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Secularism is not a choice, but necessity

This month marks 68 years of the worst sectarian strife that followed the partition of India and Pakistan on religious lines. The two neighbouring nations were one, until being split when they gained official independence from the British occupation on August 14-15, 1947. Muslim Pakistan came into being as an Islamic republic, whereas India chose to remain a secular democracy. The division sparked religious riots on both sides of the border. While Muslims were targeted by Hindu and Sikh extremists on the Indian side, non-Muslims were traumatized and forced to flee by Islamic fundamentalists on the other end. Thousands of people were murdered and their properties were looted. Women were subjected to sexual violence. Although the Indian and Pakistani establishments continue to celebrate their freedom from British rule, the ugly events that consumed innocent lives seem to have been forgotten by the privileged ruling classes. Instead of learning lessons from the tragedy that was a result of religious fanaticism, the establishments on both sides have found ways of using religion as a tool to divide and rule the people. One can understand what is wrong with Pakistan, which is a theocratic state where minority rights have continued to be crushed both by the state and the Taliban, but the situation in India, which claims to be a secular democracy, is totally unpardonable. There is no denying the fact that ultra-Hindu nationalism has been allowed to grow in India since the time of independence. The extremists subscribing to the 'Hindu nation' ideology had always wanted to see India become a Hindu state. Frustrated by the efforts of people like Mahatma Gandhi to keep it a secular democracy, they assassinated him shortly after independence. During years that followed Gandhi's murder in 1948, the Hindu extremists continued their activities without any fear. In the meantime, Gandhi's Congress party, which has always claimed to be secular, tried to appease both religious minorities and the Hindu majority for its political survival. When it suited it, the Congress unashamedly indulged in politics that pleased Hindu nationalists. In 1984, the Congress engineered anti-Sikh pogroms after the assassination of then-Prime Minister Indira Gandhi by her Sikh bodyguards. Earlier that year, Indira Gandhi had ordered a military attack on the Golden Temple Complex, the holiest shrine of the Sikhs, which had been turned into a fortress by the religious extremists. The military attack invited the wrath of the Sikh community, but was welcomed by the ultra-Hindu nationalists. These actions paid dividends to the Congress party, which gained a brute majority in the general election after Indira Gandhi's murder. In 2002, the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government in Gujarat orchestrated similar violence against Muslims after a train carrying Hindu pilgrims caught fire, killing more than 50 passengers. The BJP government accused Muslim extremists of torching the train. The current Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi, was the Chief Minister of Gujarat at the time of the massacre, and is widely blamed for inciting violence. The Gujarat massacre also helped the BJP in making electoral gains in the state. Notably, the BJP government in Gujarat has also been responsible for attacks on Christians and Sikhs at different times. Ever since the BJP came to power with a heavy mandate under Modi, the Hindu fanatics have started exerting pressure on the Indian state to transform pluralist Indian society into a theocracy. Some are asking for a debate on the preamble of secularism enshrined in the Indian constitution. Others simply want secularism to be removed from the national text, or to adopt the Hindu holy book, *Bhagwad Gita*, as the national

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text. Efforts to rewrite Indian history from a Hindu nationalist perspective have already begun. Emboldened by the BJP government, they have intensified the campaign to terrorize religious minorities, and openly glorify the assassin of Gandhi. Today when we look back at the holocaust of 1947, it appears that the circumstances that led to the country's division have not changed. Religious bigotry has instead grown in India over the years, and Modi's ascendance to power can be partly attributed to this fact. Compared to the violence that followed the partition of 1947, the two big massacres of 1984 and 2002 were organized by democratically elected governments, and the state machinery was used to protect the perpetrators rather than the victims. In a way, there is no parallel between what happened in 1947, when power was being exchanged between foreign and domestic rulers under chaotic conditions, and what happened in post-independent India under the Congress and BJP governments. Not surprisingly, many of the Sikh victims of the 1984 pogrom had earlier survived the carnage of 1947. They had fled to Delhi from Pakistan to start their lives from scratch. They had never foreseen that Delhi would become unsafe for them many years later in an independent and secular India. We have to swallow a bitter reality that the political parties do not need to learn anything. It's the people who need to learn what our political leaders really are: the merchants of death and destruction. What needs to be done is to make these leaders accountable for their actions, and to keep watch to ensure that secularism is not dismantled, since it is not a choice, but a necessity for peace and progress.

Editors

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Holocaust Heroes

Remembering secularist activists who stood up against religious violence of 1947

When the story has largely remained unheard and most people only know him by the title of the portrait; *The Patriarch* or *Malwe Da Bapu* (Father of Malwa). Muslims started leaving India and migrating to Pakistan, while Hindus and Sikhs fled for India, leaving behind their homes and ancestral land. Religious fanatics on both sides killed innocent people. Hindu and Sikh fundamentalists targeted Muslims on the India side, while Islamic extremists forced non-Muslims to leave their newly born homeland. Pakistani leaders rejoiced in their liberation from both British and "Hindu dominance". The

Portrait Artists chose prominent Punjabi painter Jarnail Singh's portrait of a Sikh elder for the Daniel P. Izzard medal, there was hardly any recognition of the story of the man in the picture. He risked his life by helping people during the 1947 violence triggered by the religious division of India and Pakistan, an act of courage in the face of death. Yet, Kakka Singh was from the Malwa region of Punjab when India was divided on religious lines at the end of the British rule on August 14-15, 1947. After Muslim Pakistan was separated from India, there was a massive exchange of population from both sides of the border.

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Muslim majority states were awarded to Pakistan after years of their campaign for a separate state.

