged. But the RSS played a major role in an anti-Muslim riot in Nagpur, the place where its headquarters are located, much earlier in September 1927. It is important to notice that this riot followed shortly after the RSS was formed, and gave confidence to the group. Since then the Hindutva organizations have been

consistently involved in well organized violence against Muslims and Christians.

Over the years, other fanatical Hindu groups have also mushroomed across India, sharing an ideology similar to the RSS and HMS. Among them are Shiv Sena, Vishwa Hindu Parishad, Bajrang Dal, Abhinav Bharat, Sanatan Sanstha and a few others. Hindutva is the common ideology that ties them together into one family, commonly referred to as Sangh Parivar both by their supporters and the critics. Part of their frustration is that India officially remains a secular state, and never chose to adopt Hinduism as its state religion. Any affirmative action to empower religious minorities by the Indian state is seen by them as an act of appeasement.

Around the time when *Tamas* was aired, the Sangh Parivar started a movement asking for the construction of a grand Hindu temple in Ayodhya, the birth place of Rama, one of the most revered Hindu gods. Sangh Parivar claims that the original Rama temple was demolished under Islamic rule after which Babar, a Muslim Emperor, constructed a mosque at the same spot to humiliate Hindus. Now they wanted back at least three disputed sites, which according to them originally belonged to the Hindus but were turned into Muslim

shrines by the Islamic rulers. They openly threatened to carry out violence if there was any attempt to stop construction of the Rama temple.

The so-called secularist Congress that ruled India for many years since independence remained soft toward the activities of the Hindutva brigade. Apart from banning the RSS temporarily after Gandhi's murder and a couple of times more, it did nothing to stop it from marching ahead year after year. On the contrary, it tried to please the RSS by letting Hindus perform prayers at the disputed site of Ayodhya, starting TV serials on *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* the mythological Hindu epics - and also organizing violence against Sikhs after the 1984 assassination of then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi by her Sikh bodyguards. The murder of Indira Gandhi followed the army attack on the Golden Temple Complex, the holiest shrine of the Sikhs, which was turned into a fortress by the religious extremists, who were killing Hindus in Punjab. It is widely accepted that the Sangh Parivar supporters participated in the anti-Sikh pogrom as foot soldiers, although the bloodshed was directly orchestrated by the Congress government.

These ugly events culminated in the December 1992 demolition of the Babri

Mosque, named after Babar in Ayodhya. The whole structure was razed in the presence of the Sangh Parivar leaders. Seeing the situation getting out of hand, the Congress government in New Delhi temporarily banned the RSS one more time. These skirmishes had little impact on the political future of the BJP and its Hindutva allies, as they continued to gain strength by polarizing the Hindu population.

The demolition of the Babri mosque was followed by anti-Muslim riots in Mumbai. The

Shiv Sena, a BJP ally played a significant role in the violence. Years later the Ayodhya issue led to a large-scale anti-Muslim massacre in Gujarat, the birthplace of Gandhi, who stood for Hindu-Muslim unity. Under Narendra Modi, who was the Chief Minister of the province back then, Muslims were systematically targeted during 2002. The provocation was the burning of a train bringing Hindu pilgrims from the disputed site in Ayodhya. More than 50 people died in the incident, which was blamed on Muslim

fundamentalists by the Modi government. Though one commission of inquiry found it was an accident, the ruling BJP continues to claim that it was a deliberate act to kill Hindu pilgrims. Hindutva goons used techniques against the Muslims similar to those used against the Sikhs in 1984. Modi was denied entry into the US for his alleged involvement in the anti-Muslim pogrom, until he was elected as Prime Minister in 2014.

The demolition of Babri mosque and subsequent anti-Muslim violence turned many

Muslim youths to terrorist activities. The prejudices against Muslims in the police and the security agencies further complicated the matter. This gave more legitimacy to the Hindutva forces.

In the meantime, the attacks on Christians also continued for all these years. If Muslims were seen as potential terrorists or Pakistani spies, Christians were accused of converting tribal people. Gujarat also witnessed sustained anti-Christian violence under the BJP government.

In Orissa, Australian missionary Graham Staines

and his two children were burnt alive in January 1999 by the Hindu extremists. One of them, Ravinder Kumar Pal, alias Dara Singh, is associated with Bajrang Dal. He is currently serving time for the murder. The Sangh Parivar leaders frequently try to justify his action by blaming the missionaries for converting tribal Hindus to Christianity.

