

WORKERS, FARMERS, AND SOCIAL PHILOSOPHERS: THE RISE OF SOCIALIST
ACTIVITY IN COLONIAL PUNJAB AND NORTH AMERICA, 1906-1926

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Abstract

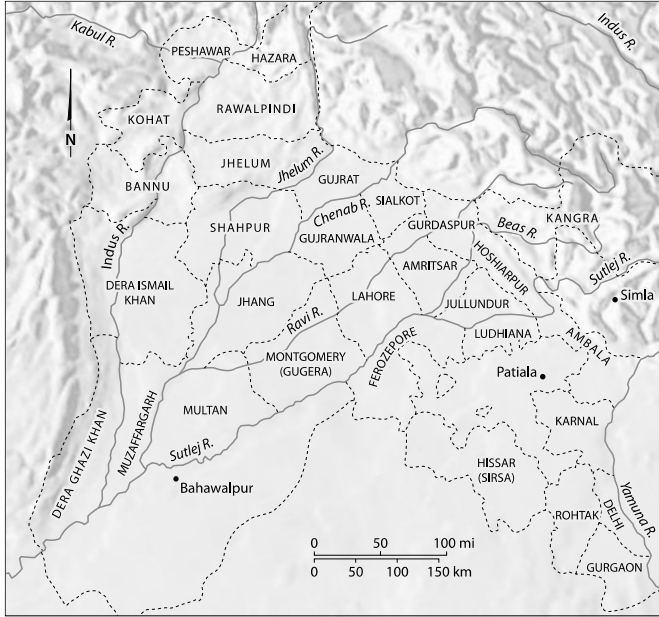
My project attempts to historically trace how socialist and revolutionary forms of politics arose in colonial Punjab from the period 1906-1926. The wave of migrant Punjabi laborers to the Pacific West Coast at the turn of the 20th century is crucial to analyzing the socioeconomic origins of diasporic nationalist politics. Agrarian unrest, collective labor coalitions, and Sikh values contributed to the poetic and martyr-centric ethos of the proto-socialist party Ghadar. The analysis of the formation and development of the Ghadar Party relies on historical work done at the Bancroft Library archives, specifically the *South Asians in North America, 1899-1974* collection. As opposed to the prominent historiography situating the Ghadar party into the trend of anti-colonial cosmopolitanism, a more critical evaluation of the sources demonstrates how local conditions and mentalities shaped the production, reception, and distribution of Ghadar literature and activity. The radical methods utilized by the Ghadar Party to contest imperial barriers, citizenship, and the role of labor in society differentiated them from the contemporary pan-Indian political coalitions. These methods included socialist experimentation between intellectuals and workers and the militarization of organized action. A potential sphere for future research is the cultural integration and evolution of the Ghadar's legacy in Punjab's post-colonial political life.

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MAP 4. The districts of British Punjab, ca. 1880.

Gilmartin, *Blood and Water*, p. xiv

INTRODUCTION



Punjabi Sikhs working on a railroad camp somewhere on the Pacific West Coast, undated.¹

In a letter to Charles Van Wyck Brooks, the prominent Indian intellectual of the early 20th century Har Dayal wrote “You may try to get into close touch with them [workers] as men and women and not merely as students. Incidentally, you may note a few facts about working-class psychology (social). That’s a question we must study before we can organize a movement successfully.”² The sufficient conditions for social reorganization lay in the workers’ consciousness for Har Dayal. As a student of philosophy at Oxford and a public lecturer on anarchism in California, his popularity gained him the status of a quasi-mythic political figure due to his ascetic practices and unorthodox social attitudes. Only under such provocative guidance could his working-class followers gravitate to the radically polemical beliefs he espoused at labor halls, farms, and universities. One could say his philosophical thought balanced modernity and tradition as a scholar of Buddhism on the one hand and studying Plato, Kant, and European social philosophy on the other. However, confining Har Dayal’s career to a dialogue between the East and West reduces the cross-cultural political and sociological dimensions of his thought. The political frame of his thought shared vast similarities between

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¹ Berkeley Archive, BANC PIC 2002.183, AX BOX/BOX 23 #11.

² 1. Letter by Har Dayal, December 23, 1913, Ms. Coll 650, Folder 716, Van Wyck Brooks papers, Kislak Center, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA.

societies across the East-West dichotomy in which the peasant or worker is continually subjected to cultural, economic, and social oppression. Har Dayal condemned the peasant's inferior status within the repressive social structure and sought to rediscover and reconstruct the primacy of peasant labor for the sake of cleansing India of her crude cultural past. The method employed by radical revolutionaries of reclaiming the peasant and worker as central to India's imagined national identity is a signature method used by anti-colonial and anti-authoritarian movements across the globe. The adoption of Marxist-Leninist political frameworks following the Russian Revolution of 1917 enabled Indian nationalists to mobilize workers and peasants through state-specific parties funded by the Communist International, an organization founded by Vladimir Lenin to advocate for a global communist movement fighting against the national bourgeoisie in each participating country.

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Before the explicit avowals made by Indian communists to the Bolsheviks, a movement developing on the western Pacific shores of North America before the start of the Great War laid the groundwork for radical coalitions between workers and intellectuals to form a revolutionary nationalist politics. Yet, the story of how this formation of politics occurred bears numerous unassuming traits. Punjabi peasants with previous careers as soldiers or police officers in India and stations across East Asia came to Canada and the United States in search for higher paid work. These turbaned, dark-skinned men faced exclusion by the white population, leading to a series of legal battles that irrevocably politicized their ethnic identity. The Orientalist paranoia of the white working-class people won the attention of politicians and contributed to the cementation of racial biases into law. The hopes of earning a living wage in British Columbia became an impossibility due to the attempts by the government to deport, resettle, or extradite the Indian laborers, who were primarily of Punjabi descent.

Those who managed to pass immigration inspection and get a job doing seasonal work initially lived a squalid and unpredictable life due to poor housing conditions and mounting race riots. Fear and anger rose to peak levels in the years 1907-1911 as the American economy also suffered from a financial crisis. On the other hand, democracy offered privileges unavailable under British colonial rule. Political freedoms to discuss social issues affecting the community, speak with members of neighboring ethnic communities, and catch up on events happening in India created networks unavailable in a society at home governed by strict censorship codes enforced by colonial authorities, from the canal colonies to the local banks. While social and economic freedoms increased to some extent for the Indians residing in North America, the political question of a *free* India remained unresolvable. Around the same time, Indian nationalists came to North America as political refugees and attempted to stir up this question through radical means. Liberating India gradually became a psychological itch for the diasporic Indian communities who developed a sense of national solidarity beyond caste, creed, and class in North America.

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One of the major factors in mobilizing ordinary Indians in North America was the Ghadar party, a diasporic nationalist party founded in 1913 in the ethnically diverse city of San Francisco. The center of this thesis is the Ghadar party. Specifically, each chapter sets about answering questions about the Ghadar party not only as a strand of revolutionary nationalism, but a social phenomenon and a dynamic model employed by Punjabis to respond to political and agrarian crises. The author takes the opinion that the social condition of a people cannot be disregarded when discussing their political sentiments and ideals. The first chapter will analyze the social and economic conditions of Punjabi agrarian life and how legal and administrative changes enacted by the colonial regime disrupted these conditions, triggering social unrest.

Nationalist leadership briefly emerged on the rural and urban fronts during this period. However, the quick suppression of all forms of agitation under the false accusation the social unrest was a conspiratorial plot of urban nationalists prevented an enduring resistance movement to take hold among the people. The second chapter is the centerpiece of the entire thesis as it traces the history of the Ghadar party, starting with the migration of laborers to the Pacific West Coast. Immigration is an issue of immense social and economic significance for the Punjabi laborers who encountered exclusionary practices and laws as soon as they reached the border. This experience differed from students and intellectuals who had greater ease integrating into society since the anti-Asian beliefs often intersected with class prejudice. The thriving backdrop of radical activity on the West Coast facilitated Indian nationalists to gain popularity for their revolutionary prints, oftentimes supported by Irish-American radicals. Issues of social, ideological, and political importance shaped what would become the Ghadar party. The question of who founded the Ghadar party uncovers tensions relevant to historians studying socialist and communist movements: the dichotomy of worker and intellectual leaders. Beyond this dichotomy, the literature produced by the Ghadar party and the socialist-aligned thinking put into real practice led to the formation of a revolutionary politics. The last chapter will examine the case of the *Komagata Maru* – a Japanese steamship that chartered 376 passengers from the Punjab province to immigrate to Canada - as a crucial turning point for Indian nationalism. The expansion of British judicial and policing powers in response to domestic riots and geopolitical concerns led to the repression of leftist radicals in Punjab during the Great War. Consequently, many radicals associated with the Ghadar movement traveled to Soviet Union to carry on their educational training. Specifically, they sought to rethink the concept of revolution through

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Marxist-structured pedagogy that emphasized revolution as naturally springing up from the social order rather than attained by artificially planned force.

One major question guiding this thesis is: What drove the formation of a revolutionary politics in North America among a community of Punjabi Sikh laborers? A supplementary question is: What factors and incentives led to cross-class public participation in a nationalist movement? Answering these questions allows for deeper understanding of the socioeconomic consequences of agrarian crisis, the culture of socialist politics, and the trend of violent radicalization in Punjab, still apparent in the conflicted political landscape of modern-day Punjab, India.³ Though discussions on the Ghadar movement are usually confined to the framework of Indian nationalism, the movement also contributed to regional identity-building, new forms of socialization, and radical principles on the relationship between the community and state. Therefore, in addressing the questions about the political formation of Ghadar and other socialist-leaning organizations in the 1910s and 1920s, it is also important to situate the developments of the movements in a broader context of social relations between Indians that extended after independence and in no way were resolved after the departure of the British.

The rise of socialist action in colonial Punjab and North America emerged initially due to ethnic solidarity built between Punjabi Sikh laborers in cultural spaces. Intellectuals who came to America to seek political refuge appropriated and voiced radical critiques on the conditions of laborers in North America and redirected the grievances of laborers towards British imperial silence, exclusion, and suppression. Though historical and intellectual influences were

³ After partition, Punjab was split between India and Pakistan. Since the major actors in this thesis are Hindu and Sikh, the relevance of the Ghadar movement is primarily in Punjab, India. However, further research may reveal additional connections with Punjab, Pakistan especially due to the secular nature of the movement. Nevertheless, partition and the rise of nationalism across the globe led to increasing identification with religious identity in post-colonial India, as demonstrated by the Khalistan movement today.

interwoven into the variant ideological stances of the Ghadar leaders, the lack of a coherent ideology points to the power of psychology in its premature stage of resistance. So, the role of revolutionaries was to *make the unthinkable thinkable* rather than create a coherent ideology for the laborers to strictly conform to and reproduce. The performative and literary productions in this era of Indian nationalism in the context of labor radicalism, anarchism, and print production in the United States represented political concerns of how to achieve a psychological revolution in the working-class, as mentioned in Har Dayal's letter and implied in a myriad of his other writings. The cross-class and public nature of participation in the Ghadar movement, though declining in the post-war era and surging again after communist coalitions formed, allowed for experimentations in social organization. Such experimentation was not possible where roles were rigidly kept by custom and British administrative techniques. Finally, the political and religious aura encircling Ghadarite martyrs created an ultimate ideal for the next generation of revolutionaries in post-war Punjab who inserted the Ghadarites into a tradition of radicals, communists, and anarchists as opposed to incarnations of Sikh gurus. Their deaths symbolized the perfection and paradise of an independent India. The psychological, experimental, and self-sacrificial components of the socialist revolutionary currents in Punjab engendered a form of radical politics intended to bridge the divide between the classes and castes of Indians inherited from ancient to colonial times. Yet, it failed to project this politics into a practical and viable form of governance through a modern Indian nation state lurking on the horizon. Instead, the influence of Ghadar may be seen by the continuing politicization of agrarian problems and the militarization of identity groups in Punjab.

The historiography of the Ghadar movement is generally uniform on the question of its origins, though some secondary sources place marginal value on the historical development of

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the movement. Harish Puri's groundbreaking text in the field situates the movement in the context of socioeconomic factors shaping the movement and ideas of the future Ghadar members, who were predominantly rural Jat Sikhs.⁴ A thorough discussion on this sociocultural identity will be found in Chapter 1. Harjot Oberoi expands on the motives for immigration in his article by including the construction of transcontinental railroads and a boom in the lumber industry in America and Canada, transmitted to these rural men most likely by flyers put up by steamship companies.⁵ Similarly, Johanna Ogden places emphasis on American perceptions of the Sikh Ghadar members, namely the continuous exclusion of them, to historicize the notion of belonging experienced by migrant.⁶ Puri links the ethos of the Ghadar movement to the heroic tradition of self-sacrifice, a culturally significant tradition for followers of the Sikh religion. The most famous contemporary work on the Ghadar party is Maia Ramnath's *Haj to Utopia*.⁷ Out of all the secondary sources listed, her work gives the least attention to the historical development of the movement and focuses on inserting the movement into a framework of transnational anti-colonial radicalism. Her narrative briefly touches upon the socioeconomic and cultural origins of the North American Sikhs, since her first chapter titled "Ghadar in America" indicates to the reader where the said author believes the history starts. Seema Sohi's *Echoes of Mutiny*, though technically not centered around the Ghadar movement but anticolonial radicalism in North

⁴ Harish K. Puri, *Ghadar Movement: Ideology, Organisation and Strategy* (Amritsar, India: Guru Nanak Dev University, 1993).