As the stories of murders, rapes and lootings began pouring in, Kakka Singh took upon himself to protect Muslims in his village in Bathinda. This was a time when Hindu and Sikh fanatics were not only killing Muslims, but also terrorizing those who were protecting them. As the situation started getting worse and it became difficult for Muslims to stay in India, Kakka Singh planned a scheme to safely transport Muslims to the border so that they could reach Pakistan. He along with other like minded people led a convoy of Muslims that walked for miles to reach the Indo-Pak border. To ensure

safety, the Muslims all disguised themselves as Hindus or Sikhs, moving at night and halting to rest in daytime, giving an impression that they were refugees from Pakistan heading to India. Upon reaching the border, the Muslim refugees thanked Kakka Singh. Since Kakka Singh and his wife were a childless couple, before entering Pakistan they prayed to the god to bless them with a child. Kakka Singh's son, former Surrey MLA Jagrup Brar claims that following this episode his parents were blessed with their first child. Call it a miracle or a pure coincidence depending on one's belief, but that Kakka Singh won the goodwill of the

survivors cannot be disputed.

Jarnail Singh recalls that he started working on this unusual portrait on the request of the Brar family in the early 2000s. He was only provided a small headshot to make the portrait. The story of Kakka Singh's bravery greatly influenced Jarnail Singh, who turned him into life with a portrait of a man with authority, someone who stood for the rights of the victims of violence. Of course, he kept in mind the typical lifestyle

and body language of authoritative elders of the Malwa region while making the portrait. Singh, who also comes from Malwa, has made close to 600 paintings, including over 50 portraits, and considers this one among the closest to his heart.

But Kakka Singh is not the only hero of the catastrophe of 1947, or the only one with a Canadian connection. While the ruling classes of India and Pakistan were busy celebrating freedom from British occupation and the transfer of power into their hands, others were playing with fire in attempts to save human lives from mass murderers blinded by religious bigotry.

The maternal grandfather of Ujjal Dosanjh, the former BC

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Premier, also tried to save Muslim lives during that time. Moola Singh Bahawal was one of the leaders of the liberation movement. Unlike Kakka Singh, an unknown village elder, Bahawal was influenced by the ideology of the Ghadar Party, which believed in armed rebellion against the British Empire. The party was formed in North America by South Asian radicals in 1913. These immigrants had come to Canada and US as British subjects seeking a better livelihood. But blatant racism and the failure of the British authorities to help them in any event of racial violence transformed many into political activists. They believed that the root cause of their sufferings in this foreign land was the British occupation of India. The Ghadar Party was founded to fight racism abroad and foreign rule back home. It desired to form a secular and egalitarian republic in post-British India, and encouraged its members to keep religion and politics apart. The Ghadar narrative denounced religious sectarianism and believed in people's unity. The British rulers often used divide and rule policies to create rifts between different religious groups, and the Ghadar activists realized how important it was to keep people united. Among those who founded and led the Ghadar Party were people from diverse faith groups, including Muslims. When they resolved to fight jointly against the British, they never imagined that their motherland would be divided on the basis of religion. But the new rulers did not see anything wrong in

continuing the divide and rule policy of the previous regime. The partition was a byproduct of that politics.

Bahawal's uncle, Bir Singh, was a Ghadar Party supporter and lived in Vancouver. He had returned to India only to meet the gallows. Bahawal had fought both against the British occupation and later against religious fanatics within his own community. He formed a peace committee to stop bloodshed in the Hoshiarpur area, and spent the final years of his life in Vancouver. Dosanjh, a vocal critic of religious extremism, acknowledges that he inherited secularist ideas from his grandfather.

Not surprisingly, the Ghadar activists played a significant role in protecting Muslims during the mayhem. True to their commitment towards secularism, those who survived executions used all their energy to rescue people who had become vulnerable during the holocaust. Ghadar Party President Sohan Singh Bhakna even received death threats for doing so. These threats were not hollow; Gehal Singh Chajjalwadi, a leftist activist who had saved Muslims, was

murdered by Sikh extremists. According to Iqbal Kaur, Chajjalwadi's daughter, he was brutally tortured and killed by the Sikh extremists. He was riding a bicycle when a jeep carrying his assailants hit him. He was then abducted and taken to a temple and tortured to death. Both Bhakna and Chajjalwadi had distant relatives and friends in Vancouver, and they actively helped Muslims in the Amritsar region of Punjab. Disappointed and pained by the partition of his country, Bhakna described it as murder of the Ghadar ideology.

Among the Ghadar Party supporters who lived in Canada and later returned to launch a rebellion were Sher Singh Vein Poin, Munsha Singh Dukhi, Bhagwan Singh Dosanjh, Bhag Singh Canadian, Bachint Singh and Chainchal Singh Jandiala. Unfazed by threats and intimidations, all these individuals established peace committees in

different parts of Punjab and helped Muslims reach refugee camps safely.

The poet Dukhi was so touched by the massacre that he penned a poem in protest against the killings. Interestingly, many of these people had a Sikh heritage and were practicing Sikhs, but they remained untouched by the madness which overwhelmed their co-religionists. The Sikhs who had migrated from Pakistan suffered great emotional and economic loss, separated from their important religious shrines, including the birth place of Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism. Besides, they had to leave behind agricultural land and ancestral properties during the partition. Thanks to the indoctrination of the Ghadar Party, its secularist and liberal Sikh members were quick to respond to this extraordinarily challenging situation and came to the aid of Muslims.

Years have passed since this tragedy shook the world, but apart from individual efforts of people like Jarnail Singh, no special efforts have been made to get these unsung heroes recognized on Canadian soil. Another small attempt has been made by Sohan Singh Pooni, an independent history researcher who authored a book on Ghadar activists. Published in Punjabi, *Canada De Ghadri Yodhey* (Ghadar Combatants of Canada) has brief sketches of the Ghadar activists, including those who played a positive role during the partition.

