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**Cover Picture :** Tony McAleer is a former Neo Nazi, who now inspires youngsters to stay away from racism and violence. This picture was taken outside Surrey Sikh temple in 2012. He visited the temple to offer his prayers for Nirmal Singh Gill, who was murdered here in 1998 by white supremacists. Though he had no role in Gill's murder, McAleer feels that he has a moral responsibility to accept the wrongs committed by men like him against people of colour in the past. His is one of the rare voices in North America that are critical of doublespeak on terror. He wants the mass murders committed by white supremacists to be treated as acts of terrorism as well.

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The logo for 'RADICAL DESI' features the word 'RADICAL' in a large, serif font with a stylized arrow pointing to the right, and 'DESI' in a smaller, sans-serif font to its right. The entire logo is underlined.

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

## Something new Canadians need to know about their chosen country

This month marks the 149<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Canada Day, which is celebrated with a lot of enthusiasm every year both by born-Canadians and those who have made this country their home by choice. Next year, the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Canada is expected to be observed with more euphoria. Many new Canadians are enamoured by the image of the country world-wide. They consider this as an ideal nation and a human rights leader in the world, as it gives refuge to oppressed people from countries in grip of wars and conflicts. The current Liberal government under Justin Trudeau has won many hearts by giving adequate representation to visible minorities in his cabinet. The Sikhs who dominate the South Asian community are particularly overwhelmed by his gesture of appointing Harjit Singh Sajjan as the first turbaned Sikh defence minister, and his official apology for the Komagata Maru. The Japanese vessel carrying South Asian immigrants, the majority of them being Sikhs, was forced to return from Vancouver in 1914 under the discriminatory immigration laws that were meant to keep Canada a "white man's country". Trudeau apologized for that racist incident in Parliament in May. The Sikhs, who had to endure human rights abuse in India when Sikh insurgency for a separate homeland was at its peak, have always seen Canada as a safe heaven. Every July 1, they proudly raise the Canadian flag and express their loyalty with the adopted nation. This is also true for other persecuted communities from many different countries, such as Pakistan, where Christians, Hindus, Sikhs, Shia Muslims, Ahemdiyas, Balochs and LGBT live under fear, or Bangladesh, where non-Muslims are constantly targeted by Islamic extremists, and Sri Lanka where non-Buddhists are under threat from Sinhala radicals. While this is understandable and we

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need to respect their feelings, it is important to remind everyone that Canada has never been nice to its First Nations, the original inhabitants of this land. New Canadians who love becoming flag bearers for their adopted nation need to know that this nation is built on stolen land that belongs to the indigenous peoples. It's a shame that the real stakeholders of Canadian land have been reduced to a minority in their own country. They make only four percent of the Canadian population, although this land actually belongs to them. They were marginalized by the European settlers, who through their controversial residential school system tried to assimilate them and eliminate their culture. Shamefully, settler colonialism has not ended in their daily life. They continue to face structural racism and systemic violence. The attempts to appropriate their lands for extraction industries have been going on. More than 100 boil water advisories have been issued in their communities. There have been more than 100 attempted suicides in Attawapiskat due to poverty. They over-represent their population in jails. Indigenous women are far more likely to fall prey to sexual violence. All these facts reflect very badly on Canada. To celebrate a new home is one thing, but to overlook these injustices in your backyard is not acceptable. New Canadians need to recognize this. It is good that some inconvenient facts about indigenous history have been included in the new citizenship guidebook to sensitize immigrants, but more needs to be done to break the myths and stereotypes about First Nations among new Canadians who often get carried away by the mainstream discourse which has remained harsh on indigenous peoples. Never forget that the South Asians and First Nations share a history of occupation and racism. Therefore, it becomes important for us to stand up in solidarity with indigenous allies, friends, elders, brothers and sisters. We need to support initiatives to empower this community in Canada, which should be made accountable for mistreatment of its original inhabitants. Above all, we need to recognize that we are all on the turtle's back, according to oral traditions of the indigenous peoples for whom North America is "Turtle Island", and reject racist notions and theories that see North America as discovered territory or an empty space before the European settlers stepped foot on this land with an intention to steal it.

-Editors

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## The Terrorism Double Standard

Orlando massacre story reveals how the system continues to indulge in doublespeak on terror

**O**n June 12, Orlando was rocked when 49 people were shot to death at a gay nightclub. Hours later, an attempt to harm a pride parade was foiled by the police in Los Angeles after the arrest of a man carrying weapons. While the intended targets in both cases were the members of LGBT community, what separated the two stories was the mere fact that the suspects in two separate episodes belonged to different ethnicities, prompting the authorities and the media to judge similar situations differently.

While the lone gunman involved in the Orlando shootout died in the police action after the crime, the potential attacker was held before any untoward incident during LA pride parade. Though the Orlando massacre was almost instantly dubbed as an act of terrorism, the LA incident was not seen that way. This may be partly attributed to Islamophobia, as the gunman involved in Orlando shooting was Muslim, while the one arrested in LA is a white man.

This whole framing of the big media and the authorities concerned has once again left everyone wondering whether the system indulges in doublespeak on terror. The double standard on terrorism has always been a subject of debate, not just in US, but around the world. That said, the June 12 events on a single

day within one country have stirred fresh controversy which may not die soon.

### **Mateen versus Howell**

30-year-old Omar Mateen was born in New York, to Afghani Muslim parents who had moved to the US in 1980s. He shot and killed 49 people and left over 50 injured in a violent attack on Pulse gay bar before being killed by the police. He reportedly called 911 to claim his allegiance to the Islamic State, a Muslim extremist group accused of being involved in terrorism.

The incident was described as an act of hate and terror by US President Barack Obama. The massacre was seen as an attack on the victims' sexual orientation. Those active on social media replaced their profile pictures with rainbow flags to show solidarity with the LGBT community. The reaction reinforced the image of Islam being a conservative religion that banishes homosexuality.

