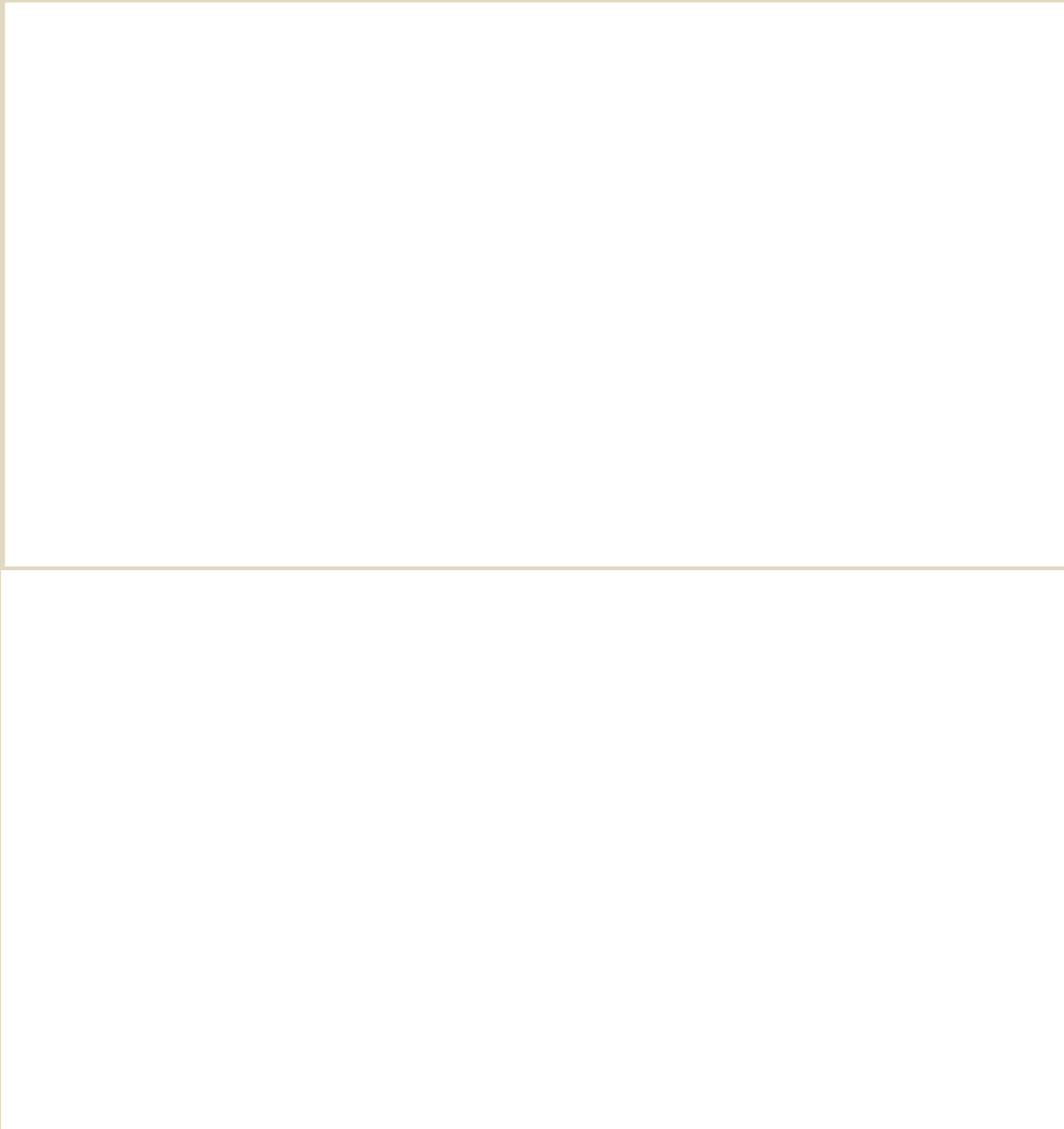




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Cover Picture: Portrait of Bhaag Singh, the leader of the Khalsa Deewan Society who was assassinated one hundred years ago. Made by Jarnail Singh, the portrait is part of his series of paintings depicting the history of Komagata Maru.

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Design & Layout: Rajpreet Singh

Printed: Kulwinder Aujla | Prime Printer

RADICAL
DES

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

~ Desmond Tutu

Time to elect humane and pro-people civic governments

As the campaign for the November 15 civic elections heats up, Radical Desi would like to appeal to readers to choose humane and pro-people local governments. It is the moral duty of all citizens to vote. Particularly, the South Asians must enthusiastically exercise their right to vote, which was earned by their elders after a 40-year struggle. Indians were disfranchised in 1907, and got back the right to elect in 1947. Defying the ban, prominent social justice activist Hussain Rahim cast his ballot in the 1912 provincial election and was arrested for doing so. Rahim was also in the forefront of struggles against racism and British colonialism in India.

This year, as we celebrate the centenary of the Komagata Maru episode, we must remember that the incident was a symbol of resistance against racism. The Japanese vessel carrying over 300 South Asian passengers was forced to return in 1914 under the discriminatory immigration law. Hussain Rahim and other community activists participated in the campaign for the ship passengers. All these struggles were connected, including the one for the right to vote, as these laws were made to discourage permanent settlement of South Asians in this country. A century later, when we have the right to vote and electoral representation in city councils, legislatures and Parliament, we must vote

judiciously to elect more responsible governments.

In the upcoming civic elections we must identify the issues that are important to all of us. One issue which we would like to highlight is a growing demand to make Vancouver and Surrey sanctuary cities. Toronto has already taken the lead, and now it is time for the culturally diverse cities of BC to follow. There is a significant population of refugees in Greater Vancouver. Often they are forced to reveal their status to get access to services. Since there is a danger of being arrested and deported, refugees generally prefer to remain in closets rather than expose themselves. As a result, they suffer abuse and exploitation. Our community should ensure that those running for the posts of Mayor or city councillors must make a commitment to transform these places into sanctuary cities, so that the refugees can get some relief and move around freely without fear and intimidation.

Also, we need to press upon city councils to tackle the problem of homelessness. To that end, the number of affordable homes should be increased. In Surrey and Abbotsford, instead of meeting the needs of the homeless and poor, those people have been subjected to humiliation. Shamefully, chicken manure was thrown to chase away homeless people in these municipalities.

EDITORIAL

Rather than removing poverty, the poor are being displaced ruthlessly, which reflects very badly on civic governments.

As a commitment to human rights, places like Surrey City Hall should be forced to fly the rainbow flag to show solidarity with gays and lesbians during Pride week. In our opinion, the City of Burnaby has proved to be a civic government which has always stood for human rights and social justice. Burnaby city council has always supported the idea of raising the minimum wage, and has opposed controversial pipeline projects. It has consistently supported progressive ideas by recognizing diversity. On other occasions, they have recognized the radical history of the South Asian community. In 2007, Burnaby city council issued a proclamation to mark the birth centenary of Bhagat Singh, a

towering Indian revolutionary, and in 2013 it recognized 100 years of the Ghadar Party, a group of South Asian political activists who organized themselves to launch an armed rebellion against the British Empire and fought against colonialism and racism. Lastly, it goes to the credit of the City of Burnaby that in 2004 it recognized the contributions of Dr. Bhim Rao Ambedkar, the famous social justice activist and scholar of India. Ambedkar authored the constitution of India that guarantees equal rights to oppressed communities. Let's make sure that instead of electing candidates who represent corporate interests, we vote for candidates and groups that are pro-people and have a will to stand up for social justice.

-Editors

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Temple Fight

What does the Vancouver Gurdwara election mean on the centenary of Bhaag Singh's assassination?

One hundred years ago in the first week of fall, a shooting inside the gurdwara in Vancouver left two men dead. Among the deceased was Bhaag Singh, the towering leader of the Sikh community. There was no doubt in anyone's mind that he was a targeted man. Targeted for speaking the truth. Targeted for standing up against racism and injustice. Targeted for questioning the power. Bhaag Singh was a well respected figure in the local South Asian community who had led struggles for equal rights for the immigrants, who were not allowed to bring

families to Canada. They were neither allowed to vote. All this was done to discourage permanent settlement by the people of colour from India, to keep Canada white. As an answer to the rampant racism, the Sikh community in Vancouver established the Khalsa Deewan Society - the oldest Sikh body that governed the temple that served more like a secular community center, and eventually became a center of political activities. As leader of the society, Bhaag Singh looked directly into the eyes of the establishment whose agent pumped bullets into his body on September 5, 1914, killing him and his comrade Badan Singh.

