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Cover Picture : Surrey Newton MLA Harry Bains campaigning for raising the minimum wage to \$ 15 an hour.

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RADICAL
DESI

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

It's time to oust Liberals from power in BC

Sixteen years is a long time for any democratically elected government. The Liberals have been in power in BC since 2001, when they decimated the New Democratic Party to merely two seats in the legislature under the leadership of former Premier Gordon Campbell. After performing badly in that election, the NDP continued to improve its position in later elections, but have not been able to come back to power. Even though the NDP was doing well in surveys leading up to the 2013 election, the party performed adversely when the province went to the actual poll, crashing all hopes for a change. This was despite the fact that Premier Christy Clark,

who had replaced Campbell as the leader, was facing many internal challenges and low ratings. Currently, the Liberals have 48 out of total 85 seats in the house, while the New Democrats sit at 35. Of the remaining two seats one is held by the Green Party, the other by an independent MLA. The contest is once again mainly between the Liberals and the NDP. Clark and her party primarily represent the rich and the corporates, whereas the NDP under John Horgan is batting for the support of the working class and the marginalised sections of society. Clark is seeking another chance on the basis of her performance that Liberal supporters feel is good for BC's economy. On the other hand, the NDP constantly accuse the Liberals of ignoring the needs of the poor and underprivileged, and promise to increase social spending if elected to power. The Liberals may pat themselves on the back for the so-called progress and development of the province, or the balanced and surplus budgets, but the fact remains that their development model is flawed and does not include the people on welfare or lacking a roof over their heads. The disparity between the rich and the poor continues to grow, while most working people are forced to live pay cheque to pay cheque every month. Health care and public education have been under constant attack. Years of power has made this government arrogant. Clark and her cabinet are disconnected with ordinary people whose voice needs to be heard by our elected officials. Though it goes to her credit for raising the minimum wage in 2012 to \$10.25/hour (the original demand of the labour unions which Campbell refused to meet), she remains adamant not to raise it to \$15 an hour from the current level of \$10.85. She has even refused to restore the BC Human Rights Commission that was dismantled by the Liberals in 2002, even as it has become more relevant today in the light of growing racial hatred in Canada in the post-Trump political environment. While she has been critical of Donald Trump for his anti-immigrant rhetoric, her government has not shown any leadership by continuing to do trade with US. This is not to suggest that the NDP or the Greens are perfect or they can turn BC into utopia, but the Liberals have through their policies and actions proved that they are the party of the rich and billionaires. Their cutbacks have largely hit the salaried class and the poor, with no impact on the wealthy. Best described as the right-wing conservatives in the garb of progressives, the BC Liberals are often mistaken by gullible voters as Federal Liberals, although the two parties are different in terms of ideology and platform. The Liberals have been given enough long rope for all these years and time has come to remove them. The voters, especially the working men and women, should get united and elect a party that is more humane in its approach. Those who are looking for alternatives can choose between the NDP and the Greens. But since the NDP has established its credentials in the past by delivering on social spending, progressive programs and standing up for the working people, the voters should seriously consider bringing it back to power. One cannot be sure how they are going to perform in future, but their track record speaks for itself. Voters should therefore act wisely on May 9. Rather than falling into the trap of getting carried away by Liberal attack ads that put the NDP in a negative light, they must vote for a government that listens to its people and not those handful of the super-rich who continue to influence policies that are too brutal for the common man. The NDP should also be careful about its agenda and focus more on the needs of the less privileged, and under no circumstances compromise on its progressive values by adopting a middle-of-the-road approach to woo big business. It must remain steadfast on its commitment towards a just society, and do more to assure people that an NDP government can also create jobs through alternative form of governance.

-Editors

Time for change

BC gears up for decisive election after sixteen years of Liberal rule,
but can the NDP really come back to power?