Consumed by Islamophobia, right wing political figures like

Donald Trump, the presumptive Republican nominee for President, repeated his demand to ban the entry of Muslims to the US and criticized Obama for not blaming "radical Islam". This is despite the fact that Mateen was US-born, and many Muslims are also among the LGBT community. So much so, Mateen's own sexual orientation is under question.

An ex-male lover of Mateen has told the media that he had a sexual relationship with him and that he was "100 percent gay". Others speculate that he was gay or bisexual as he had been seen at the same club a number of times.

Mateen had married two times. He divorced his first wife in 2011 and married the second woman in 2013. His first wife told the media that he used to be mentally unstable and often used to assault her physically.

The story has still many unanswered questions, as no concrete evidence of Mateen being involved in terrorist




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activities has emerged so far. Was it really an act of hate and terror, or was Mateen fighting an internal conflict that led to the mass murder? Only time will tell, but one thing is sure: that an incident bearing similarities and occurring hours later in a different part of the US was not seen in the same light.

20-year-old James Howell, a white man, was arrested with weapons and ammunition as he was heading to the gay pride parade in LA. He had reportedly told an officer that he wanted to harm the gay pride event. Unlike in the Mateen case, there was no reference to terrorism. This may be because he never claimed an allegiance to any terror group, but white supremacists too despise homosexuality and have been capable of targeting people from visible minority groups with weapons.

Whatever the merit of the case involving Howell, it certainly did not generate similar media frenzy as Mateen's story, nor any sharp reaction from men like Trump.

To be fair, there were no deaths in the LA incident. Nevertheless, if the police had not arrested Howell right on time, the probability of another mass murder with equal intensity could have become a reality. But the question remains whether the incident would still have been described as an act of terrorism. The facts related to some other prominent US cases, involving white men and multiple deaths, speak for



Morphed images of Osama Bin Laden, who was behind the 9/11 attacks, and Dylann Roof, who was responsible for the mass murders at Charleston church last year.

themselves.

### White Supremacy and Terrorism

The most glaring instance of terrorism not being considered as a motive when white men are involved in violence is last year's shooting at a Charleston church.

On June 17, 2015, Dylann Roof entered Emanuel African Methodist Church and killed nine Afro-Americans. That he was influenced by Neo-Nazi ideology and his manifesto posted online revealed his admiration for Hitler did not make him an outright terrorist. Early this year, when white armed militiamen occupied a wildlife refuge in Oregon, it did not elicit a prompt use of excessive police force, leave aside the question of treating

this as an act of terrorism.

Former Neo-Nazi Tony McAleer who now inspires youngsters to stay away from racial violence and runs a group called Life After Hate - felt that the state response was totally different in both Charleston and Oregon. Perhaps this wouldn't have been the case if the suspects were Muslims or people of colour, he observed. He also wrote a piece for *Radical Desi* last year, in which he had demanded that the Charleston massacre be treated as terrorism. He sees such selective approach as signs of growing Islamophobia and doublespeak.

McAleer's concerns are shared by many in Canada. Imtiaz Papat, a well-known community activist who advocates for the rights of religious minorities and the LGBT community, asks why the fear of terrorism is only raised when a Muslim is involved in violence? He pointed out that white supremacists like Tim McVeigh, who was responsible for Oklahoma bombing in 1995, have also been involved in terrorist activities. He thinks that this is done not only to create hatred against minorities, but also to divide people. He brought a group of protesters together in Vancouver to demonstrate outside Trump Tower. In a show of people's unity, he invited speakers from diverse backgrounds to speak in one voice. Among them were not only the LGBT people, but also Muslims,



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Christians, Jews, Sikhs and atheists. Indo-Canadian atheist leader Gurmail Gill also spoke on the occasion where Trump was criticized for his anti-Muslim rhetoric.

The attack on a Wisconsin Sikh temple in August 2012 left six people dead, but was not seen as a terrorist incident either. The gunman Wade Michael Page, who later shot himself, was a white supremacist. Yet the authorities and the Sikh leadership saw it as a case of mistaken identity. They believed that the turbaned and bearded Sikhs were taken as Muslims. The question of white supremacy being a terrorist ideology was lost in the debate over Sikhs being different from Muslims. Everyone was made to believe that this act was a result of ignorance. For many, the blame lies on Islamic extremists who were behind the 9/11 terror attacks and have made Muslims and Sikhs vulnerable to racial violence. Mimicking the authorities, the Sikh leadership emphasized their distinct identity to distance themselves from the Muslims. The reality is however different. The Sikhs too have been under constant threat in North America for years. Sikhs were targeted by the mob of white supremacists during the Bellingham riots in 1907. This suggests that the roots of hatred against Sikhs and Muslims go back a century before 9/11. North America has a long history of white supremacy and Neo-Nazi violence, not something

unknown to the authorities.

The situation in Canada is no different. In 1998, Nirmal Singh Gill, a caretaker at the Surrey Sikh temple, was murdered by Neo-Nazis. The Sikh community at that time was badly divided between two camps; moderates and fundamentalists. Immediately after the murder, a blame game started within the Sikh community. The moderate leaders blamed the fundamentalists for the murder, as the temple was under the control of the moderate group. Much to the embarrassment of the moderates, it was later discovered that the crime was committed by white supremacists.

McAleer visited the Surrey Sikh temple parking lot in 2012 to pay his respects to Gill and express his repentance for his murder. Though he had no role in the crime, he feels that it is his moral duty to take responsibility for contributing to hate propaganda in the past that led to violence against the people of colour.