⁵ Harjot, Oberoi. "Ghadar Movement and Its Anarchist Genealogy." *Economic and Political Weekly* 44, no. 50 (2009): 40–46. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25663888>.

⁶ Johanna Ogden, "Ghadar, Historical Silences, and Notions of Belonging: Early 1900s Punjabis of the Columbia River," *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 113, no. 2 (2012): [Page #], <https://doi.org/10.1353/ohq.2012.0018>.

⁷ Maia Ramnath, *Haj to Utopia: How the Ghadar Movement Charted Global Radicalism and Attempted to Overthrow the British Empire* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2011).

America, pins down labor and political migrations as the major cause of anticolonial politics arising among diasporic Indian communities.⁸

The ideology of the Ghadar movement is typically the focus of the scholarship. Puri's reappraisal of the ideological origins and writings of the Ghadar movement is robust, partially due to his political science background. He innovatively applies the dichotomy of traditional and organic intellectuals, originally theorized by Antonio Gramsci, to the two forms of leadership that arose with the foundation of the Ghadar party. However, the passive application of this dichotomy appears to situate the lives of the workers in synonymous mental and physical spaces of the intellectuals. His major contribution to the analysis of the party's ideology, which he defines as a framework of consciousness, is the use of the vernacular by the *Ghadar* newspaper and other types of literature produced. Almost all revolutionary journals prior to *Ghadar* wrote in English since the writers thought the ideas of revolution could only be understood by university-educated intellectuals. By expanding access of radical political thought to Punjabi laborers who could not read English, ideas of revolution spread to the masses and won their approval. The unorthodox ideological background of Har Dayal is an area of great interest among scholars. Emily Brown's biography is the most notable contribution to this field in recording the different places he studied and the writings he produced there. Oberoi's article targets certain beliefs as central to his philosophy: the abolition of government, internationalism, and the total emancipation of women, along with views in alignment with Bakunin and Kropotkin that there are no laws of history constraining human volition. Ramnath's work marks a sharp turn in Indian historiography by incorporating a framework of cosmopolitanism and internationalism into the trajectory of anti-colonial movements of the early 20th century, in alignment with authors like

⁸ Seema Sohi, *Echoes of Mutiny: Race, Surveillance, and Indian Anticolonialism in North America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

Kris Manjapra and Ali Raza. The book prioritizes the words and sentiments of the members of the movement itself to show how they radically constructed utopian visions of the future in racially and economically adverse environments. The pragmatic aspects of the ideology and its complicated relationship with British surveillance and repression are almost entirely disregarded. There is also a multitude of ideological jargon used to describe the Ghadarites - which includes a sizable number of illiterate farmers - as internationalist, secularist, syndicalist, republican, anticapitalist, and militantly revolutionist. If there existed historical evidence outside of the self-praising testimonies of the Ghadar leaders to prove the movement acted with such strong yet variant ideological tendencies, then such an assessment would be justified. However, this is not the case, and the author falls into a trap of generalizing the transient doctrines of a singular member to the entire movement. Also, it distorts the nature of radical activity as a direct product of ideology rather than depending on the degree of cross-class participation central to the party since its inception.

Gerald Barrier, Hugh Johnston, Joan Jensen, and Seema Sohi are four historians who conceptualize politics as implicated in the political schemes of anti-radical governments. Overall, I tend to gravitate toward this view and temporarily use their methods and findings to gain a deeper understanding of the formation of radical politics. This view opposes the cosmopolitan and utopian trend that yearns to purify and reify the political ideologies of anti-colonial leaders rather than situating politics in a dialogue with social issues, the colonial apparatus, and economic constraints interwoven into all political action. As an example, Sohi and Johnston include letter correspondences between British officials and informants in their histories of Indian nationalism to uncover the effects of surveillance, color prejudice, and immigration policy

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on the trajectory of the nationalist movement.⁹ These factors can also influence the development of a radical consciousness within Indian diasporic communities because ideas of self-determination may be unintentionally implanted by immigration or imperial authorities rather than intellectuals. How a political idea gains force may be unknowable given the number of factors acting upon one political movement during one period.

Finally, the transnational dimension of the Ghadar movement is disputed in the historiography. Recent scholarship tends to overestimate the scope of transnational activities and the responsiveness toward an internationalist framework of radicalism. The idea of transnational rhetoric and utopian visions in the new scholarship erases the quotidian aspects of reality by embellishing the worker retroactively with ideological constructs. The Punjabi laborers who travelled to America in the early 1900s never consciously shunned the norms of agrarian life, so it is erroneous for Ramnath to equate the mentalities of Indian laborers and students, who received a progressive education from the University of California, Berkeley. Additionally, the frequent references to non-Indian revolutionary struggles in the *Ghadar* literature is not evidence that the Ghadar movement operated within an internationalist framework. Almost always the references serve to criticize the British empire: in other words, the local enemy of Punjabis' livelihoods, land, and freedom. Connections formed between ethnic communities in North America can be interpreted locally without illogically relying on the disputable fact of the transnational, imaginative, utopian minds of anti-colonial radicals. The least convincing part of the internationalist argument is involvement in conspiracies that extended from North America to East Asia to Europe. Ramnath's account relies on two sources with biased incentives to fit into

⁹ Hugh J. M Johnston, *The Voyage of the Komagata Maru: The Sikh Challenge to Canada's Colour Bar*, 2nd ed. (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2008); Hugh Johnston, "The Surveillance of Indian Nationalists in North America, 1908-1918," *British Columbia Studies*, no. 78 (1988): <https://doi.org/10.14288/BCS.V0178.1288>.

her framework: a Ghadar revolutionary's testimony who admires the global scope of nationalist activities taken by the party and two Punjabi police inspectors' account that accumulated evidence to incriminate the Ghadar party of destabilizing the empire during the war. Outside of these two accounts, there is little evidence to suggest the Ghadar members, mostly consisting of illiterate farmers, participated in schemes involving communication with German diplomats. Puri sees the Ghadar movement's involvement in the Indo-German conspiracy confined to three projects, mostly carried out by students or intellectuals. The radical consciousness brewing among the Ghadarites aimed to overthrow British colonial rule and establish a fair society for Indians, not to join wartime espionage projects with foreign diplomats who supported the Indian nationalist cause to increase the power of their own empire.

I will briefly elaborate on my contributions to the historiography. The historiography of the Ghadar party often focuses on the anti-colonial revolutionary heroism of its members and the role of contingency in the years leading up to its official formation. The trajectory of a radical organization like Ghadar is part of a much larger history of labor, immigrant, and nationalist radicalism surging around the globe and across national borders. The fact that Ghadar incorporated a variety of strands into its movement does not mean it escapes the definition of a traditional organization, which some scholars have recently adopted. With this intellectual shift in the scholarly community, seemingly invented terms foreign to the era take on more significance than the contextual relations underpinning the formation and ideology of Ghadar. "Cosmopolitan" and "utopian" are examples of terms used to describe Ghadar and other early anti-colonial revolutionary movements of Indians, which serve to insert the movement into a

special category rather than explain or reconstruct the historical period and lived experiences as such.¹⁰

This thesis aims to contextualize many of the sources commonly and uncommonly used to analyze the Ghadar movement. Historically valid interpretation is key to using a source in its most relevant significance and avoiding the conflation of modern-day social tendencies with historical ones. Primary sources undersused and understudied by the contemporary historiography are economic surveys. The three economic surveys I use are by Malcolm Darling, E.D. Lucas, and Rajani Kanta Das. These surveys of Punjabi agrarian workers living in Punjab and North America provide necessary context of the social, cultural, and economic practices and relations and their adaptation to foreign institutions and ways of life. The context is tied to the core argument because the formation of a revolutionary politics in North America depended on a unique and dynamic social hierarchy. Newspaper articles are useful repositories for information concerning major events and the perceptions of Americans and Canadians toward Indian immigration, however they are less effective at describing the experiences of the diasporic Indian communities.

Primary sources directly pertaining to the Ghadar movement include letters written by Har Dayal, memoirs by leaders including Sohan Singh Bhakna and Bhai Parmanand, translated *Ghadar* articles and poems, and government accounts of the movement. A more critical eye is given to revolutionary and government accounts that tend to weigh the most subversive forms of radical activities as the most important. Other primary sources written from the perspective of someone outside the party and not antagonistic toward it provide the least skewed version of the activities of the Ghadar movement. An example of this type of source is an interview given by

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¹⁰ Prominent scholars in this trend include Maia Ramnath, Kris Manjappa, and Ali Raza.

the wife of the second editor of the *Ghadar* paper, Padma Chandra. The interpretation of sources differs from previous scholars' interpretations that at times exhibit a teleological or a moralistic bias by inserting the movement assertively into a utopian nationalist framework and endowing all nationalist activity as praiseworthy and a model for modern-day political theories. In this thesis, more attention is given to how the sources explain the changing relations between classes and social groups rather than to construct a clear ideology out of the performative doctrines produced by the party. Due to the innumerable historical, social, and political influences woven into most documents concerning Indian radicalism in North America, a coherent ideology is almost impossible to be extrapolated. Thus, this thesis will not have as satisfying a conclusion as a "utopian vision" or "anti-colonial rebels" to describe the Ghadar movement. Instead, the Ghadar movement should be interpreted as a significant development in Indian radical politics for its capacity to incentivize and socialize cross-class and public participation in a nationalist movement. The capacity to do so did not come out of a unified vision or a coherent ideology, but through a demonstrated use of psychological tactics by intellectuals to rouse the working-class into revolutionary work, which often meant sacrificing one's body and soul for the sake of an *imagined* independent India.

CHAPTER 1: The Agricultural Front of Punjab

Peasant under Canal Colonization

In the late 19th century, the British Raj introduced a variety of institutions, plans of land redistribution, and readjustment programs for peasants in colonial Punjab. The most prominent of these were the canal colonization projects implemented specifically for the topography of Punjab. Because of the predominant role of agriculture in the region intersected by five rivers (*panj ab*), canal colonization promised to increase prosperity for the rural landowners, tenants, and peasants. Compared to all other regions in British India, the irrigation works in Punjab required the most capital outlay and generated the highest revenue as a percentage of the former, which was 12.41%.¹¹ The net revenue amount was also the highest, amounting to 1.6 million pounds. The North Western Frontier Province (NWFP) earned the second highest at a considerably lower value of about 578 million pounds.¹² From the period of 1894-1912, the government acquired more irrigated land while the amount decreased under private enterprise. Overall, the area of irrigated land increased due to the government's initiatives in claiming vast dry tracts of land in Punjab for cultivation. By subsuming the desert-like lands into the construction and development of canals, the goals for Punjab differed drastically from those concerning other parts of India because it involved transferring communities into these Crown Waste Lands.¹³ As a result, the experiment of canal irrigation in Punjab was not simply a test of agricultural technology but a manifestation of the regime's political need for an all-

¹¹ "Irrigation Works," *Statistical abstract relating to British India*. From 1903-04 to 1912-13. Forty-eighth number.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ M. Mufakharul Islam, *Irrigation, Agriculture and the Raj: Punjab, 1887-1947* (Manohar, 1997), 30.

encompassing project of social engineering. In other words, the social and economic norms prescribed in these canal colonies altered the distribution of land among social groups, interfered with the personal routines of peasants, expanded commercial operations into what used to be primarily subsistence labor, and exacerbated debt and landlessness. While the policies regarding social readjustment were part and parcel of the administrative machine of the British empire, debt and landlessness were unintended consequences due to lack of foresight and knowledge of the peasants' economic culture. Also, the policy failed to include protective mechanisms under such circumstances of disruptive land transfer. However, the real ideological goal of the British administration was to protect the interests of the Punjabi peasants who would serve as the breeding ground for military recruits in the Indian Army.¹⁴ By investing time, land, and capital into the development of irrigation projects, the Raj hoped to deliver fertile land to the peasants and save them from the threat of famine and social exclusion. Rather than a philanthropic spirit, a paternalistic ethos characterized British administration in the Punjab, with its geopolitical and economic importance. In order to preserve the loyalty of the military base who would protect the colony in the event of political turmoil, the British directed their policies at preventing the seeds of political radicalism from spreading within the peasant population. Therefore, business-minded goals meshed with political ones in the grand canal colonization schemes in Punjab.

The enactment of various laws in the canal colonies sowed the first seeds of unrest among the Punjabi peasants. Peasants made up the largest portion of grantees for the disposal of colony lands due to the political considerations of the Raj mentioned previously.¹⁵ The other grantees were *nazrana*-paying (gift or tribute), essentially landlords and the urban bourgeoisie, and military grantees. The peasant grantees primarily came from Hoshiarpur and Jullundur

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 26.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 32.