On Sunday, April 2, May 9. while Indo-Canadians were celebrating the 70th anniversary of the historic day when their elders won back the right to vote in BC, MLA Harry Bains reminded a big gathering of South Asians at the opening of his campaign office in Surrey-Newton to exercise their right to franchise to bring a change on In a packed room at his campaign office, Bains – who himself came to this country as an immigrant from India - listed the names of community heroes who laid down their lives while fighting back against racism and for the right to vote. The Indians were disfranchised in 1907 as part of the racist policies of past governments that wanted to keep Canada “a white man’s country”. After a forty years long struggle, the community regained the right to vote on April 2, 1947. Thanks to those who participated in the fight, people like Bains sit in the BC legislature, which has two more MLAs of Indian origin. Seventy years ago, the South Asians had to fight for a space

in the electoral system; today they are fighting an ideological war to consolidate their political position as part of the Canadian mainstream. Bains and his Punjabi colleague Raj Chouhan represent the opposition New Democratic Party (NDP), which is known for its pro working class stance, while Amrik Virk is a minister in the provincial government, representing the right-wing Liberal party widely known for being pro-business. Bains' gesture touched a chord with predominantly South Asian participants at the opening of the campaign office, in a riding with a sizable Punjabi population. But whether his pitch will really

work to encourage the voters to elect his party to power next month remains to be seen.

Bains has been the Surrey Newton MLA since 2005, when his party NDP staged a comeback as official opposition, after near decimation with only two seats in the 2001 elections. The Liberals have been in power since then. For Bains, the fight goes on to reclaim a majority in the BC legislature. As the Liberals complete sixteen years in office with the baggage of cutbacks impacting the working people, Bains is hoping that his party will sweep to power this time. That he chose to open his

campaign office on an auspicious day in the history of South Asians could be a pure coincidence, but it is not a matter of chance that he belongs to a party whose founding fathers stood for the rights of the immigrants, including the right to vote.

Fight for right to vote to fight for change

While Bains and his Punjabi colleague Raj Chouhan do not forget to remind their compatriots about the role the NDP's previous avatar, the Commonwealth Cooperative Federation (CCF), played in fighting for equal rights to the immigrants, when the Liberals first came to power in BC in 2001 they had a record

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number of eight South Asian MLAs. Ironically, the first Premier of Indian origin, Ujjal Dosanjh, led the NDP government to a humiliating defeat in that campaign after remaining in power for nine years.

Dosanjh became the leader of the NDP after former premier Glen Clark got embroiled into controversy. He could not survive the anti-NDP wave that reduced the party to two seats in the house. Dosanjh, a political turncoat, joined the federal Liberal Party (no connection with BC Liberals) after some time.

Once the BC Liberals came to power under Gordon Campbell, an era of cutbacks began. Campbell rode to power on the tide against the NDP that was depicted as a party run by big labour unions and "not good for business and economy". NDP supporters, however, believe that the party cared for public services and was good for the working class and visible minority groups. After all, it stood against racism and anti-immigrant policies.

Before Dosanjh became Premier, Moe Sihota, another towering NDP leader, was elected in 1986 as the first Indo Canadian MLA in BC – or anywhere in Canada.

As most South Asians worked in the farms and mills when they started coming to Canada more than 100 years ago, they saw the CCF as their natural

ally for its pro-worker and pro-immigrant positions when racial hostilities against people of colour were blatantly common. As the community grew and flourished and started getting involved in business, such as farming, real estate, taxi, trucking and construction, the right-wing parties began making inroads into the new business class within the Indo Canadian community. Thus, the Indo Canadian vote bank did not remain a territory of the "left-wing" NDP alone.

To a large extent, the BC Liberals have understood the changing dynamics of the community, leaving no stone unturned to prove that their party is inclusive too. It is their provincial government which brought Wally Oppal, a former judge, and then former police officers Kash Heed and Amrik Virk, all of them Punjabis, into

politics as star candidates and made them cabinet ministers. It is a separate matter that Oppal and Heed were soon out of power for different reasons. The biggest challenge today in BC is not polarisation of the communities by the Liberals and the NDP on racial lines, but rather the divisions on class lines. Stability, economy, jobs, affordability, healthcare and education affect all Canadians alike, and have now become the real issues for those who are either with Liberals or the NDP. If a quick glance at the list of Punjabi candidates fighting on either side is any indication, the battle lines are drawn on the question of class.

Among the five Punjabi Liberal candidates are two prominent business people, Gurminder Singh Parihar and Puneet Sandhar. Among the 12 Punjabi NDP candidates are some with strong labour backgrounds. Not only were Harry Bains and Raj Chouhan trade unionists before joining active politics, others such as Jinny Sims and Rachna Singh have also been associated with workers' unions.

The cutbacks under Campbell were described by the Liberals as "short term pain for long term gains". The public services came under assault. So much so, the BC Human Rights Commission was dismantled, making BC the only province in Canada without such a Commission.