Notably, an internal document of CSIS, the premier spy agency of Canada, warned last year that lone wolf attacks from white supremacists accounted for more than the ones coming from Islamic extremists. According to this, white supremacist ideology has been the main source for 17 percent of such attacks, as against 15 percent from Islamic radicals. This document was prepared in the aftermath of a "lone wolf

terror attack" at the National War Memorial in Ottawa that left Cpl. Nathan Cirillo dead in October 2014. The attacker, according to the authorities, was a radicalized Islamic extremist, though he had some mental health issues.

Then-Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper, who led the right-wing Conservative Party, responded sharply to the attack and continued to raise alarms about the growing threat to Canada from Islamic extremists. Many see some parallels between his election campaign last year and the one led by Trump in the US. Harper spoke very strongly against Jihadist terrorism, and his Conservative government went to the extent of barring Muslim women from covering their faces during the citizenship oath ceremony, in the name of security and Canadian values. There are indications that some white supremacist groups expressed their solidarity with the Harper administration through social media for talking tough on immigration and terrorism. In the end, Canadians voted him out and brought Liberals under Justin Trudeau to power.

### Looking beyond North America

The doublespeak on terror and violence is not just confined to this part of the world. A country like India that claims to be a secular democracy has repeatedly shown how it discriminates between terrorists from the majority Hindu community, and those belonging to minority communities, like Muslims and

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Sikhs.

India isn't a Hindu theocracy, but it is a Hindu dominated country which has a poor record of state sponsored violence against religious minorities. If the list of banned terror groups of India's National Investigation Agency (NIA) is any indication, it only sees Muslim and Sikh extremists, Maoists, and supporters of other nationality movements as potential terrorists. No Hindu extremist group involved in terrorism is on the watch-list, although the NIA itself has been investigating some of these high profile cases, including the Samjhauta Express blast. The Samjhauta rail service connects India and Pakistan, a Muslim-dominated neighbour of India. In February 2007, the train was bombed leaving 68 people dead. The majority of the victims were Pakistani Muslims returning home when the tragedy occurred. The incident took place on the Indian side. The Indian authorities almost instantly blamed Pakistan-based Islamic extremists for the incident. One of the arguments was that Pakistani extremists do not want peace between the two countries, but Hindu extremist groups in India have also been opposed to ties with Pakistan. Still, the investigation remained focused on the enemies on the other side of the border. It is widely known that Pakistan has been sponsoring terrorism and subversive activities in India, as the two countries have had hostile relations, but

India has never been immune to home grown domestic terrorism. Thanks to the objectivity of some police officers, the investigation unearthed the hand of ultra-Hindu nationalists in the Samjhauta blast.

This was certainly a very sensitive case, but not really unique. The involvement of Hindu extremists in some other bombing incidents was gradually revealed. In almost all these cases Muslims were the target. But due to the prevailing prejudices in the police force, Muslims were wrongly arrested as potential suspects and thrown in jails. To justify this, some officers argued that Hindu theocratic terrorism is a new phenomenon and part of retaliation against ongoing terrorist attacks by Islamic extremists. How far that is true can be understood from the fact that Mahatma Gandhi, the towering leader of the passive resistance movement against British occupation of India, was assassinated by Hindu extremists in 1948. Those involved in the Samjhauta blast and similar incidents subscribe to the ideology of the killers of Gandhi.

Gandhi's killers wanted to turn India into a Hindu theocracy, an idea which Gandhi opposed. He had also opposed the religious partition of Pakistan from India in 1947. That's why he was murdered after repeated attempts on his life. Ever since India gained independence, Hindu nationalists have been trying

to transform it into a Hindu state, using both violent and democratic means. It is therefore not surprising that under the current Hindu nationalist Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) government, the NIA chooses to overlook this form of terrorism. Already there are reports that some of those arrested for running a Hindu theocratic terror network are getting back door amnesty, and prosecutors are being advised to go slow.

As against this soft approach towards the supporters of a Hindu state, Muslim and Sikh extremists have been brutally tortured or eliminated by the police in staged shootouts. The so-called secularist Congress party, which had been in power for many years before BJP, also lacked the political will to sternly deal with the Hindu extremists.

A Congress government was in power in New Delhi when the Samjhauta blast took place. That government wanted to isolate Pakistan internationally, and tried to play down the involvement of Hindu extremists. Groups that used violence as a political tool in the name of Hindu nation were not included in the terror watch-list when Congress was in power. It is a separate matter that the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), a Hindu nationalist body of which the BJP is a political wing, was banned after the murder of Gandhi and accused of indulging in terrorist methods; that ban was subsequently revoked.

**Local repercussions**

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The discourse set by the powerful Indian establishment has at times influenced politics in Canada too. During the cold war era days when India sided with the Soviet Union, Canada and the US were on the other side of the fence. This was the time when Sikh separatists in North America gained legitimacy, partly due to human rights abuses in India, and partly due to the political considerations of US and Canada. Under these circumstances the Sikh separatists gained enough strength. The ugly political events of 1984 gave them a handle to beat the Indian state with. That year the Indian army invaded the Golden Temple Complex in Amritsar, the holiest shrine of the Sikhs, to flush out extremists who had fortified the place of worship. The military assault left many people dead and buildings inside the shrine heavily destroyed. This enraged Sikhs across the world. There were angry protests in Canada, where the Indian Consulate in Vancouver was vandalized. After Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi was assassinated by her Sikh bodyguards, well-organized mass murders of Sikhs began across India. The goons involved in the violence were led by members of the slain leader's Congress party. All these incidents culminated into the Air India bombing on June 23, 1985. Flight 182, with 329 people aboard, was bombed above the Irish Sea. The explosive device used in the crime originated from

Vancouver. The Sikh extremist group Babbar Khalsa was blamed for the episode. Its leader, the alleged Air India bombing mastermind Talwinder Singh Parmar, who was a Canadian citizen, was mysteriously killed in 1992 by the police in India, where he had gone to carry out political activities. Since the Air India days, India has continuously accused Canada of being soft on Sikh militants.