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which are districts in eastern Punjab. Additionally, these rural landowners assigned to agricultural castes by the administration included Jats and Arains. Prior to British assignment into agricultural and non-agricultural castes, the distinctions between castes lacked formalization. Blurry caste boundaries allowed for certain caste groups to take advantage of privileges granted by the strictly defined British categorization of castes. Such demographic information on the geographical and caste composition of the canal colonies is directly related to the migration of laborers in the latter part of the 1900s because most of these laborers and future members of the Ghadar Movement (central part of my thesis) in California were Jat Sikhs from Hoshiarpur and Jullundur.¹⁶ While establishing direct links between irrigation policy and radicalization of migrants is not possible on an individual level, the economic changes introduced by canal and land-related policies nevertheless exposed the agrarian scene to new forms of exploitation: the throes of market-oriented production, a risky credit market, and chronic conditions of debt and landlessness.¹⁷ One argument provided by Malcolm Darling, a member of the Indian Civil Service beginning in 1904 and an expert on Punjabi rural life, is the tendency of prosperous peasants to end up in debt due to shortsighted and profligate spending. These conditions required making agricultural loans that most peasants had little experience or competency with sustaining, and with market less forgiving than the village elder, dispossession was inevitable.

One controversy surrounded the Irrigation Department's regulation of the permissible area of irrigation. A decision that would previously be reached by the convening of the *panchayat* (village council) and therefore depend on the district now turned into an official declaration blind to the nuances of the water system across the region. Though cultivators

¹⁶ Harish K. Puri, *Ghadar Movement: Ideology, Organisation and Strategy* (Amritsar, India: Guru Nanak Dev University, 1993).

¹⁷ These ideas are discussed in a variety of works by scholars studying agriculture in colonial Punjab, namely M. Mufakharul Islam, N. Gerald Barrier, and Malcolm Darling.

disobeyed the regulation frequently, others took advantage of it for their own purposes.-

Additionally, the regulation failed to deliver an equal supply of water across villages due to the indiscriminate nature of the ruling.¹⁸ Therefore, a competing game of water interests emerged.

The Government Tenants Act of 1893 stimulated a similar controversy in which land grant policy extended beyond minute fiscal changes and interfered in the personal practices of peasant grantees, including sanitation, succession, residence, and right of alienation.¹⁹ Debates on the legal privileges for those holding proprietary or tenancy rights to agricultural land continued to be a divisive political issue following the passage of more stringent acts in the 1900s, specifically restricting the transfer of land. British economic rules on succession conflicted with the customary law of inheritance in India which entailed a fragmentation of holdings between several heirs rather than consolidation of land holdings under one heir. By disregarding traditions and inserting a foreign rule of law along with prohibiting transfer of land except under certain conditions, the imperial apparatus presumed authority over the social and economic activities of the Punjabi peasants and undermined the developed knowledge of the communities built over centuries. Moreover, the disposal of colony lands excluded the predominantly lower-caste landless population, thereby reproducing the inequities of the caste system in a legalized form of economic marginalization. Lower-caste peasants were confined to menial jobs whereas higher-caste peasants performed duties essential to the empire, such as enrolling in military service.

The clear evasiveness of the Raj on issues of social disintegration and underdevelopment reached its political climax with the Land Alienation Act of 1900. The Land Alienation Act was the product of an increasingly bureaucratic centralization of the administrative functions in Punjab. Notably, prior to the annexation of the province by the British, land transfer was

¹⁸ *Irrigation*, 35.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 33.

uncommon due to communal landholding and the low value of agricultural property.²⁰ The transfer of power from the Sikhs to the British not only imposed an imperial design on rules regarding revenue and ownership but also introduced the commercialization of agriculture. Property provided a new arena for profit-making as it could now be invested in and subsequently rented or resold. Additionally, the illiterate masses of peasants in the rural regions had to adjust to new methods of saving money in order to meet the constant revenue demands of the collector. As mentioned before, the *panchayat* lost authority in affairs dealing with private property as the courts, representative of the English judicial system, claimed jurisdiction over these redresses.²¹ These new changes in the legal system disfavored the illiterate Punjabi peasants accustomed to local traditions of land ownership, sale, and mortgage. The peasants who could no longer find recourse or assistance through local custom due to the infiltration of legal and financial norms and institutions resorted to urban moneylenders.²² Under this new system, the peasant found it increasingly difficult to manage the land and pay revenue, so moneylenders allowed for a postponement of his expenses by granting loans. This became a common practice in Punjab, as documented by Malcolm Darling in his well-known studies of the peasantry, and essentially converted the peasant into a slave of the moneylender's will. Usually, peasants chose to take unsecured loans with a higher rate of interest in order to prevent a mortgage due to the social, familial, and economic ties to the land; in other words, it damaged his *izzat* or honor in the eyes of the village if the land was wrested from him. These conditions help account for the high incidence of debt - 83% of all proprietors.²³ Darling also attributed the moneylenders' rising

²⁰ N. Gerald Barrier, *The Punjab Alienation of Land Bill of 1900* (Durham: Duke University, Program in Comparative Studies on Southern Asia, 1966), 1-4.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 9.

²² Studies on the moneylender in Punjab famously done in works by S.S. Thorburn and Malcolm Darling.

²³ Malcolm Darling, *The Punjab Peasant in Prosperity and Debt* (Columbia, MO: South Asia Books, 1925).

power to the less inhibitory financial atmosphere of British rule as the former held more control over the production and distribution of wealth than the agriculturalists themselves in many parts of Punjab. The antagonistic relationship between peasant and moneylender incited fear of possible retribution or rioting by the peasants which would destabilize the regime's idyllic conception of Punjab as the upholder of peace and prosperity. Therefore, the British decided to pass the Act in 1900 which forbade the sale and mortgage of land to a list of non-agricultural castes - including urban moneylenders - produced by the administration. Restricting land transfer to the so-called "agricultural" castes intended to stifle potential political threats of increased dispossession among peasants whose economic woes might target the government.²⁴ Despite this, peasants still struggled to reclaim their property because of the higher prices generated by the Act and the seizure of land by large landowning agriculturists.²⁵ Finally, rural financiers substituted the urban counterparts and debt continued to rise due to the continued exploitation of landless and meager landholding peasants.

The relationship between peasant and moneylender acquired an additional aspect among Punjabis since most peasants were Muslims, and most moneylenders were Hindu or Sikh. The Land Alienation Act set these religious differences into stone by the arbitrary categorization of castes, creating a tide of unrest in the region. Sohan Singh Bhakna, the founding president of the Ghadar movement, reframed the traditional dialogues on socio-economic crises in Punjab. While political parties defined themselves according to creed, Bhakna and many other radicals defied the communalization of agrarian issues to challenge the dominant forms of political

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²⁴ Islam, M. Mufakharul. "The Punjab Land Alienation Act and the Professional Moneylenders." *Modern Asian Studies* 29, no. 2 (1995): 271-91. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/312814>.

²⁵ *Punjab Alienation*, 81-83.

mobilization.²⁶ He believed conditions of labor to be a problem shared by all people regardless of the occupational stereotype of certain religious groups, a statistic consistently exploited by politicians to push agendas discriminating a religious group hostile to their interests. His hostility toward the communalist-centered politics and the interfering modes of British administration can be demonstrated by his own participation and the general ideas floating around during the agrarian unrest of 1906-07.

Agrarian Unrest and the Nationalist Cause

The political loyalty of the peasant to the Government of Punjab underwent severe blows leading up to and during the agrarian unrest of 1907. Because the peasants formed an integral part of administering the empire, British officials in Punjab bestowed grants, incomes, and a variety of other benefits to reduce fears of a potential insurrection by the peasantry. The consensus among many scholars of Punjab is that the bestowal of economic, social, and political privileges to soldiers in the rural regions created a base of Punjabis who essentially functioned as agents of the state.²⁷ The Punjab province proved to be critical in maintaining internal security because of its strategic importance as a frontier region and the prestige earned by soldiers who suppressed the famous Indian Mutiny of 1857.²⁸ Additionally, the cavalries of the army's frontier force were predominantly selected from Punjabi recruits.²⁹ Due to the multitudinous ways in

²⁶ S. S. Josh, *Baba Sohan Singh Bhakna: Life of the Founder of the Ghadar Party* (New Delhi, India: People's Publishing House, 1970).

²⁷ Barrier, N. Gerald. "The Punjab Disturbances of 1907: The Response of the British Government in India to Agrarian Unrest." *Modern Asian Studies* 1, no. 4 (1967): 353–83. <http://www.istor.org/stable/312066>. 1. Rajit K. Mazumder, *The Indian Army and the Making of Punjab* (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2011). These two sources provide rich accounts of the peasants and soldiers of Punjab.

²⁸ Mazumder, *The Indian Army*, 3.

²⁹ The Indian Army List, Oct 1915.

which the British regime formed a special and paternalistic bond with the countryside bordering between the Indian subcontinent and the Russian empire, the social constitution of the rural Punjabis shaped by recruitment campaigns and canal colonization programs tamed the tide of nationalist sentiment developing in modernized cities like Lahore.

In fact, the rise of nationalism among the urban and educated classes in Lahore, which included merchants and moneylenders, originated from their disadvantaged occupational status in comparison with the peasant proprietors.³⁰ Their gradual exclusion from government circles and land transfer in the early 20th century provided them the impetus to represent their own interests in sectarian and nationalist terms. This translated into a political ideology entrenched in Hindu religious symbols, which restricted the reception of their ideas to only those who shared or sympathized with that specific identity.³¹ Such a strand of nationalism would fail to transcend the rural/urban and religious boundaries required to dismantle colonial power in Punjab. The province was unique in its reliance on agriculture and its religious diversity: Hinduism, Islam, and Sikhism each had strongholds in Punjab. Though Muslims accounted for the majority, some districts were dominated by Sikhs or had equal proportions.³² Another problem for urban-centric nationalism to spread through the masses is that only 14 people per thousand of the agricultural population were literate, demanding novel methods to provoke a spirit of rebellion among both the educated and uneducated.³³ Most of the intellectuals to migrate to the United States, United Kingdom, and other countries in Europe came from the educated urban class and possessed fluency in English, a rarity at the time in India. The multiple cases of sedition and conspiracy

³⁰ Fox, Richard G. "Urban Class and Communal Consciousness in Colonial Punjab: The Genesis of India's Intermediate Regime." *Modern Asian Studies* 18, no. 3 (1984): 459–89. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/312263>.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 468.

³² Census of India, 1911. V. 14, Punjab, Chapter IV.

³³ *Ibid.*, 321.

trials initiated by the British during the late colonial period against detractors of the regime, who most often identified with communism, were predominantly directed at urban intellectuals. Thus, the Ghadar movement is an anomaly because it arose out of the laboring class in a foreign country yet attracted British paranoia in a series of conspiracy trials against its members.

Contrary to British protestations that the urban classes were responsible for the disturbances of 1907, the agitation arose from rural discontent with state interference in the social and economic life of the peasantry. The Colonization Bill of 1906 was the primary instigator of the agitation that took place the following year due to a lack of foresight regarding the built-up consequences of yearly legislation on the Chenab colony in central Punjab, a region populated primarily by Jat Sikhs - who accounted for a sizable proportion of migration to North America in the years 1907-11. This event marked a divergence from the prototypical obedient peasant, manufactured and protected by pro-agrarian legislation and supplementary military income since the late 19th century, and thereby defied the expectations of the administration.³⁴ As mentioned before, bills on land and agricultural reform sought to appease the financial anxieties of the zamindars concerning their indebtedness and loss of land. The bills failed to consider the effects of commercialization and moneylending on economic practices which led to even more indebtedness at times, threatening the socioeconomic stability of the peasant.³⁵ This evidence comes from a primary source written by Malcolm Darling, a British Indian government employee who carefully studied the effects of colonial legislation on the economic situation and methods of planning implemented for the purported benefit of Punjabi peasants. In 1906, the colonists (native peasant grantees working on the canal colonies) faced a host of problems due to the declining availability of profitable land, fragmentation of land holdings, and the tyrannical

³⁴ Barrier, *The Punjab Disturbances*, 354.

³⁵ Darling, *Punjab Peasant*.

position assumed by local officials.³⁶ The latter failed to inculcate discipline among the Punjabi peasant grantees, leading to a system of fines subsequently challenged in court by yeoman who were or knew lawyers.³⁷ Although these attempts by the inhabitants signaled disagreement with the regime's methods of rural planning, leading Punjabi officials such as Lieutenant-Governor Denzil Ibbetson responded by hardening the rule of law in the colony. Significant parts of the bill included transfer of property to the government after the owner's death if there were no legal heirs, retroactive rules on sanitation and tree-planting in the colony, increased stringency on collecting fines, and the cancellation of the imperial court's jurisdiction over the colony.³⁸ Therefore, advocates of the bill valued an over-rationalized, impersonal administration over the colonies - to the disappointment of rural Punjabis valuing a self-sustaining work ethic.