In the name of removing red tape, regulations to safeguard the rights of the workers were amended to serve the interest of businesses. A widespread outcry helped the NDP to regain official opposition status in the next election. In 2005, the NDP won 33 out of 79 seats in the legislature, while the Liberals got 46. This was a major jolt for the Liberals, who bagged 77 seats in the previous election. This was the year when Bains was first elected in Surrey Newton, serving for three successive terms. But the NDP has not been able to come back to power.

In spite of the fact that the BC Liberals have seen many ups

and downs in the past sixteen years, they continue to rule. The only major change came back in 2011 when Campbell had to resign after his controversial Harmonized Sales Tax was defeated by the voters in a referendum. He was replaced by Christy Clark, who was in his cabinet during his first term.

Clark made a shrewd move by announcing that if she became the leader she would raise the minimum wage to \$10 an hour – a demand from big labour that was staunchly opposed by Campbell. True to her words she fulfilled the demand after becoming the Premier, taking away a weapon that was being used by the NDP

opposition to hammer the government.

Among the many achievements of the Liberals under Campbell, according to Liberal supporters, were the successful holding of the 2010 Winter Olympics and creating more jobs.

In the meantime, the BC Liberals came under sharp criticism for several high-profile scandals, including the arrest of Campbell in Hawaii in 2003 for impaired driving, and later a police raid on the BC legislature in connection with an investigation into the sale of BC Rail under mysterious circumstances. The Liberals however survived despite all controversies and negative

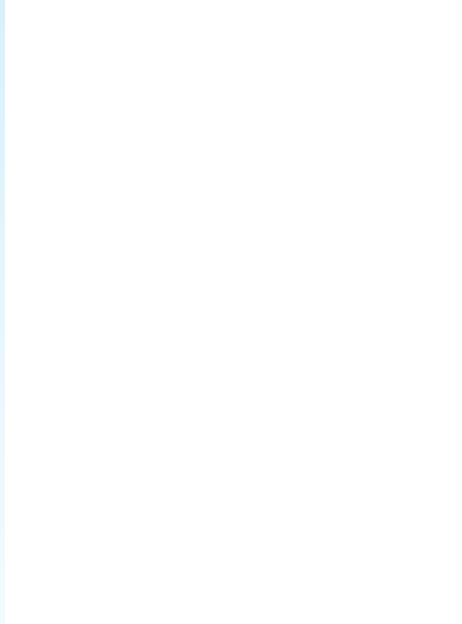
publicity.

Truth versus Hype

When BC went to election in 2013, the Liberals had completed twelve years in the office. Christy Clark was the leader who many believed was not popular enough to survive. Her rating stood low in almost all the polls. She also faced infighting from those who did not support her to be elected as BC Liberal Party leader. A section of the media speculated that she was going to lose and that BC was ready to go back to the NDP. Yet Clark remained confident and kept reminding people that the real poll was going to be held on election day. She stood vindicated when the voters elected her government with a comfortable majority proving political pundits wrong.

Notably, Clark had an added advantage of being popular within a section of the Indo Canadian community who hold the balance of power in many swing ridings. She has personal rapport with many in the South Asian community, especially those who traditionally support the federal Liberals for their socially progressive stand for minorities. Since many NDP supporters in BC have been used to supporting Federal Liberals in the federal elections, Clark's proximity to prominent Federal Liberals in the Indo Canadian community created more hurdles for the BC NDP.

Before the 2013 election, Clark had also organized a Bollywood event featuring film stars from India who have a great following in the Indian



diaspora. Some feel that the event also paid her dividends. She brought Amrik Virk, a well known tough cop, into her party as star candidate who got elected from Surrey. Virk is a bilingual who has good command of both English and Punjabi.

Clark has also been critical of US President Donald Trump for his anti-immigrant rhetoric. Her government has repeatedly recognised historical wrongs, including the Komagata Maru episode. A Japanese vessel carrying more than 300 South Asian passengers was forced to return by the Canadian government in 1914 under the discriminatory immigration policies.