In 2008, anti-Christian violence was organized by the Hindutva forces in Orissa following the murder of a Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) leader. Though Maoist insurgents had claimed responsibility for the assassination, supporters of

the VHP targeted innocent Christians.

If this was not enough, the Sangh Parivar activists started getting involved in more serious acts of terror and violence.

Sometime before the Mumbai terror attack in November 2008, an anti-terror squad under the command of a dedicated police officer, the late Hemant Karkare, smashed a network of Hindutva terrorists. These individuals were mainly based in Maharashtra, the birthplace of Godse and the RSS. They began targeting mosques and Muslim communities through bomb blasts. Among those

COVER STORY

involved, some were associated with Abhinav Bharat, a group named after the Abhinav Bharat Society established by Savarkar back in 1904. Godse's niece, Himani Savarkar, was elected president of the organization in 2008. She is married to the nephew of Savarkar. One of the founders was a serving army officer, Lt. Col. Srikant Purohit, who was later arrested in connection with the explosions. Abhinav Bharat believes in an armed uprising and began indulging in the blasts to retaliate against the bombings of Hindu temples and communities by Islamic extremists. Thanks to an objective investigation by Karkare, others involved in the blasts were also arrested. Interestingly, the security agencies and the media initially blamed Muslim extremists and Pakistan for these incidents, mainly because of their perceived bias against Islamic extremism. Hindutva terror was just out of their radar.

It all became embarrassing for the Indian government when it was revealed later that Samjhauta Rail, which connects India and Pakistan, was bombed in 2007 by Hindutva supporters. 68 people died in the incident, which was quickly blamed on the Pakistan-based Islamic extremists by the intelligence agencies, even though the majority of those who died

were Pakistanis returning to their country after visiting relatives in India. Not only that, the incident happened within Indian boundaries.

What Karkare found infuriated the BJP and the RSS. They began attacking Karkare, accusing him of being anti-Hindu. Modi, who was still the Gujarat Chief Minister, openly sided with those arrested and criticised the police. Though Karkare died in the Mumbai terror attack widely blamed on Pakistan-based extremists, some believe that his killing under the guise of a terror attack was part of a larger conspiracy which has not been established. Suddenly, Karkare became a martyr for the Sangh Parivar after he died at the hands of the Mumbai attackers. Modi went to the extent of offering a cash reward to his family, which was rejected by Karkare's widow.

Godse's ghost refuses to die

Mahatma Gandhi wasn't the only political activist who fell victim to the violence of Hindutva terrorists.

In 2013, a rationalist activist from Maharashtra, Narendra Dabholkar, was shot to death by unidentified gunmen. In response to the murder, the then Chief Minister of Maharashtra, Prithviraj Chavan, said that he was killed by the same forces that murdered Gandhi.

Dabholkar educated people against superstition and the

caste system within Hindu society. For this he had been under constant threat from Hindu fundamentalists. The investigation later led to the arrest of at least one associate of Sanatan Sanstha in 2016. The group is believed to be involved in two more murders of rationalist thinkers, Gobind Pansare and MM Kalburgi, in 2015.

A public interest litigation seeking to ban Sanatan Sanstha was moved in the Bombay High Court. The petition alleged that the group is involved in bombings and political murders. Not surprisingly, the central government has refused to ban the group, saying there is no evidence to suggest that it is involved in terrorism.

With the state remaining non-committal to suppress Hindutva terrorism, those who see Godse as their hero feel emboldened.

On October 2, 2016 HMS unveiled a statue of Godse in Meerut. The day chosen was the birth anniversary of Gandhi. While Gandhi's birthday was being celebrated world wide, in his home country Godse was being glorified right under the nose of the BJP government. This did not however surprise those who have been closely following the politics of Sangh Parivar. In 2014, a BJP MP Sakshi Maharaj had created a controversy by describing Godse a patriot.

COVER STORY

In Godse's own state of Maharashtra, Gandhi's death anniversary is celebrated by some. A play depicting Godse as hero has been played number of times in Maharashtra. This is in sharp contrast to a ban on a Punjabi film that portrayed the assassins of Indira Gandhi as heroes in 2014.

Surprisingly, in a post 9/11 environment when terrorism has entered into the collective consciousness of the western world that considers Gandhi as beacon of hope for a non-violent society, these stories have not generated much reaction. The most glaring instance of the silence over growing support of Godse's ideology is how the mainstream media completely ignored a threat of violence on social media by a Hindutva supporter in Canada.