Parmar continues to be glorified by some followers among the supporters of a separate Sikh homeland. This has often enraged Indian agents in Canada and the pro-India lobby, but there is a complete silence over the continuous glorification of Nathuram Godse, the assassin

of Mahatma Gandhi. Emboldened under the BJP government, Godse supporters are openly demanding that his statues be installed across the country. Another ideologue of Hindu theocracy, Veer Savarkar, who was involved in Gandhi's assassination but was acquitted, has been given "fitting recognition" by the BJP.

The situation has certainly changed in the post 9/11 environment, even as India has become important ever since it adopted economic liberalization policies, opening doors for foreign investment. The bias of the Indian state in such a scenario can hardly be resisted by Americans or Canadians.

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In 2010, when a supporter of Sikh homeland advised two moderate critics of terrorism, Ujjal Dosanjh and Dave Hayer, to come to the annual Surrey Vaisakhi parade with their own security, it was interpreted as a threat. Dosanjh is a former BC Premier. He was once physically attacked for denouncing violence by the Sikh separatists. Hayer is a former MLA, known as a vocal critic of religious extremism. The statement by Inderjit Singh Bains, who was associated with the Dashmesh Darbar Sikh Temple that organizes the Vaisakhi parade in Surrey every year, resulted in a media backlash. Even then-BC Premier Gordon Campbell intervened and threatened to boycott the Surrey parade. But this wasn't the case when a rather more explicit threat of violence was made by a BJP supporter in Edmonton in 2015.

Gagan Vidhu had stated on social media that he would go and kill Gandhian activist Anna Hazare in India. He had also stated that he would be the next Nathuram Godse and kill this modern Gandhi. Hazare is an anti-corruption crusader and follower of Gandhi. He wanted to start a movement against the BJP government. This angered Vidhu, whose threat was virtually ignored; the mainstream media did not take notice, nor did any political leader come out with a statement. Pro-India community leaders who had once hosted Hazare during his Vancouver visit also remained

quiet.

Sometime ago, the Indian press reported that a Sikh man named Hardeep Singh Nijjar is running a camp in BC where Sikh separatists are getting armed training to carry out violence in Punjab. Interestingly, the Canadian media that generally avoids publishing stories without attribution picked up this controversial story, which had no attributions and seemed to have been planted by unnamed sources in the Indian intelligence. Nijjar is a Sikh activist who supports the demand for right to self-determination, but claims that he is not involved in violence. The authorities in BC have also rebuffed the report about a terror training camp.

It is pertinent to mention that Hindu nationalist leaders, who have been in the news for making controversial statements against Muslims, have also visited BC on several occasions, but this has never generated any curiosity in the mainstream media. They have a significant following in North America, but the mainstream

media in Canada still has to do a comprehensive investigation into their activities.

One can argue that since Air India tragedy is part of the Canadian narrative, any perceived threat from Sikh extremists is bound to be taken more seriously. Nevertheless, the Air India incident was a direct result of the situation in India, where violence against religious minorities has grown under the current BJP government. If any lesson from the Air India tragedy is to be learnt, the repercussions of the current violence cannot be ruled out in Canada, where groups like Sikhs For Justice have already sharpened their campaign for right to self-determination and demonstrated against visiting Indian politicians.

### **Majoritarian Democracies**

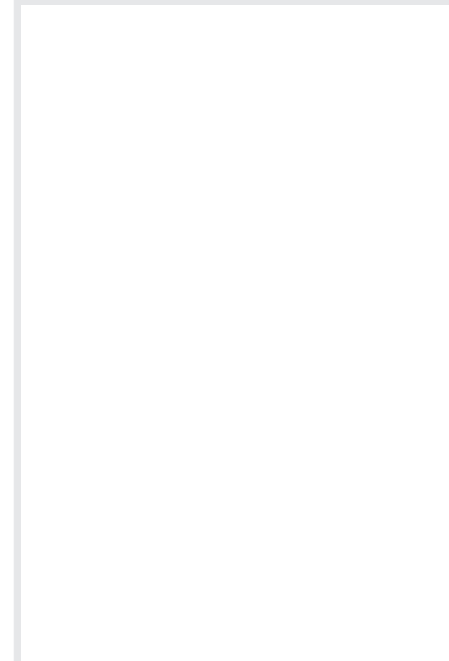
What binds all these stories across the world is that it is easier to pick targets from minority communities to win majority votes. That's what helped the current Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who was earlier the Chief Minister of Gujarat that

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witnessed an anti-Muslim pogrom in 2002. That violence, which was state sponsored, had helped Modi consolidate his power by polarizing Hindus in the assembly election that followed the carnage. The violence had followed the burning of a train carrying Hindu pilgrims. Over 50 people died in that incident, which was blamed on Pakistan-based Islamic extremists by the Modi government in Gujarat. Later, he rode to power in the 2014 general election with a brute majority, becoming the Prime Minister of a government led by RSS supporters. Modi himself is an RSS man, and once publicly opposed the arrests of Hindu extremists involved in the bombing incidents. He was also seen in the company of an ascetic involved in bombings. The Congress did the same in 1984, winning the general election with a heavy mandate in the aftermath of anti-Sikh violence. The election campaign was run on the plank of national unity after Indira Gandhi's murder by her Sikh bodyguards.

Clearly, the two victories of two major political parties of India at different times show that creating a fear of "others" can pay dividends.

