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Cover Picture : Michael Moore, a prominent US filmmaker and commentator, displaying sign to show his solidarity with Muslims who are being hounded under Trump.

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RADICAL
DES

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

United We Stand

March 21 marks the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. Though we all continue to celebrate it every year, this time it has become even more relevant in the light of growing racial violence under newly elected US President Donald Trump, whose anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim rhetoric has vitiated the social environment right across North America. Emboldened by his overtly racist views, white supremacists and supporters of alt-right movements have intensified their hate propaganda right in our own communities. These actions culminated in the massacre of six people at the Quebec City mosque on January 29 and the murder of Indian immigrant Srinivas Kuchibhotla in Kansas

on February 22. Kuchibhotla was taken as Iranian by the suspect. Though racism has impacted all people of colour, Muslims are today being hounded more than others in this part of the world. Islamophobia has become synonymous with racism. Trump has complicated the matter by ordering a travel ban on people coming from six (originally seven) Muslim countries. Even though so-called Islamic terrorism also affects Muslims, populist political figures like Trump have a tendency to paint the entire Muslim community with one brush. This is being done to use fear against others to win elections and retain power. We all need to stand up against this and show our solidarity with Muslims. It is unfortunate that a section within the immigrant communities has internalized racism, and rather than challenging those attacking Muslims, often tries to distance itself from Muslims and continues to hold its own prejudices against Islam. Particularly, several Sikh groups have frequently emphasised that they are different from Muslims following racial violence targeting turbaned Sikh men taken as Muslims in the US. They have probably forgotten that the Sikhs were also subjected to similar racial stereotypes back in the 1980s, when the Sikh separatist movement was at its peak in India. Rather than distancing yourselves from Muslims, we urge the Sikh leadership to stand in solidarity with Muslims. Sikhism also teaches us to stand up for others. Balbir Singh Sodhi, the Sikh gas station owner who was murdered by a white supremacist in Arizona following 9/11, and Kuchibhotla, a Hindu, were both taken as Muslims. We need to get united and fight against hate instead of seeing Islam as the root of the problem. The racists really don't care which community you belong to. All they know is that you look different and do not belong here. They don't even want to know how Sikhs or Hindus are different from Muslims. Muslims are just the scapegoat. The anger is directed at all immigrants and people of colour. Never forget that in 1998, long before the Quebec City mosque massacre, white supremacists had killed Nirmal Singh Gill, a caretaker at the Surrey Sikh temple in BC. In August 2012, a lone white supremacist murdered six people at a Sikh temple in Wisconsin. In February 2015, two Hindu temples were vandalized in Seattle. In June 2015, an attack on the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston left nine people dead. Synagogues have been targeted countless times across North America. This clearly shows that all communities and their religious places have been targeted by followers of racist ideologies. The indigenous communities, blacks and other immigrant communities have endured this pain for years. Then white liberals, women and LGBT people have also been on their hate list. It is time to form broader coalitions to fight back against this growing tide of racism and bigotry. Pressure should also be built to isolate politicians like Trump internationally. We must also bear in mind that he is not the only leader promoting bigotry. Human Rights Watch has rightly pointed out in its reports that populist leaders in North America and Europe are trying to create divisions that lead to human rights abuses. One of them is Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who represents the Hindu nationalist Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP). Under the BJP government religious minorities, particularly the Muslims and Christians, are being forced to live in fear. Modi himself has been creating divisions between different communities. Not surprisingly, many of his supporters in the US are fond of Trump, and worked hard during his election campaign. Modi also admires controversial historical figures who drew inspiration from Hitler and Mussolini, and always wished to transform India into a Hindu theocracy. There are many like Trump and Modi everywhere, including in Canada, and we all need to remain vigilant and work together to defeat their nefarious designs.

-Editors.