Unrest broke out in rural regions quickly after the bill passed, in the form of mass meetings and demonstrations. Disaffection spread even among the once politically isolated soldiers. The relevance of rural unrest to the Ghadar movement becomes apparent in the similarity of methods employed to disseminate the language of subversion across the province and the informed participation of future Ghadar president, Sohan Singh Bhakna. A newspaper sprang up among a group of agriculturalists called *The Zamindar* that cleverly printed and distributed cartoons and literature catered to illiterate peasants through its use of caricatures and images.³⁹ Moreover, in contrast to the prevailing voices of nationalism, agitators from urban and rural backgrounds professed a purportedly non-communal ideology. Bhakna's support for this brief radical outburst in Punjab is thus no mystery, given his deep commitment to tearing down

³⁶ Barrier, *The Punjab Disturbances*, 357-358.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 359

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 360.

³⁹ 365.

religious divides between Punjabis. His secular values motivated him to engage in charity for the poor and beggars without any prejudice based on caste, class, or religion.⁴⁰

Early in his life, Bhakna demonstrated a devotion to social reform growing up in a village just north of Amritsar. Despite his abstention from religious involvement, the political climate of his time usually had a religious slant. He traces the origin of his revolutionary tendencies to Baba Kesarji, who was part of a Sikh purification movement known as Kuka that opposed structured and elaborate rituals.⁴¹ Minimalism in ritual and dress along with communal singing were features of the socio-religious reform movement. The Kuka movement openly revolted against the British regime on the grounds of economic disparities, organizing boycotts of foreign goods and government postal services. The intertwined threads between the cultural atmosphere of the Punjabi Jat Sikhs and the political climate in Punjab reveal a specific trajectory within Indian colonial modernity: a growing politicization of culture. A short description of this cultural group will help illuminate the rural dimension of nationalist agitation and general norms characterizing the group's activities in this period. Firstly, religious reform movements and militant ideals crafted a unique Sikh identity in the latter half of the 19th century depicted by a collective demand among religious groups to define themselves for the sake of electoral and institutional representation. Such demands sometimes were a direct result of British legislation that distributed benefits to Indians based on a particular identity. In other words, the revitalization of the Sikh tradition through newspapers, educational establishments, and new political goals came out of a confluence of internal and external factors.⁴²

⁴⁰ Sohan Singh Josh, *Baba Sohan Singh Bhakna: Life of the Founder of the Ghadar Party* (New Delhi, India: People's Pub. House, 1970), 1-2.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 8-9.

⁴² This discussion on Sikhism during colonialism takes from a variety of literature on the subject, most notably N. Gerald Barrier, Joan Jensen, and Ian Talbot.

Given this cultural context, Bhakna's severing of religious ties for the sake of peaceful secularism does not negate the influence of Sikh ideals, whether in the form of egalitarianism or militarism, that manifested themselves in his political action and ideology. It is important to note that the number of Sikhs infused with anti-British feelings was small in 1906-07 due to their relationship with the administration described above. On the other hand, the Colonization Bill of 1906 clearly destabilized previously secure relations between the peasantry and the Raj by violating the code of *izzat* (honor) intrinsic to the Punjabi Jats' lifestyles by disproportionately shifting the control over land, the heart of *izzat*, to the British.⁴³ Bhakna notably criticized the growth of administrative power in the canal colonies, which demonstrates the priority he assigned to local customs and justice at the scale of the village, activities he was presumably involved with in his own village.

The canal colony as the site of rural agitation is significant since Punjabi villages excluded from the profits of capital investment and the commercialization of agriculture differ in many crucial aspects from canal colony. A survey of the Kabirpur village in Hoshiarpur - a city of origin of many Punjabi migrants - reveals these major differences, especially with its reliance on wells for irrigation rather than British-funded canals. Kabirpur is representative of other villages outside the canal colonies where population pressure and low income led to migration into canal colonies or enrollment in the military.⁴⁴ The economic life of this Punjabi village provides an explanatory example of the absence or presence of political radicalization across the province. Despite the noted unproductivity and the unpredictable effects of floods on crop yield in the village, the lack of interference from the colonial administration allowed for informal

⁴³ Josh, *Baba Sohan Singh Bhakna*, 10.

⁴⁴ E. D. Lucas, *The Economic Life of a Punjab Village* (Lahore, India: The "Civil and military gazette" Press, 1920), 33-34.

social and legal structures to be kept intact.⁴⁵ The author describes the *panchayat* (village council) as a space for Punjabis to resolve issues among themselves in a consistent and inexpensive manner because it provided moral security. Along with this, the joint family system – a conglomerate of families of the same caste and religion typically - increased flexibility among the villagers through the sharing of earned income and expenditure.⁴⁶ Such an economic system meshed well with the social customs of Punjabi families which included lavish marriages and festivals. In many ways, those who stayed in the village missed economic opportunities existing in the canal colonies because of the unfavorable plots of land and unregulated borrowing from the local banks instituted by the British. The social structure of labor, though gradually adapted to the norms of the encroaching export market and increased fragmentation of land, suited the cultural attitudes of the Punjabis in times of distress. For example, the system of *Awat* among farmers loosened the definition of obligations by inviting friends and relatives to join in harvesting through repayment by food rather than wages.⁴⁷ These unorthodox methods did not exist in the Chenab colony, overrun by tyrannical surveillance and bureaucratic legal and economic institutions. Therefore, the interconnected relations and networks based on caste and kinship not only demonstrated the lack of barriers in exercising social ties during times of acute need but also how these social ties strengthened community identity in the face of economic constraints.

In the absence of a community like this, peasants and politicians in Punjab shifted to political attacks to critique the system in its naked power rather than fall back on blaming *kismet* (fate) or the environment for the social injustices and financial instability they experienced.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 38, 58-59.

⁴⁶ 44, 47.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 77.

Additionally, this shift translated into a means for non-rural groups to express solidarity with the socioeconomic struggles produced by political faults of the regime and thereby briefly conjoin a spontaneous agrarian crisis with the nationalist movement. Bhakna's observation on the participation of railway workers in the agitation stands out when compared to secondary literature that makes no mention of this cross-communal and cross-class aspect of the rebellion.⁴⁸

The rural agitation also was somewhat of an anomaly in Punjab because of its unprecedented disaffection towards what the administration framed as protective measures in 1906, but which were perceived as intrusive and excessive because of their inability to root out corruption and lower taxes and fines.⁴⁹ In spite of this, Lieutenant-Governor Charles Rivaz accused outsider urban politicians of stirring unrest in rural regions, revealing his indubitable allegiance to the social and economic benefits of the bill. Rivaz trivialized the targeted protests of the rural agitators to be the puppeteering of the power-seeking urban classes. Because the unrest was imagined by colonial officials including Rivaz in Punjab as being manufactured by the conniving political elites in the cities of Rawalpindi, Lahore, and Amritsar, the regime cracked down on these cities by prohibiting public meetings and deporting two outspoken revolutionaries, Lala Lajpat Rai and Ajit Singh.⁵⁰ Rivaz' dismissal of the explicitly rural nature of the agitation and harsh crackdown stemmed from a misdiagnosis of existing social issues and paranoia concerning a potential mutiny among the strategically located Punjabi regiments. Village headmen and even a military pensioner attended the public meetings, zamindars petitioned for the viceroy to veto the bill, and the unrest spread from the colony to home districts to army contingents blind to the prejudice of religion; nevertheless, the Punjab administration could not digest the idea of an

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⁴⁸ Josh, *Baba Sohan Singh Bhakna*, 10.

⁴⁹ Mazumder, *The Indian Army*, 205-206.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 204.

untainted rural resistance that pointed out the flaws and failures of paternalistic policy. Their politically motivated vindication of the peasantry from willful involvement in riots originated from a misinterpretation of their socially conscious criticisms and action. These rural grievances spread to parts of the Sikh regiments and even brought fears of a defection of the soldiers if incitement did not subside.⁵¹ While the disaffection dissipated after the government recognized the bill as the root of unrest, systemic issues relating to the representation and autonomy of the Punjabi peasants remained undealt with. At the heart of this agitation and central to further developments in radical nationalism was a severe political miscalculation of rural interests.

The mindset undergirding this political miscalculation, latent in the canal colonization schemes and manifest in imperial and immigration policies of Western powers, is clearly outlined in writings by authors who sympathized with the British imperial cause. An English newspaper article written during the year of agitation comments on the “suicidal” and “fanatical” resistance by the educated classes, who exploited the issues of the agrarian crisis for the purpose of political gain.⁵² The correspondent finds the possible native acquisition of power demanded by these classes as a ridiculous outcome of the contemporary social and political tensions, emphasized by the opinion that India ruled without British influence would be entirely self-destructive. There are insinuations that the objects of the revolt are purely for political bargaining instead of resolving the local problems of the Punjabis. In fact, the basis of agitation among the rural population shown by their lack of confidence in European banking and resisting the payment of land revenue is attributed to falsehoods spread by the propaganda of Arya Samaj, a

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⁵¹ 207-209.

⁵² "UNREST IN THE PUNJAB: THE MARK OF SIMPLICITY A MISCALCULATION." *The Times of India (1861-2010)*, Aug 31, 1907. <https://proxy.library.upenn.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/unrest-punjab/docview/231004799/se-2>.

Hindu reformist group closely aligned with the urban middle class. Essentially, the correspondent argued, the agitation had no nationalist or political basis for the peasants because their desire to revolt vanished once their grievances were addressed. It was a manifestation of political misuse by the agitated classes.

Such ideas matched those of Michael O'Dwyer, a future Lieutenant-Governor of Punjab. Both viewpoints revealed an incapacity to perceive long-term social and economic disadvantages as part and parcel of political representation. During O'Dwyer's time in power, he observed a moral decline of the peasantry as evidenced by the growing sedition and rebellion among them, especially after the infamous Jallianwala Bagh massacre in 1919 in which Colonel Dyer ordered indiscriminate firing on a peaceful crowd gathered in Amritsar and blocked the exits so they could not escape. Additionally, he implicitly makes a claim for a directly causal relation between the material interests of the peasants and political loyalty, specifically for the Punjabis. Espousing views typical of the Punjab administration, he believed legislation protecting rural interests and investment in the prosperity of the peasants translated into positive political traction (O'Dwyer).⁵³ However, this theory posits politics as transactional and underestimates the peasants' ability to act as agents of social and political change. The defects of this theory come to light in various examples this thesis sets out to study: the disturbances of 1907, the Ghadar Movement beginning in 1913, and communist-aligned movements after 1917. The theory imagines agrarian life as totally severed from urban culture, which turns out to be false in cases of transnational migration and the global spread of newspapers in which rural and urban issues become unified under the banner of radical nationalism. Prominent aspects of the peasant's life in society go unnoticed in such a theory, as with the Punjabi Jats who concentrated their labor for

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⁵³ Michael Sir O'Dwyer, *India as I Knew It* (London, England : Constable, 1925), 170-171.

the subsistence of the family and village, not the regional or global market. In conclusion, assuaging economic problems through external laws and institutions failed to root out political discontent since the latter gradually grew out of the devaluation of local social structures and curbing of autonomy in the lives of Punjabi peasants. This devaluation challenged intrinsic beliefs of the Punjabis such as *izzat* and *kismet*. Such a contradiction between the state and its people laid the foundation for a radical subsection of the peasantry to emerge in conjunction with a persecuted class of intellectuals in the diasporic movements of the Pacific West Coast to advocate a political agenda calling for the end of poverty and discrimination in India. The eradication of these crimes for the radicals entailed toppling British colonialism and all its products of social, economic, and political exclusion.

CHAPTER 3: Labor and Nationalist Radicalism in North America

Journey to America

The previous section explored the initial development of radicalism in Punjab and the suppressive response of the government. This discussion operates as a useful framework for understanding how the complex and unequal dynamics among urban politicians, rural landowners, military servicemen, and legislative authorities in colonial Punjab exposed conflicting interests of important historical actors that allowed for political radicalism to bud, even in the premature and quickly dissipated phase observed in the agitation. The linking of socioeconomic disadvantage with political exclusion became a core ideological factor of the Ghadar movement as a result of the unique alliance formed between Punjabi Sikh laborers and political revolutionaries seeking asylum in California, imbued by a collective consciousness and subsequent critique of British colonialism. The Ghadar's method of achieving a nationalist revolution against the British was specific to its historical development and therefore should not be seen as grounded in universal principles expounded by the intellectuals at the time, as some scholars have been inclined to do. Moreover, the poems and articles disseminated by the Ghadar organ cannot be analyzed as a testament to a true set of conditions experienced by Indians throughout the subcontinent, though this current of nationalist sympathies that simplify the contingencies of radical movements is prevalent in popular literature about Indian revolutionaries today. Instead, the Ghadar movement was a product of a period in which the social and economic structures that grounded the laborers' lives were in great transformation and radical ideas on social reorganization and political violence diffused across varied sections of

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Indian society through the medium of public speeches and newspapers. A comprehensive study of the Ghadar movement then requires a history of migrant labor pertaining to the Punjabi peasants, a history of social philosophy espoused by the intellectuals, and a history of radicalism in relation to the state. Each of these are not separate histories but enmeshed together in various ways. The laborer, the intellectual, and the political official actively confronted one another based on a changing set of identities, economic uses, and political strategies. The conception of the radical as free from these sorts of relations in which he or she lives must be abandoned since it is the radical most conscious of the iniquity of the current state of social and economic relations who incites change on behalf of the people, where social and political consciousness is already latent as will be described below.