Gagan Vidhu, a BJP supporter who lives in Edmonton, threatened to kill an anti-corruption activist in India on Facebook in 2015. He was upset with Anna Hazare, a Gandhian, for his anti-corruption campaign against the Modi government. Vidhu openly stated that he will be the next Godse and kill this modern Gandhi (Hazare).

Recently, when the Modi government decided to phase out old Rs. 500 and 1,000 notes carrying the picture of Gandhi, the HMS demanded that his picture should be removed from the Indian

currency permanently. Vidhu's video with a similar demand, describing Gandhi as evil, also went viral on social media. This was not the case when a Sikh separatist in Surrey made ambiguous remarks against moderate critics of Sikh extremists in 2010. Those remarks were interpreted as a threat by many. The case was widely reported by the media, and even as the political leadership was on its feet. Vidhu's threat of murder, on the other hand, was virtually overlooked by the Canadian media and political leadership.

Such an approach might explain why the lists of banned terror groups in these countries do not include the names of Hindutva groups. To be fair with the authorities here, the Islamic and Sikh extremist groups are banned in Canada partly because of their involvement in violent activities in these parts of the world. While the World Trade Centre attack on September 11, 2001 is blamed on Islamic extremists, the Air India Flight 182 bombing of June 23, 1985 is blamed on the Canada-based Sikh separatists. Nevertheless, this part of the world is not totally untouched by the supporters of Hindutva ideology. RSS leaders have been visiting British Columbia. On top of that, the Sangh Parivar has a strong following in the US. That Modi was

denied entry into the US until he was elected as Prime Minister shows that its authorities are not ignorant about the activities of the Hindutva forces.

Modi's Mahabharata

In October 2014, Modi stunned the world by stating that genetic science existed in ancient Hindu society. Quoting from Hindu mythology and *Mahabharata*, a Sanskrit epic, he told a gathering of doctors and scientists that Karna a prominent character in the text who was considered as the son of Surya (the solar deity) was born outside his mother's womb, which means that genetic science existed at that time.

The comment coming from the Prime Minister of an officially secular state stirred controversy, but BJP watchers were not actually surprised by this reflection of the Hindutva ideology that currently governs India. The underlying message of the statement is that India is a Hindu nation, whether you accept it or not. The BJP is known for its moves to rewrite the history of India with a Hindu lens. Glorification of controversial figures like Savarkar and Godse is just part of that exercise. What is more dangerous to some is the continuous portrayal of Islamic rulers as invaders, and appropriation of

revolutionaries as Hindu nationalists. In these circumstances, a nationalist discourse becomes exclusionist toward non-Hindus.

Beyond the academic discussions and curriculum exists a world of much harsher realities, where self-styled patriots are determined to turn India into an intolerant Hindu state. Terrorism is just one of their many weapons to achieve that end. The problem is, who will stop them when their mentors are in control of the power structure? While Muslim extremists or Maoist insurgents either get killed in staged police shootouts or are frequently arrested for sedition, those indulging in violence in the name of Hindutva are being patronised both directly and indirectly. The previous Congress government failed to ban these groups fearing a Hindu backlash, and the current government has asked its agents to go slow on investigations against Hindutva terrorists, as revealed by those involved in such investigations. And if India's National Investigation Agency list of banned terror groups is any indication, Hindutva terrorists are just out of bounds. The list includes Sikh, Muslim and Maoist extremist groups, but not a

single Hindu subversive group is mentioned, even as the NIA handles cases involving soldiers of Hindutva. If the Indian state, under whose jurisdiction Hindutva terror continues to grow, lacks the will to stop it, how can the world powers be expected to take this challenge seriously? The newly-elected US President Donald Trump, who otherwise is known for his hawkish views on terrorism, is least expected to deal with this challenge. Trump has a big following among the supporters of Modi in the US. They invited him to speak at an event titled Humanity United Against Terrorism before the November presidential election. Organized by the Republican Hindu Coalition, the event was focussed more on Islamic terrorism, a common enemy of the Indian and American governments. Significantly, Trump had advisers on his team who are greatly enamoured by Modi's spectacular victory in the 2014 election. Following into his footsteps, Trump made an appeal, "Ab Kee Baar Trump Sarkar (This time Trump government)". This was the exact slogan used by Modi to win his election. Being right wing allies who are frequently criticised for anti-Muslim bias, one can assume that they lack

any will to go after Hindutva terrorists.