Small progressive groups, such as Taraksheel Sabha, an Indian rationalist society, started organizing annual vigils in Surrey in memory of the thousands of people killed during 1947. The Fraser Valley Peace Council and Committee of Progressive Pakistani Canadians have also been supporting such initiatives. But these efforts have

been largely eclipsed by independence day celebrations. So much so that some key organizers of the events to commemorate the holocaust victims have started celebrating the joint independence day of India and Pakistan, to promote friendship between the two nations by cutting cakes and exchanging greetings followed by a candle light vigil. Some genuinely feel that this becomes necessary to avoid isolation from mainstream Indians and Pakistanis, who generally want to forget the past and look forward. Others think mere commemoration of the victims of violence will unnecessarily open old wounds and refresh ugly memories, so it is acceptable to have both commemoration and celebrations. Shahzad Nazir Khan of the Committee of Progressive Pakistani Canadians, who is very passionate about Indo-Pak friendship and remembering the victims of the

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holocaust, points out that both nations need to learn from the US-Canada relationship. In his opinion, if these two countries can live in peace as "children of the same mother", his home countries of Pakistan and India can live in harmony as they share a joint heritage. Notably, Punjabis from both India and Pakistan dominate the local South Asian population in Surrey. They not only share a common language, but also in many cases common surnames. Only religion separates them from each other. Those who wish to see Indo-Pak relations flourish point out that

lots needs to be done to overcome hostilities since the days of partition. The two countries have already fought two wars, and have been locked in low scale conflicts over some ticklish issues.

For progressives who think beyond the nation-state concept, the real challenge lies in narrow nationalism, which is as problematic as religious bigotry. Paash, a revolutionary Punjabi poet, took upon himself a mission to stop the repetition of 1947. He opposed religious fundamentalism of all shades when the Sikh separatist movement peaked during the

1980s. He condemned both Hindu chauvinism and Sikh fundamentalism in his writings. To make a point he launched *Anti 47 Front* to challenge another attempt to divide society on religious lines. This was the time when the Indian establishment and the Sikh militants were engaged in a bloody conflict. The militants had launched an armed struggle and targeted the Hindu minority in Punjab, while the Indian state promoted violence against the Sikh minority across the country. Following the assassination of Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi by her Sikh bodyguards,

anti-Sikh violence was engineered across the country. Paash had written a highly provocative poem in protest against these mass murders. In his paper published by *Anti 47 Front*, he criticized all sides, including the icons of Indian nationalism for inciting religious fanaticism. He was murdered by the Sikh separatists in 1988.

Whatever may be the explanation, the stories of heroes like Kakka Singh remain untold because of the jingoism in both communities. As religious fanaticism continues to grow in that region, there are less buyers of secularism among political circles. Succumbing to pressure of the orthodox religious groups, the mainstream political parties in both countries often get carried away,

reviving fears of another catastrophe or war. Not very long ago, some progressive Pakistanis

wanted a road crossing in Lahore to be renamed after Bhagat Singh, a towering Indian revolutionary and a

follower of Ghadar ideology. But the move was scuttled by threats from Muslim extremists. Similarly, efforts are afoot under the right-wing Hindu nationalist government in India to minimize the role of Muslim liberation struggle heroes in history books, and to appropriate Ghadar activists as Hindu or Sikh. In such a scenario, the chances of recognition of heroes like Kakka Singh in popular discourse in India and Pakistan seem to be bleak. Will the legacy of such individuals ever be successful in ending these divisions permanently? Only time will tell, but it remains relevant as religious intolerance and violence continue to threaten world peace.

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of the First Nations became the subject of my research paper for the course. My extensive readings revealed that the root cause of the problem was the racial arrogance of the European colonists, who considered their Christian ways superior over Indigenous cultures. Since the church gave them a sanction to occupy the Americas on the assumption that it was an empty land, they treated those who lived here as "savages" and heathen. This was despite the fact that Indigenous peoples had well organized societies where land was used collectively in the absence of individual ownership. But a false sense of cultural and biological superiority encouraged by papal edicts brought the colonial powers to the Americas. The doctrine of 'discovery' was popularized to suggest that North and South America were first found by the Europeans.

The colonists in later years continued their efforts to impose Christianity and Eurocentric values on the Indigenous population. When the rulers decided to educate Indigenous children in the Indian residential schools or boarding schools, both in Canada and the US, they did not really mean to provide them a space to get enlightened. The colonial mindset behind the policy was aimed at forcing Indigenous children to abandon their cultural identity and languages, and to embrace Christianity. The Canadian government gave the responsibility of running such schools to Christian

missionaries. The state provided funding for the 'education' of Indigenous children, administered by churches which were interested in growing their following. In these schools, the Indigenous children were often punished for speaking their own languages, and were forced to adopt Christian names. Their spiritual beliefs were ridiculed and belittled, and time was invested in educating them about Christianity.

This resulted in a situation where Indigenous communities, deprived of their traditional lands and ways of life, were forced to internalize racism, to an extent that impoverishment, substance abuse, domestic violence and suicides have become a common occurrence in the lives of many First Nations.

Undoubtedly, the IRS was an extension of the colonial project,

which was a byproduct of the false notion of discovery aimed at dispossessing the First Nations of their land and culture to enable permanent settlement of Europeans in the Americas. The story of IRS shows why secularism matters, and why it is necessary to keep religion and politics apart. Such experiments often result in dominance of one group and marginalization of others. The social impacts of such problems are felt for a long time.

Christianity is not the only religion responsible for such a mess; other established religions also had political considerations attached to them. Hinduism, for instance, permitted caste-based discrimination, which has resulted in the inhuman practice of Untouchability that refuses to die in spite of tall claims of development in India. In orthodox Indian society, the Hindu priests forced the rulers to follow the caste system, which remains deeply entrenched even as stringent laws are in place to eradicate the problem.

The combination of state and religion throughout the world has only brought miseries in the form of wars, slavery, racism and sexism. Hopefully, the ugly legacy of IRS will open the eyes of the world to force powerful states to stop using religion to rule over the weak and vulnerable.

Gurpreet Singh is a founder of Radical Desi.

Canada and Greece - perhaps not so very different?

Many Canadians are closely watching the situation in Greece, with a mixture of curiosity, fear and even anger. We are constantly told that the economic crisis in that country is "their own fault" - that social programs have been too lavish, or that Greeks refuse to pay taxes like civilized people. The full history of Greece is usually avoided; for example the fact that the Greeks borrowed from Britain to finance their struggle for independence from the Ottoman Empire - or that it took them 130 years to pay off these loans from the British Empire's bankers.