Islamophobia

Racism of a new kind

Shortly after the January 29 shooting at a Quebec City mosque that left six worshippers dead and nineteen others injured, media across North America reported that two suspects had been rounded up, including a Muslim man. US-based right wing Fox News channel went to the extent of speculating that this could be another terror attack

committed by Islamic extremists. The basis of their assumption was that the man was of Moroccan origin, and that Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau had described the attack as an act of terrorism. So much so, a section of the media reported that one of the attackers had shouted, "Allah Hu Akbar". Hours later, the police clarified that the Muslim man wasn't a

suspect, but rather a witness. However, the damage was already done. Consumed by anti-Muslim prejudices, media and observers had made a false judgment leading to massive misreporting. To their embarrassment, it turned out that the only suspect was a white nationalist who hated Muslims and immigrants. Welcome to North America, a land of Islamophobia, where a

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hated immigrants. His postings on social media had captured the attention of several people, who found him as someone who liked Trump and other right wing nationalist political figures, such as Le Pen of France, who is known for her anti-Muslim views. The only charges are six counts of first degree murder, five counts of attempted murder, and keeping a restricted firearm, despite the fact that his act was dubbed as terrorism by none other than Trudeau. Some feel that had he been one of the Muslim community

he would have been charged with terrorism.

Not only were the early signs of a possible hate attack ignored, the crime was initially blamed on Muslim extremists. Islamophobia was visible at every level.

That Quebec is a hotbed of anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant alt-right nationalists isn't something unknown.

In October 2016, right-wing groups came together to protest against Islamic terrorism outside the Quebec National Assembly. They carried a banner that read; "Death to terrorists, Islam

Out". They were obviously targeting the growing number of Muslim immigrants in the province under the guise of an anti-terror campaign.

Notably, on March 1, barely a month after the Quebec City shooting, Concordia University in Montreal received death threats targeting Muslim students. As a precaution, several buildings were evacuated.

A self-styled underground group named Council of Conservative Citizens of Canada (C4) had sent the threat letter to different media outlets. It clearly read, "Now

that President Trump is in office south of the border, things have changed.”

Hisham Saadi has been charged for inciting fear of terrorism and issuing death threats.

But such incidents aren't confined to Quebec. The problem exists in other parts of the country as well.

Almost at the same time when Concordia University came under threat, an arson was reported at a mosque in Toronto.

All these brutal incidents followed the appearance of racist flyers in different

communities from the east to the west coast. Muslims and other immigrant groups were repeatedly targeted in these flyers, some of which were distributed by the Ku Klux Klan in BC.

An increase in such incidents was noticed ever since Trump got elected last November. During his election campaign, he frequently targeted Muslims, and promised to ban their entry into the country once he came to power. Keeping his words, he ordered a ban on visitors from seven Muslim nations; after that initial ban was overturned by

the courts, he issued a new directive with slightly narrower criteria, targeting six countries (dropping Iraq from the initial list).

Anti-racism activists see a direct link between the recent violent incidents and Trump's politics, which according to them has emboldened white supremacists and supporters of alt-right movements. The Trump administration denies this, and was on the defensive following the murder of a man of Indian origin in a hate crime in Kansas on February 22.

Srinivas Kuchibhotla and his friend Alok Madasani, also an

immigrant from India, were at a bar when Adam Purinton, a 51-year-old Navy veteran, confronted them and asked them to "get out of his country". He later came with a gun and shot the two men, leaving Kuchibhotla dead. An American who tried to intervene and save the two men was also injured in the shooting.

Purinton, who is charged for the crime, had reportedly told a bartender that he thought the two men were Iranian. In other words, he suspected them to be Muslims.

Not only did Trump remain silent, his administration called it "absurd" to link the killing with his rhetoric. But the White House did condemn the incident.

Roots of Islamophobia

Many believe that Islamophobia or perceived fear about Islam has its roots in the 9/11 attack that was blamed on Islamic extremists.

On September 11, 2001 hijacked planes were used to bring down the World Trade Center buildings in New York. The attack had left about 3,000 people dead. This was followed by a spate of hate attacks on Muslims and turbaned Sikhs who were taken for Muslims.

Those who have been following racial violence in North America however differ. They think that racial prejudices against those who look different have always

prevailed in this part of the world, and the roots of Islamophobia go back to times much before 9/11 when Muslims started immigrating to the western countries. For them it has always been one of the many dimensions of racial hatred directed towards people of colour and those who practice religions other than Christianity.