The last elections were disastrous for the NDP, whose supporters had created a hype about the impending victory. They were not entirely at fault, as poll after poll predicted that Clark was losing to the NDP. For these reasons, the NDP supporters saw their leader Adrian Dix as the future Premier. For the record, Dix too had warned his supporters not to believe the polls and work hard to ensure victory. But when the results came on the night of the election, a pall of gloom descended on NDP campaign offices across BC. Clark was picked as the next Premier by the voters. Later Dix acknowledged that "the NDP campaign did a poor job of telling British Columbians why they shouldn't re-elect Liberals". Dix was forced to resign, paving the way for John Horgan, the current leader of the NDP.

The Liberals, on the other hand, continued to attack NDP for their alleged opposition to gas pipelines and economic growth, thus jeopardizing the chances of creating more employment opportunities in the province. The NDP's promises for raising the minimum wage and social spending were seen as "anti-business" by the Liberals, who still claim that their rivals are going to ruin the "booming economy" if ever elected to power.

In spite of the NDP's poor performance last time, recent

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polls are still showing the party ahead of the Liberals. Learning from the rude shock of the 2013 results, NDP supporters aren't taking any chances this time. The hype that was seen during the last campaign is missing this year. Most NDP campaigns are focussing on intense canvassing rather than expecting a cake walk, to prevent any kind of complacency on part of the supporters.

Will the NDP get another chance in BC will become clear on May 9, but nothing can be ruled out. After all, the neighbouring province of Alberta created history by electing an NDP government in 2015. The NDP under Rachel Notley defeated the Progressive Conservatives who had been in power for 44 years. If something unexpected could happen in a territory held for so long by a right-wing party, why can't the NDP come back to power in BC, where they were in office for nine years before the Liberal government got elected?

The challenge, however, remains. One thing that separates the NDP in Alberta from the NDP in BC is their conflicting positions on the issue of gas pipelines. Whereas Notley, the premier of oil rich Alberta, supports the expansion of the Kinder Morgan pipeline, Horgan differs with her. The project is vehemently opposed by

environmentalists and many indigenous communities in BC. His criticism of Kinder Morgan is being used by the Liberals to embarrass him and show the BC NDP in a poor light as against the NDP government in Alberta. Their continued advocacy for raising the minimum wage, more

spending on social services and opposition to "development" are being used against them by the Liberals through attack ads. At the end of the day, undecided voters can tilt their scales to a side that can provide food on their table, even if NDP has a lead among the decided voters.

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What is at stake?

As we draw close to the election, the BC Liberals, apart from distributing goodies and making populist announcements, have intensified their attack ads targeting the NDP as a party that is against business and progress. The temples where South Asians go to have also received some funding during the last several days. All this gives advantage to the ruling party, and make things difficult for the NDP who continue to struggle for resources for the campaign. Their only hope is either donations from big labour or individual supporters, that further helps the Liberals to dub them as a party run by unions that are "anti-business".

In between the attacks and counter attacks, some important issues are at stake. The economy according to some polls is the most important one. To what extent NDP will succeed in selling its ideas to the voters is hard to predict.

The building and construction business is one of the key areas in BC, and Liberals have always been supported by big builders. But the recent tax of 15 percent imposed on housing sales to non-Canadians, since purchases by foreigners were said to be making housing unaffordable, has slowed down investment and annoyed a section of

builders. The NDP therefore has an opportunity to exploit the builders' anger and discomfort.

Uber is another hot issue, affecting the taxi industry. The app company is being challenged by the local taxi industry, which feels that Uber is going to create more

unemployment.

Taxi owners and operators who have supported the Liberals in the past are now agitated with the emerging signs that this government might eventually allow Uber to expand in BC. They fear that a parallel taxi industry run by independent drivers at

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competitive rates is going to finish them. A number of taxi owners and operators are now showing their frustration that might help the NDP to make inroads in the taxi industry. Harry Bains, who is vocal on the issue, has assured that an NDP government would scrap the announcements made by the Liberal government in relation to Uber and won't proceed further without consultations with the taxi industry.

Other pressing issues include healthcare and public education. There is a growing need of more hospitals, beds, health staff, paramedics and even family physicians in BC. This issue affects everyone alike, not working men and women alone. The frustration of patients who continue to suffer due to long waiting periods for surgeries is becoming increasingly visible as Clark's government continues to give tax breaks to the corporates. A growing threat of a profit-oriented healthcare system under the Liberals has been widely noticed. The NDP has been campaigning hard on the issue which was always dear to the heart of men like Tommy Douglas, a CCF leader and the father of Universal Healthcare in Canada.