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COVER STORY

A century later, the organization once led by the slain leader is heading for an election next month. Scheduled for November 1, the election is more or less an issue of self-prestige and power control, as against Bhaag Singh's fight against the system. A section of the congregation of the temple, activists and scholars, see a lack of commitment towards activism that was once cherished by men like Bhaag Singh. That the election coincides with the centenary of Bhaag Singh's assassination makes no impact on any side with stakes in the gurdwara politics. This is despite challenges under the current right wing Conservative government, which continues to make immigration and citizenship laws tighter and more stringent. A general silence prevails, as community gate keepers lack the will to respond to these assaults on rights that were never served on a platter, but were given only due to the consistent efforts of Bhaag Singh and his associates.

There is nothing surprising about the heat which the Khalsa Deewan Society's election generates in the local Sikh community. Thanks to its glorious history and a strong influence on the community, the temple's politics is sometimes more popular among Sikhs than any other election. For the past many years, the fight has always been between two camps: "pro-India moderates" and "anti-India fundamentalists" seeking Khalistan - a separate homeland for the Sikhs. Sometimes these divisions are very explicit, while on other occasions they take different forms. Sometimes, the divisions within these groups become visible, leaving questions in the minds of temple followers whether their leaders are really sincere to their ideologies. Nevertheless, the conflicting sides are on the

same page on inconvenient issues, including immigration, by either maintaining silence or rubbing shoulders with powerful lawmakers.

Established in 1908, the Vancouver Sikh temple served as a community centre that was open to all the faith groups and provided space for activism against racial discrimination. In subsequent years, other branches of the Khalsa Deewan Society sprung up in different parts of BC. The Sikhs had started migrating to this part of the world in the beginning of the 20th century. Since they dominated other migrant groups from South Asia, they established the Khalsa Deewan Society in accordance with the Sikh faith to govern their oldest shrine. The migration began while India and Canada were under British occupation. The migrants from India came to Canada as British subjects. Many believed in the fairness of the British Empire. However, they soon realized that the British establishment discriminated against them in North America, where racial violence against immigrants from India was very common. In an event of hate crimes, the British consulates never came to their aid. The year 1907 was a major turning point in their lives. Not only were the Indians disfranchised in BC that year, race riots broke out across the border in the US that led to an exodus of Indian immigrants to Canada. The South Asian immigrants felt that the root cause of their sufferings abroad was the foreign occupation of their homeland. These harsh experiences transformed many into diehard political activists, who formed networks to fight against racism in an alien land and colonialism back in India. Bhaag Singh was one of those who became an active supporter of the Ghadar Party - a group of South Asian radicals in North America that believed in an armed rebellion against the British Empire.

COVER STORY

Formed in 1913, the party wished to establish an egalitarian, secular and democratic republic in free India.

Bhaag Singh had previously served in the British army. Disillusioned with the attitude of the British authorities, in 1909 he encouraged former Sikh soldiers to burn their uniforms and certificates to sever all ties with the Empire, a radical act of its time that took place in Vancouver even before the Ghadar Party came into being. He took the lead in many campaigns, such as the struggle for the right to bring families from India. Defying the discriminatory immigration laws, he brought his own wife to Canada. He became the president of the Khalsa Deewan Society in 1910. He also participated in the struggle for the passengers of the Komagata Maru ship. Over 300 Indian passengers aboard the Japanese vessel were not allowed to disembark under the controversial continuous journey law in 1914. The current Prime Minister Stephen Harper apologized for that in 2008. After the ship was forced to return, bloody conflict arose in the community. Bela Singh, who represented the pro-government faction and worked closely with the immigration department, shot Bhaag Singh inside the gurdwara. He passed away on September 6, 1914. Bhaag Singh's supporter Mewa Singh later avenged his murder by assassinating Immigration Inspector William Hopkinson, and was hanged for the action in January 1915.

"Bhaag Singh can be best described as a true Sikh and an activist as he believed in real Sikhism which is more about compassion and social justice", says Sohan Singh Pooni, a prominent Sikh historian. Pooni has written extensively on the Ghadar history. According to him, Sikhism has always taught its followers to fight against oppression and injustice, and by

laying down his life for that cause, Bhaag Singh proved himself as a true follower of that philosophy.

For years, the Khalsa Deewan Society remained secular and liberal in character. Not that there were no divisions within the Sikh community. The devout Sikhs who sported long hair and those with shorn hair had sharp differences, but Bhaag Singh always emphasized that Sikhs remain united against racism and give up their petty fights in the larger interest of the community. He had cordial relations with the leftists and the activists from other faith groups. "He was not rigid. He also believed in internationalism. He never even hated Canada. All he wanted was a better Canadian society with its doors open for everyone", insists Pooni.

The situation gradually changed in post-independent India after 1947. The migration of more conservative Sikhs saw the slow emergence of a movement when a section of Sikh leadership started insisting on maintaining a strict religious code. Earlier, many Sikh men with shorn hair visited the temple with heads uncovered, and the community kitchen was served on tables and chairs. For the newly arrived conservative Sikhs, it was a big cultural shock as they considered these acts "sacrilegious". They insisted on head-coverings and serving of the meal in community kitchens, to devotees sitting cross-legged on the floor in a more traditional way followed in Sikh temples in India. The conservative camp slowly became powerful enough to challenge these practices and their presence started showing in subsequent elections. These groups were able to bring more strict codes into practice whenever they won the temple elections at different times. In later years, they established their own gurdwaras.

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Amarjit Sufi, an independent history researcher and a staunch secularist activist who migrated to Canada in 1970, has keenly noticed the shift of political dynamics in the community. According to him, the social environment was definitely much more liberal in the past. Since the non-Sikhs were in a minority, there were almost no Hindu temples or mosques, and people of all backgrounds frequently visited the Vancouver Sikh temple. "Visiting the gurdwara with uncovered heads was a common sighting."

The early 1980s particularly witnessed the emergence of the Sikh separatist forces in Canada. It was a time when there were political disturbances in Punjab, India. The Sikh leadership was seeking some extra rights for their home province of Punjab, but the Indian government remained adamant. A political agitation culminated into a militant movement under the leadership of Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, a fiery Sikh preacher. The holiest shrine of the Sikh community in Amritsar became the centre of his activities. Following violent incidents in Punjab, the Indian government ordered a military attack on the Golden Temple Complex in June 1984 that left many

people dead and several buildings inside destroyed. Sikhs across the world took to the streets to register their protest. There was an angry demonstration in Vancouver. The army invasion had alienated the Sikhs in general, which led to the growth of a movement in support of Khalistan. Following the assassination of Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi that year by her Sikh bodyguards, innocent Sikhs were murdered in different parts of the country by goons led by her Congress party leaders. The Air India bombings of 1985 that left 331 people dead were a direct result of the ugly events of 1984. Blamed on Sikh separatists, the Air India tragedy sharpened the temple fight in Vancouver, where the battle lines were clearly drawn between the pro-India moderates and the separatists. Sufi, who steadfastly supported the moderates in the past to weaken the separatists, recalled that before the 1980s all the national days of India were commonly celebrated in the gurdwara. Since extremists were intimidating moderate voices, men like Sufi decided to get involved in temple politics.

For years the separatists controlled the Khalsa Deewan Society, when tempers against the Indian government were running high in the community. As things became cooler with the end of a decade-long Sikh militancy in India in the early 1990s, the separatists slowly began losing their power, although not completely over the temples in Greater Vancouver.

At present, the Khalsa Deewan Society is controlled and managed by the moderate group, which is generally supported by the mainstream political parties of India, including the Congress and the communists, and has always enjoyed the backing of the Indian government.

Major Singh Sidhu, the current vice-president of the Khalsa Deewan Society, had

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jumped into the temple politics after he lost his sister, a nephew and a niece in the Air India tragedy. For men like Sidhu it was important to "liberate" the Khalsa Deewan Society from the separatists, but the fundamentalists too see it as their moral duty to "liberate" temples from the "apostates". This fight has divided many families on ideological lines, and the conflict has turned violent several times. A sense of suspicion continues to prevail. So much so that when a volunteer named Nirmal Singh Gill was murdered by white supremacists inside a Sikh temple in Surrey in 1998, moderate leader Balwant Singh Gill prematurely blamed the fundamentalists, only to apologize later.