After all, white supremacy has always questioned anything that isn't Eurocentric ever since North America was colonized. First the indigenous communities, later the Africans who were brought across the Atlantic as slave workers, and then other immigrants, including Jews, Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims, were all harassed over one pretext or the other. Anything from poor economy and unemployment to national security became a ready tool to beat these groups with.

For the record, almost 20 years before Quebec City mosque was attacked, white supremacists killed Nirmal Singh Gill, a caretaker at a Sikh temple in Surrey, BC in January 1998. Gill was an immigrant from India who had come to Canada to support his family, including a disabled son.

In August 2012, a lone white supremacist shot and killed six people at a Sikh temple in Wisconsin.

In February 2015, two Hindu temples were vandalized near

Seattle.

In June 2015, an attack on worshippers at the historic Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal church in Charleston by another white supremacist left nine people dead.

Synagogues across North America have been attacked countless times.

From the pattern, one can conclude that racism has always been there and has affected both Muslims and non-Muslims, with their worship centres targeted by racists in different communities. Perhaps the 9/11 episode only intensified Muslim bashing, which has gotten even more acceptance under Trump. Some believe Muslims are just a scapegoat, while the real anger is over growing numbers of immigrants from all over the world, with a common complaint being they are taking away jobs. It only takes leaders like Trump to exploit this anger to win elections.

Others argue that Islamic extremists involved in violence across the world are themselves to be blamed for growing bias against Muslims. But in many of the terror attacks in Muslim-dominated countries, including those on Trump's travel ban list, it is mostly Muslims who are the victims. Followers of Sufism and moderate Muslims are frequently targeted by more radical Islamic terror groups, yet the Islamophobic

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politicians try to paint the entire Muslim community with a single brush. For this reason, not everyone agrees with Trump's blanket ban on visitors from the Muslim countries. The Trudeau government in Canada has rather opened doors for immigrants from those nations.

Then there is evidence to suggest that radical Islam was once promoted by the US itself against the Soviets, during the cold war era in Afghanistan. It was only later that the two sides fell apart on many issues. Trump's anti-Muslim

statements in the light of a series of terror incidents blamed on Islamic extremists might have resonated with a section of ordinary frightened voters, but wasn't convincing for people who still remember how his own Republican Party had endorsed radical Islam in its fight against "communist expansionism". The growth of Islamic extremism can be traced back to that time period, but those who have fallen into Trump's trap overlook this inconvenient truth.

Internalized racism

In October 2016, shortly

before Trump was elected, he was invited to speak at an event named Humanity United Against Terror, held in New Jersey. Organized by the Republican Hindu Coalition (RHC), the event was apparently used to target Islamic terrorism. Speaking at the event, Trump categorically said, "We can't have prosperity without security and that's why we appreciate the great friend India has been to the United States in the fight against radical Islamic terrorism." Then he went on, listing the number of terror attacks frequently blamed on





government, amidst thunderous applause. In complete agreement with the narrative of the Indian state, he mentioned that India has seen first hand the brutality of terrorism from across the border and called it outrageous. "We will defeat radical Islamic terrorism. When I am President we will stand shoulder to shoulder with India", he asserted while Shalli Kumar, the founder and president of RHC, who shared dais with Trump, applauded in appreciation.

Separately, Kumar in his

Pakistan-sponsored terrorism in India. He tried to convince the gathering that only Trump is determined to declare Pakistan a terrorist state, and to stop the military funding the country gets from the US.

Kumar accused the outgoing Democratic President of paying lip service to India by organizing Hindu festivals at the White House, while continuing military aid to Pakistan.

It is a separate matter that Pakistan is not among the seven Muslim countries on Trump's travel ban list.

US ally, and was instrumental in the creation of Islamic extremists in Afghanistan to fight against the Soviets.