The current crisis is rooted in Greece's entry into the Eurozone. After 2002 the European and Wall Street bankers flooded Greece with 'easy money' and generous debt-refinancing arrangements. That, combined with tax evasion by Greek corporations and the super-wealthy, resulted in an unsustainable 'debt bubble' (now estimated at almost \$400 Billion US). When the global economic crisis hit in 2008, Greece couldn't meet interest payments to foreign bankers without massive new 'bridging' loans requiring vicious austerity measures. Wages and pensions were cut, public sector

workers laid off, and social services slashed, resulting in unemployment, poverty and misery on an unprecedented scale.

Other European states face similar fiscal crises - Spain, Portugal, Italy, Ireland, France, and some of the Eastern European states swept up into the EU vortex. Everywhere, austerity measures imposed by the Troika and private bankers have exacted a heavy toll on working people.

Some Canadians may feel smug, thinking "that can't happen here." But there are parallels between the two countries. Both have economies much smaller than their neighbours - the EU (and especially Germany) in the case of Greece, and the United States in our region. That often leaves Canadians and Greeks feeling like (in former Canadian PM Pierre Trudeau's memorable words) mice sleeping beside elephants.

Our standard of living, wage rates, social programs are more closely linked with the ups and downs of the global capitalist economy than with particular policy decisions by our politicians. Governments in Canada have also adopted the neoliberal austerity programmes ordered by

international finance capital and right-wing politicians, even after the 2008 capitalist meltdown: proved that such policies leave most people far more vulnerable to cyclical economic crashes. Not all of us, of course - corporate profits in Canada quickly recovered from that crisis, zooming up to the current annual level of \$300 billion. And while most Greeks line up for small cash withdrawals, a small minority of that country's wealthy elite have done very well for themselves. Is this scenario in our country's future - perhaps if this year's oil price shock is followed by a more widespread economic downturn?

The events in Greece have had other particularly nasty political and social impacts, such as the emergence of powerful far-right, racist and anti-immigrant movements. The Golden Dawn neo-Nazis have 17 members in the Greek parliament, despite (or partly because of) their frequent violent attacks against migrants, people of colour, trade unionists, and leftists. When the system breaks down, some people fall for the argument that "others" are responsible - in this case, for example, migrants fleeing the disastrous economies of Africa, where imperialist powers

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have spent centuries exploiting natural resources and encouraging local elites to purchase high-powered weapons rather than investing in clean water, housing, or economic independence.

Progressive-minded Canadians sometimes think that our country is "different" but of course this ignores our true history. Canada is one of the original racist countries, built on the theft of indigenous lands and the exploitation of cheap immigrant labour. For centuries, Canada's unofficial founding ideology has included the concept that the Aboriginal peoples were "savages" - less than fully human, suitable for "Christianizing" and assimilation only after their "backward" languages and cultural heritages were cleansed in the residential school system.

This ideology painted Canada as a "white man's country," one in which immigrants from Asia were particularly marginalized - often forbidden from entering the country, and then barred from bringing family members or attaining the right to vote. The most vicious attacks targeted people of Chinese, South Asian and Japanese origin during the 20th century, but white supremacism remains alive and well to this day, even at times when such groups receive little attention in the mainstream media.

More recently, far-right forces, including the Harper Conservatives, have found other suitable targets. The scapegoat de jour can change

quickly, from a few hundred Tamil migrants arriving in rusty boats, to Mexicans fleeing the US-driven "drug war" cartels, to Roma people seeking a haven from persecution in various European countries, or indigenous land defenders who refuse to accept that corporations have the unfettered "right" to engage in drilling and mining on unceded territories. The usual point man for these attacks is Jason Kenney, widely touted as Stephen Harper's successor. (Now there's a frightening thought.) But Harper himself joins the fray to whip up hatred against Muslims, who are depicted as a community riddled

with terrorist lone wolves. Mass surveillance is presented as the only way to protect "Canadian values." We are encouraged to bully Muslim women who follow "unacceptable" practices such as wearing head scarves.

What would it take to help turn this racist harassment into a full-scale campaign of anti-immigrant bashing across Canada? If our country's economy enters the type of turmoil seen in Greece and other south European countries, will the white supremacist groups turn from a fringe minority into a vocal movement capable of electing political candidates?

These are not idle questions. Golden Dawn in Canada? Don't kid yourself - these thugs are already here, laying the groundwork for similar racist activities when conditions are right.

The best way to avoid such scenarios is to build strong ties of solidarity among all those who are scapegoated by the Harper Tories and other right-wing forces. Otherwise, the next economic crisis will inevitably see a new upsurge in racism and immigrant-bashing, new calls for expanded police state powers, and even more overseas wars with deadly consequences for those hit by Canadian bomber attacks.

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

Modi's disastrous first year

When Narendra Modi arrived in New Delhi to be sworn in as India's prime minister, he flew in a private aircraft belonging to the Adani Group, although he could have taken a commercial flight or a chartered plane. On landing, he was greeted with the communal-military slogan Har Har Modi.

The two events showed where Prime Minister Modi's loyalties and priorities would lie: with Big Business and Hindutva, both of which he had served with pious zeal in Gujarat since the anti-Muslim pogrom of 2002 and through crony-capitalist deals later.

Over the past year, he has showered favours on both, and antagonised many who voted for him. His honeymoon period has ended, but he hasn't fully understood that.

This was proved by a third development. That's Modi's May 16 statement in Shanghai to an Indian audience: "Earlier, you felt ashamed of being born Indian, now you feel proud to represent the country..." He repeated this in Seoul, adding the religious motif of "sins" committed in past life as the cause of being born Indian.

Modi thus gratuitously insulted Indian citizens. The use of terms like 'shame' and 'sin' reveals deep insecurity and an inferiority complex in Modi's persona, which psychologists should analyse.

The boastful claim that India's 'mood' has changed dramatically in a year is meant to cover up that inferiority – the way Hitler and Mussolini tried to do by declaring they had made the German and Italian people "proud" through military aggression and by making the "trains run on time"!

What's the first-year balance-sheet of Modi's government? Frankly speaking, it's overwhelmingly negative. India has socially regressed in multiple ways, economically become more unequal, and politically got further polarised in an unhealthy manner.