The two sides have left no stone unturned to appropriate Ghadar history and political icons like Bhaag Singh and Mewa Singh at a symbolic level, but their critics believe that both are miles away from the activism practiced by those men a century ago. The moderates who oppose the demand for Khalistan claim to be real followers of the secularist Ghadar party, while separatists claim that they are also fighting against the oppression of the Indian establishment, much like the Ghadar activists did. The appropriation of Ghadar history therefore is mainly focused on the question of nationalism versus separatism, or secularism versus sectarianism.

But both camps are largely inactive on more pressing local issues that affect the community. Hardly any prominent face from the two camps has showed up at rallies against racism or the anti-immigrant policies of the Conservative government. Bill C-24, the "Strengthening Canadian Citizenship Act" recently adopted by Parliament, empowers the authorities to strip people of their citizenship, causing much outrage in the community, but so far none of the known

moderate or separatist figures have attended the demonstrations and public forums against the legislation. Instead, cabinet ministers have been frequently welcomed in the temples, including the one run by the Khalsa Deewan Society in Vancouver. There are some exceptions; the Shri Guru Granth Sahib Satkar Committee, a small fledgling religious body of Sikh activists in Abbotsford, organized a rally against Bill C-24 last summer. Its leader, Kuldip Singh Sekhon, says they got a lukewarm response from the temple leaders. "We tried to outreach every gurdwara, but hardly any prominent leader showed up, barring a very few ordinary people from different congregations."

Not surprisingly, the gurdwara leaders remained unmoved when Laiber Singh, a physically disabled failed refugee claimant from India, was forced to return in 2008 when the Canadian government refused to let him stay on humanitarian and compassionate grounds. Singh came to Canada as a refugee in 2003. While in Canada he became paralyzed after suffering from a spinal infection. In the meantime, he was ordered deported after his claim was rejected. The Indo Canadian community rallied behind him strongly and wanted him to stay on humanitarian and compassionate grounds. Except for one gurdwara in Abbotsford, no other Sikh temple was willing to provide him a sanctuary, despite the fact that churches continue to give sanctuary to refugees in Canada. Ultimately due to the adamancy of the government, Singh became exhausted and left Canada voluntarily.

Without saying much on this, Pooni briefly commented, "I only want to focus on history as I have no interest in politics. This is a sign of degeneration of the society. Not everyone is bad in the community, but self interest has become supreme over the collective interest."

COVER STORY

Another Sikh historian, Dr. Puran Singh Gill, is more articulate. He thinks that both camps lack leadership that can match the standards of people like Bhaag Singh. "Nobody from either camp is even close to him. I am sure many of them might not be even aware of who Bhaag Singh was and what he died for." Being a practicing Sikh himself, Dr. Gill says that the devout Sikh leaders lack commitment towards true Sikh philosophy, let alone any commitment to political activism. "The followers of both camps enjoy doing photo ops with the immigration ministers and others in the government instead of questioning them on behalf of the community. That was not the case when Bhaag Singh was the leader."

Manjeet Singh Dhillon, whose grandfather Niranjan Singh Pandhori was a Ghadar party activist, feels the same. Although he has some soft corner for the moderates as he is opposed to the Sikh separatists, he agrees that the moderate camp is not doing enough to resist racism and stand up against the current "anti immigration" policies of the Conservative government. "Definitely, those seeking a theocratic homeland for the Sikhs have nothing in common with the

Ghadar Party, but the moderates should also show some guts on behalf of our community and follow the ideals of Bhaag Singh."

As an author of a famous Punjabi novel on Sikh temple politics, Amarjit Sufi has established himself as an authority on the subject. He thinks that though extremists in the community continue to distort the socialist aspect of Sikhism and Ghadar history, the moderates cannot be spared of criticism. From his perspective, the Sikh separatists have nothing in common with Bhaag Singh, who was secularist. But he is equally critical of the moderates, who he thinks share much in common with the fundamentalists when it comes to the question of immigration and racism. "Moderates are only good for being against Khalistan. But they are no different from their rivals when it comes to pleasing the power. Both sides prefer to avoid confrontation with the Canadian establishment as they rely heavily on the government to sponsor priests from India." He explains that since earlier Sikh immigrants were mainly workers doing blue collar jobs, they identified themselves more with the trade unions and other activist groups. Things started changing with more and more South Asians becoming business people and coming close to the right wing parties. "The current generation of people involved in businesses loves to be pro-establishment."

Sadhu Binning, another established author and the editor of the Punjabi magazine "Watan", thinks that the November temple election means nothing for the community at large, as the temple politics is confined to the internal affairs of the Sikh community. "It's not the same situation as it used to be a century ago. Nobody involved in temple politics is taking any keen interest in struggles against racism or discriminatory immigration policies." Binning has

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written several books on the history of struggles against racism. He feels that the generation of Bhaag Singh was much clearer in its vision. The Khalsa Deewan Society back then aggressively participated in many important struggles, including the Indian liberation movement. "Unfortunately, the Khalsa Deewan Society today has turned into like any other religious institution, whose officials are more interested in maintaining power and control rather than worrying about public interest."

Harjit Daudharia, a well-known political activist associated with the communist movement, consistently attends rallies against war, racism and gender discrimination. He notes the general absence of those involved in temple politics. "This is in sharp contrast to what Bhaag Singh stood for. He had good relations with the leftists and other activists who fought against racism and colonialism. Today's generation of the temple leadership is more aligned with the power and has never showed any interest in political activism." He pointed out that nobody from the moderate or the fundamentalist camps ever showed up at recent rallies against the Israeli aggression on the people of Palestine. "This only demonstrates their increasing reactionary tendencies."

Lakhsbir Khun Khun is associated with the Ghadar Party Centenary Celebrations Committee, a coalition of leftist organizations created to commemorate 100 years of Ghadar history in a "true sense". He pulls no punches in criticizing those running for temple election. "The moderates in particular are openly aligned with the establishment, not only in Canada but also in India. They hardly say a word against oppression of minorities and other marginalized groups in India." Khun Khun and his allies organized a rally against Bill C-24 in July, and on another occasion issued a statement in support of Palestinians and indigenous struggles in Canada. "Rather than paying lip service to Bhaag Singh and the Ghadar movement, the temple leaders should pay attention to these real issues."

Interestingly, Khalsa Deewan Society President Sohan Singh Deo agrees with some of these observations. "We do acknowledge our shortcomings. But we think that it's not just the temple leaders who should be held accountable for all this. Why aren't the elected representatives from our community being made answerable?" There are three Indo-Canadian MPs from BC, and one turbaned Sikh minister in the federal cabinet. "100 years ago, we did not have any elected representative from among us in the parliament. But now we have people there, so why not ask them to do something instead of expecting everything from the Khalsa Deewan Society?" Nevertheless, Deo claims that he has often raised these issues with the bureaucrats and the ministers whenever they have visited the gurdwara.

- RDNB

Opinion

Time to say goodbye to samosa politics

The miniature Eiffel tower sitting in my living room often makes me sad and reminds me of the pitiable condition of undocumented immigrants in France. I purchased it from a Punjabi man in Paris where I was vacationing with my family in July this year.

As one comes close to one of the world's famous tourist attraction, scores of pedlars, mostly from the African and other racialized communities, greet you selling miniature Eiffel towers, and things like roses, water bottles and beer. A significant number were from the northern Indian state of Punjab when I visited the giant landmark of Paris for the first time. Since Punjabi is my first language, I could easily communicate with them, including the one who sold me the memorabilia that is now part of the artifacts at our home. He sold it to us only after we insisted on buying it from him, rather than accepting it as a gift. As a Punjabi, he wanted to gift it to his compatriots from Canada, as a gesture of goodwill for talking to him and listening to his story.

When we stepped on French soil for the first time, we knew that Punjabis live in that part of the world, and expected them to be driving cabs like in Canada and elsewhere. But we hardly found any Punjabi sitting behind the taxi wheels. Slowly

we started noticing them at important tourist sites, such as the Louvre. Men aged from 25 to mid-50s were moving around as pedlars, talking in a hushed manner and ready to run in case a cop shows up. I spoke to as many as I could, and was told that at least 300 Indian nationals without documents are living in and around Paris. Most either work as daily labourers or move around selling stuff stealthily to avoid getting arrested and harassed.