It should not surprise anyone that Donald Trump is playing the same trick by creating fear of Muslims and immigrants. This explains why a little known group, Hindu Sena (army), organized prayers for Trump and celebrated his birthday in India. Their



justification was that only Trump has a determination to deal with "Islamic terrorism". It is often said that one nation's terrorist is other nation's hero, but nation-states have gone far enough to even discriminate between terrorists on the basis of religious and political beliefs. The root of the prejudice is more pragmatic than emotional. If suppression of minorities can create a false sense of security and assurance, opportunist political leaders won't shy from using such means to win the confidence of a majority in any democracy. Islamophobia is one of those constructs that has suited political leaders ranging from Modi to Trump, and this is at the bottom of double speak on terrorism. One illustrative example is sufficient to understand this politics. The BJP, which is known for talking tough on terror, has been seeking the blood of Muslim extremists

involved in terrorist incidents, but they supported the demand to give amnesty to Sikh militant Devinderpal Singh Bhullar, who was facing death row for his involvement in a 1993 bomb blast that left nine people dead. Bhullar's wife is a Canadian. BJP leaders here attended a Vancouver event organized in support of Bhullar. This is mainly because the BJP is sharing power with Akali Dal, a regional party of the Sikhs in Punjab. Akali Dal has also been seeking amnesty for Bhullar to win over the confidence of the Sikh majority in their state. The two parties have been in a political alliance, so for the BJP, supporting Bhullar becomes more meaningful than trying to contextualize the situation of extremists from minority communities, including Muslims. Consistency in dealing with terrorism in all its forms has become a real challenge, in a social environment which has become vicious due to divisive politics that can only be defeated through education of the masses about the complexities of the issues, and breaking racial stereotypes and fear of the unknown. In the meantime, the double standard on terrorism continues to benefit majoritarian terror groups, who can easily get melted into society without being questioned, allowing the authorities, the politicians and the media to collectively decide: who is a terrorist and who is not?

-RDNB



## Remarkable similarities between Ambedkar and Ali

Gurpreet Singh

**T**he passing away of legendary boxer Muhamad Ali last month coincides with the 125 years of the birth of Dr. Bhim Rao Ambedkar, a towering scholar and social justice activist of India.

Though it is a pure coincidence that Ali died during the year when Dr. Ambedkar's legacy is being celebrated world-wide, the two individuals share some similarities in their fight against injustice. That both stood against the convention and populism will always be remembered by the masses.

Dr. Ambedkar, affectionately remembered as Baba Sahib by his followers, was an architect of the Indian constitution, known for his continuous struggle against caste-based oppression and gender discrimination in Hindu society.

He himself was born in the Dalit or so-called untouchable community in 1891, and had endured discrimination first hand by the upper-caste Hindus. Despite many challenges, he rose up to become a great scholar. He had many roles to play in the years to come: an educationist, a lawyer, an editor, an elected official and above all the leader of the oppressed communities.

He was born under British-

occupied India. While the mainstream political leadership of his country was busy fighting against foreign occupation, he devoted his time and energy on the fight against injustice within Indian society. Unlike him, the mainstream leadership lacked political will to eradicate the caste system, but was more inclined to drive out British rulers. For this reason, Baba Sahib was not very popular among them, and often he would be accused of working against the collective interest of the Indians. In spite of such

attacks, he proved himself to be a true defender of the untouchables and instilled among them self-confidence. He strongly believed that unless his compatriots are allowed to break themselves free from the chains of social slavery, real freedom would not come.

He also refused to be a part of the freedom movement, on the suggestion of a towering leader of the nationalist movement while he was studying in the US. He remained a staunch critic of Mahatma Gandhi, the leader of

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the passive resistance movement, for not doing anything meaningful to eradicate casteism.

He courageously fought against untouchability that was practiced by Hindus in the temples and other public spaces that remained out of bounds for Dalits. In his writings and speeches, he even challenged Hinduism and its scriptures that legitimized caste system, without compromise.

He organized agitations to force the temples to open the doors for Dalits, and to let them use water from public wells and ponds. He also burnt the Hindu texts that promoted the caste system.

He announced that though he was born Hindu, he would not die as a Hindu. True to his words, he embraced Buddhism before his death. That action itself was a statement against brutality of the Hindu society.

In free India, the mainstream leadership accepted him as the sole representative of Dalits, and gave him an opportunity to draft the constitution that bars untouchability and guarantees religious equality and freedom. But it had its own limitations; Baba Sahib once had to say that it was not according to his own desire, and he would not shy from burning it.

However, his tireless efforts yielded many positive results for Dalits. He died in 1956.

Much like Ambedkar, Ali also endured discrimination because of his race. Born in 1942, his original name was

Cassius Clay. He grew up in a racially segregated environment in the US. As Baba Sahib was once denied a haircut by a barber because of his caste when he was very young, Clay was also denied water at a store because of being black.

As he grew older, racism continued to trouble him. On one occasion, he was refused service at a "whites-only" restaurant. As a protest of this humiliating experience, he threw his Olympic gold medal into Ohio river.

When the US was involved in the Vietnam war, Clay refused to be conscripted by the military. He said, "Why should they ask me to put on a uniform and go 10,000 miles from home and drop bombs and bullets on Brown people in Vietnam while so-called Negro people in Louisville are treated like dogs and denied simple human rights?"

In the mid-1960s, he embraced Islam and became Muhammad Ali, stating that Cassius Clay was his "slave name". That he resisted joining the army during

Vietnam war and changed his religion to break away from the slave identity shows he was no different than Baba Sahib when it came to walking against the current. These actions of the two warriors evoked a backlash from the right wing forces.

The joint legacy of both Baba Sahib and Ali is relevant even today, as racism and caste system refuse to die. Instead, the establishments in both India and the US are trying to appropriate these individuals, who have become larger than life, in an attempt to dilute their radical impact on people of the oppressed communities.

In India, the current right-wing Hindu nationalist government has left no stone unturned to appropriate Ambedkar and distort his teachings to confuse people, whereas in reality they have nothing in common with Ambedkar's philosophy. They only want us to remember him as the architect of the Indian constitution. This helps them in eliminating the real Ambedkar and appropriating him to woo Dalit voters at the same time. Similarly, Ali's championship and boxing skills will always be part of the popular discourse in US that showcases blacks with success stories, but his radicalism will never be embraced as part of the mainstream narrative.