Leave aside Trump. That the US government lacks the will to go after Sangh Parivar became evident when a petition seeking to ban the RSS as a terrorist organisation was rejected by a US attorney in 2015. The petition was moved by the Sikhs For Justice, a Sikh advocacy group for human rights, in a district court in New York. Responding to the petition, US attorney Preet Bharara announced that they will move for dismissal of the lawsuit.

Whether the world will wake up to accept the growing threat of Hindutva terror is hard to predict. The civil rights groups and secularist forces continue to fight against this menace without any support from the establishment. In a fight like this, Gandhi, who had his own contradictions and limitations, can at least become a weapon to educate the masses about the reality of a terrorism of a different kind that remains obscured, either due to Islamophobia, or a lack of courage to accept that the world's so-called largest democracy could also be a safe haven for forces inimical to peace and universal brotherhood. **-RDNB**

Standing up for Bollywood star Kareena Kapoor

Bollywood diva Kareena Kapoor has come under attack from right-wing Hindus in India for naming her newly born baby Taimur.

Married to Bollywood Muslim star Saif Ali Khan, she was blessed with a baby boy on December 20. The couple decided to name their child "Taimur", which means *Iron* in Arabic.

But not everybody was impressed. Particularly, the Hindu nationalists who say that Taimur (or Timur as it's sometimes spelled) was a tyrannical Muslim conqueror, who invaded India and slaughtered Hindus between the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries.

After the name of the newborn was announced, the couple faced a backlash on social media, mainly from right-wing Hindus, who slammed them for giving their son the name of a brutal invader.

It is not the first time that Kapoor, who was born into a Hindu family, has come under attack from Hindu fanatics. She was a target of their vicious campaign when she married Khan in 2012.

A magazine published by the women's wing of a right-wing Hindu group carried her morphed picture on the cover

that depicted her as part Hindu and part Muslim, with half of her face covered with veil.

It was a part of their controversial "Love Jihad" movement that targeted Muslim men, who were being accused of entrapping Hindu women and then forcibly converting them to Islam. The movement was widely condemned back then by secularists.

Notably, Kapoor has kept her Hindu name though she uses Khan as her last name. But that is not the point. Whatever name she wants for herself or her child is purely her choice and nobody has a right to interfere with her personal

freedom.

The issue here is that a female Bollywood star is being repeatedly hounded by religious fanatics who are in the habit of indulging in moral policing. They are the same people who have always looked upon Muslims with an eye of suspicion.

Under the current right-wing Hindu nationalist government, they have become emboldened and continue to target Muslims over range of issues, including terrorism and eating beef.

Kapoor is not alone in being harassed by such forces as Bollywood bashing is part of the agenda of those who owe

CURRENT AFFAIRS

allegiance to Hindu nationalists in power.

Other Muslim stars including Aamir Khan, Shah Rukh Khan, Salman Khan, and Nawazuddin Siddiqui have also come under attack during recent months.

Aamir Khan was targeted for sharing his concern over growing religious intolerance in India. Meanwhile, Shah Rukh was described as a Pakistani agent by supporters of the ruling Hindu nationalist Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP).

Dhoom 3 star Aamir Khan is one of several Muslim actors who've been harassed by Hindu fundamentalists.

Hindu fanatics did not even let Siddiqui perform in *Ram Leela*, an annual countrywide play that depicts the story of Lord Rama, one of the most revered Hindu gods. In 2003, Salman Khan also came under attack when it was reported that he might act as Rama in a movie.

Only recently following a militant attack on an Indian army installation in Kashmir, the Bollywood establishment came under pressure not to cast Pakistani actors.

The attack was blamed on Pakistan-sponsored Islamic extremists. This resulted in a split within Bollywood as many stars supported the idea of banishing Pakistani artists, while others were opposed.

Nevertheless, Shah Rukh recently assured one Hindu group, Maharashtra Navnirman Sena, that a

Pakistani star Mahira Khan will not be invited to India to promote his upcoming film, *Raees*, which he has done with her.

Looking at the larger narrative, Hindu nationalists have always tried to question the patriotism of Muslims, never accepting their faith as an indigenous religion.

Hindu revivalists have always emphasized that Muslims came to India as invaders and destroyed their temples. These Hindus not only describe Taimur as villain, but also portray Akbar a secular and liberal Muslim king in the 16th and 17th centuries in a negative light.