Then I ended up meeting this guy near the Eiffel Tower, who told me that he first came to Italy and then migrated to France for a better living. While speaking at length about the condition of the undocumented Punjabi migrants, he revealed how many of them have illegally crossed into London through containers over the years. That practice has almost stopped, as there is not much work in England these days. He told us that if the police show up, they have to run for shelter to avoid getting arrested. The saddest part of his story was that the leaders of the local Sikh temples are generally unconcerned about their situation. Although the temple leaders have an influence over local elected officials, nothing is being done to help them get legal documents to stay and work without fear. These leaders are mostly busy with politics revolving around religious symbols. The Sikh leaders had protested when turbans and the symbols of other religious faiths were being

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banned in public schools in France. While we were talking, another Punjabi man selling roses appeared. He handed out one rose to my six-year-old daughter affectionately. He declined to take money, but my wife gave him some coins anyway. Before these men took leave, I told them that their situation is no different from the undocumented migrants in Canada, and that the temple leaders in Vancouver are also indifferent to the problem.

While we are celebrating the centenaries of the Komagata Maru episode and the martyrdom of Bhai Bhaag Singh, the physical and conceptual borders continue to exist across the world, and migrants continue to face discrimination and hardships. The spirit of activism started by our community elders a hundred years ago is waning, replaced by the samosa politics which has brought the temple leaders and the establishment on the same page. The temple leaders only intervene when it comes to identity politics, but stay away from real issues affecting racialized communities. This was not the case a century ago. Men like Bhaag Singh stood up for the rights of all South Asians. He got assassinated for standing up against racial discrimination. His non-Sikh comrades, Hussain Rahim and Taraknath Dass, also raised their voices against any kind of social injustice, without discriminating between the Sikh and non-Sikh migrants. The Khalsa Deewan Society, the oldest Sikh body that was once led by Bhaag Singh, is generally silent over the ongoing assault on the rights of immigrants under the current Conservative government of Canada.

The 2008 Laiber Singh episode brought to the fore this repulsive politics. Singh was a

disabled failed refugee claimant from Punjab. Although he was forced to return due to the adamant attitude of the federal government, it reflected very badly on our temple leaders. Singh had traveled to Canada as a political refugee in 2003. His application was rejected and he was ordered deported. In the meantime, he became paralyzed due to a spinal infection. As a result, the Indo-Canadian community wanted him to stay. All the prayers before the government to let him stay on humanitarian and compassionate grounds fell on deaf ears. Barring Kalghidhar Gurdwara, a Sikh temple in Abbotsford, no other gurdwara was eager to provide him a sanctuary. This was in sharp contrast to the practice followed by churches in Canada. Laiber Singh was forced to live in the sanctuaries of different Sikh temples, one of which was even determined to hand him over to the border agents if they ever showed up. On International Human Rights Day in December 2007, when Singh was taken to the airport for deportation, angry South Asian protesters prevented his departure. Many of the community gatekeepers who wanted to take credit in case he won his appeal to stay announced that he would not be allowed to go. But later, they started showing signs of weakness. I remember how enthusiastically the radio station I worked for campaigned in his support, and its staff also participated in the protest. I suggested to let him leave, so that South Asians can celebrate International Human Rights Day as a “day of shame” every year, a reminder to the younger generation of the ruthlessness and barbarity of the Conservative government. But nobody was willing to listen, not even the management of the radio station.

■■■ COVER STORY

Their hollowness was soon exposed, as some of them had strong ties with the Conservatives. They gave up the struggle and started suggesting to Laiber Singh to leave on his own. They started attacking the credibility of honest activists, such as Harsha Walia and Harjap Grewal, who are associated with No One is Illegal, an advocacy group for the migrants and oppressed classes. No One is Illegal was aggressively campaigning for Singh, and roped in support from other communities, including indigenous groups. After staying in the Abbotsford gurdwara for several months, he eventually made up his mind to leave as the government remained adamant to remove him. He is currently being looked after by his poor family back home.

The hard lesson we all learnt during the process was that South Asian temples heavily rely on the government to get visas for visiting priests, and cannot go on fighting for the rights of the

migrants and refugees, like churches. However, the Sikh temples have a long history of fighting for social justice. If that glory is hard to maintain, then the temple leaders should simply stop paying tokenistic and symbolic respect to our revolutionaries who laid down their lives for a better world. If they are happy to have cozy relations with the establishment, there is no point celebrating the radical history. It's time to say goodbye to samosa politics, to ensure a just and fair society that welcomes racialized communities with open arms rather pushing them to the margins.

Gurpreet Singh is a founder of Radical Desi. He's working on a book tentatively titled Canada's 9/11: Lessons from the Air India Bombings. He has a Facebook page called We Are All Untouchables!!!

The priests

Carrying a cross on the shoulders
doesn't make an actor a pope or a Christ

encountering death is different
from wearing a golden cross like a necklace

a guerrilla fighting an evil set-up
is the brother of Christ
though he may not profess
to be the son of god

both of them fight evil
and challenges the vested interests

the actor and the pope only act
they never offer themselves for the cross

the tyrants and the executioners of yesterday
were paid workers
today they have undertaken the profession of
priesthood

they occupy seats of authority
and call themselves successors of Christ

*Gurcharan Rampuri is a respected progressive
Punjabi poet who lives in Port Coquitlam.
Originally written in Punjabi, "The priests" was
translated by S.N. Sewak.*

To so-called voter-regime

quarrelsome limited and agile workers
companies would run after crushing all the snakes and scorpions
rascal high-caste money lenders would kill the obnoxious weeds and parasites
pierced people's eyes

the humility matured the pains of patience to shake off the dry chaff
and destroy after shaking off

oil floated on black waters still
the rivals conspiracy became more visible many pregnancies would abort
and conceive after aborting

the claimants submitted their claims and conceive after aborting
the oppressors engaged judges instead of advocates give birth after conceiving
the inheritors entitlement and would chop the heads of the tyrants
took menial perquisites for false evidences

at night the king's one-eyed mare calved still
the minister's jennet aborted big operations are on the way
for providing hands to the handless
eyes to the blind

the favourites celebrated the new possessions utterances to the dumb
and ears to the deaf
drank old pegs from new bottles

the exhausted fortunes only then would usher in a blooming atmosphere
plays of destiny boys and girls would perform folk dances
providential meetings of the last age the elders would narrate
connections of dealings the personal adventures to the small children
the burden of poverty people would narrate stories
packs of threats of the long forgotten
knots of shame

long distances, thorns in feet

friends! all these are not destinies!
these are
designed schemes

still
the battles would be carried on concrete bridges
the mansions to be attacked and fired
the pains to appear in palaces

hard-handed

lest
the returning witch may not spend noon here
and uproot the common workstand
constructed with blood and sweat
Harjit Daudharia is a well known community activist and poet. Originally written in Punjabi, "To so-called voter regime" was translated by Dr. Om Parkash Vasishta.

Pro left Burnaby Citizens' Assembly seeks another term

The ruling Burnaby Citizens' Assembly (BCA) is seeking a tenth consecutive term in the November 15 civic election. Currently led by Mayor Derek Corrigan, the Burnaby Citizens' Assembly first got elected in 1987 and has been in office since. This year's election coincides with the City of Burnaby's ongoing legal dispute with Kinder Morgan. The city is seeking an injunction against surveying on Burnaby Mountain, the company's proposed route for its pipeline expansion. The City council, which has been taking advocacy positions on environmental issues, opposes any work that destroys trees and natural parks.

This isn't surprising for those who have closely followed the progressive politics of the City of Burnaby. Declared as the “best-run” city by Maclean's magazine in 2009, Burnaby City Council under the leadership of Corrigan is known for its

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strong positions on a range of social justice issues. They have consistently supported child care, affordable housing, and a higher minimum wage. Environmental issues are particularly dear to the BCA, explains city councillor Sav Dhaliwal, who is also seeking another term. “We have declared many areas reserved for parks to keep pressure on future councils, which will have to get plebiscite done before rezoning.”

The BCA stand against fracking was not appreciated by the NDP, the party with which Corrigan and his team are affiliated. As the province is heading into the civic elections, the BCA is getting a hard time from some of its own allies, like unions representing building trades workers, for its position against Kinder Morgan. “Occasionally, we have differences of opinion on project to project, but we have always been supportive of the working group,” says Dhaliwal. While acknowledging his concern over friction with unions, Dhaliwal told RDNB that they stick to their fair wage policy, and even independent contractors are not allowed to pay lower wages.

The BCA, according to Dhaliwal, has also maintained diversity. There are two other Punjabis on Corrigan's team, including Baljinder Narang, who is the Chair of the Burnaby School Board, and

Harman Pandher, who serves as School Trustee. There are two Chinese-Canadians among the BCA city councillors and two more on the School Board.