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## Petition launched seeking statutory holiday for National Aboriginal Day

**J**ennifer Sherif, an indigenous activist and educator, has launched a petition seeking a statutory holiday for National Aboriginal Day. Last month, the 20<sup>th</sup> National Aboriginal Day was observed on June 21. While Prime Minister Justin Trudeau participated in the sunrise ritual and wore the buckskin

jacket of his father, the late Pierre Trudeau, Sherif announced the online petition through Change.org. The demand is picking up as many indigenous activists want a statutory holiday on the occasion so that people can reflect on indigenous struggles, history and culture. For the supporters of the

demand, the mere declaration of National Aboriginal Day goes nowhere in educating people and helping them participate in various events held across Canada to raise awareness, unless they have a day off to attend them. Radical Desi supports this demand and would encourage its readers to sign the petition.

## Two murders shock Indo-Canadian community

**T**wo murders have left the Indo-Canadian community shocked in Greater Vancouver.

Amar Singh Sandhu, a prominent businessman and Sikh activist, was shot to death in Richmond on June 4.

Sandhu had been active in local Sikh politics, and was seeking votes for the slate that is going to challenge the moderate Sikh group which is in the control of the Ross Street Sikh temple in Vancouver in the upcoming temple election this fall.

Within a week, while the community was still in shock, Sukhvir Deo, a former

gangster from Vancouver, was shot to death in Toronto. Deo was the nephew of Sohan Singh Deo, a former president of the Ross Street Sikh temple. Deo is part of the moderate group.

The violent deaths of two individuals connected with rival temple groups within such a short span of time left many wondering whether they have to do anything with temple politics, but the temple leaders strongly deny such speculations and want the community not to listen to rumours. As of now there are no definite clues about motives or suspects.

-RDNB

## Kimball Cariou bereaved

**R**adical Desi editorial team member Kimball Cariou lost his father last month.

85-year-old Mark Cariou breathed his last on June 2 at Powell River Hospital. He was ill after suffering a major stroke.

*Radical Desi* would like to take a moment to pay condolences to the bereaved family.



## Sikh veteran and antiracist champion Pritam Singh Jauhal dies

**A** prominent Sikh Second World War veteran who fought for his right to wear turban in a Royal Canadian Legion branch in Surrey has passed away at the age of 95.

Retired lieutenant-colonel Pritam Singh Jauhal not only stood for the religious rights of his own community, but also against the previous Conservative government's discrimination against Muslim women who wore the niqab (veil)

Jauhal shot to prominence in 1993 when he was prohibited from entering the Newton Legion on Remembrance Day. At the time, the establishment wouldn't allow turbaned Sikh veterans on the premises.

Legion officials insisted that Jauhal and other Sikh veterans who had served the British Empire in the Second World War could only come in after removing their turban as rules forbade veterans from wearing headgear.

This was despite the fact that female veterans from England were allowed to go in wearing their berets.

Jauhal wrote a letter of protest to the Newton Legion detailing the sacrifices made by South Asian soldiers during Second World War in a bloody fight against the Nazis. He also wrote to the Queen of England, who is the constitutional head of Canada.

Following the support Jauhal received from mainstream allies, the Legion was forced to apologize and amend its policy.

Jauhal also received threats from white supremacists for raising the issue. During these difficult times, his wife died after suffering a cardiac arrest.

When Jauhal moved to Surrey in 1980s, he had to hear racial taunts, like "Paki Go Back."

In 2013, he told his story in his memoir, *A Soldier Remembers*, and was given a standing ovation at the launch of his book. Among

those in attendance were former elected officials who supported him in the 1990s, and the event turned into a celebration of his life.

Last year when the Conservatives banned Muslim women from covering their faces during the citizenship oath ceremony, Jauhal re-emerged in the public eye to say that the rules must be amended to accommodate their religious freedom, much as rules were changed for the turbaned Sikhs in Canada.

The issue polarized Canadian voters during the federal election campaign last year. So much so that turbaned Sikh Conservatives, including then federal minister of state for multiculturalism Tim Uppal, saw nothing wrong with the ban.

**-RDNB**

## One man's struggle against sexual exploitation of women

Gaurav Shah

**Y**ear 2010. One dark night and one lifetime strange and saddening experience.

While struggling days in Mumbai, I had to live in sharing apartments with different people. Some good and some bad.

One night a few other guys dropped in, basically my other room mate's friends.

They wanted to go to Juhu beach.

I was asked to accompany and I love nature, so beaches, mountains and jungles always attract me. It was late at night, but I said yes.

However, that was not a good decision. I experienced a situation which I had only heard in news or seen in movies.

They took the autorickshaw to a point where I could see many other autorickshaws all together, with 2-3 females in each, and every auto will stop in front of you if you are on that particular road stretch.

Rest story cut-short, they were all prostitutes, and those guys wanted to spend their night with them, which was totally against my character and I was pretty much annoyed with it.

I ended up making one female as sister, and gave her Rs.250/- in a situation where I had only Rs. 800/- in my account, rent was paid but it was just the beginning of the month and it was expensive city "AAMCHI" Mumbai.

Well I did at the moment, what I felt was good, and after that incident I actually had more respect for those females who are into that profession.

Coming back to present now, just heard super star Salman Khan giving a statement, "While shooting, during those six hours, there'd be so much of lifting and thrusting on the ground involved. That was tough for me because if I was lifting, I'd have to lift the same 120-kilo guy 10 times for 10 different angles. And likewise, get thrown that many times on the ground. This act is not repeated that many times in the real fights in the ring. When I used to walk out of the ring, after the shoot, I used to feel like a raped woman. I couldn't walk straight. I would eat and then, head right back to training. That couldn't stop."

Well India is a democratic country and everyone has right to speak but at the same time we can't forget our culture and our values. Most importantly "HUMANITY"

When I combine both these incidents then I came up with this story.