Even if we assume for a moment that Kapoor has deliberately named her son after Taimur the invader, then why is not a fuss being made about the stepson of Anupam Kher, another Bollywood personality and a staunch BJP supporter? The stepson's name is Sikandar. It's an Urdu alternative of Alexander, who also invaded India. It is pertinent to mention that Sikander's mother, Kirron Kher, is a BJP MP.

If naming anyone after a tyrant is a sin, then Hindu fanatics should also think about other historical and mythological names that may cause trauma to non-Hindus in India.

For instance, Manu, the author of an ancient Hindu code that created the caste system, upsets Dalits, or so-called

untouchables, who remain an oppressed community in India. Likewise, Dronacharya, a Hindu teacher, denied a tribal boy's entry into his school of archery to favour Hindu princes during the period covered by the Mahabharata. Manu's statue was installed outside courts in the Indian state of Rajasthan, whereas the Indian government has instituted the Dronacharya sports award.

Kapoor did not do anything wrong. Those who are attacking her and trying to impose their ideology on Bollywood have shown their true colours and proven that India is becoming increasingly intolerant under the BJP government.

It is time for all humanists and secularists to not just stand up for her but also for Bollywood to reclaim the secular space it used to occupy despite some serious limitations, such as caricaturing certain communities. Bollywood, too, should be forced to stand up against pressure from sectarian forces. Otherwise, the Indian diaspora should think of boycotting the industry to send a strong message. After all, it partly survives on revenue generated through film watchers in countries like Canada.

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.

Last chance for Leonard Peltier?

Forty years ago, one of the leading figures in the American Indian Movement (AIM) received a life sentence after being convicted for the killing of two FBI agents under dubious circumstances on the Pine Ridge Reservation in 1975.

Leonard Peltier was among the most prominent of AIM's leaders, but far from the only one who was jailed or murdered during the terrible decade of the 1970s, when the organization (along with the Black Panther movement) became the target of state terror in the United States.

AIM members and supporters, and many other critics of US state persecution of indigenous peoples, have always maintained that Leonard Peltier was railroaded - denied a fair trial from the beginning.

Now, even James Reynolds, who was the chief prosecutor in Peltier's 1977 trial has appealed for clemency. The former Iowa United States attorney in charge of the prosecution and conviction of Leonard Peltier has written President Obama saying that granting clemency to the 72-year-old, whom may be the longest-held political prisoner in the U.S., would be "in the best interests of justice."

Reynolds joins Nobel Peace Prize winners Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Nelson

Mandela and Rigoberta Menchu, and tens of thousands more who have signed petitions calling for clemency for Peltier.

"It is truly extraordinary for the head prosecutor in such a politicized case to take a public stance contrary to the FBI. It is unprecedented to our knowledge," says Martin Garbus, the lead counsel in Peltier's petition for clemency. "We will urge President Obama to weigh Mr. Reynolds' letter when considering Mr. Peltier's case, and to examine the Petition with fresh eyes. We believe that Mr. Peltier's conviction presents one of the greatest injustices in the history of the American justice system."

Peltier has always stated his innocence, and evidence continues to surface showing that he was convicted under false pretenses. For example, a U.S. appeals court judge has found that the FBI withheld key ballistics evidence showing Peltier's gun did not fire the bullets which killed the two agents, and that the key testimony used to extradite Peltier from Canada, where he sought asylum, was perjured. As of early January, President Obama had granted clemency to 1,176 prisoners, more than the previous 11 presidents combined.

Now the pressure is on to finally pardon Peltier, who is

gravely ill. Without such clemency, he will almost certainly die in prison, since there is almost no chance that incoming President Trump would release the world-renowned political prisoner.

We have been close to this point before. Former President Clinton told Peltier's defense team that he would grant clemency before leaving office in 2000, only to break that promise after a last-minute protest at the White House by gun-toting FBI agents.

In support of Peltier's release, Archbishop Tutu wrote, "In a nation which so prides itself on a strong and incorruptible judicial system and a human and responsive government, it is sad indeed to think that in nearly a (half) century, justice has been elusive for this man. If the matter continues without remedy and action, it will soon be too late for any justice at all. A tragedy of this magnitude cannot be allowed."

Time is now very short, with Barack Obama leaving office on January 20. Those who wish to see this historic injustice corrected at last are urged to send emails and messages to the White House before it becomes too late.