Corrigan is also popular among Punjabis for recognizing the radical history of the community. He was honoured this year by activists representing Dalits or the so-called “untouchables,” an oppressed group of Indian society. Burnaby City Hall had already recognized Dr. Bhim Rao Ambedkar, the architect of the Indian constitution and a messiah of the Dalit community, who tried to empower women and religious minorities in India. A portrait of Dr. Ambedkar was installed at City Hall ten years

ago. Likewise, Corrigan issued a proclamation to mark the centenary of the Ghadar Party last year. The party that fought against racism and colonialism in India was established in 1913 and had a big following in Vancouver. In 2007, the City of Burnaby also issued a proclamation to mark the birth centenary of Bhagat Singh, a towering Indian revolutionary, who was hanged in 1931 for killing a British police officer. The City had to take some criticism for doing so.

Why Sanctuary City movements are important?

One of the experiences that brought me into the migrant justice movement occurred thirteen years ago when Bilquis Fatima, a 64 - year Pakistani refugee in a wheelchair, was reported to immigration officials during her dialysis treatment at the hospital. She was jailed with her son Imran, a minor, for over a month while awaiting deportation.

The very real experiences of thousands of migrants and refugees like Bilquis who are afraid of accessing healthcare, who are unable to enroll their children in school, who are denied access to food banks, who are ineligible for a range of social assistance benefits, who are detained by local police forces and turned over to immigration enforcement has underscored the critical and urgent need for Sanctuary City movements.

Sanctuary City movements organize to create community spaces and neighborhoods where undocumented migrants can access critical services without the threat of deportation. It ensures that undocumented migrants, despite lacking full legal immigration status, can have their basic needs met and be supported in creating spaces of safety.

Over thirty US municipalities have been pressured to adopt City of Refuge ordinances that prohibit municipal employees from requesting or sharing information about immigration status when providing city services. In Canada in 2013, after over a decade of grassroots community organizing and mobilizing across service sectors,

the city of Toronto declared that all city services would be accessible to undocumented migrants and migrant workers. Hamilton soon followed suit in February 2014.

A short history of Sanctuary City in Toronto (from Solidarity City Network)

JULY 2004: A 16-year old undocumented woman from Grenada is handed over to immigration enforcement by Toronto police when she reports an assault against her. Massive community mobilization at the Toronto Police Services Board demands a Don't Ask, Don't Tell policy

FEBRUARY 2006: Toronto Police Services Board passes a partial Don't Ask policy, community advocates insist the policy is not enough.

APRIL 2006: Kimberley and Gerald Lizanno-Sossa are arrested at their school, massive community mobilization demands that the Toronto District School Board pass a Don't Ask, Don't Tell policy at the Toronto District School Board.

JULY 2006: The Don't Ask, Don't Tell Coalition is formed led by No One Is Illegal – Toronto. Over 80 community agencies pass Don't Ask, Don't Tell policies across Toronto. The Coalition demands that the City of Toronto pass a policy ensuring access to services without fear.

MAY 2007: Toronto District School Board becomes the first school board in Canada to declare itself a Sanctuary zone.

OCTOBER 2008: Isabel Garcia is denied refugee

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status in Canada and is scheduled for deportation. Over a 100 feminist and anti-violence against women organizations support the formation of the Shelter | Sanctuary | Status Campaign

AUGUST 2009: Immigration enforcement arrests an undocumented woman at a Toronto area food bank. A community mobilization ensues to ensure Access Without Fear policies are implemented in food banks.

NOVEMBER 2010: After immense community pressure, the Canada Border Services Agency agrees to not enter, wait outside or call inquiring about the identity of undocumented women at any anti-violence against women space in Toronto. The federal government swoops in, firing the head of Toronto area immigration enforcement and reneges on this policy. However, they agree to only carry out enforcement if given explicit permission by the staff at anti-violence against women spaces.

FEBRUARY 2013: Toronto City Council re-affirms its commitment to providing services without fear to undocumented residents and to get recommendations on clear next steps by September 2013.

Limitations of a Sanctuary City movement

The major limitation of Sanctuary City movements is that municipal governments have limited jurisdiction. Transit police, school boards, health authorities, BC Housing are all under provincial jurisdiction and require changes at the provincial level. Therefore, one major shortcoming has been that these policies end up existing only on paper, as a symbolic gesture, and no real changes are made to the major institutions that are inaccessible to migrants – public housing, social assistance, and schools. This is similar to the symbolic gestures

made by Vancouver city council to recognize that Vancouver is unceded Indigenous land, although in effect no real changes have been made, and the federal government in particular continues to infringe on Aboriginal lands.

A second major limitation is that while municipal governments can ensure that city services are available to migrants (Access Without Fear), it has been much more difficult to ensure that local law enforcement agencies do not collaborate with immigration authorities (Don't Ask Don't Tell). So when migrant women call police in situations of domestic violence or transit authorities detain refugees for unpaid fare, they almost always collaborate with immigration authorities.

A final limitation of Sanctuary City is that the movement is intended to keep migrants safe while they are in the country, but the reality is that under the current government more and more migrants are being kidnapped from their homes and workplaces and being deported at faster rates. The Harper government, more than any previous government, is carrying out detention and deportations on a daily basis. Last year alone, 10,088 people were detained by the CBSA.

Solidarity With All Migrants

Regardless of some of these limitations, Sanctuary City movements are important in ensuring that migrants are included within our communities and can access basic services without fear. In Montreal, signing onto the declaration in support of Sanctuary City means that organizations have agreed to:

- 1) Never ask for information regarding immigration status;
- 2) Treat all information regarding other people's immigration status as strictly confidential, and

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- never share it with government agencies;
- 3) Not charge fees based on immigration status;
 - 4) Implement a policy of non-cooperation with the Canadian Border Services Agency, including barring them from organizations' premises
 - 5) Make sure that labour and other human rights standards are applied equally to all, without regard to immigration status.

Furthermore, these movements also open up space for conversations about the reality of migration and living without status in Canada. As No One Is Illegal-Toronto member Fariah Chowdhury describes it, "Sanctuary City is a way of organizing as well as a goal. It is a way to get access to services for non-status people right now, and to involve people in the control and organization of the places they work, live, and receive education, healthcare, and

basic services. . . . We know that this is only possible when all grassroots movements in the city collaborate, connect, and commit to a politics based on autonomous power that is separate from state power."

Or as No Is Illegal-Toronto member Syed Hussan describes, "To me, Sanctuary City movement is an opportunity to change the imagination of Canadian society."

For more on Sanctuary City in Vancouver, check out Sanctuary Health blogspot.

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

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Teachers settle new collective agreement, win wide public support

The teachers of British Columbia won wide public support for their three-month stand on the picket lines, in the face of constant attacks by the Liberal government. This summer's labour dispute had its origins in the first Liberal term in office, when then-Premier Gordon Campbell and Education Minister Christy Clark ripped up negotiated collective agreements and imposed dramatic funding cuts on the public school system. Following the ratification of a new six-year contract (including the last year while bargaining was taking place), the teachers went back to classrooms starting September 22.

Having made huge sacrifices, some teachers were reluctant to accept a deal which leaves them with just 7.25% pay increases over a period of eight years, and with only minor gains on the crucial issues of class size and composition. The tentative agreement was supported by 84% of teachers in a September 18 ratification vote, but many who voted "yes" told the media that the deal falls far short of resolving the problems caused by many years of under-funding.

Some pundits went so far as to declare that the BCTF "lost" this strike. On the other hand, the teachers successfully resisted Premier Clark's insistence on concessions, and they did win some new funds to help improve working and learning conditions in the classroom.

Perhaps more significantly for the long run, the teachers rallied huge numbers of British

Columbians to their side. Social media debates were largely dominated by the teachers and their supporters, overwhelming attempts by the government and its supporters to win the public relations battle. Thousands of students, parents, and other community members held daily pickets, demonstrations and sit-ins, sometimes blaming "both sides", but more often to express solidarity with the teachers. Only a handful of pro-government public actions were organized by small groups of right-wing activists.

All this spells trouble on the horizon for Premier Clark and her government's agenda of cutbacks and privatisation. The teachers showed that it is possible to say no to the Liberal government on a major issue, and this may have an impact on future budget debates. Until now, the Liberals have used their massive tax cuts for the wealthy and the corporations - costing the province more than \$2 billion in lost revenue every year - as a tool to hold down spending on education, health care and social services. Many believe that their real strategy is to "create crises", undermining confidence in the public sector and creating fertile ground to push a pro-corporate, privatization agenda. Critics pointed to the Liberals controversial subsidy of \$40 per day for students under the age of 13, calling this plan a back-door strategy to encourage families to pull their children out of the public system, and into private for-profit schools, which are heavily subsidized by taxpayer dollars even though they are often based on religious principles.