Intriguingly, Kumar admitted that he once supported Democrats and grew up admiring John F. Kennedy. He changed his mind in 1979 after coming in contact with Ronald Regan, who inspired him by speaking about winning the cold war. He went on to say that he is proud of his conservative values, and proud to be a Hindu. Drawing parallels with the Jewish community, he noted that

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Hindus too have sustained the threats of radical Islam.

To ensure Trump's victory, Kumar and others coined the slogan; "Ab Kee Baar Trump Sarkar" (This time, Trump administration) in Hindustani for the Hindi-speaking audience. The slogan was popularly used by Narendra Modi during the election campaign that culminated in his spectacular win to become Indian Prime Minister in 2014. Modi represents the Hindu nationalist Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP), known for its anti-Muslim bias and hawkish position against Islamic terrorism and Pakistan, a hostile neighbour of India.

Before becoming Prime Minister, Modi was the Chief Minister of Gujarat, which witnessed an anti-Muslim pogrom in 2002. Human rights activists and eyewitnesses continue to allege his complicity in the massacre. Though he was never convicted, the US had denied him visa in the past because of the violence. Kumar, a big fan of Modi, had been trying to get visa for him, which he finally got after being elected as Prime Minister.

Obviously, the RHC wanted to ensure that Trump got maximum votes from the Hindu community in the US, and thus the entire messaging of Trump supporters influenced by Modi's narrative paid them dividends.

Not surprisingly, a rabid Hindu group called Hindu Sena

celebrated Trump's birthday and held prayers for his victory while he was still running for the office in New Delhi. Its members described Trump as saviour of humanity from Islamic terrorism. As the news of his victory came in, they gathered again to celebrate in India.

These seemingly comical incidents show that even though Hindus have also been target of racial violence in the US, there is a lack of empathy toward Muslims among the right-wing Hindu leaders. Ironically, the BJP government strongly condemned the murder of Kuchibhotla, as others protested against racism and Trump in India at the time of his cremation.

A section within the Sikh community has also been trying to distance itself from Muslims in an event of racial violence. Several Sikh groups had been emphasising that they are different from Muslims since the time of 9/11. Particularly after the murder of Balbir Singh Sodhi, a Sikh gas station owner, by a white supremacist in Arizona following 9/11, a full blown campaign was started to educate mainstream about the difference between Muslims and Sikhs.

In both cases; the murders of a Hindu and a Muslim were seen as instances of mistaken identity by killers looking for Muslim men.

A lack of united resistance against hate crimes from all

the communities impacted by racism only reveals underlying prejudices against Muslims within the immigrant communities.

With Muslims under the microscope of the big media and populist leaders, immigrant communities like the rest of their targeted audience also get carried away by the stereotypes about Islam. Since public memory is short, they often forget their own experiences with racism. A case in point is that of the Sikh community that also came under microscope during the 1980sm, when a Sikh separatist movement was at its peak in Punjab, India. The 1985 Air India Flight 182 bombing that left 329 people dead was blamed on Sikh extremists based in BC. As a result, the Sikhs were subjected to racial profiling. Still, a section within the Sikh community remains indifferent towards Islamophobia.

Whether Islamophobia is a new phenomenon or not could be debatable, but that it is a form of racism cannot be denied. The worst hit are hijab-wearing Muslim women, who are targeted at different levels, for being women, for the colour of their skin, and for their religious belief. With Trump's election and the rise in white supremacy along with internalized hatred within the immigrant communities, it has become synonymous with racism.

-RDNB

Racism disguised as paternalism: the case of Senator Beyak

acist ideologies can take many forms, depending on the historical circumstances of the societies concerned, the personal views of individuals, and other factors. In some cases, few would argue that racism exists. For example, only the most bigoted white supremacists attempt to argue that the trans-Atlantic slave trade was somehow in the best interests of the millions of Africans kidnapped from their homelands to perform brutal unpaid labour in the plantations of the western hemisphere. Similarly, South African apartheid is almost universally condemned as a racist system which denied non-Whites any meaningful human rights, let alone social or economic equality. But even in these cases, there are still a handful who claim that some Blacks benefitted from the slave trade and apartheid, thanks to the "generosity" of the masters who provided meals or limited access to schools or Christian churches.