Then a campaign is going on to

force the government to stop aiding private schools, and instead increase funding for public education in the province. Class sizes continue to increase as against a shrinking number of teachers. In Surrey, the issue of portable schools has galvanized over the last several weeks. Former BC Teachers' Federation President Jinny Sims is running in Surrey-Panorama, a riding held by the Liberals, and hopes to capitalize on this issue.

One of the sensitive issue is the BC Human Rights Commission, dismantled by the Liberals when they first came to power, making BC the only province in Canada without an investigative body for human rights. What BC has today is a Human Rights Tribunal, which has a limited role to hold hearings following

individual complaints, with no mandate to investigate cases of racism or human rights abuse. While Horgan has announced that an NDP government would restore the BC Human Rights Commission, Clark remains adamant and believes that the Tribunal is doing a perfect job. For the NDP, these issues have a wider appeal in the working class, giving them enough ammunition to blast the Liberals.

When Bains made a passionate appeal to the voters reminding them of the struggle for right to vote, he also tried to make them understand what is behind the attack ads of the Liberal Party. He insisted that the government wants people to forget the era of cutbacks which has certainly created haves and have-nots in the province.

It is the have-nots, along with others who have had enough of the Liberal government, who might fulfill the aspirations of the NDP. But there are many slips between cups and lips, and with the campaigning picking up fast, the future of the party remains unknown. It is now with voters to decide whether they want a status quo or a change in BC's political landscape.

-RDNB

Soldiers of Odin: A growing threat in Vancouver

The anti-racism rally that came under attack on March 26.

The attack by Soldiers of Odin on anti-racist protesters on Sunday, March 26th to mark the International Day for the Elimination of Racism at Victory Square in East Vancouver is a cause for serious concern. They moved into the crowd aggressively carrying large Canadian flags and threw a purple smoke bomb just as Vancouver East MP Jenny Kwan was about to speak. This is the first time a white supremacist group has attacked anti-racists in a long time. What is more troubling is that the Vancouver Police Department is failing to protect protesters from these white supremacists. The VPD didn't take any action until the crowd tried to stop them from attacking the speakers. It was only then that three of them were handcuffed, to be released later as the crowd dispersed. Though the VPD spokesperson said they were no longer a threat, they

attacked the protesters again and continued to harass them as they were leaving.

The VPD used to separate the anti-racist protesters and the white supremacists in the 1990's. But recently they have not been doing that. They allowed white supremacists to infiltrate the protest during the opening of the Trump Tower recently. Strangely while we saw white supremacists attacking anti-racist protesters and throwing a smoke bomb, the VPD denies this, even as a video footage clearly shows the use of a smoke bomb.

The Soldiers of Odin claim that they are not racists; however, their facebook page is clearly calling on shutting down Antifa, whose mandate is to fight fascism. It appears they want to attack Antifa because it is challenging their fascist

organization. On Sunday, March 19, 30 Soldiers of Odin rallied outside Vancouver City Hall and other City Halls across Canada as a part of day of action to oppose Motion 103, which condemns racism and Islamophobia and which was recently passed in the House of Commons. Soldiers of Odin openly oppose M103 on their facebook page because it challenges their right to promote hate towards Muslims and immigrants. We have clearly seen that white supremacists are not being treated the same way as Black and Muslim extremist suspects. Now that M103 has been passed, let's see what the government does about the resurgence of racism and fascism in Canada.

Soldiers of Odin clashed with anti-racist protestors at Toronto City Hall on Sunday,

April 2nd as White Supremacists continued their campaign against Motion 103. The police kept the protesters separate in Toronto, which they didn't do in Vancouver.

Maple Ridge Mayor Nicole Read has publicly shown concern over groups of Soldiers of Odin patrolling in her community and attacking homeless people since 2015. We are now seeing their presence in East Vancouver and the Downtown Eastside, intimidating people in the community. But we have not heard any concern about this from the VPD or the Mayor of Vancouver.

Imtiaz Popat is a well known social justice activist and an independent broadcaster. He is one of the founders of the Coalition Against Bigotry that organized the March 26 rally against racism.

India owes answers to the world for Samjhauta blasts

India, which has always claimed to be a victim of terrorism for all these years, owes answers for one of the worst terrorist incidents that is hardly discussed across the world, either due to silence over Hindutva violence, or to Islamophobia that continues to grow in the post 9/11 environment.