The practical realities of the large waves of migration from 1907-1911 must now be considered to establish the geographical, economic, and social aspects of movement for the colonized – as subjects of the British empire - migrants across the Pacific Ocean. While traces of the individual lives of these migrants before they arrived at the Vancouver and San Francisco ports are nearly impossible to find in primary sources, the general course of migration and the previous political lives of leaders like Sohan Singh Bhakna help us flesh out this perilous journey from India to Canada and the United States. The major incentives for the wave of migrants from Hoshiarpur and Jullundur in Punjab were economic as described in the previous section. However, multiple attacks of plague and famine also induced migration. The highest mortality rate from the plague in Punjab was in 1907, resulting in 608,685 deaths.⁵⁴ With rising inequalities, debts, and fatalities in the first decade of the 1900s, the peak in immigration to North America begins to make sense. Wages in India were meager compared to those in the

⁵⁴ Census of India, 1911. V.14 Punjab

industrial localities of Canada. The former amounted to 10-15 cents a day while the latter went as high as \$5. For Indian immigrants, this would be dropped to a wage closer to \$2 because of the perceived racially inferior status of their labor and exploitation by employers to acquire cheap foreign labor.⁵⁵ Nevertheless, the news of higher wages triggered flocks of migrants to sell their labor on a foreign coast.

One unresolved ambiguity concerning the journey of Indians to America is their first point of departure. Between 1907-1910, immigration reports from the United States clearly state that most laborers arriving on the Pacific Coast had traveled southward from Canada. The first wave of immigrants to Canada was said to be Sikh policemen stationed in Asian cities such as Penang and Hong Kong who found out about the economic opportunities in Canada through attendance at the Queen's Jubilee in 1897.⁵⁶ On their journey back to England through Canada, they were apparently impressed with the natural and social environment and began sending letters to friends and relatives about the opportunities to be found in the country.⁵⁷ Such a well-crafted explanation by the Royal Commission of Canada gives way to imperial sentiments about the Punjabi Sikhs' devotion to the great size of the British empire, which is contradicted by the discriminatory obstacles they faced in navigating across the Pacific Ocean to find work. Still, the primary and secondary literature variously confirms the background of most Punjabis in the early years as military men stationed in Asia. Another thread of scholarship and immigration reports describes most of them as farm laborers who mortgaged their share of family lands to obtain passage money through a steamship that took off at Calcutta, stopped in Hong Kong due to

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⁵⁵ Rajani Kanta Das, *Hindustani Workers on the Pacific Coast* (n.p.: De Gruyter, 1923), 6, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783111456911>.

⁵⁶ W.L. Mackenzie King. Report of the Royal Commission Appointed to Inquire into the Methods by Which Oriental Labourers Have Been Induced to Come to Canada.

⁵⁷ Das, *Hindustani Workers*, 8.

imperial restrictions on direct transit from British India to British Columbia, and finally steerage to Vancouver for \$50 in gold.⁵⁸ This corroborates testimonies by landed Indian immigrants who made claims to owning valuable farmland, which aligns with the economic background of the Punjabi Jat Sikhs. Were these farm laborers coming directly from India and stopped in Asia only because it was deemed an admissible port of entry by the U.S. Department of Labor, or were they stationed in Asia as policemen and sailed to North America from there? Both scenarios are possible; however, it is difficult to arrive at a clear answer because of the high chance of miscommunication between the predominantly illiterate Punjabi laborers and the English-speaking immigrant authorities in North America, where information about military and occupation status were not stringently recorded.

Race Riots and Exclusion

Before the formation of the Ghadar party, which poses its own historiographical challenge due to contentious debates on chronology and leadership, the Canadian government erected serious barriers to migration and labor participation towards the predominantly Punjabi Sikh laborers arriving at the port of Vancouver. Typically, the American government followed suit in increasing restrictions against the “undesirable” group as pointed out to the Commissioner of Labor by the Immigration Commission in a letter dated August 11, 1910.⁵⁹ In fact, these political opinions of executive immigrant officials stemmed from a rising discontent in cities as early as 1906 against the “Hindu” population, a misnomer for the Indian immigrants who were Hindu, Muslim, and Sikh. The precedent for the exclusionary acts passed by Canada and the

⁵⁸ Joan M. Jensen, *Passage from India: Asian Indian Immigrants in North America* (New Haven u.a.: Yale Univ. Pr., 1988).

⁵⁹ Letter to Hon. Chas P. Neill, Berkeley online archive “Entry of Hindu and Sikh immigrants to California”

United States in 1909-1910 were growing anti-Asiatic sentiment and riots, starting in Canada and traveling southward with the movement of the Punjabi laborers looking for a place to work where there was less risk imposed on their lives.

The rising number of Punjabi laborers in Canada, who left their farms back home to earn higher wages, attracted the attention of the organized white labor unions and nativist groups. Because of their distinct appearance from other Asian groups with their darker skin and turbaned heads, journalists spoke in a mixture of confusion and fear at this immigrant group arriving on their shores. Commonly labeled as the “tide of turbans”, claims of their similar ethnic stock to Europeans as members of the Aryan race made little difference to the widespread racist attitudes adopted by white working men and immigrant officials. Opposition to the “Hindu invasion” coming from Angel Island and across the Canadian border originated from cultural and economic concerns of the white native inhabitants. One writer asserts the two civilizations cannot mix other since the “dark, mystic race” enslaved by the “fetters of caste and creed and weird superstitions” are too strange to mingle comfortably with the white inhabitants.⁶⁰ The type of work associated with the toiling Sikh laborers included “wielding crow-bar or shovel along the tracks” and working at “lumber-mills buried in the thick fir forests along the Columbia river”.⁶¹ Such observations targeted the laboring social class among the Indian population, specifically those who immigrant and labor officials could question and subsequently compiled statistics and answers in immigration reports.⁶² The rising hatred toward these “Hindu hordes” arriving on the Pacific Coast for better wages as advertised at police stations and steamship companies in Hong Kong and India posed a threat to the white labor force who scoured for a

⁶⁰ “The Tide of Turbans” in *The Forum*, XLIII:6 (June 1910), p. 616-617.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² These reports extend from approximately 1910-1914, “Entry of Hindu and Sikh”.

racially distinct scapegoat during the recession of 1907. The racial ideology promoting the marginalization of Indians finds great fervor in *The White Man* magazine, dedicated to lobbying support for the exclusion of Asiatics. The significance of magazines like these and the Good Fellowship Club with similar beliefs comes to light from their inclusion in exclusive political communications between top immigrant officials. *The White Man* presents a variety of arguments for the exclusion of Indians, most of which are directed at their uncivilized social practices such as polygamy, diet and caste prejudice along with spreading “leprosy, bubonic plague, beri-beri, trachoma, and other terrible diseases of the body” to the United States.⁶³ Significantly, fragments of letters and speeches from almost fifty political candidates demonstrate a consensus on excluding Asiatic immigrants to protect America from the expanding dumping grounds for cheap and contract labor and the immoral consequences of assimilation between racially superior white people with Asiatics.⁶⁴

The ideological fervor for a white man’s country took its first grasp against the Punjabi laborers in violent riots across the Pacific Coast in 1907. As the laborers heard there were slightly higher wages and a better climate in America, a large southern migration followed from Vancouver into Washington State, seeking jobs in the lumber mill industry.⁶⁵ Bellingham, a frontier town in Washington, attracted the migrant laborers despite the overcrowded and unsanitary conditions of the mill camps.⁶⁶ Viewed as a menace to the white working classes because of the competitively lower wages given to them, their increasing numbers alarmed workers and immigrant officials alike since this movement of laborers bypassed the legal constraints put in place by strict port inspection. In the latter case, officials exercised a clause

⁶³ “The Hindu,” *The White Man*, August 1910, p. 7-8.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 9-20.

⁶⁵ “Have We a Dusky Peril,” *Puget Sound American*, September 16, 1906.

⁶⁶ Joan Jense, *Passage from India*.

called “likely to become a public charge” to debar immigrants and performed physical and mental examinations as another means to exclude certain immigrants.⁶⁷ The combination of a gap in immigration authority on this no mans’ land with the acquiescence of the police to the white laborers proved to be destructive. Mobs succeeded in driving out Indians as they raided their quarters, threw their belongings into the streets, and dragged them from their beds to “herd them like cattle outside.”⁶⁸ One author commented “the spirit of the mob was one of hilarity and good humor,” since it restrained from fatal violence and accomplished the expulsion of Indians longed for by the nativist white population. Afterward, the population of migrant laborers dwindled to zero from almost 400 before the riots. This outbreak of racial violence made its way back to Canada as some Punjabi Sikhs decided British Columbia may hold more respect for them as ex-soldiers and policemen of the British Empire, while others continued their southward journey to Oregon and California where many began to settle in the farms of the San Joaquin and Sacramento valleys, a familiar mode of work to their agricultural livelihoods back home.⁶⁹

Animosity toward the laborers from Punjab did not go unnoticed by the American and Canadian governments who launched investigations into their migratory methods and their means of attaining jobs in North America. For example, Immigration Inspector D.J. Griffiths toured the railroad camps to secretly obtain information on whether the “Hindu” laborers came to California under contract, thereby establishing grounds for arrest since migrant contract labor was illegal.⁷⁰ The passage of Punjabis into America and Canada distressed political officials because they sought to represent the interests of the white laboring class whose riots and newspapers asserted their deep antagonization towards the Indians as carriers of disease, contract

⁶⁷ Rajani Kanta Das, *Hindustani Workers on the Pacific Coast*, 1922.

⁶⁸ Werter D. Dodd, “The Hindu in the Northwest,” *World Today*, 1907, p. 1156.

⁶⁹ *Hindustani Workers*, 20.

⁷⁰ “Probe Influx of Hindu Laborers,” *San Francisco Examiner*, October 28, 1907.

labor, and cultural impurities. To fulfill these goals, the once tentative government intervention in the immigration of Punjabis transformed into radical measures to curb immigration and settlement, especially in British Columbia. Two oft-cited examples are the continuous journey clause and the British Honduras transfer proposal. These responses cemented the vague belief of racial superiority among the masses into law, thereby undermining the status of Punjabis as British subjects and relegating them to a lower-class racialized person undeserving of citizenship rights even within the auspices of the British Empire. Such a development in government policy reduced the lionized Punjabi Sikhs as former arbiters of security across colonies in Asia to a powerless gang of laborers exploited at the expense of white workers' interests. This revealed an intentional failure of the British to protect its subjects across the borders of its empire. The acutely perceived silence of the British to the discrimination faced by the Punjabis on Canadian and American soil, from racial riots to barriers imposed on migration and settlement, forced the culturally isolated group into the domain of politics as they exercised their right of representation through both constitutional and seditious channels.

The continuous journey clause, assented to on the 10th of April in 1908, amended subsection 1 of section 30 of the Immigration Act in Canada and substituted it with a well-crafted prohibition:

“The Governor in Council may, by proclamation or order, whenever he considers it necessary or expedient, prohibit the landing in Canada of any specified class of immigrants or of any immigrants who have come to Canada otherwise than by continuous journey from the country which they are natives or citizens and upon through tickets purchased in that country.”⁷¹

⁷¹ Continuous Journey clause, <https://pier21.ca/research/immigration-history/continuous-journey-regulation-1908>

An addendum to the clause was migrants had to be in possession of a sum of at least 200 dollars.⁷² The Deputy Minister of Labor William Lyon Mackenzie King's report on the influx of Asian laborers in Canada was responsible for the enactment of this legislation. The mild spirit of the prose with such a modest claim as "continuous journey" disguises its subversive attack on the Punjabis. Canadian officials knew the passage these laborers took from India to Canada from interviewing individuals at railroad camps and lumber mills, who gave out their district of origin, previous occupation, and method of travel.⁷³ Gleaning from this information, officials obtained solid proof from interviews and port inspection that almost every migrant departing from Calcutta came to Vancouver via Hong Kong on a steamship. Since the Canadian government as a British dominion could not explicitly restrict the entry of British subjects, the continuous journey clause essentially permitted a targeted exclusion of Indians who, in the minds of officials, instigated unrest among white laborers in the years prior due to their unwelcomed presence in a society that disfavored non-white inhabitants. Importantly, this clause did not apply to Chinese and Japanese immigrants since they usually booked a ticket straight from their homeland to Canada, while Punjabis either came from the distant port of Calcutta where direct travel was impossible or were stationed as non-native policemen in Hong Kong.

These grievances of Sikhs in Canada fell on deaf ears to their supposed paternalistic protectors who valued their military service in Punjab. Once they no longer performed military and security duties for the Raj, the denial of citizenship rights to Punjabis within the realm of the British Empire evoked little care. Moreover, the willful ignorance of the British toward the Punjabi demands for representation in Canada and America signaled their tacit agreement with

⁷² Isemonger and Slattery, *Account of Ghadar Conspiracy*, 1918, p. 3.