India's social regression is evident in the growth of rabid communalism, attacks on democratic rights, censorship of free speech, intolerance towards dissent, spread of authoritarian ideas, greater licence to male-supremacism and violence against women, insecurity among the religious minorities, all amidst neglect of human development.

The *Ramzada-Haramzada* abuse, *ghar wapsi* and calls for depriving Muslims of the right to vote are just the crassest forms of the present outbreak of communalism. The government's indulgence towards them sends a message: it's India's open season to malign non-Hindus, ban the sale of beef and even slaughter of bulls, impose the *Bhagwad-Gita* on schools, and build a cult around

Gandhi's assassin Godse.

The message is amplified when those charged with Gujarat's 'fake encounters' and communal killings, including BJP president Amit Shah, are discharged without trial; but the entire might of the state is brought to bear against secular campaigners like Teesta Setalvad – because they tried to bring the culprits of Gujarat-2002 to justice.

There have been savage cuts in social sector budgets: 20 percent in health, 29 percent in Mid-Day Meal schemes, 17 percent in education, 51 percent in women and child welfare, and so on. Central transfers to the states, which implement many social schemes, were cut by 30 percent.

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act had its worst-ever performance under Modi. In 2014-15, the number of person-days of work created was 40 percent less than two years ago. Only three percent of families got the promised 100 days of work, and 70 percent of wages were delayed – to disastrous effect in a year of acute agrarian distress. Employment growth in industry has fallen to barely a fifth of what's needed to absorb the growing workforce.

The *suit-boot-ki-sarkar* is shamelessly pro-rich and anti-poor. It's cajoling capital to invest. But investment isn't forthcoming. Fifty-

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two percent of India's top 500 companies are excessively indebted, 14 percent of bank loans have gone bad.

Modi has failed to diagnose this, and believes that the key to stimulate investment is threefold: dismantle environmental regulations, allow unbridled diversion of agricultural land to industry (hence the land ordinance), and 'reform' labour laws to allow hire-and-fire.

The first approach has meant ruthless 'fast-tracking' of industrial-project clearances without scrutiny, violating the Forest Rights Act and coastal zone regulations, and redefining 'forests'.

The high-level (TSR Subrahmanyam) committee has recommended far-reaching changes in environmental laws, including abolition of pollution control boards, self-certification of environment-related information by project promoters, and automatic clearances for roads and power-lines through forests, etc. But environmental regulations are no obstacle to industry: over 94 percent of proposals have been cleared since 2007.

Land has become an extremely contentious issue. The UPA's land law was meant to give farmers and those dependent indirectly on agriculture a stake in determining their fate – necessary since some 60 million people have been displaced from land since 1947, mostly without rehabilitation.

The NDA's ordinance undermines this rationale. It is opposed tooth-and-nail by a wide spectrum of parties and farmers' organisations. A land agitation could turn politically explosive.

The government is sitting on lakhs of acres it acquired for military use and Special Economic Zones, but hasn't distributed. The ordinance will give private capital free access to land and what lies under it, especially minerals – a huge racket. This has become a Modi obsession.

The planned dismantling of labour protections will rob workers of the right to form unions (for which the minimum membership has been raised from seven to 100). No permission will be needed to lay off workers or close factories with 100 workers; these account for 90 percent of the total number of units. The factories Act will also be undermined, dismantling safety rules. Employment of contract labour for permanent work will become rampant.

Politically, Modi is running the most over-centralised government in India's history. This cannot work without destroying decision-making integrity and creating insecurity among bureaucrats and ministers; indeed, RSS men have been appointed as 'officers on special duty' to spy on them. This makes nonsense of cabinet government.

Modi has introduced venomous confrontation into politics, against the spirit of democracy. Intimidating your opponents, and even your allies, can quickly become counterproductive. Several NDA constituents and Sangh Parivar outfits have turned against the land ordinance. Modi is making enemies out of friends.

Going by recent elections, by-elections, and local bodies polls in different states, the enthusiasm witnessed for Modi last year has all

but vanished. The BJP proved incapable of repeating its Lok Sabha performance in vote-shares/seats even in favourable situations like Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh. The edge it established in parts of West Bengal, including Kolkata, has already eroded.

What's becoming obvious now is the effect of the thinness of the original support for Modi. He won 31 percent of the vote, but 52 percent of the Lok Sabha's seats, the highest disproportion ever. His support was highly concentrated in a handful of states – thanks to planned communal violence and polarisation along caste and class lines.

Another factor was his high-octane multi-billion dollar election campaign, which hyped up Gujarat's at-best-modest social indicators as major achievements. A CSDS-Lokniti poll asked people which state they thought was India's most developed: 64 percent answered Gujarat, only four percent said Maharashtra, and even fewer cited Kerala, India's indisputably most socially developed state.

This illusion, partly based on the search for a messiah, is breaking down. People are realising that the '56-inch-chest' man is a hollow caricature of his bloated image. Modi's troubles are set to worsen.

Praful Bidwai was a prominent writer and a secular columnist who wrote courageously against Hindu extremism despite threats and intimidations. He passed away on June 23. This article was published by thenews.com.pk and is being reproduced here as a tribute to him.

Public forum held on the murders of secularists in South Asia

The South Asian Dabholkar had invited the wrath of three bloggers in Bangladesh. Network of Hindu nationalists for challenging these individuals were murdered by Secularism and religious superstition, while Islamic fundamentalists for Democracy organized a public Pansare was opposed to the promoting atheism and free forum on recent murders of activities of pro-Hindu state thinking. He warned that the social secularist activists in South Asia by terrorists. The investigations of media has not only created space religious extremists. Held at the both murders remain unresolved, for secularists, but also for the Simon Fraser University Harbour Bhardwaj believes that under the extremists who continue to Centre on June 21, the event was current Hindu nationalist threaten anyone who promotes attended by speakers who made government in India, such forces critical thinking about religion. presentations on the killings of have become emboldened.

these individuals in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh.