The longest school strike in BC history is over, but this epic struggle over the future of the public education system will continue early in 2015, when the next provincial budget is announced. Will school boards be hit with another round of under-funding? And if so, will elected school trustees comply with government pressures to lay off more teachers and close schools - or will they say "no", following the example of the teachers? Stay tuned, this story is far from finished.

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

Teachers' strike raises questions about the future of public education

The recent BC teachers strike raised serious questions about the future of public education. These issues should be on our minds in the November 15 municipal elections, including for School Boards.

Such an outlook sees no fundamental need for a well-funded, secular, public school system; private schools (with generous taxpayer funding!) are considered the preferred option, even though these are often based on particular religious outlooks.

Ever since the founding of public schools in Canada during the early 1800s, two very different philosophies of education have emerged.

The first is based on the view that the main purpose of the education system is to train each new generation to become "gainfully employed." This is clearly expressed in the Liberal government's "B.C. Skills for Jobs Blueprint", which designed to turn out skilled trades workers for an economy based on the extraction and export of fossil fuels and minerals. From this perspective, educating students with learning disabilities or language barriers is often considered a waste of taxpayer dollars, since these people are a so-called "burden" on society. Teaching students to think critically about wider issues is frowned upon. Students are treated as products to be manufactured at the lowest possible unit cost, without learning about topics such as the racist colonization of North America, the growing gap between rich and poor, or the

impact of rising greenhouse gas emissions on the future of our planet.

In contrast to this narrow viewpoint, the "Charter for Public Education" developed with wide public input over a decade ago stresses that "as a community we promise to prepare learners for a socially responsible life in a free and democratic society, to participate in a world which each generation will shape and build. We promise a public education system which provides learners with knowledge and wisdom, protects and nurtures their natural joy of learning, encourages them to become persons of character, strength and integrity, infuses them with hope and with spirit, and guides them to resolute and thoughtful action."

It recognizes that "Everyone has the right to a free, quality public education," and that "Each first nation has the right to be recognized and respected by those within the educational institutions located in their traditional territory."

The Charter emphasizes that government must be responsible to fully fund all aspects of a quality education, and demands equitable access

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for communities to programs, resources, experiences and opportunities for learners, regardless of geographic location or socio-economic status.

This concept of schools that are welcoming, diverse, and socially responsible is under pressure around the world, including in British Columbia. Under Gordon Campbell and Christy Clark, the Liberals have ripped up collective agreements and systematically underfunded schools. It appears that their intention is to undermine public education, forcing more families to consider expensive private "for-profit" alternatives.

In the process, public confidence in the school system, teachers' morale, and the quality of education itself have suffered. Students with challenges such as learning disabilities or who speak English as an additional language have been most affected, along with those living in poverty, and those who face racism, sexism, homophobia, and transphobia.

The courageous strike by BCTF members won some limited gains to address the problems of classroom size and composition. Students are now back in school, but these deeper issues remain unresolved. The time has come for school districts across B.C. to seriously consider saying "no" to more cuts. Instead of adopting compliance budgets that fail to meet the true learning needs of students, trustees should demand increased

funding, and join with parents, students, unions and the community to build strong coalitions in support of public education.

I hope that Radical Desi readers consider these thoughts on November 15 when you vote for school trustee candidates in your district.

Working for a society that is engaging, inclusive, welcoming, and just for all children and youth - Jane Bouey is an Executive Assistant at a provincial non-profit, and host the current affairs show Media Mornings on Vancouver Co-op Radio. Jane was an elected trustee for two terms on the Vancouver School Board, including one as Vice Chair of the Board. On twitter: @janebouey.

White House invitation to Modi reflects badly on US government

The White House's invitation to newly-elected Prime Minister Narendra Modi reflects very badly on the US government, which claims to be the leader in human rights. Modi was previously denied a visa by US authorities for his government's complicity in the 2002 anti-Muslim pogrom in the Gujarat state of India. Modi was the Chief Minister of Gujarat back then, and many human rights groups have found his government to be involved in the massacre. The mass murder of Muslims followed the burning

of a train that left over 50 Hindu pilgrims dead. The incident was blamed on Muslim fundamentalists, and the Modi government is accused of giving a free hand to Hindu mobs to target Muslims.

In 2005, the US government was adamant about not allowing Modi to visit their country, but with his election as head of the Indian state, the White House has welcomed him with open arms. Obviously, this has to do more with the growing economy of India, which has attracted US investors. However, the change of heart only

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demonstrates the lack of commitment by the US when it comes to protecting human rights. Although Modi has not been convicted, his Hindu nationalist Bhartiya Janata Party has not been completely absolved from the allegations of engineering the massacre at the behest of the Modi government. The investigations into the massacre still continue.

One can understand that Modi, being a head of state, cannot be stopped from visiting the US, but the White House invitation has certainly raised many valid questions. A group named Sikhs for Justice spearheaded a campaign to force the White House to cancel his visit. This group had earlier petitioned to recognize the 1984 anti-Sikh massacre as genocide. Sikhs were targeted across India in 1984, following the assassination of then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi by her Sikh bodyguards. The goons led by her so-called secular Congress party leaders murdered Sikhs with the help of the police. A similar technique was followed against Muslims in 2002.

Much to the embarrassment of the governments of both India and the U.S., a federal court in New York issued a summons to Modi as he was heading for his trip to America. The summons was issued following a lawsuit by a human rights group, American Justice Center, on behalf of two survivors of the 2002 pogrom. Though Modi enjoys immunity, this initiative has captured headlines across the world.

Right now the apologists of the Indian establishment are describing Sikhs for Justice and others like them as “anti-India separatists”. What is the political agenda of Sikhs for Justice can be best explained by them. One can always disagree with their demand for “sovereignty” to the “Sikh

nation,” and nobody can deny the crimes against humanity committed by Sikh separatists in India, but it's hard to overlook the bloody episodes of 1984 and 2002, and the involvement of the government machinery in these crimes. These state-sponsored crimes actually bred more violence and terrorism. State terrorism cannot be equated with the terrorism committed by a few individuals or groups who operate outside the legal and constitutional boundaries.

Instead of hitting back at critics and questioning their intentions, the Indian government should first look hard at itself for these incidents, which were unacceptable for a country whose constitution is based on the principles of secularism and democracy. That the US government has also ignored the wishes of human rights groups is not surprising. Those who continue to trust that the US and other western powers really care for human rights are naïve. Both the US and Canada are built on the stolen land of the indigenous peoples. These nation states have a long history of systemic racism against First Nations and people of colour. Needless to say, the US is involved in many war crimes. To think that the US can be relied upon to stand up against political figures such as Modi is laughable. Having said that, the US government owes an explanation to the world and its citizens for its compulsions behind inviting Modi to the White House. To set the record straight, the US government should honestly acknowledge that for them, business interests are supreme over human rights.

-RDNB

Bhagat Singh's relative denounces ongoing repression in India

A visiting relative of the towering Indian revolutionary Bhagat Singh has denounced ongoing repression in different parts of the world's largest democracy.

Harbhajan Singh Dhatt's brother was murdered by the Punjab Police in 1989. He says that state repression goes on in his home country with the patronage of the corrupt political leadership, which does not want to address real problems and often uses the power of the gun to silence voices of dissent.

Bhagat Singh was in the forefront of the armed revolution that was launched to liberate India from British rule. He was hanged for waging war against the Empire in 1931. Before his hanging, Bhagat Singh said the struggle for social justice and equality would go on even after India gained official independence. He predicted that class struggle will continue in post-independent India if power was vested in the hands of the rich and influential.

On a recent private visit in Greater Vancouver, Dhatt said that these observations have proven to be correct in the light of continuous exploitation of the poor and underprivileged in India.

Dhatt notes that the disparity between the rich and the poor has grown over the years, with the Indian establishment giving concessions to big businesses and corporate houses and doing nothing to eradicate poverty. He believes that these problems have contributed to the political insurgencies, such as Maoism.

"Instead of going into the roots of the socio-economic problems, the political leadership is increasingly using police force as a tool to muzzle any voice of opposition," he says.

Dhatt warns that the political leadership also relies heavily on armed vigilante groups to instill fear in the minds of public. To prove his

point, he showed pictures of some armed gangsters posing fearlessly before cameras on social media. He claimed that despite complaints to the police about such illegal activities, no action has been initiated: "Instead of going after such elements, the police threaten those who fight for social justice."