⁷³ Report of the Royal Commission Appointed to Inquire into the Methods by Which Oriental Laborers Have Been Induced to Come to Canada. W.L. Mackenzie King. 1908.

the governments' decision to either send them back to India or transfer them to a colony with predominantly non-white inhabitants, like Honduras. In fact, the British reassured Canada that it should act in accordance with its domestic interests, despite the resentment it stirred within the communities of diasporic Indians.⁷⁴ In the wake of this sudden disfranchisement at home and abroad, the Punjabis realized no government existed to secure their rights because of their status as colonized subjects no matter where they resided. The mark of their military experience now turned to be a mark of slavery, as an article from the early revolutionary paper *Free Hindustan* remarks.⁷⁵ This article provides an anecdote on how one prominent Sikh by the name of Natha Singh spoke to a crowd in the Sikh Temple of Vancouver to stop wearing medals, buttons, uniforms or insignias signifying British loyalty. The prestige of a soldier means nothing when he must follow orders from a *firanghi* (foreigner) intent on depriving the native regiments of basic political rights such as self-representation and autonomy. Alongside the emergence of flagrant anti-British sentiments and a radical nationalist consciousness, Sikh delegates exercised their power in constitutional channels to find a legal means to attain representation for the Punjabi laborers. In the following section, I will cover how radical nationalists primarily of Hindu background such as Ram Nath Puri, Taraknath Das, and Har Dayal led nationalist and anarchist organizations to consolidate a radical base among the masses to violently overthrow the British regime during the years 1907-1912. This accounts for a prehistory of the leadership of the Ghadar party.

Nonetheless, embattled negotiations between the Sikhs and foreign governments enabled the mobilization of political interest groups and created solidarity between migrant laborers. These developments diverted the course of the ordinary Punjabi Sikhs who came to Canada and

⁷⁴ Baba Sohan Singh Bhakna, 16-17.

⁷⁵ James Campbell Ker, *Political Trouble in India 1907-1917*, 1917, p. 229.

America for economic opportunities. Now, the contestation of imperial barriers led to organized political action and natural leaders arose among the masses to address the inequities of immigration restrictions and racial discrimination. Interestingly, social and economic stability failed to realize its promise of a sustainable livelihood due to the pervasive effects of political exclusion, forcing Punjabis to take a political stand as observed briefly in the rural agitations back home. Moreover, the Punjabis relied on informal networks of kinship on the Pacific Coast to secure jobs due to discriminatory practices of most employment agencies.⁷⁶ Two years following the continuous journey-induced drop in migration from 2623 in 1908 to 6 in 1909, a deputation of Sikhs traveled to Ottawa “to represent their grievances before the Canadian authorities, but without result”.⁷⁷ In addition, the government found no legal wrong in separating families of the Punjabis, demonstrated by their refusal to admit the wives of Bhag Singh and Balwant Singh, prominent members of the Sikh community. A mass meeting of Indians in Vancouver held on the 22nd of February in 1913 bears great significance for Sohan Singh Bhakna as a moment when Punjabi Sikhs united to condemn the anti-Indian attitudes of the Canadian government and demand legal rights of immigration and settlement.⁷⁸

The resolution of the meeting depicts a clear mobilization of Sikh organizations and forming the initial bonds of ethnic solidarity as it is stated “we, the Hindustanis of Canada, assembled in a mass meeting under the auspices of the United India League and Khalsa Diwan Society, Vancouver, British Columbia... to secure the primary, elementary and vital condition of our domiciled existence in this country, and to remove disabilities on immigration”.⁷⁹ The specific language employed here for political goals helps to trace the radicalization of Sikh

⁷⁶ *Hindustani Workers*, 30.

⁷⁷ *Hindustani Workers and Account of Ghadar*, 3.

⁷⁸ *Baba Sohan Singh Bhakna*, 20.

⁷⁹ *Account of Ghadar*, 4.

laborers in Canada. By this point, they identified themselves as Hindustanis, rather than Punjabis or Sikhs, since the cause of their disadvantaged condition lies in their status as colonial subjects from India. Such a statement foreshadows the staunchly secular values of the Ghadar party who professed Indian nationality as transcending religious, linguistic, and caste boundaries. On the other hand, the mention of the Khalsa Diwan Society (KDS) points to the continued cultural and political significance of Sikh organizations. The KDS was registered on March 13, 1909 as a governing body for the gurdwaras in Vancouver. The gurdwara, a sacred space for Sikhs gaining influence in the late 19th century, symbolized the egalitarian ideas of the gurus since people shared the space and partook in meals irrespective of social and economic differences.⁸⁰ Notably, the Khalsa Diwan in Vancouver functioned as a hub for religious, social, and political activities. People could come to the KDS for employment opportunities, listen to speeches by radical *Granthis* (preachers), or participate in public discussions on social and political issues. Since religious networks previously established legitimacy by covering basic needs for the Sikh laborers in their travels across the Pacific Ocean, they easily assimilated into agendas concerning social welfare and political representation.⁸¹ KDS was responsible for mobilizing the Punjabi Sikhs given their participation in the deputation and funding of Sikh newspapers. The three delegates of the deputation ended up in India where British officials feared the unrest they stirred among seditionist newspapers and Punjabi soldiers.⁸²

Rise of Revolutionary Prints Abroad: Politicization of Workers?

⁸⁰ Raj Kumar Hansen, *Gurdwara as a Cultural Site of Punjabi Community in British Columbia, 1905-1965*, p. 218-219.

⁸¹ *Passage from India*.

⁸² *Account of Ghadar*, 5-7.

As Punjabi Sikh laborers contested their right to migrate and settle in North America through constitutional channels, political refugees fled radical bases of activity across Europe and India due to a lessening fervor for revolution, surveillance, and disintegration of revolutionary societies. The reception of English-educated Indian revolutionaries differed from that of the turbaned Sikhs, whose foreign garb stirred memories of a primitive era to the industrialized West. With degrees in law, engineering, or philosophy, these Indians assimilated with much more ease into American society, whereas the laborers' vulnerable occupation made them victims to the xenophobic white labor unions and economic distress in their first few years of arriving. A glimpse of an Indian student's life in America can be gained from a Bengali's perspective in "American Impressions of a Hindu Student."⁸³ In this article, the student views Americans as particularly receptive to Indian students and displaying heartfelt feelings towards their kind, debunking the assumption of racial discrimination intrinsic to an interaction between persons of the "Oriental" and "Occidental" civilizations. Moreover, the journal *The Hindustanee Student* published by Indian students at the University of California, Berkeley expresses amiable relations toward the West as a counterpoint to Indian culture. The authors imagine a revitalization of Indian culture to progress the national development of India but stray away from attacking the colonial system. Instead, one professor lauds the contributions of both the East and West and urges India "not to surrender herself to the aggressive force" of industrialization since that would lead to a usurpation of the Hindu identity "by being a mere echo of the westerner."⁸⁴ Combing the Hindu ideals of "love, reverence, and renunciation" with the Western ideals of "science, self-government, and democracy" will pave the path to a better society. These authors

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⁸³ Box 1, Folder 12. Collection: BANC MSS 2002/78 cz. SANA 235. Sudhindra Bose. "American Impressions of a Hindu Student," *The Forum* (New York). 53, pp. 251-257. (photocopy) February 1915

⁸⁴ *The Hindustanee Student* (November 1915)

view Hinduism as compatible with the technological and democratic norms of Western society given their partiality toward manifesting the true intellectual ideals under whatever new conditions may emerge. The students hoped to preserve an image of India as a spiritual center to America, extending the pioneering work of Swami Vivekananda. Through this propagation of Hindu-American intellectual harmony, the social condition of Sikh laborers and Indian subjects is intentionally obscured. Despite their concern for the national future of India, the political dimensions of the growing nationalist feelings in San Francisco go unmentioned either due to a dismissal of their radical beliefs or the public participation of illiterate Sikh laborers.

With such a wide gap between the experiences and perspectives of students and laborers, the slow march of revolutionary work towards the base of workers residing on the Pacific West Coast acquires a new meaning. Such political work carried no historical precedent for Indian revolutionaries operating outside of their native land since centers of resistance developed between Oxford-educated students, foreign intellectuals, and elite politicians.⁸⁵ Indians from lower social classes found themselves scattered across the world as police inspectors in East Asia or indentured servants in the West Indies, occupations visibly or invisibly monitored by figures of authority on the basis of colonial subjection or racial inferiority. On the other hand, revolutionaries roaming around the liberal cultural centers of London, Paris, and Geneva came across a wide variety of nationalist currents. Exposed to the militant struggles espoused by Irish and Egyptian nationalists along with Russian anarchists, Indian nationalists established political connections with foreign nationalist movements. During his Oxford days, Har Dayal gave up his studies to devote himself totally to the nationalist cause and began wearing traditional Indian

⁸⁵ Arun Bose, *Indian Revolutionaries Abroad, 1905-1927: Select Documents* (New Delhi: Northern Book Centre, 2002)

clothes in silent protest of English institutions.⁸⁶ Abandoning a career as a barrister-in-law by this action, a highly sought-for position among members of the Indian middle class which he belonged to, he committed himself to a moral and intellectual fight against the British by adopting an ascetic lifestyle. In London, he came across Peter Kropotkin, the famed Russian anarchist who advocated for cooperation as the core ethic of human relations and the absolute decentralization of government. While in London, he worked at the India House founded by Shyamji Krishnavarma. As a hub for Indian revolutionaries, it offered fellowships for Indian students to complete their education in Britain.⁸⁷ Along with this, the house distributed a journal called *The Indian Sociologist* beginning in January 1905 that became one of the first revolutionary prints published in a foreign country. Each issue had two quotes of Herbert Spencer at the top promoting ethics of freedom and the right to resist. As one of the first imported journals to be prohibited due to its classification as seditious under Sea Customs Act, it set a precedent for the themes of future revolutionary literature, specifically in *Ghadar*. Namely, the transnational references of nationalist struggles, descriptions of starvation and poverty at the hands of the British government, and the call for Sikh soldier defection.⁸⁸

Har Dayal continued to develop his political thought as a contributor to the more radical journal established in Geneva called *Bande Mataram*.⁸⁹ Articles of this journal explicitly named revolution as the only feasible method to obtain independence in India. Despite the nationalist fervor present in the journal's rhetoric, the disintegration of the movement due to the elderly age of the leadership and internal disputes signaled an end to the dissemination of the journal. However, copied articles of the journal would find a new home in North America among the

⁸⁶ Emily Clara Brown, *Har Dayal* (Tucson, Ariz.: Univ. Pr., 1975).

⁸⁷ Bose, *Indian Revolutionaries*, 15.

⁸⁸ Ker, *Political Trouble in India*, 109-112.

⁸⁹ Bose, *Indian Revolutionaries*, 27.

burgeoning radical activity. In essence, the movement fell apart due to an ignorance of the social conditions in India since the political leaders lived a posh and liberated life in Europe. While Har Dayal obtained crucial political training from his involvement with these pioneering revolutionary journals, he most likely recognized the shortcomings of an elite-centered movement lacking a base of Indians who were familiar with the agricultural and military schemes of the British empire: namely, the swathes of Punjabi Sikh laborers on the West Coast.

The formative period of revolutionary literature production influenced the ideological leanings of the nationalist newspapers established in Vancouver, most notably *Free Hindustan* founded in 1908 by Taraknath Das. The social context in which these newspapers disseminated vastly differed from that in London and Paris where the main audience was composed of nationalists already exposed to radical ideas of a violent struggle. Before a revolutionary print emerged in Canada, Taraknath made the first steps in bridging the divide between revolutionary work and the working-class. The latter may have developed an ethno-national solidarity in response to the exclusionary policies and racist attitudes pervasive in British Columbia, but they lacked a consolidated leadership to represent the right of self-determination. As demonstrated earlier, their political action was reactionary and attempted to exercise legal rights through the systems used by white Canadians since they viewed themselves equally as subjects of the British Crown. Clearly, they were not advocating for this subjecthood to end but for it to be universally applied in all British territories.

A letter sent from Taraknath Das to Mayor Bethune of Vancouver on September 13, 1907 informed the local administration of the unsuitable housing accommodations for arriving Sikh laborers which made them vulnerable to disease due to the poor sanitary conditions.⁹⁰ He

⁹⁰ "Letter from Taraknath Das to Mayor Bethune," *Vancouver Daily World* (Vancouver), September 13, 1907.

proposed to erect a building for the Sikhs to dwell in under the auspices of the Hindustani Association. Taraknath formed this association in response to the anti-Asiatic riots in Vancouver. His political agenda extended beyond fighting for immigration rights, which he exercised as an interpreter for the Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization Service persuading top officials to allow entry of Indian laborers. He criticized the Canadian government for failing to recognize the right for Sikh laborers to find housing due to persistent denial on the grounds of ethnicity.⁹¹ As itinerant farm workers prone to leasing land from Americans and Canadians in their early years of residence, they typically resided in temporary quarters attached to the lumber mills and logging camps they worked at.⁹² Employers built numerous shacks of timber across the Pacific Coast to house the migrant farm laborers as a cheap way to sustain a constant flow of workers. Since neither the employers nor the employees had incentives to repair the dilapidated state of the shacks, a report on housing notes some did not conform to the regulations of the Californian Commission of Immigration and Housing.⁹³ The author of the report points out that the worst housing conditions were found in some of the saw-mills in British Columbia. The active role Taraknath played in representing the housing issues of Sikh laborers demonstrated his solidarity with his fellow Indian countrymen regardless of their religion, caste, class or literacy.⁹⁴ Revolutionaries alongside Taraknath, including Ram Nath Puri and Pandurang Khankohje who arrived from Lahore and Maharashtra respectively, informed the political trajectory of revolutionary work in North America. While working menial jobs and later working for the government to acquire citizenship, Taraknath veiled his radical anti-British sentiments until a

⁹¹ Tapan K. Mukherjee, *Taraknath Das: Life and Letters of a Revolutionary in Exile* (Calcutta: National Council of Education, Bengal, Jadavpur University, 1998), 11.