A prominent filmmaker and graduate student at University of British Columbia, Ajay Bhardwaj, Pakistan will never be able to throw light on the murders of transform itself into a secular republic, and began Islamic state. Pansare in Maharashtra state of India. Dabholkar was assassinated by Taliban and like-minded forces. murdered in February this year. Hindu extremists are suspected to be involved in both murders.

Aden dune-Aden another Grewal spoke about challenges graduate student at UBC, spoke before secularism in Canada, where the right-wing Conservative government is creating barriers for immigrants and racialized communities in the name of "Canadian values". He cited the example of the proposed ban on veils during the citizenship oath ceremony, which Muslim women see as an assault on their religious freedom.

Anis Rahman, a graduate student at SFU, gave his presentation on the brutal murders

-RND

Petition in support of NOTA provision launched

Radical Desi Publications Ltd. has launched an online petition in support of None of the Above (NOTA) provision during elections. It can be accessed at the Change Petitions website. The petition seeks inclusion of a 'None of the Above' option on ballot papers to give voice to marginalized communities who are not satisfied with the current political system or parties and candidates. The petition is addressed to the Governor General, and asks for constitutional amendments to have this choice before the voters. The idea is to give an alternative to the voters to reject all the candidates, pressuring them to think hard about how to win public confidence.

NIA: San Hammett also lends for folk victims of Nepal earthquake

San Hammett, a well-known local philanthropist, has also lent his name and resources to help victims of the recent earthquake in Nepal. The 7.8 magnitude quake, which struck the Himalayas on April 25, has killed more than 8,000 people and injured tens of thousands more. San Hammett, who is a member of the local community, has been instrumental in organizing relief efforts for the victims. He has donated funds to various organizations that are providing food, shelter, and medical aid to the people affected by the quake. San Hammett also plans to visit Nepal to see the damage firsthand and to provide support to the relief efforts.

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“The real terrorists are those sitting in the Indian Parliament”

Amolak Singh, a visiting leftist activist from India, says that the real terrorists sit in the Indian parliament. Singh was a keynote speaker at an event organized by the Ghadar Centenary Celebrations Committee at the Progressive Cultural Centre in Surrey on June 30.

Singh is the Trustee of Desh Bhagat Yashwantrao Chavan Hall Jaandhar, a centre that preserves Ghadar history. At an event held in commemoration of the centenary of the execution of Kartar Singh Sarabha, one of the Ghadar Party founders, he said that merely remembering Ghadar heroes

is not sufficient and the activists have to keep their struggle for a just society alive.

He pointed out that the circumstances that led to the birth of the Ghadar Party continue to prevail in the form of neo-colonialism and social inequality both in Canada and India. He encouraged Vancouver-based South Asian community members to participate in struggles against austerity and repressive laws in Canada.

Talking about India, he said that the Indian establishment continues to threaten the existence of Indigenous communities, by using armed forces to help corporate

companies to extract natural resources from traditional lands, in the name of war against Maoist insurgency. He also noted the ongoing repression against the people of Kashmir. He reminded the gathering of the massacres of religious minorities in India and thundered that the real terrorists are sitting in the parliament.

However, he pulled no punches while criticising the Sikh extremists who murdered secularist activists and Communists in Punjab during their movement for a separate homeland.

-RDNB

Tribute to the first Indian revolutionary martyr executed in London

This month marks the 106th anniversary of the hanging of Madan Lal Dhingra – the first Indian revolutionary martyr to be executed in London.

Dhingra was given the death sentence on August 17, 1909, for murdering Sir Curzon Wylie, a high ranking British officer, who was associated with Indian affairs. Ironically, Dhingra was born into a family of toadies in British-occupied India. His father had served the British Empire as a doctor in Punjab. Being British loyalists, his family members had denounced his action and went to the extent of disowning him as an eccentric.

Dhingra arrived in London in 1906 to study Engineering. There he came in contact with revolutionaries who were seeking freedom of their homeland from British occupation. He was influenced by the group of Indian scholars who were campaigning for independence from abroad. These individuals had established India House as the nerve centre of radical activities. India House was created as a counterweight to the Indian Association, a group of pro-British Indians. The Indian Association was a controversial group aimed at keeping Indian immigrants away from political activism, and encouraging

them to serve the interest of the Empire. It was instrumental behind creating a class of government servants, whereas the founders of India House gave fellowships to those who were determined not to serve the British Empire, and willing to dedicate their lives to the cause of the liberation movement.

The year 1907 became a major turning point in history, marking 50 years of the first uprising against the British rulers in India. The rebellion

of 1857 had brought all classes of India together against the foreigners. However, that revolt was suppressed by the British Empire. On the 50th anniversary of the episode, the British authorities celebrated their victory in London, where the participants of the rebellion were shown in a negative light. India House organized a parallel celebration to glorify those who died fighting against the British. Dhingra was among the

RADICAL HISTORY OF THE MONTH

organizers of the event. As a result, the radicals came in direct conflict with the British officials, culminating in the assassination of Sir Wyllie on July 1, 1909. Wyllie was discouraging Indian students from participating in political agitation. He was previously posted in the political department of Government of India.

Dhingra faced his trial with courage, and did not have a counsel to defend him. In his statement before the court, he said that no English court had any authority to arrest him, since it was much more justifiable to fight the English out. He charged the British government of looting and repression in his homeland.

His execution had added a new chapter in the war of independence in India and influenced the next generation of radicals. This charged the political environment within the Indian Diaspora, following which the Ghadar Party was formed in North America in 1913. The party believed in an armed rebellion against the British Empire and had appropriated the word Ghadar, which means mutiny in Urdu, from the British. The name was coined by the Empire to refer to the uprising of 1857. To the Indian radicals based in London and North America, the first rebellion was an important milestone. If Dhingra and his compatriots celebrated the first uprising, the Ghadar Party tried to revive it.

Years later, Dhingra inspired Bhagat Singh, a towering Indian revolutionary who followed the

RADICAL DESI

Ghadar ideology and was hanged in 1931 for killing a British police officer. In his writings, Bhagat Singh had described Dhingra as the first revolutionary martyr of Punjab.