His younger brother Kuljit Singh Dhatt was kidnapped and murdered by the police. Early this year, the courts convicted three former police officers for conspiracy and murder. In all, five officers were involved, but two of them have died. One of the deceased officers, Ajit Singh Sandhu, committed suicide in 1997 following a series of litigations for his involvement in human rights abuse.

As a village headman, Kuljit Singh Dhatt consistently opposed police high handedness when the Sikh militancy was at its peak. Although he had no affiliation with any Sikh militant group, the police detained him and tried to implicate him in a murder case.

"The police were obviously annoyed with him as he stood in their way. They wanted to teach him a lesson. Thus they entangled him in a motivated case," Harbhajan Singh Dhatt says.

According to him, Kuljit died after being subjected to electric shocks. Later the police concocted a story about his escape from custody. Following the intervention of the Supreme Court of India, a commission of inquiry was constituted, finally leading to the conviction of three former cops after 25 years.

- RDNB

South Asian media blacks out story of picket outside Indian consulate

Social justice activists picketed outside the Indian consulate in Vancouver on August 22 to protest against undeclared censorship and ongoing fascist attacks on free expression under the Modi government in India. But this news story was ignored by the major South Asian radio and TV channels. Barring a few independent journalists and alternative media outlets, including those outside the South Asian community, no prominent South Asian journal reported the story. The action was organized by Radical Desi Publications and its allies. Close to 20 participants showed up, from different progressive groups in Greater Vancouver. A moment of silence was observed in memory of U.R. Ananthamurthy, a South Indian scholar from Karnataka who passed away at the age of 82. Ananthamurthy was highly critical of newly-elected Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his right-wing policies, and had received threats from Hindu extremists. Some

Hindu fanatics celebrated his death. A memorandum of demands was also submitted at the consulate. Unfortunately, some consulate officials came downstairs and unnecessarily argued with women protesters, who were picketing peacefully.

-RDNB

Decade of Ambedkarism in Canada

The followers of Dr. Bhim Rao Ambedkar, a towering intellectual of India and a well respected social justice activist, are celebrating a decade of his recognition in Canada. The month of October marks ten years of the installation of his bust at the Simon Fraser University in Burnaby. A public event is planned at noon on October 14 at the W.A.C. Bennett Library. Dr. Ambedkar was born in an oppressed community and faced a lot of prejudices from upper caste zealots. Despite challenges which are a daily occurrence in the lives of those denounced as “untouchables” by caste-ridden Hindu society, Dr. Ambedkar rose to

prominence as a scholar. He authored many books and documents, and was known as an architect of the Indian constitution that enshrines religious and economic freedom and empowers women and other oppressed groups, including Dalits or “untouchables”. Over the past ten years, Ambedkarism has grown in the Greater Vancouver region. Not only was his bust unveiled at SFU, but Burnaby City Hall has also recognized him by installing his portrait inside the building, and a room at the Surrey Central Library is named after him.

-RDNB

Documentary about revolutionary playwright shown

A successful premiere of a Punjabi documentary about revolutionary playwright Gursharan Singh Bhaaji was held in Surrey early last month. Made by prominent Punjabi journalist and independent documentary filmmaker Sidhu Damdami, "Punjabi Rangmanch Da Bhaaji" throws light on the life and times of Gursharan Singh Bhaaji. A well known Marxist, Bhaaji had visited Canada a number of times before his death on September 27, 2011. Incidentally, he died on the eve of the birth anniversary of Bhagat Singh, a famous leader of the radical camp that led an armed resistance against the British occupation of India. Bhaaji always considered Bhagat Singh as his role model, and actively promoted his philosophy through his plays in villages across Punjab. He worked tirelessly in the communities of oppressed groups. The documentary shows how a family belonging to the oppressed class invited him to stage a play when a child was born. Bhaaji had written many plays critical of both state terrorism and the Sikh fanatics when the movement for a separate Sikh state was at its peak. The premiere was organized by the Indian Rationalist Society.

- RDNB

Tagore remembered

The Tagore festival was held last month in Richmond, where a number of artists performed, and papers and poetry were read in his memory. Rabindranath Tagore was a well-respected author and poet of India, who returned the knighthood given to him by the British Indian government in protest against the Jallianwala Bagh massacre of 1919. The British police had fired indiscriminately on a peaceful gathering in Amritsar of supporters of passive resistance movement, killing scores of people. This incident galvanized the freedom movement and turned many young people, like Bhagat Singh, into militants. A short documentary on Tagore by Duke Ashrafuzzaman was also shown on the occasion that highlights Tagore's activism. Apart from the Jallianwala Bagh incident, the Komagata Maru episode had also affected Tagore. After he won the Nobel Prize, he was invited to Canada, but refused to come here in protest against the mistreatment of the South Asian ship passengers under the discriminatory immigration laws.

- RDNB

Bhaag Singh's 100th martyrdom anniversary celebrated

Radical Desi Publications and its allies celebrated the 100th anniversary of the assassination of Bhai Bhaag Singh in Delta last month.

On September 5, 1914, Bhai Bhaag Singh – who was the towering leader of the South Asian community - was shot to death by an agent of the British Empire inside the Vancouver Sikh temple. Bhaag Singh was an active supporter of the Ghadar party, a group of revolutionaries that fought against racism in North America and British occupation of India. The slain leader was in the forefront of struggles for equal rights to the immigrants in Canada. As a result of his assassination, Immigration Inspector William Hopkinson was murdered by another political activist, Mewa Singh, who was hanged in 1915.

On the anniversary of his martyrdom, a public forum was organized to caution people about the dangers of the controversial Bill C-24 recently passed by Parliament. The bill allows the government to take away citizenship. The speakers, including immigration lawyer Peter Edelman, felt that the rights of immigrants are once again under attack from the right-wing Conservative government, and there is a need to challenge these attempts through sustained grassroots level activism. The event began with a ceremonial traditional song by prominent indigenous activist Cecilia Point from the Musqueam band. Her community had organized

an event to commemorate the Komagata Maru centenary in May. The Japanese vessel carrying more than 300 Indian passengers was forced to return under the discriminatory immigration laws back in 1914. Prime Minister Stephen Harper apologized for that episode in 2008. Point said that their community elders had tried to help the Komagata Maru passengers, and if the indigenous peoples were not colonized by the British settlers at that time, they would have welcomed the South Asian passengers with open arms. Criticizing Bill C 24, she categorically said that Harper has no right on Turtle Island (the traditional name for North America) to decide who should be let in. As a token of gratitude, a portrait of Bhaag Singh was presented to her by Manjit Dhillon, the grandson of Ghadar activist Niranjan Singh Pandori, on behalf of the South Asian community. Painted by Jarnail Singh, the portrait will be installed at the Musqueam Band Council office.

-RDNB

Pakistani woman deported

During the centenary year of the Komagata Maru incident, Jamila Bibi, a native of Pakistan, was deported from Saskatoon on September 16 despite fears of being stoned to death in her home country. Her lawyer, Bashir Khan, had warned that his client could be stoned to death if sent back because of an adultery allegation against her. Violence against women is almost a daily occurrence in the conservative male-dominated society in Pakistan.

Requests by the family to the government to stop her deportation fell on deaf ears. Ironically, current Prime Minister Stephen Harper had apologized for the Komagata Maru incident in 2008. Bibi's bid to avoid or delay deportation had failed after a federal judge ruled that she did not have enough evidence to remain in Canada. Interestingly, her case remains before the United Nations Human Rights Commissioner. **-RDNB**

“Harper owes apology for the Mount Polley disaster”

The Harper government has failed to apologize or make any statement following the Mount Polley disaster, which is the worst industrial catastrophe in BC history and has caused havoc in the lives of indigenous peoples. If the government lacks the will to take corrective measures because of its ties with the big business, the indigenous peoples will have to do their own monitoring to ensure that their environmental and human rights are well protected.

That was the message from panelists at a press conference called at the Union of BC Indian Chiefs (UBCIC) office in Vancouver, following the Mount Polley spill which has created environmental havoc affecting the quality of water, salmon and the wildlife. Among those who addressed the media were activists Kanahus Freedom and Anushka Nagi, who came out with a solid report on the mining disaster. Others included Grand Chief Stewart

Phillip, President of the UBCIC.