Ten years have passed as the families of the victims of

Samjhauta blasts continue to wait for justice.

On February 18, 2007, explosions aboard Samjhauta rail express that connects India and Pakistan left 68 people dead and about 50 injured. At least 42 of the victims were Pakistani citizens, most of them returning to their home country after visiting relatives in India. The rail service was

started to connect the families divided by the partition of India and Pakistan in 1947, and to promote people to people contact between the neighbouring nations that have gone to two major wars in 1965 and 1971.

The Indian government initially blamed Pakistan-based Islamic extremists for the incident. In fact, several Muslims were rounded up for investigation.

The Indian establishment claimed back then that the attack was done by radical Islamic elements in Pakistan to undermine the relationship between the two countries. Not surprisingly, the media too accepted the narrative, and the incident was taken as another instance of terrorism aided and abetted by a hostile neighbour from across the border. It seemed that everyone in India was convinced that it was a handiwork of the Jihadists killing their own Muslim brethren.

True. There is no dearth of such elements in Pakistan, but India too is home to Hindu radicals who do not want Indo-Pak relations to improve either. They too have been protesting in the streets against any peace initiative and efforts to strengthen economic and cultural ties between the two countries. But mainly because of the prejudices against Muslims and Pakistanis within the Indian intelligence and security agencies, this scenario was completely overlooked, or maybe deliberately glossed over to give legitimacy to Hindu extremists. This is despite the fact that a majority of victims were Pakistanis.

Thanks to the honest investigation by some thoroughly professional police officers, the network of Hindutva terrorists involved in the crime was unearthed.

Several suspects were eventually rounded up as it was revealed that they wanted to turn India into a Hindu theocracy through armed uprising and creating fear in the minds of the Muslim minority. One of them, Swami Aseemanand, confessed to his involvement not only in the Samjhauta case, but other explosions as well. All these bombings were aimed at Muslim communities and their places of worship in different parts of India. He and his associates claimed they were doing this to retaliate against the bombings of Hindu temples and communities by the Jihadi terrorists.

Interestingly, these startling revelations came when India was ruled by a secularist Congress government that also wanted to isolate Pakistan internationally for supporting subversive activities on its soil. Since the existence of Hindutva terrorists weakened its case, the investigators were forced to look into other possibilities and rather go slow. Nevertheless, it was difficult to conceal the truth.

Unfortunately, things started moving in a wrong direction since the right-wing Hindu nationalist Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) came to power in 2014 under Narendra Modi. There were apprehensions that the prosecution and the courts might be pressured to dilute the cases against these

people. The first indication came when former prosecutor Rohini Salian spilled the beans in 2015. She revealed that she was asked by the National Investigation Agency (NIA) that is handling these investigations to go slow against the Hindutva extremists. After all, the BJP strongly believes in Hindutva – an ideology that sees India as a Hindu nation. There is every reason to believe that they have been patronising such elements for political considerations and shared ideology.

Modi, who was previously the Chief Minister of Gujarat, is widely blamed for the 2002 anti-Muslim massacre, though he was never charged. It is pertinent to mention that Modi had publicly condemned the arrests of Hindu activists in connection with the bomb blasts. So much so, he was pictured alongside Aseemanand at a public event. Aseemanand was once active in Gujarat, where he targeted Christian missionaries.

Another glaring instance of NIA's lack of will to deal with Hindutva terrorists is the absence of the names of Hindu extremist outfits from its list of banned terror groups. Barring the Sikh, Muslim, Maoist extremist groups and those representing other sub-nationalities, there is no mention on its website list of any Hindu nationalist group, including those involved in

Samjhauta blasts. If the latest development in one of the cases against Aseemanand is any sign, the current government certainly lacks the will to punish them.

Only recently Aseemanand was acquitted in the Ajmer blast case. The October 2007 bombing near the famous Muslim shrine in Ajmer, Rajasthan, left three people dead and 15 injured. This was one of the many acts committed by Hindutva supporters to terrorise Muslims. Like in the Samjhauta case, that too was initially blamed on Pakistan-based Jihadi groups.

Reacting to his acquittal, Pakistan expressed its displeasure and asked India to bring the perpetrators of the Samjhauta blasts to justice. In response, the Indian government accused Pakistan of interfering in its internal affairs.