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

Remembering Hussein Rahim

This month marks the 81st death anniversary of a towering radical political activist, who fought for the rights of the South Asian immigrants in Canada. Hussein Rahim was born in a Gujarati family in Delhi, India in 1865. He moved to Vancouver in 1910. Before immigrating to Canada, he had spent thirteen years in Japan, where he ran a business that went into losses.

While in Vancouver, Rahim noticed how South Asian immigrants faced institutional racism. Though most South Asians came here for a better livelihood as British subjects, they never got any help from the British authorities in an event of racial violence. Back then, both India and Canada were part of the British Empire. Rahim realized that the root cause of the sufferings of South Asian immigrants to this part of the world was foreign occupation back home. He started organizing the community to not only fight back against racism abroad, but also British occupation of India.

He became the leader of the Hindustan Association, dedicated to the cause of liberation of India from British rule. He consistently raised his voice against discriminatory laws that were implemented to discourage Indian

immigrants from permanent settlement. In 1907, they were disfranchised as part of this policy. They were not allowed to bring their families,

and a continuous journey law was passed, under which the Komagata Maru ship carrying more than 300 passengers from India was forced to

RADICAL HISTORY OF THE MONTH

return in 1914.

Rahim fought against all these injustices. For his involvement in political activities, he was under constant watch of the authorities and attempts were made to deport him.

Rahim was arrested in March, 1912 for participating in the electoral process, violating the rules that barred Indian immigrants from exercising their right to vote. During the same year, Rahim had organized the community to boycott the visit of King George V to protest against the British government's reluctance to help South Asians in Canada.

Rahim had close ties with the Socialists, with whose support he established the United India League in 1911. He encouraged many prominent Sikh activists to join the league. Among them was Bhai

Bhaag Singh, leader of the Khalsa Diwan Society, the oldest Sikh body in Vancouver. Notably, the Khalsa Diwan Society was also established to fight back against racism.

Bhaag Singh was gunned down in September 1914 in the aftermath of the Komagata Maru episode, by a British agent, Bela Singh. Later, Bhai Mewa Singh, another Sikh activist, assassinated controversial Immigration

Inspector William Hopkinson, who patronized Bela Singh.

Rahim had actively participated in the struggle for the rights of the Komagata Maru passengers. He was part of the committee formed to defend those aboard the vessel. Thanks to his efforts, a

Caucasian lawyer with socialist leanings, J. Edward Bird, agreed to defend the case of the ship passengers. Bird had received many threats from the white supremacists.

The authorities suspected Rahim to be involved in the conspiracy to murder Hopkinson. He was arrested in connection with the incident, but acquitted by the court due to lack of evidence.

To educate the South Asians

about their rights and make them politically aware, Rahim launched a monthly newspaper called *Hindustani* in 1914. The British India government had banned its entry into its territory.

A tireless champion of human rights, Rahim passed away on January 31, 1936.

Though he is not among us, his struggle for a just society should be kept alive. His legacy of struggle against racism and occupation will remain relevant as long as structural violence against the indigenous peoples and other minority groups continues in Canada. With the victory of Donald Trump as US president, racism is once again raising its head in North America. If we really care for Rahim and his philosophy, we must join hands to defeat bigotry.

As we are heading close to the provincial elections to be held on May 9, South Asians should exercise their right to franchise to bring change in BC. Never forget that we got this right because of men like Rahim. To carry forward his struggle, we must fight for change in the electoral system as well. To make the electoral system accountable and more inclusive, we should be asking for the right to reject and a provision for proportional representation. -RDNB

Books

Books also communicate,

Revealing tales of time gone by,
Tales of our world,
Stories of human beings,
Today's tale or yesterday's tale,
Tales of every moment spent in
happiness or pain,
Flower laden tales,
Cruel stories of bombs,
Stories of our victories and
defeats,
Tales of love and deceit,

Love! Shall you not listen these
tales?

Love! Shall you not go through
these books?

Look! How eager these books
are to communicate.

Look! How Impatient these
books are to stay with you.

Safdar Hashmi was a progressive playwright and poet. He was murdered by the political goons who were upset with his activism aimed at educating the poor and the workers about their rights. He was playing Halla Bol (Raise your voice), a street play, when he was fatally injured in the attack and died in 1989. These passages from his poem, originally written in Hindi, are reproduced here to recognize his martyrdom day that falls this month.