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Such are the views of racists who still believe that non-whites are child-like creatures in need of "guidance".

Some of these racists are die-hard segregationists, struggling to prevent so-called "race mixing" in order to preserve the mythical "purity" of the "white race" - in defiance of scientific knowledge that the concept of a "pure race" is utter nonsense. Others believe in the "assimilationist" strategy - that the best way to "improve the downtrodden races" is to

help them overcome their backwardness by discarding their shameful dark-skinned status and becoming just as "white" as "mainstream society."

The latter is essentially a paternalistic ideology, dividing society into the superior white category and the inferior peoples who need to accept the "benefits of civilization". Within the context of the history of the Canadian colonial state, this ideology has been the prevailing view of the ruling class for centuries,

and elements of such thought remain deeply embedded in Canada to this day. This was the thinking behind the push to make Canada a "white man's country," which included a range of infamous laws targeting immigrants from China, India, Japan and other Asian countries.

The "white man's country" ideology began by depriving indigenous peoples of their traditional territories and other forms of genocide. When such efforts failed to wipe out the indigenous peoples, other

tactics were developed, notably the Indian residential school system, which was intended to "take the Indian out of the child" by removing entire generations of children from their homes, punishing them for speaking their own languages, and "educating" them to become "Canadians like everyone else."

After many years of resistance, indigenous peoples finally succeeded in achieving at least partial apologies and compensation for the genocidal residential school system. But true to their views that First Nations, Inuit and Metis peoples are "inferior," some apologists for the residential schools continue to claim that despite some problems, these institutions "helped" students to obtain the benefits of civilization. And after all, they say, many of the students were not sexually abused or starved or beaten or left to freeze in drafty dormitories. The majority survived their experiences in such schools, learning to read and write English and become good Christians - so why all the fuss? Sadly, this is the view expressed by Conservative Senator Lynn Beyak, who (according the CBC and other news outlets) "mounted a defence of the residential school system for Aboriginal children in the Red Chamber (on March 8), lamenting that

the good deeds accomplished by well-intentioned religious teachers have been overshadowed by negative reports documented by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission."

Having spoken to some indigenous people who are members of Christian churches, Beyak praised the residential school staff, "whose remarkable works, good deeds and historical tales in the residential schools go unacknowledged for the most part." She had nothing to say about the findings of the Commission, which found physical, mental and sexual abuse was rampant, and that at least 6,000 children died while in care because of malnourishment or disease. Instead, she expressed disappointment that "the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's report didn't focus on the good." In her view, that included learning "valuable teachings about Jesus and the Gospel."

Not surprisingly, Beyak is also a big fan of Pierre Trudeau's 1969 white paper on Indigenous issues, which proposed doing away with the Indian Act, treaties and eliminating a distinct legal Indian status.

"The leaders of the day called it 'forced assimilation,' but I don't believe that was Trudeau's intent," she said. "I think he just wanted us to be

Canadians together. The concept was to trade your status card for Canadian citizenship ... it was brilliant and revolutionary."

Of course, for those who see European ethnic origins and white skin colour as the ultimate marks of higher status, it is always "brilliant" to tell others that they should just become "white like us." And it is never a good idea to pay any attention to the opinions of the child-like brown people, is it Senator Beyak?

Some racists send in the military to slaughter indigenous peoples who get in the way of capitalist progress. Others establish concentration camps to murder "non-Aryans" by the millions. And some, like Senator Beyak, proudly flaunt their superior status as the guiding fundamentalist Christian parents of non-white peoples. In the end, they are all advocates of a chilling ideology of white supremacy. Senator Beyak should be compelled to resign immediately. Instead, she will likely continue to receive her annual salary of over \$145,000 (plus benefits) courtesy of Canadian taxpayers for spreading these poisonous views.