⁹² Das, *Hindustani Workers*, 69.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 71

⁹⁴ Mukherjee, *Taraknath Das*, 13.

secure base emerged for ideological shaping. In other words, a direct way to communicate to the masses regarding the realities of British rule, requiring in most cases a sacrifice of security and occupation for revolutionaries.

The revolutionary journal *Free Hindustan* caught the attention of the infamous Canadian immigration inspector, and former Calcutta police inspector, W.C. Hopkinson who surfaced in Vancouver in 1908.⁹⁵ Despite his employment by the Canadian government, his main work was collecting information on Indian nationalist agitators operating from Canada and America to expand the surveillance necessary to preserve British imperialism. Guided by an unassailable loyalty to the empire, Hopkinson pounced with self-sacrificing effort – under a lower than predicted salary – to any information that pointed to involvement of Indian nationalists and thereby established somewhat legal grounds to deter Indian immigration into Canada.⁹⁶ Not only did these backdoor and at times illicit operations favor him among political officials, but they also implicitly constructed a method of nationalist activity prior to the awareness of its radical scope by the revolutionaries themselves. Hopkinson predicted the consequences of “seditious” speech received by Indians in the Vancouver community since these files recording relevant information found their way to the Criminal Intelligence Office in India.⁹⁷ There was no doubt in Hopkinson’ mind that the violent rhetoric espoused by Taraknath, who erected a school to spread radical ideas and traveled through labor camps and lumber mills in British Columbia lecturing on the evils of British rule and political unrest, was a potential threat to the political stability of the empire even in the backwater towns of the Pacific Coast.⁹⁸ Taraknath laid out a unity of his

⁹⁵ Hugh Johnston, "The Surveillance of Indian Nationalists in North America, 1908-1918," *British Columbia Studies*, no. 78 (1988): 6, <https://doi.org/10.14288/BCS.V0178.1288>.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 5

⁹⁷ Johnston, "The Surveillance," 9.

⁹⁸ Mukherjee, *Taraknath Das*, 16-17.

theory and action in this statement: “I cherish that the government of India must be a government of the people of India, by the people of India, and for the people of India, and *Free Hindustan* represents that idea.” The American influence is clear from the anaphora used.

The newspaper was a repository for immigrant issues, grievances against colonialism, and socialist currents. As with Taraknath’s own career, the focus of the newspaper began with meetings convened by Sikh leaders against the exclusionary immigration polices but slowly gravitated toward denouncing the dehumanizing effects of colonialism in their motherland. The articles stress solidarity between all classes of Indian people as the only way in which the colonial power can be rooted out, clearly departing from the orthodox politics of the elite parties that confined discussions on law and justice to those with background in the Anglicized educational system.⁹⁹ In this way, national aspirations attain a new meaning, and he stressed in the article that national leaders must “forget little differences and party feelings.” The article deftly points out the hypocrisy of British privileges in a foreign land compared to the barriers of movement and settlement for Sikhs in a land, Canada, considered part of their territory. Moreover, racialization is not considered as a major factor in the prejudices faced by Sikh laborers, but instead the author shifts attention to the imperial benefits of isolating Indians from the infectious ideas of liberty and equality pervasive within the democracies of Canada and the United States. Taraknath effectively traces the grievances of Sikh laborers to a latent nationalist yearning brewing among all Indians rather than an arbitrary cultural or ethnic classification that can be manipulated in various ways, as elaborated throughout this paper. Therefore, the once local fight directed toward obtaining political rights redirected its energies to the antagonistic imperial agenda inherently opposed to the liberation of India for its people. Such a move in

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⁹⁹ *Free Hindustan*. Vancouver, Canada. Issue of April 1908.

rhetoric symbolized a parallel step in the morphing political interpretations of cultural homeland, one of resounding psychological significance.

One of the major contributions of *Free Hindustan* to the intellectual theories developed by radical nationalist movements was its ability to link social criticism with the right for self-government, at least in theory. Inspired by the European journals *The Indian Sociologist* and *Bande Mataram*, articles explicitly list the crimes committed by the British in India with special attention given to the manufacturing of famine and poverty by imperial self-interest and private capitalists. In the first issue of the newspaper, the author connects famine in Hindustan to the lack of foresight in the government's agricultural projects. The example of the irrigation canals in Punjab as creating unnecessary economic pressures on rural farmers, leading to the string of riots in 1907, intends to politicize one of the most esteemed functions of the colonial regime, that being its efforts to economically develop the province.¹⁰⁰ However, the criticism is limiting in its effects because it theorizes the draining of resources and wealth in India as a result of a contingent rather than a structural factor. In other words, by centering the critique on past events, it obscures the nature of colonial rule that the author clearly intends to deconstruct and defamiliarize.

This mischaracterization is natural given the premature stage of the newspaper as it relies on emotionally imbued language to provoke a psychological reaction in its readers. In contrast, the task for subsequent nationalist movements depends on the analytic clarity of its proposed form of governance and social organization. In this stage, the idea of revolution is unthinkable to the Sikh laborers in Vancouver. Much of the revolutionary work of Taraknath Das and Har Dayal whittles down to the degree of eloquence and persuasiveness of their written and oral

¹⁰⁰ *Free Hindustan*.

arguments over the feasibility of these arguments. In this paper, the pioneering socialist-leaning movements at most times barely grasped the systemic issues embedded in colonial and capitalist forms of production and social organization because their self-prescribed mission, as relayed to the revolutionaries by the loyalist tendencies of the Sikh laborers, was making the unthinkable thinkable. Such a job entailed intellectual work targeting the *psychological* dimension of nationalism, in contrast to a *pragmatic* approach which assumed the deliverance of an independent government at a certain date and time. The dichotomy of psychological-pragmatic may be an oppositional or indifferent relation; nevertheless, it provides a useful framework to interpreting the social and intellectual roots of revolutionary socialism during the colonial period. Previous scholars either nitpick the flaws of the ideological views of revolutionaries or hail the visionary latitudes of the revolutionaries' doctrines. Both scholarly perspectives fail to address the continuous tensions confronted by both the elites and laborers between theory and action, whether that theory be a formally dictated ideology or a poetic reconstruction of colonial power relations. The significance of psychological affect is more conspicuous in radical movements and parties than other types because of the isolated position in which they place themselves in relation to socially accepted political forms. How theory and action relate to each other differ for a psychological and pragmatic stage. The former views action as a stimulus to theory whereas the latter views action as the total realization of theory. Taraknath at a political gathering celebrating the Partition of Bengal states "It is impossible to describe definitely and adequately the scope and aim of Indian nationalism because it is an expression of human aspiration."¹⁰¹ The quixotic tone of the statement should not reduce Taraknath's ideology to a mere outburst of emotion. Sacrificing most of his money for helping the education of Indian students, laborers,

¹⁰¹ Mukherjee, *Taraknath Das*, 41.

and the production of revolutionary literature and working closely with Sikh settlers in Canada to radicalize them over the duration of several years is not a momentary phenomenon. Rather, the ideology and action of Taraknath adheres to a psychological aim: make people adopt a revolutionary mentality with whatever means available.

Hints of pragmatism linger in the academic writings and references of Taraknath's career. He wrote a dissertation concerning "Employers' Liability Law in the United States" for the University of Washington's political science department, a research project which intended "to create a public consciousness against the tragic conditions imposed upon the masses of people by the absence of strong rules and regulations for the protection of employee interests."¹⁰² He worked as a vegetable picker on a farm and organized Indian students at Berkeley to fight for immigration rights as a concerted action to address the social inequities researched as part of his dissertation. The specificities of the theory enable a total realization through action which delivers a clearer understanding of the theory. On the other hand, Taraknath's previous speech mentioned along with a speech made in front of an all women's California Club around September 21, 1910 indefinitely seek action as a means to stimulate the idea.¹⁰³ For the California Club speech, Taraknath started with explaining "the various systems of philosophy taught in India" with quotations from Sanskrit but suddenly "veered to the might and majesty of Great Britain... how England taxed the people until famines ensued, how all the grain was exported, how the per capita wealth of the 300,000,000 people there was but three-fourths of a pence." These expositions are clearly taken from the anti-British doctrines espoused in *Free Hindustan*. The rhetorical use of statistics to justify the economic exploitation performed by the

¹⁰² Ibid., 34.

¹⁰³ "Hindu Is Hissed by Women for Speech," *San Francisco Examiner* (San Francisco, CA), September 21, 1910, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

British delivers not so much of a pragmatic standpoint on the issue but a categorial psychological affect in the crowd as “some of the English women present... in a burst of emotion, one of them hissed.” Performance, rhetoric, and radical discourse shaped the revolutionary work delivered to Western audiences, working-class people, and onlookers on the street through various forms including lectures, poetry recitations, and assassinations indicative of radical Punjabi politics from 1905-1947. Simply put, the politics was governed by an acute notion of radical consciousness more than academic theory.

West Coast Cities: Sites of Radical Immigrant Activity

Radical consciousness emerged side-by-side political activities of other immigrant groups whose tactics inspired Indian revolutionaries in the United States. One of the most influential cross-ethnic radical alliances formed between Indian and Irish students in New York City.¹⁰⁴ Irish nationalists in America were the first immigrant group to contest British imperialism. George Freeman, a prominent Irish-American nationalist and editor of *Gaelic American* newspaper, had friendships with two major revolutionaries linked to the revolutionary Ghadar movement: Mohammed Barakatullah and Taraknath Das. Closely tied to the pan-Islamist and Indian nationalist movements, Barakatullah started a publication called *El Islam* in Tokyo, advising Muslims to form secret societies and annihilate the oppressive British regime.¹⁰⁵ Barakatullah, Das, and Freeman all worked together to produce and print *Free Hindustan*.¹⁰⁶ This Indo-Irish connection in the States lasted for years and influenced the geopolitical alliances

¹⁰⁴ Bose, *Indian Revolutionaries*, 44.

¹⁰⁵ Ker, *Political Trouble*, iv.

¹⁰⁶ Matthew Plowman, "Irish Republicans and the Indo-German Conspiracy of World War I," *New Hibernia Review* 7, no. 3 (2003): 85, <https://doi.org/10.1353/nhr.2003.0069>.

formed during World War I in which the Ghadar party made strong statements of solidarity with anti-British groups, including the Irish, Germans, and Egyptians, as a part of a subsequently conceived “global colonial rebellion.”¹⁰⁷ The presence and support of radical voices from neighboring immigrant communities assured Indian nationalists of the political validity of violence as a tool to challenge British hegemony.

The normalization of violence in the rhetoric of revolutionaries informally designated military training as a rational means to overthrow the British empire. Emma Goldman, a Russian-born anarchist, gained notoriety for her radical ideological views and provocative public speeches. Har Dayal supposedly met Emma Goldman and even mentions her name in one of his letters.¹⁰⁸ Her position on the framework of radical movements stands in close relation to the tactics employed by Indian revolutionaries, as demonstrated in her essay “The Psychology of Political Violence.”¹⁰⁹ In this essay, she views political violence as a human response to the social and economic inequities causing suffering among the lower classes. Given her anarchist beliefs, social unrest is the product of a government that unjustly enforces its laws onto people necessarily through violence. She also supported women’s rights and free love, a protest against the institution of marriage for restricting the social and economic independence of women. Around the time Goldman and other anarchists’ views were rising in popularity, Har Dayal stepped onto American soil for the first time in 1911 to study Buddhist philosophy at Harvard University. With a past of radical activity in Europe and India, he appeared to have momentarily pushed it aside to embrace a life guided by metaphysics, asceticism, and contemplation.¹¹⁰ Yet, a

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 86.

¹⁰⁸ Letter by Har Dayal, Ms. Coll 650, Folder 716, Van Wyck Brooks papers, Kislak Center, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA.

¹⁰⁹ Emma Goldman, *The Psychology of Political Violence* (Whitefish, Mont.: Kessinger Pub., 1917).