One may argue that the Indian judiciary can solely take care of such cases, but Pakistan is within its right to ask for answers for an incident that left its citizens dead. If India is really worried about its image, it should set its house in order and deal with the Hindutva terror with a similar zeal that is shown to other terror groups. It is no secret that the Indian police and security forces have killed Sikh, Muslim and Maoist extremists in staged shootouts by using extra-judicial means, so why such

softness toward Hindutva extremists? The least the Indian government can do to silence Pakistan or its domestic critics is to punish those guilty of Samjhauta blasts, instead of giving them back door amnesty. This whole approach reflects selective justice of the Indian state, which lacks courage to stand up against majoritarian democracy. That's the reason why Hindutva extremists have continued to grow over the years.

Instead of cursing Pakistan all the time and blaming it for terrorism within India, the Indian government should look hard at itself in the mirror. Even if one believes that terrorism is being fully supported from across the border, which is not deniable, India must take blame for providing reasons for compelling its citizens to become recruits for Jihadi movements. Particularly, the BJP and its cohorts are to be blamed for pushing Muslims to the wall and forcing them to take to arms. They demolished an ancient Muslim mosque in 1992, repeatedly harass Muslims for eating meat, and accuse them again and again of being Pakistani agents and unpatriotic. In a way, they themselves have been feeding the demon called Jihadi terrorism. The recent appointment of Yogi Adityanath, a bigot known for his anti-Muslim rhetoric, as the

Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh following a spectacular victory of the BJP in the assembly elections, leaves no doubt that India is heading towards becoming a Hindu state. It is only a matter of time when the Indian constitution is amended to replace Hindutva with secularism as one of its preambles. All this suggests that the Hindutva terror that resulted in tragedies like Samjhauta episode is not going to die soon, and will continue to gain more acceptance under the Modi administration.

The argument that Pakistan is interfering into the internal matters of India is weak and speaks volumes about the double standards of a government which not very long ago showed its concern over the increased hate attacks on Indian immigrants in the US.

For the record, India has time and again raised eyebrows over the softness shown by Pakistani judiciary and government toward Jihadi extremists involved in terrorist incidents within Indian territories. Maybe India needs to be reminded that those who live in glass houses should never throw stones at others.

Gurpreet Singh is the founder of Radical Desi. He is a newscaster and talk show host at Spice Radio in Burnaby and freelances for Georgia Straight and People's Voice.

Remembering an unusual Saint

This month marks the 140th birth anniversary of a Sikh saint who participated in the freedom movement of India and dedicated his life to the cause of human rights and dignity.

Born into a farming family in April 1877 in Punjab, Wasakha Singh was named after the month of April according to the traditional calendar followed by his devout Sikh family. His elders were greatly influenced by the founders of Sikhism. One of the family patriarchs was baptized by the tenth master of the Sikhs, Guru Gobind Singh, in 1699. Since then the family remained dedicated to the Sikh values that are based on the principles of egalitarianism and social justice. His mother Ind Kaur was a very religious woman who raised him with those values. He got baptized at the age of 12 and prayed every day.

He was married to Ram Kaur who died four years later. Wasakha Singh never remarried.

As he grew older he joined the army, but soon started showing the signs of rebellion against the British who occupied India. He never liked addressing the British officers as Sahibs or Lords. In 1907, when a farmers' agitation began against heavy agricultural taxation, Wasakha

Singh went to attend one of the political rallies. He was summoned by the authorities for an explanation, but he resigned and decided to go abroad for a better livelihood. He first went to China where he worked as a police employee, but quit that job too after seeing cops harassing ordinary people.

By 1908 he reached San Francisco. He was enamoured by the free society in US and desired to see India

liberated like America. He soon came in contact with like-minded immigrants who wished to see their home country free from foreign occupation. These men took an agricultural land on lease in California where they grew potatoes. Once their economic situation improved, they began sponsoring young people from India, so that they could educate themselves abroad and use their skills for the freedom of their

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motherland. Their farm became a source of employment for these students, as well as a refuge for new immigrants who often faced racial hostilities in an alien country.

They also established a gurdwara or a Sikh temple in Stockton, which became a center of political activism. Gradually, the ground was laid for the Ghadar Party that believed in an armed uprising against British in India and fought against racism in America. The party wanted to establish a secular Indian republic after liberating it from foreign rule, and denounced bigotry and religious fanaticism to ensure people's unity.