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



Racism and RSS

ot many people would know that the governing party of India the so-called largest secular democracy of the world is an offshoot of a right-wing Hindu nationalist organization that sees controversial figures like Hitler and Mussolini as their role models. The Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) is a political wing of the

Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh (RSS) whose founders idealized both fascism and Nazism. As we gear up to celebrate International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination this month, there is a need to have a candid conversation on the agenda of the RSS and the BJP government, under which attacks on religious minorities,

particularly the Muslims and Christians, have grown. The RSS was founded in 1925 with a mandate to establish an exclusionist Hindu nation. It was started as a cultural outfit dedicated to the cause of establishing a Hindu theocracy. The volunteers were encouraged to take physical training. Interestingly, the group was formed under British-occupied

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India, but remained aloof to the freedom struggle that was more inclusive and secular in character. Since the time of its foundation, RSS has always seen India as the land of Hindus, while Christianity and Islam are foreign religions. Other minority faith groups such as Sikhism and Buddhism have always been seen by them as part of the Hindu fold. The BJP later came into being as a political arm of the RSS, with a mandate to transform India into a Hindu state through electoral means. Many prominent BJP leaders are members of the RSS. Among them is Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who was the

Chief Minister of Gujarat when an anti-Muslim pogrom broke out in that state in 2002. The violence began after a train carrying Hindu pilgrims caught fire killing more than 50 passengers. The Modi government blamed the incident on Muslim fundamentalists. He reportedly asked the police to look the other way and let Hindus vent their anger in case there were protests in the streets. Though Modi was never convicted for the violence, human rights groups and the survivors continue to allege his complicity. For this reason he was denied visa by many countries until he got

elected as Prime Minister in 2014.

Much before 2002, the BJP government in Gujarat was also accused of inciting anti-Christian violence, while Sikh settlers from Punjab in Gujarat state also became targets of attacks around 2014. The so-called untouchables within Hindu society also came under vicious attacks of the Hindu extremists in Gujarat in recent months.

RSS founder Keshav Baliram Hegdewar and his ally BS Moonje were greatly impressed by the fascist regime of Italy. In fact, Moonje, who was the mentor of Hegdewar, had visited Italy

in 1931. Not only did he meet Mussolini, he visited important military schools and the fascist academy. Following in the footsteps of the fascist government, RSS began recruiting young boys who were given physical training. Likewise, VD Savarkar, another prominent Hindu supremacist leader who had an influence over the RSS, was an admirer of Hitler. Savarkar had earlier participated in the freedom movement, but later quit after seeking pardon while serving jail time. He did not agree with those who saw Hitler as a "human monster". He rather noted that Nazism proved the saviour of Germany. He even went to the extent of supporting Hitler's anti-Jewish genocide and saw in it a solution for the "Muslim problem" in India. For these leaders, Hindus happen to be Aryans who belong to the national race of India, while Muslims and Christians are aliens whose sacred lands are located far away. Besides, the RSS also believes in the brutal caste system and orthodox Hindu texts that subjugate women as inferior. When India was divided on religious lines in 1947, the year it gained official independence from the British, the RSS cadres indulged in violence against Muslims to drive them out to fledgling Pakistan. Mahatma Gandhi, the

towering leader of the passive resistance movement against the British, was assassinated by one of the supporters of RSS for denouncing partition of the country and standing up for Muslims in 1948. As a result, the RSS was briefly banned. Savarkar was also arrested in connection with Gandhi's assassination, but acquitted for lack of evidence. As things stand today, the RSS continue to enjoy impunity under Modi's government. Modi has acknowledged that he is indebted to the RSS. In some of the provinces ruled by the BJP, officials can also join the RSS drills. Significantly, Modi has publicly appreciated Savarkar, whose portrait is now installed inside the Indian parliament. That the RSS and the BJP supporters believe in ethnic cleansing became clear in the number of violent incidents targeting Muslims and Christians across India during different times. The RSS even justified the anti-Sikh massacre in 1984 following the assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi by her Sikh bodyguards. Gandhi had ordered a military attack on the Golden Temple complex, the holiest shrine of the Sikhs, to flush out religious extremists who had fortified the place of worship. Massive damage to the buildings inside the shrine and many deaths had enraged the Sikh