In March 1940, Udham Singh, another radical activist, repeated Dhingra's action and assassinated Michael O'Dwyer, the former British Lieutenant-Governor of Punjab, in London. Dwyer was instrumental behind the executions of Ghadar Party activists who had returned to India from North America to launch an uprising. Udham Singh was hanged in the same jail where Dhingra was executed, on July 31, 1940. Dhingra's execution therefore marked the beginning of the period of sacrifices made by those who wanted to free their homeland from the clutches of British through armed struggle.

Dhingra could have chosen a

comfortable life for himself in London and would have easily been absorbed by the Empire, considering his family background, but instead he chose the path of social justice and kissed the gallows for his cause. Unlike many other revolutionaries who had inherited patriotism from within their families, Dhingra lacked such a family environment, choosing to become a nationalist after coming into contact with freedom fighters. His action needs to be situated in the broader context of the history of colonialism and oppression. What he did was not a murder for any personal motive, but an act of resistance against imperialism and plunder of a colonized land. His story will remain relevant as long as neo-colonialism and exploitation of the poor continue in the contemporary world.

-RDNB

Precious than our country are its people

Our country is more precious to us than our
laws,
precious than our country are its people
we are going to break
we are going to break the like-breaking law is.

the beauty of our people is in looking
we will break the empire and strength of its
freedom
none of your minds will come now,
none of your minds will come now, you have come

when the force now comes will run
the workers and the peasants will not let their
age
by a little hands
by a little hands of workers and peasants.

we will bring back the outraged wrongs
that is what people are going to know
the heart of people power
the heart of people power cannot be stopped

we will turn death and pain on the earth
we will turn the pollution that is in the air
we will turn the health of
we will turn the health of, for each century
Kings.

the revolution have enjoyed the fruits of freedom
workers now are reduced to rage
the community of people comes
the community of people comes, for the whole.

I have your crown, we will turn you upside down
you the layers of cows and fish
you speak of no rule
you speak of no rule, from the earth there is no rule.

the rest of you will be built in the sky
when the revolution you will see and feel

there is no crime of lawless
there is no crime of lawless, does not satisfy us
any more.

our country is precious to us than our
precious than our country are its people
we are going to break
we are going to break, the heart of people power.

Sant Jhul Debut was a revolutionary Marathi poet.
Translated by Susha Bhatnagar. This poem has been
reproduced here in recognition of India's
Independence Day which falls on August 15. For
many like Gopal, the nation is not just a piece of land
confined in borders, but a composition of people.
For them, true patriotism is standing up for people
and not being in the service of ruling classes.

High degrees of happiness positively correlated to a rise in unbelief

A woman, feeling committed to hospital is asked: what religion is it? "None" is her answer. A hour later she overhears a doctor and nurse talking about her case. "You know, she really doesn't seem like a nun", reports the nurse. It's not a great joke but it does illustrate a social paradigm that is sweeping western nations and now has its hooks into North America in ways not long a generation ago, could have predicted. I am talking of course about the rise of secularism, Humanism and atheism. I see several reasons for this rise, and several reasons it is hopeful about.

Western Europe has been undergoing this shift for much longer, the results of this social experiment are now available. Nations such as Norway and Sweden, among the most successful, have the largest number of people reporting high degrees of happiness and other measures of social progress such as equality, human rights, standard of living etc. All are positively correlated to a rise in unbelief.

If I know you are interested in how things are at home, I'll begin with the sometimes boring statistics, in this case however, the numbers at least show reason to be optimistic.

Canada has always been a predominantly Catholic country. This is of course a remnant of out-

dated thinking. Protestants and denominations made up the bulk of the rest of the population, but the numbers are shifting.

In 1971 Protestants represented 37% of the population with Catholics at 47%. Those numbers in 2011 were 27% and 34% respectively. Interestingly, the change in "other" religions over the same period is up from 4% in 1971 to 11% in 2011. Of interest to me, which will explain later, is the drop in church attendance in 1990. 43% of Canadians went to church at least once a month, in 2012 that number had dropped to 29%.

Pew's social index for the "unaffiliated" goes back to 1970 when 6% of Canadians checked the "none" line. That number in 2012 was 24%. Clearly a more significant rise in terms of percentages that the drop in religious affiliation. Let's unpack those stats to see where those numbers are coming from.

If you were born before 1946, in other words, probably boomer, your rise in religiously unaffiliated numbers rose from 4% to only 8% from 1971 to 2011 whereas baby boomers rose from 9% to 20%, millennials were at 29% in 2011. You don't have earlier stats on them because they were too young to be included in any polls. As an aside, but not within the scope of this article is why there are no statistics past 2011. The mandatory long form census was abolished in 2011.

One can imagine why since things like drops in religiosity are not what the conservative government wants to hear.

Some believe immigration has a role to play in all of this but the statistics tell a slightly surprising story. Protestant and Catholic immigrants have gone down by 18% from 1971 to 2011 while immigrants with "other" religions have gone up 15%. The "unaffiliated" immigrants have gone from 20% to 21%, no doubt within the margin of error. I think generally speaking, the rise in unbelief and the decline in the religious cannot be due to immigration, although there is a trend, at least within the scope of this article that shows that religions such as Islam, Sikhism, Hinduism and Buddhism are on the rise in Canada. A National Post article from 2013 showed that among the groups listed above, the difference in numbers of immigrants between 1971 and 2011 was: Muslims 0.7% to 17.4%, Sikh 0.8% to 4.8%, Hindu 0.8% to 6.0% and Buddhist 0.7% to 2.8%. Writers such as Ezra Levant and Mark Steyn, see this as a troubling trend in other parts of the world but I don't see any need for concern in Canada at this point in our history. For reasons that will become clear later.

Well, that wasn't so bad was it? Stats etc can be fun, or perhaps you prefer this like to Dan All Hall's book *How to lie With Statistics*.

VOICES FROM THE MARGINS

Either way I encourage you all to do your own research as numbers do vary depending on the source. I like the Pew forum because it prides itself on its independence and is among the most respected polling organizations in the world.

But that is where the objectivity of this article ends. I of course declare my bias very openly. I am an advocate for secularism and Humanist values so the trends happening in Canada and other developed countries give me hope, but I also see something hidden in the numbers.