Almost 1,400 traffickers have had cases filed against them and many are rotting in jail, thanks to Ajeet Singh who has been waging a war to free minor girls from their clutches.

Ajeet Singh was just 18 when he attended a wedding in his home town near Varanasi in 1988. It was here that he saw a nautch

girl performing at the wedding.

"The way people were looking at her and treated her both shocked and saddened me". It was then and there that he decided to do something to free girls like her from such a profession.

This was not just a passing thought that Ajeet had that day. When the girl finished her performance, Ajeet went up to her and asked if he could take care of her children and give them an opportunity to study and lead a better life.

Ajeet Singh was still in his teens when he realized what he wanted to do.

It wasn't easy for an 18-year-old boy who was still in his first year of college to take on such a big responsibility. But Ajeet didn't think twice and actually adopted the three children of the girl.

"Of course this decision was not welcomed by my family or society." He faced huge opposition from everyone.

He then went ahead and started teaching the children in his spare time and helped them come up with life goals that would take them far away from the dark streets on which their mother lived.

In addition, he started going to the red light areas of Varanasi to teach the children of the women who worked there. But he soon realised that the problem was much more complex than he had thought.

"The whole profession and system are so complex that

## GAURAV'S GOODY BAG

providing mere education to the kids or spreading awareness about health, HIV, etc., cannot solve it. The issue is slavery and the need to abolish the system of sex trafficking. It is only then that girls can be saved to lead better lives,"

Ajeet thought it was time to take a more aggressive approach. This is when he started an organization called "GURIA" in 1993 to fight against the sexual exploitation of girls, especially minors. What these girls needed was freedom and he was here to help them.

Ajeet prepared himself to take on the racket. He got a few hidden cameras in his pen, shirt button, watch, etc. and started to pose as a customer, only to track the locations of red light areas and the number of minor girls there.

Once he had done the mapping, he collected a large number of volunteers and raided the Shivdaspur red light area of Varanasi. They managed to rescue 15 girls in one day.

Since then he has conducted raids on all the red light areas of Varanasi and rescued over 1,000 girls so far.

Ajeet organizes many campaigns and rallies to spread awareness about the issue of human trafficking.

Once the girls are rescued, they are sent to government shelters and homes and, after counselling, sent back to their parents. A close track is kept on their activities to make sure they do not end up back in the same situation.

After he started rescuing the girls, Ajeet decided the next step was to take on the pimps and

brothel keepers who played a key role in the prostitution racket. "Even the police did not do anything".

So, apart from rescuing girls, Ajeet started taking legal action against the sex traffickers. Through his organization, Guria, he has filed about 1,400 cases against traffickers and has even landed many of them in jail.

Guria's work does not end with just filing cases against the traffickers. The organization also tries to ensure that those who have been convicted do not get bail. The team works intensively towards the bail rejection of such convicts. Over 400 such bail requests have been rejected due to Guria's intervention.

"Often, these traffickers who get bail come out quickly and start doing what they did earlier. We make sure they stay in jail for a long time. Some of them have been in jail for about four to five years now,"

Another area of focus is to get the rescued girls to the court for trials. They are provided witness protection, helped with mock trials, provided counselling, and encouraged to speak up about the wrong that has been done to them. Over 108 girls are currently being protected and hidden at various locations to get them ready for trial.

Guria also helps in rehabilitating the rescued girls and teaching them various skills so they can switch to other professions.

Guria is working to prevent trafficking, especially of minor girls.

Educational workshops and awareness campaigns are among the other initiatives of

Guria. "Their idea is not just to provide one-time support. These girls are like children. Children just cannot be provided with clothing or food. You have to give them overall support. This is what they do for these girls,"

He has been attacked so many times and given death threats. Even his family did not support him. A lot of people raised question about his work but he was determined to save the lives of these girls.

Ajeet wants to make sure that no girl is forced to enter the dark profession of sex trade.

Also, the network of brothels is so complex that many girls always speak in favour of the brothel keepers.

"They are brought up in that environment, they are scared and never speak against them. When it comes to minors, they don't listen to them and sometimes have to pull these girls out of the brothels,"

With a team of 25 members and hundreds of volunteers, Ajeet continues his mission to eliminate this profession entirely from the streets of Varanasi. He gets support from CRY and individual donations, which help him conduct rescue operation and organise various workshops. In the future, Ajeet wants to continue with his mission to make sure no girl is forced into this dark profession.

***To listen to Gaurav Shah's good story every morning Monday thru Friday, tune in Spice Radio 1200AM Band at 8:45am. Also Listen to his entertainment program Spicy Chah With Shah from 10-12 pm on the same frequency.***

### Remembering Panditji

**T**his month marks 110<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary of a great Indian revolutionary, Chandra Shekhar Azad.

Affectionately known as Panditji by his comrades, Azad was born on July 23, 1906 in British occupied India.

Though his ancestors hailed from Uttar Pradesh province, he was born in Jhabua, Madhya Pradesh.

His father Sitaram Tiwari was a Hindu Brahmin who had a dairy in Jhabua. Due to a drought in 1912 he lost some cows, because of which he found a job in a state owned garden.

Azad grew up in an environment where most of the people in the area belonged to a tribal class that survived on meagre sources and forests. The exploitation of these people was rampant. Azad was fond of roaming around in the forests and loved hunting with bows and arrows like the tribals.

His father was a man of integrity and never accepted favours or bribes. He did not even let his children pluck flowers from the garden under his supervision.

These early childhood experiences must have helped in shaping his ideas for a just society.

Once he beat up his teacher with the same cane that he used to spank his students with whenever they made mistakes. That teacher was

beaten by Azad for giving incorrect information during a class test. By doing so he stunned his father. This was probably the first sign of revolt coming from young Azad.