The farm established by these men not only provided free food for the Ghadar activists, but became a training ground for those who wanted to learn handling weapons for a future revolution.

In 1914 when Britain and Germany got locked into a war, the Ghadar party began sending its members to India to launch a revolt against the British by taking the help of Indian soldiers working for them. They wanted to take advantage of the crisis.

Wasakha Singh returned to India in 1915 but was house arrested. Subsequently, his native village of Dadehar became the center of Ghadar activities. Despite being a

practising Sikh, he was opposed to the pro-British Sikh clergy that ostracised Ghadar activists at the behest of their political masters.

The attempted revolt by the Ghadar Party failed, partly due to lack of support from the public that wasn't yet ready for revolution, and partly due to the infiltration of British spies in the movement.

Wasakha Singh was convicted for life for conspiring against the empire, and sent to the infamous cellular jail of Andaman Island, far from the Indian mainland. He had to go through inhuman treatment there, and resorted to hunger strikes for justice. After being released in 1920, he returned to his village and established a society to look after the families of the slain freedom fighters and political prisoners. Later, he actively participated in the movement for the liberation of historical gurdwaras from the corrupt priests, who were patronised by the British in order to neutralize ordinary Sikhs and keep them away from political activism.

Even after India gained official independence from Britain in 1947, Wasakha Singh never gave up his fight for social justice. He came to the rescue of innocent Muslims who were targeted by the Hindu and Sikh fundamentalists following the partition of India and Pakistan

on religious lines.

He raised his voice against the arrests of communists in post-British India and lodged his protest before Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru. In his public speech in 1955, he noted that social and economic inequality still prevails and must be fought for a just society.

Wasakha Singh passed away in December 1957.

This brief history of Wasakha Singh shows that his legacy is still relevant as the world grapples with problems that prevailed at the time of the emergence of the Ghadar movement. Racism continues to exist in North America, where bigotry has grown under political figures like Donald Trump. Occupation of indigenous lands in this part of the world and of Palestine by the state of Israel points out that the fight started by Wasakha Singh against colonialism is not over. Religious fanaticism is not ending, and rather continues to gain legitimacy under a right-wing Hindu nationalist government in India. In a fascist world, political prisoners are being constantly mistreated not just in India, but everywhere.

In order to fulfill his dreams, the fight against racism, occupation, religious extremism, and state violence must go on.

-RDNB

22 Vows of Dr. Ambedkar

I shall have no faith in Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh nor shall I worship them.

I shall have no faith in Rama and Krishna who are believed to be incarnation of God nor shall I worship them.

I shall have no faith in 'Gauri', Ganapati and other gods and goddesses of Hindus nor shall I worship them.

I do not believe in the incarnation of God.

I do not and shall not believe that Lord Buddha was the incarnation of Vishnu. I believe this to be sheer madness and false propaganda.

I shall not perform 'Shraddha' nor shall I give 'pind-dan'.

I shall not act in a manner violating the principles and teachings of the Buddha.

I shall not allow any ceremonies to be performed by Brahmins.

I shall believe in the equality of man.

I shall endeavour to establish equality.

RADICAL NARRATIVE

I shall follow the 'noble eightfold path' of the Buddha.
I shall follow the 'paramitas' prescribed by the Buddha.
I shall have compassion and loving kindness for all living beings and protect them.
I shall not steal.
I shall not tell lies.
I shall not commit carnal sins.
I shall not take intoxicants like liquor, drugs etc.
I shall endeavour to follow the noble eightfold path and practise compassion and loving kindness in every day life.
I renounce Hinduism which is harmful for humanity and impedes the advancement and development of humanity because it is based on inequality, and adopt Buddhism as my religion.
I firmly believe the Dhamma of the Buddha is the only true religion.
I believe that I am having a re-birth.
I solemnly declare and affirm that I shall hereafter lead my life according to the principles and teachings of the Buddha and his Dhamma.

Bhim Rao Ambedkar was a prominent social justice activist of India. He was born into a family of Dalits or so-called untouchables, and had to endure caste-based oppression. He embraced Buddhism to make a statement against Hinduism, which patronized the caste system and discriminated against Dalits. At the time of embracing Buddhism, he made these points, reproduced here to mark his birth anniversary that falls on April 14.