Answering a question, Kanahus Freedom said that the indigenous peoples are spiritually connected with salmon, and any destruction of salmon is virtually a devastation of the indigenous peoples. “Our DNA and the DNA of the salmon are the same.” **-RDNB**

Mount Polley and the Desi community

The Imperial Metals Mount Polley mine tailings storage facility damn breach is the largest industrial environmental disaster in so called British Columbia's history. The 4 kilometre wide, 35 meter high (think the size of Stanley Park) damn breach unleashed 10 billion litres of contaminated water and 5 billion litres of solid tailings waste into Polley Lake, down Hazeltine Creek, into Quesnel Lake and onto the Quesnel River which directly connects to the Fraser River Watershed. The Quesnel Lake watershed is host to the second largest sockeye salmon run in the world and 63% of the provincial population is

dependent on the Fraser River watershed.

The Imperial Metals Mount Polley mine is located on unceded and unsurrendered First Nations territory, specifically, Northern Secwepemc territory and therefore, most directly effects the Secwepemc who rely on salmon as their principal food source and the impacted area for hunting game, fishing, gathering berries and medicines. The disaster is also directly affecting Likely residents who have no immediate access to drinking water and are experiencing serious health effects as a result of the spill.

This disaster is an important opportunity, a loud and clear message and wake up call to all of us. This type of profit fuelled industry and the destruction and disaster it inevitably causes should

||| SPECIAL ARTICLE

not and cannot be allowed to continue. More importantly, these kinds of disasters are a direct result of colonialism. So many of us come from backgrounds of displacement as a result of conflict or poverty, so many of us come to places like "Canada" searching for better things. Have we found them yet? No. What we have found is another kind of conflict and another kind of poverty. The roots of which are the same. Colonialism. In India, it was the British, in Canada it is still the British. We come from places that know what stolen land means and so, we have a responsibility.

We know that what is called Canada is a series of First Nations, of Indigenous nations whose land and children are being stolen, whose women are being murdered and whose men are being imprisoned. We know that disasters like this and the governments that allow them are actively committing this violence and destroying these nations. If we know all of these things, we also know it's time to stop them from happening. We have powerful communities, we have powerful families and the similarities in our histories make us natural friends and allies of those who are struggling to free their nations. It's time we extend our friendship and our hands, it's time we fulfill our responsibility to the lands we are on and act in ways which preserve them and their people. From learning which nation you are in and the true histories of its people to

sharing that knowledge with those around you to actively supporting these nations flourish and find safety from the colonial governments that are actively trying to destroy them. There's so much we can do. There's so much we must do. There's so much we will do. As families and as sister communities in the struggle.

Anushka Nagji is a poet, writer and community organizer. As a recent graduate of law and full time organizer, she is actively working with Indigenous nations towards sovereignty, nationhood and protection of land and water.

October Revolution and the independence movement of India

The October Revolution of 1917 in Russia was a major turning point in the history of the independence movement in India.

India was under British occupation when the Bolsheviks took power in Russia under Lenin almost a century ago. It raised hopes among the oppressed and colonized nations across the world. After all, Lenin believed in the right to self determination of suppressed nationalities. He had expressed his solidarity with the liberation struggle in India and elsewhere after assuming power. His revolutionary program particularly inspired the radical political activists within the freedom movement of India, especially those associated with the Ghadar Party.

The Ghadar Party was a group of South Asian immigrants in North America, who were determined to launch an armed rebellion against the British Empire.

Most of these men had migrated to North America at the beginning of the 20th century for economic reasons. Financial hardships under British rule had triggered this migration. These men moved to this part of the world as British subjects, but the British consulates hardly came to their aid in an event of racial violence, both in US and Canada. They soon realized that the root cause of their sufferings was “slavery” back home. They could see how the British Empire clearly discriminated against them in an alien land. They started getting organized and subsequently

established the Ghadar Party in 1913 to resist racism and fight back against the foreign occupation of their homeland.

The Ghadar Party believed in an armed rebellion and wished to establish an egalitarian, secular and democratic republic in free India. The party believed in social justice and equality, and forged alliances with the labour movement, socialists and revolutionaries from other countries, including Russia. The Russians who came in their contact had fled from the repressive Tsarist regime.

In 1914, many Ghadar Party activists returned to India to launch an insurgency when the world war broke out between Germany and Britain. Thinking that the time was ripe to strike against the British government when it was locked in war with Germany, they rushed to India for mutiny. But the social and political conditions of India were not up to their expectations. They did not receive mass support to launch an armed struggle. People were not ready yet for a militant movement. The pacifist camp under the Congress party, which did not seek anything beyond dominion status, wielded influence over the larger population. The British government was able to suppress the attempted rebellion and many prominent Ghadar leaders were executed or thrown into jails to serve long term imprisonments.

But this did not deter the Ghadar party members, many of whom remained underground

■■■ RADICAL HISTORY OF THE MONTH

and started looking to Russia for support when Bolsheviks came to power. Some well known Ghadar party leaders traveled to Russia to get indoctrinated into the communist movement. They eventually learned ways and means to organize the peasantry and the working class for revolution. Upon coming back to India, they started the communist movement and launched publications to educate the masses about imperialism and the goal of a classless society. Instead of going in for direct armed resistance, they now changed their tactics with a focus on starting a grassroots level mass movement. They tried to synchronize Marxism and Leninism according to Indian conditions. This shift came naturally to the Ghadar activists, who already had adopted socialist ideas at the beginning of their own movement in North America. The internationalism that was cherished by the communist revolutionaries was not entirely new

to these people who were ahead of their time. The communist activists, in particular those with a Ghadar party background, continued their fight against colonialism until India gained official independence in 1947.

Thanks to the growth of the communist movement, the Congress was forced to adopt a resolution for complete independence during the years near the end of British rule.

The communist movement initially refused to accept the official independence of India, seeing this as a mere transfer of power between foreign and native rulers. Some diehard communists continued their struggle for social justice and a classless society even in post-independent India. Among them were people like Bujha Singh, who joined an ultra leftist movement and got killed by the police in a staged shootout in 1970.

-RDNB

The story of Mouseland

It's the story of a place called Mouseland. Mouseland was a place where all the little mice lived and played, were born and died. And they lived much the same as you and I do.

They even had a Parliament. And every four years they had an election. Used to walk to the polls and cast their ballots. Some of them even got a ride to the polls. And got a ride for the next four years afterwards too. Just like you and me. And every time on election day all the little mice used to go to the ballot box and they used to elect a government. A government made up of big, fat, black cats.

Now if you think it strange that mice should elect a government made up of cats, you just look at the history of Canada for last 90 years and maybe you'll see that they weren't any stupider than we are.

Now I'm not saying anything against the cats. They were nice fellows. They conducted their government with dignity. They passed good laws--that is, laws that were good for cats. But the laws that were good for cats weren't very good for mice. One of the laws said that mouseholes had to be big enough so a cat could get his paw in. Another law said that mice could only travel at certain speeds--so that a cat could get his breakfast without too much effort.

All the laws were good laws. For cats. But, oh, they were hard on the mice. And life was getting harder and harder. And when the mice couldn't put up with it any more, they decided something had to be done about it. So they went en masse to the polls. They voted the black cats out. They put in the white cats.

Now the white cats had put up a terrific campaign. They said: "All that Mouseland needs is

more vision." They said: "The trouble with Mouseland is those round mouseholes we got. If you put us in we'll establish square mouseholes." And they did. And the square mouseholes were twice as big as the round mouseholes, and now the cat could get both his paws in. And life was tougher than ever.

And when they couldn't take that anymore, they voted the white cats out and put the black ones in again. Then they went back to the white cats. Then to the black cats. They even tried half black cats and half white cats. And they called that coalition. They even got one government made up of cats with spots on them: they were cats that tried to make a noise like a mouse but ate like a cat.

You see, my friends, the trouble wasn't with the colour of the cat. The trouble was that they were cats. And because they were cats, they naturally looked after cats instead of mice.

Presently there came along one little mouse who had an idea. My friends, watch out for the little fellow with an idea. And he said to the other mice, "Look fellows, why do we keep on electing a government made up of cats? Why don't we elect a government made up of mice?" "Oh," they said, "he's a Bolshevik. Lock him up!" So they put him in jail.

But I want to remind you: that you can lock up a mouse or a man but you can't lock up an idea.

Tommy Douglas was the towering leader of the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation, the socially conscious forerunner of the New Democratic Party. Douglas had been the Premier of Saskatchewan, and later as an MP he was a force behind the adoption of universal healthcare by the federal Liberal minority government of Lester Pearson. This fable was told by Douglas in 1944, and has been reproduced here in commemoration of his 110th birth anniversary on October 20.