While Azad acquired discipline and self-esteem from his father, he learnt to be compassionate from his

of the working people living in big cities and learnt about their difficulties first hand. However, he became disinterested in continuing to live that kind of life and went to Varanasi, an important religious city of the Hindus, to learn Sanskrit.

He reached Varanasi in 1921.

It was here that he became wedded to the cause of the freedom movement. He first participated in the civil disobedience campaign that encouraged Indians to buy local produce and boycott foreign goods. As a result of this campaign he was arrested and flogged. He identified himself in the court as Azad, which means the one who is free, and faced the flogging with courage. Since then he came to be known as Chandra Shekhar Azad.

He was given a heroic reception by the people for such a daredevil act. This brought him in contact with radicals who believed that the freedom of India could only be achieved through an armed uprising. He subsequently joined the Hindustan Republican Association, which believed in revolutionary methods and wanted to establish an egalitarian society in post-British India.

The organization later transformed itself into the

mother Jagrani. He was not only a determined fighter, but a kind hearted human being.

As he grew older he moved to Bombay, the financial capital of India, to earn his livelihood. Here he worked as a ship painter. Being a Brahmin he was initially reluctant to share food with people from other caste groups, as caste prejudices were very strong at that time. But soon Azad gave up his caste biases and started dining with others. Slowly he picked up the proletarian ways

## RADICAL HISTORY OF THE MONTH

Hindustan Socialist Republic Army (HSRA). Azad due to his commitment became its Commander in Chief. The HSRA participated in major actions, such as political robberies and assassinations. They believed in looting the government treasury to finance their struggle. Azad was also particular about not exposing himself for the sake of donations. On one occasion he was approached on behalf of an influential woman admirer, who wanted to meet him and offered to give a donation in person, but Azad declined the request, saying he did not believe in behaving like celebrities.

Azad was very shrewd in maintaining secrecy. He knew how to disguise oneself to avoid arrest, and lived like an ascetic on some occasions. He never thought of getting involved in romance, and once refused to accept the advances of a widow while staying underground. He frequently used to say that his life companion is his pistol and he would rather marry death.

He was strictly vegetarian, but never imposed his ideas on his comrades and never minded dining with them. He once helped a Muslim friend in arranging for the marriage function of his daughter.

On many occasions he stood for the underdog. Once he beat up a man who often used to beat his wife after getting drunk. On other occasion he fought with a money lender who was bothering a poor worker for not paying back debt on time.

Azad was fond of revolutionary songs and used to hum, "In an independent India, the masses will have enough food to eat, clothes to wear and house to live in."

His kindness can be gauged from his reaction to events leading to the assassination of a British police officer in 1928.

A junior police officer of Indian heritage died while trying to save him. Azad mourned his death. In fact, Azad was part of the action. He had advised him to keep away, but since the officer was adamant, Azad shot him at non-vital organs, like upper thighs and groin. However, he died due to excessive bleeding and delay in medical help. Azad was pained at the death of a compatriot in the line of duty.

But Azad daringly owned up to the murder of the British officer on behalf of his organization, which brought out a pamphlet stating that the slain police officer was the representative of a cruel institution.

When some anti-people draconian laws were introduced by the government in the national assembly, the HSRA decided to send two comrades to throw non-fatal bombs during the session, and surrender to use courts as a political platform to outreach the masses with their mandate. Bhagat Singh and B.K. Dutt were two men who were sent on this mission. Since Bhagat Singh was involved in the murder of a British police officer who was assassinated in 1928, Azad was worried that he may be

tried and executed in that case. Though he did not want him to go, a joint decision by the HSRA had left him with no choice but to dispatch Bhagat Singh for the operation. The HSRA thought that since Bhagat Singh was a well-read person, he could articulate better about the party program during the trial.

Once Bhagat Singh was arrested, Azad tried to rescue him but could not succeed.

Azad died in a fierce battle with the police on February 27, 1931. The same year Bhagat Singh and his two comrades were executed on March 23.

While Azad is no more, his legacy remains alive and relevant. His fight for a just society still goes on. The tribals in India continue to be exploited. The poor workers continue to grapple with inflation and shortage of food. Religious intolerance has grown under a right wing Hindu nationalist government in India. While Azad never imposed his vegetarianism on others, supporters of the current government attack people for eating beef. Attacks on Muslims have also increased. Police brutality still goes on to suppress the voice of dissent, and anti-people laws continue to be adopted in the world's so-called largest democracy. Azad and his comrades believed that their fight will carry on as long as exploitation of man by man continues. It is time to keep their struggle alive instead of paying them symbolic tributes.

-RDNB



## Your Death Echoes

Sant Ram Udasi

**T**here will be no day like this,

There will be no night like this.  
Instead of you, we receive the news of  
your death.

I see the moon  
Shining in the skies.  
Oh the wisest! You are no more,  
I can see you singing.  
O the people!  
The wolves won't better your destiny.  
There will be no day like this,  
There will be no night like this.

I see the sun  
Clearing the mist all around.  
The wicked insect pervading the air  
Eats whatever comes across it.  
The clusters of stars foretell that  
The light is going to dawn.  
There will be no day like this,  
There will be no night like this.

O dear, why weep on my death?  
Take up swords and rise up!.  
Let us challenge the God who  
Ordains the birth of kings.  
Today we have to bow to destiny,  
To live our lives.  
There will be no day like this ,  
There will be no night like this.  
Instead of you, we receive the news  
of your death.

*Sant Ram Udasi was a revolutionary Punjabi poet. This poem was dedicated to Bujha Singh, a former Indian freedom fighter who later joined the ultra-leftist Naxalite movement for the sake of oppressed classes and landless tillers. He was killed in a staged shootout by the Indian police on July 28, 1970. Originally written in Punjabi, this poem was translated by Satnam and has been reproduced here to mark the martyrdom day of Bujha Singh that falls this month.*