"Unaffiliated" means you do not associate with church and/or religion. This says nothing about your "spiritual" beliefs. I know many people who despise organized religion but have worldviews as metaphysically absurd as the most fundamentalist religionist. Many atheist believe in UFO's, that we are being visited right now by extraterrestrials, others think vaccinations are a government plot and others, much to my dismay, think Deepak Chopra actually has something of value to offer in the spiritual marketplace.

So while I am delighted to see religion on the decline, I also see it being replaced with ideas that may not always be as dangerous as religious beliefs but are equally as bereft of evidence. So where is my optimism?

It is and always has been in education. Higher degrees of education correlate negatively to religious belief, in other words, the more educated, the less likely you are to be religious (note that there is a difference between intelligence and education, many very educated people are not actually that smart).

We see in the statistics that the more educated report less religiosity but there is another trend that may tell us why.

The students of today are better educated than ever before. This is partly due to the Internet. It

has been said many times that: "The Internet is where religion goes to die". Younger people eschew religion in rates never before seen in history. 76% of people born between 1984 to 1993 have no religious affiliation. Think about what that means for the future. As we baby boomers and our parents shuffle off to become fertilizer, the Canadian population is on track to become a virtual atheistic country. Well, if not atheistic, at least secular. I will settle for that.

I promised earlier to explain why the numbers on church attendance are significant. Over 70% of Canadians call themselves religious. Pollsters admit that in many cases this answer is given without much thought. People simply answer with the religion they were brought up with. I once worked with a person who told me that being born into a Catholic family made me a Catholic no matter what I decided later in life. I of course reject that claim but many think this subconsciously and the numbers bear this out. If over 70% are religious but only 27% go to church then what does that say about what they really believe? The fact is, most people are what I call apathist, they are simply apathetic about religion but click the box because it is what their mom would like. Understand this but I think it skews the numbers. Add to that, the negative connotation atheism has thanks to the Communist scare of

the 1950's - "It's those godless atheists" or "A red under every bed" rhetoric; and we end up with self-reported statistics, that in my mind do not accurately reflect the true nature of Canadian's metaphysical beliefs.

So where does this leave us? As a board member of Center For Inquiry Canada, a registered charity whose designation is education, I think the answer is in more education. If we teach our youth about the natural world and the wonders it produces, if we allow kids to think critically, if we teach them not what to think but how to think, and let the chips fall where they will then we will find ourselves in a world where reason is preferred over dogma, where evidence is favored over faith and where everyone no matter what they believe, no matter who they are, who they love or what they call themselves can live as equal citizens under a secular legal system. The numbers are on our side, but they can change if we are not vigilant. That is, if we as Canadians are not shielded from the numbers by our own government. Knowledge is power, knowledge hidden from us is power that is no longer legitimate.

Pat O'Brien has been a skeptic since he was 10 and an Atheist since he was 13 but it was not till he was in his 40's that he became active in the movement. Pat was the president of The Humanist Association of U.C., the president of Humanist Canada, an ambassador for Atheist Alliance International and is now on the board of Center For Inquiry Canada. Pat's day job is being Props Master in the film and television industry; he is married and lives in Vancouver.

Tory minister's stand on niqab speaks about his double standards

Federal Minister Tim Uppal's stand on niqab or veil reveals his double standards on the question of rights of the religious minorities in Canada.

Tim Uppal recently stated that Muslim women must agree to remove the niqab during the citizenship oath ceremony. According to him, taking a citizenship oath with one's face covered is against Canadian values.

Notably, Uppal is the first turbaned Sikh minister in the federal government. Tell him that in the past, citing "Canadian values," white supremacists also opposed the recruitment of turbaned Sikhs into the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and Canadian armed forces. So what is the difference between the position of his government on niqab and that of white supremacists on the turban? He will try to get away by saying you cannot compare turbans with niqabs.

It's a shame that Uppal, who is enjoying his religious rights by sporting a turban and a flowing beard while serving in the government, is being used by the Conservatives as a poster boy for spreading Islamophobia. Not very long ago, it was brought to Uppal's knowledge that turbaned Sikhs are being subjected to secondary

security checks at airports. His government acted promptly in advising agencies concerned to stop this practice. But while airports are sensitive areas from a security point of view, citizenship oath ceremonies do not take place in a high security environment. The double standards are largely aimed at targeting Muslims to create rhetoric against Islamic extremism before the upcoming federal election. Perhaps the Conservatives think that a person like Uppal is best-suited for the job to convince the minorities because of his heritage.

Uppal, who is proud of his Sikh heritage, need not be reminded of what his religion stands for. The ninth master of the Sikhs, Guru Teg Behadur, laid down his life for the rights of Hindus who were being forced to give up their faith by the Islamist rulers in India. Despite the fact that Sikhism denounced Hindu rituals, he sacrificed his life for the sake of human rights.

Uppal should learn from the World Sikh Organization (WSO) which did a better job than him by opposing the niqab ban in Quebec. The WSO had spearheaded a campaign against the secondary security check of turbaned Sikhs at airports. It goes to the credit of WSO for standing up for other minorities, such as Indigenous communities,

and gays and lesbians too. One may disagree with the politics of WSO, but whenever it comes to the rights of minorities in Canada they have always raised these issues consistently.

The unwanted controversy will create more serious problems and is clearly aimed at polarizing voters in the name of values. The conservatives probably think that they will be able to rope in the Sikhs in their attempt to isolate Muslims, but they are mistaken. South Asians have a history of strong kinship in North America. The Ghadar Party, the group of South Asian radicals which formed in 1913 and had a big following in Vancouver, set a very good example. The party was formed to fight against racism abroad and the British occupation of India. It encouraged people to overcome religious and caste barriers and get united in their fight against colonial power. Among the supporters of the party were people from diverse faith groups. When Sikh Ghadar activists were forced to remove their turbans in Indian jails, their Hindu comrades also protested. This rich heritage of the South Asians will prevent them from falling into the Conservative trap. We do believe that the federal election will prove them wrong.

-RDNB