community. The so-called secularist Congress party of the slain leader was involved in the anti-Sikh violence, which the RSS tried to rationalize by blaming the Sikh leadership for inviting the violent reaction. Only recently it was found how tribal girls are being taken away from their poor and vulnerable parents in the North-eastern states and sent away to the RSS-run schools in other parts of India for religious indoctrination. These girls are made to give up their tribal culture and adopt Hindu rituals. The method is no different than one that was once implied by the Indian Residential Schools (IRS) in Canada, to "kill the Indian within the child" by Christianizing them. The racist history of the IRS is now being repeated by the RSS in India. The world needs to wake up and see which way India is heading, before considering free trade and business with it. Under the BJP government, India not immune to becoming an outright fascist state, despite its glorious history of pluralism and diversity. It is only a matter of time until the Modi government amends its constitution to turn into a Hindu state.

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 those who fought for the right to vote

This month marks the 110th anniversary of the disfranchisement of Indian immigrants in BC.

The then Conservative government of the province disfranchised Indians on March 27, 1907, as part of its racist policies to keep Canada as a white man's country.

Indian immigrants had started coming to this part of the world for better livelihoods as British subjects. Since India and Canada were both part of the British empire back then, many Indians believed that they would be treated fairly if they moved to another part of the empire. However, the blatant racism in Canada disillusioned many.

Often white workers would feel threatened by migrant workers who were willing to work at the terms of the employers. This reduced their bargaining power, as a result of which they began intimidating Indian immigrants. The Conservatives began formulating discriminatory laws to discourage immigrants from permanent settlement. Not only were they barred from bringing their families to

Canada, a conspiracy was also hatched to relocate Indians to British Honduras. Legislation was brought to disfranchise them as part of this policy. Incidentally, race riots targeting Indian immigrants

also broke out during the same year in the US city of Bellingham, very close to British Columbia.

Community leaders got united to fight back against this injustice. One of them,

Hussain Rahim was arrested for voting in 1912 to challenge this law. Rahim had been in the forefront of many other struggles for equal rights to the immigrants. He was one of the ideologues of the social

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justice movement who was associated with socialists. He was also instrumental in roping in the Sikh temple leaders in the fight for the right to vote.

Eventually with the support of progressive trade unions, the community leaders won back the right to vote in 1947. It took the community elders 40 years to win the fight to get this legitimate right.

The victory was important in terms of empowering Indians in Canada. Today politicians of Indian heritage have a significant presence in the Canadian parliament and different legislative assemblies, as well as local governments. Those who are now enjoying the fruits of

freedom and equality.

As BC heads for elections on May 9, South Asian voters should take a moment to remember this part of our history. They should not only respect the right to vote, but also think of voting wisely and electing people and parties that are good for the society. They should never come under any wrong influence to elect corrupt and greedy politicians who only think about the rich and ignore the needs of the poor and the working people.

There is also a need to reflect upon the current voting system. To make it more meaningful and accountable, we need to take the struggle of our elders further and fight for electoral reforms. It's a shame

inclusive proportional representation system, and also a right to reject, with a "None of the Above" option on the ballot paper. The system of recalling elected officials should also be made more effective.

Lastly, while we celebrate the victory of our community elders, we also need to recognize that the indigenous peoples of Canada were the last ones to get the right to vote in this country in 1960. This is despite the fact that they are the original inhabitants of this land mass and all others are settlers. This recognition is an important reminder that racism and occupation continue to prevail in the lives of our indigenous



Neetu Arora

Dreamer

They think

I am a dangerous woman
Women
who do not use cosmetics
who do not wear bangles
who, instead of jewellery,
buy books
are dangerous.

In their bags
you will not find
combs and mirrors
but they keep

pen and paper
Such women are really dangerous.
They think
I am a dangerous woman
They spy on me
They search every corner of my house
Not finding anything precarious
they leave my house empty handed.

They just miss
my eyes
This one spot is not searched
The only spot
where I keep my dreams
in hiding.

Neetu Arora is a progressive Punjabi poet based in India. Originally written in Punjabi, this poem was translated by Vivek Sachdeva and has been reproduced here to mark International Women's Day which falls on March 8th.