¹¹⁰ Brown, *Har Dayal*, 85.

momentous meeting with Teja Singh, who would later become the president of the Khalsa Diwan society – an organization serving for Sikh worship and as a community center for Indians - in Stockton, California, reoriented his political and philosophical views. Teja told him of the Sikh laborers on the Pacific Coast, a persecuted group who lacked a consolidated leadership. In less than a year, Har Dayal's move to San Francisco necessitated an intellectual transfer of energies from the Buddha's spiritual protest towards God and caste to the anarchists and socialists' violent cry against institutions and capitalism.

Har Dayal's political methods consisted in propagandizing lectures that stole the attention of university professors, American radicals, and Sikh laborers alike.¹¹¹ He experimented across a vast set of ideological categories in California, but finally abandoned his unpaid job as a professor at Stanford University in Hindu philosophy to engage in radical debates and establish organizations with anarchist and socialist leanings. The cause of Indian nationalism was special to him, given his background, but was temporarily abandoned during the period 1912 – early 1913 as he penetrated the political and intellectual forces composing the radical atmosphere in San Francisco. His close friendship with Bhai Parmanand, a freedom fighter who was also a founding member of the Ghadar movement, led to them lead a lecture tour across the Pacific Coast in 1914. He was educated at Dayanand Anglo-Vedic College and made his name as an instigator during the agrarian unrest of 1907 in Punjab.¹¹² In late 1911, Parmanand arranged Har Dayal to give talks with him on Hindu philosophy and religion.¹¹³ Despite the centrality of peace and *ahimsa* (non-violence) in this philosophy, both were proponents of violent methods in the

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¹¹¹ Har Dayal's speeches are mentioned in a vast array of sources, from newspaper articles to police inspector reports. Some of the major ones include Isemonger's Account of Ghadr Conspiracy, Gobind Behari Lal's Detailed Account of the Ghadar Party, and articles published in the San Francisco Examiner.

¹¹² Isemonger and Slattery, *An account*, 11.

¹¹³ Bhai Parmanand, *The Story of My Life* (Lahore, India: Central Hindu Yuvak Sabha, 1934), 52.

name of *swaraj* (independence). Police inspectors record in their book that a copy of an infamous manual on explosives and bombs were found in Parmanand's house and Har Dayal reprinted a "Philosophy of the Bomb" in the future *Ghadar* print. A more nuanced discussion on violence in the Indian nationalist movement will be saved for later, but it is important to reassess violence in its situated social context as a psychological and symbolic tool used by revolutionaries to promote a marginalized or underdeveloped discourse. The talks were arranged under the auspices of the Dionysian society.¹¹⁴ Har Dayal delivered his much-loved orations to the University of California, Berkeley where Indian students rallied around him.¹¹⁵ The appeal of sermons on Hindu culture gradually dimmed since the ideologies of anarchism and communism had their own historically determined allure applicable to modern American and Indian societies.

Parmanand criticized the radical preacher's flip-flopping between the myriad of far-leftist camps in San Francisco.¹¹⁶ However, Parmanand's view fails to consider Har Dayal's political evolution as an ideological testing ground. With a background in philosophy, he sought for an ultimate theory to explain the social issues that confronted him and explored various ways to approach them in the multifaceted, industrializing cities of the early 20th century. A time in which "-isms" were in fashion, Har Dayal opened himself up to radical ideas and friends, as he elaborates in his letters. He asked Van Wyck Brooks, a famous literary critic in Philadelphia at the time, for literary support for his proposed propagandist magazine called *Advanced Thought* to be distributed at universities.¹¹⁷ The next month, he informed Brooks that he lectured for the

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¹¹⁴ "Bhai Parmanand," *San Francisco Examiner* (San Francisco, CA), November 26, 1911, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

¹¹⁵ Gobind Behari Lal, "Detailed Account of the Ghadr Movement," in *Select Documents on the Ghadr Party*, comp. Tilak Raj Sareen (New Delhi, India: Mouno Pub. House, 1994), 31.

¹¹⁶ Parmanand, *The Story*, 53.

¹¹⁷ Letter by Har Dayal, June 11, 1912, Ms. Coll 650, Folder 716, Van Wyck Brooks papers, Kislak Center, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA.

Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). One of his famous lectures titled “The Future of the Labor Movement” outlined six factors required needed before fighting for industrial freedom, which illuminate the ways in which he theorized political formation.¹¹⁸ In this active spree of delivering speeches and forming associations and publications, he absorbed the radical social currents in San Francisco – a city “sizzling with reformers” as described by friend and Ghadarite Gobind Behari Lal, prompting him to adopt some of the most extremist beliefs for the era.¹¹⁹

However, his persona became associated with an eccentric propagandist, arousing interest from journalists and Stanford’s administration, which endangered his academic career. On July 12, 1912, he presents an indifferent response to the fears of the university seeking to preserve their reputation, writing “Besides, I have not sold my soul to Stanford in agreeing to lecture there.”¹²⁰ What piques his interest more is “Radicalism in society” that “requires to be organized and made self-conscious.”¹²¹ A unique feature to his revolutionary ideology was his inclusion and empowerment of women. He planned to write on the feminist movement and advocated for female participation in the Indian nationalist movement.¹²¹ One idea that stirred controversy on Stanford’s campus was his promotion of free love, which indicated his anti-traditionalist beliefs for both American and Indian standards. The free love movement in this era aimed to eliminate the state and legal institutions’ authority over marriages in modern society. These ideas shared an affinity with anarchism in challenging the right of the state to intervene in social and economic affairs. His views on free love went so far as to “promote several ‘free marriages’ among young

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¹¹⁸ Six things: solidarity, moral and intellectual emancipation, good workers and leaders, cooperation between labor and womens’ movement, constructive educational system, a feeling of actual brotherhood

¹¹⁹ Brown, *Har Dayal*, 108.

¹²⁰ Letter by Har Dayal.

¹²¹ Letter by Har Dayal. August 14, 1912.

college men]... caus[ing] serious uneasiness in the faculty of Stanford.”¹²² One may say his allegiance to the anarchist creed led to such non-conformist opinions on gender and sexuality by evidence of him describing a friend to-be-married as potentially “becom[ing] quite a commonplace average ‘wife’” and adding “I don’t find economically dependent women interesting. That’s part of my radical psychology, I suppose.”¹²³

In his unmediated expression of views that conflicted with the commonly accepted moral codes of most institutions, a resignation was in sight near the end of 1912. Following his resignation, he catapulted into even more radical activities in forming “The Fraternity of the Red Flag” on October, 13, 1912 that previewed the categories of political organization he would employ for the popular Ghadar movement.¹²⁴ The strict vows of poverty and homelessness for members along with outlining the principles of revolution adhere to a form of anarcho-communism in calling for the abolition of private property, religion, and government.¹²⁵ The broad scope of the political claims made by Har Dayal in private letters, public speeches, and manifestos reveal a character desperate for social change, but unchecked in the scope of the theories he posits. Though he became a sought-after leader among many revolutionary immigrant communities in San Francisco and other cities in California, he failed to find a clear means to channel his radical socialist ideas nor a base to receive these ideas. He spread himself wide in his formative years as an intellectual in America by speaking on a plethora of topics at venues and inviting other radical leaders to speak with much attention directed toward the

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¹²² “Arrest Bares Har Dayal As Leader Of ‘Reds’ Band,” *San Francisco Examiner* (San Francisco, CA), March 27, 1914, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

¹²³ Letter by Har Dayal. December 23, 1912.

¹²⁴ Brown, *Har Dayal*.

¹²⁵ “Arrest Bares Har Dayal,” *San Francisco Examiner*.

Russians for their lessons given to Indians on printing, publishing, and distributing literature.¹²⁶

A newspaper clipping from the *San Francisco Examiner* mentions “an eloquent Hindu orator and social revolutionist,” referring to Har Dayal, will deliver a lecture on “The Russian Revolutionary Movement: a Criticism and an Appreciation” in front of the Liberal Forum.¹²⁷ He made use of the Finnish Socialist Hall for public speeches before and during Ghadar, demonstrating his prowess in integrating various immigrant communities into a shared dialogue about the psychological perversity of the current social condition.¹²⁸

Formation of the Ghadar Party: Worker or Intellectual Leaders?

Before a detailed discussion on the formation of the Ghadar party commences, it is important to look at a brief stint of mobilizing students and farmers by Indian intellectuals who ultimately held sizable influence in the revolutionary political organization. One major turning point for the Indian nationalist movement situated in the United States, mentioned repeatedly in the historiography, is the Guru Gobind Singh Scholarship.¹²⁹ A potato grower associated with the Stockton gurdwara, Jawala Singh, established the scholarship to provide “Indian students of *both sexes* to receive liberal and professional education in foreign countries,” and specifically to pursue a degree at the University of California, Berkeley with a wide variety of options for academic subjects (Brown, 127; Taraknath, 40).¹³⁰ The first document pertaining to this

¹²⁶ Box 4, Folder 3. BANC MSS 2002/78 cz . SANA 392. Darisi Chenchiah. "History of the Freedom Movement in India: The Ghadar Movement, 1913-1918." Undated.

¹²⁷ "Har Dayal Will Speak Before Liberal Forum," *San Francisco Examiner* (San Francisco, CA), October 30, 1913, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

¹²⁸ Isemonger and Slattery, *An account*, 16.

¹²⁹ Emily Brown, Gobind Behari Lal, Taraknath Das memoir, Berkeley archive all make mention of this scholarship.

¹³⁰ Brown, *Har Dayal*, 127; Mukherjee, *Taraknath Das*, 40; Box 5, Folder 5. BANC MSS 2002/78 cz. Sirdar Jawala Singh. "The Guru Govind Singh Sahib Educational Scholarships," Moorland, California: [s.n.]. (photocopy) Jan. 1,

scholarship dates back to January 1, 1912 written in Moorland, CA, signed exclusively by “Sirdar Jawala Singh,” and Sirdar is a prefix to refer to someone as a Sikh. According to Har Dayal’s biographer Emily Brown, Jawala Singh was the first Sikh farmer to reach out to Har Dayal though it clearly was on the premises of the advancement of education for Indians. Taraknath Das, Har Dayal, and Teja Singh all became members of the advisory committee of the scholarship, which was widely advertised in India.¹³¹ Teja Singh was a prominent social reformer in the Canadian Sikh community who encouraged them to live independently in agricultural communes after the threats posed to their settlement by the illegitimate Honduras relocation proposal.¹³² The reason for their participation in the scholarship is not clear since none of them directly spoke about it and each had distinct means of radicalizing Indians in North America; however, the social connections that produced the scholarship are of much more interest and relevance to the thesis. Despite all three revolutionaries involved with radical and occasionally violent rhetoric as gleaned from Hopkinson’s reports recording minute details of their backgrounds, these illicit methods – at least in the eyes of the government – could not have escaped the prosperous farmer undoubtedly acquainted with the political risks it posed to his right of settlement in a foreign country.¹³³ Given all three were prominent voices in the Indian immigrant community and American public, Jawala Singh may have had politically subversive intentions in establishing the scholarship as was the case in London. The circle of radical activity was not only considered but structurally incorporated into the management of the scholarship so the students selected could carry on the nationalist mission. Of the six scholars selected, one by

1912. Subjects: History, Economics, English Literature, French Literature, German Literature, Spanish Literature, Japanese Literature, Civil, Mechanical, or Mining Engineering, Commerce, Music, Medicine.

¹³¹ Mukherjee, *Taraknath Das*, 40.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 26.

¹³³ Johnston, “The Surveillance,” 9.

the name of Gobind Behari Lal from Delhi was a favorite of Har Dayal to follow him as editor for the *Ghadar* newspaper.¹³⁴

Har Dayal emerged as a leader of the students, entranced by his lectures, and thereby formed a radical base of students around him. Around this time, he writes in one letter dated August 14, 1912 “I have been in the country for a few days to see some Hindu farmers in Stockton” and separately “I have agreed to deliver a course of weekly lectures on various aspects of the Social Revolution.”¹³⁵ This letter challenges an assumption in the historiography of the Ghadar party which puts Har Dayal’s involvement with farmers approximately a year later. There is very little reason to doubt the truthfulness of the letter since he engages in intimate confessions and self-reflection of mistakes to the recipient who is a close friend to the intellectual. However, the letter serves more significantly as a crucial reminder to the historiography on revolutionary India nationalist movements of the lack of information on the rapid fashion in which activities developed across classes and regions, especially in North America. This one letter problematizes the otherwise contentious chronology of the Ghadar movement. Such a discovery is constructive to historical writing on radicalism because it means contingent and structural factors must accompany each other to analyze the roots and development of radicalism. A disproportionate focus of one over the other produces either an idealistic historical interpretation of Indian revolutionaries or a list of facts loosely tied to each other.¹³⁶ Another significant realization for this historiography is its linguistic limitations when confined to the words and ideologies of the intellectuals, which Har Dayal himself signals to in

¹³⁴ Lal, "Detailed Account," 31.

¹³⁵ Letter from Har Dayal.

¹³⁶ Some works exemplify both, while others only exemplify one. Ramnath is an example of both, with her argument verging on speculation in asserting the cosmopolitan and anti-colonial visions of Ghadarites AND constructing the timeline from clearly biased sources, sometimes without cross-referencing them.

writing “You must not think that I attach much importance to public lectures. A lecture is only a kind of drum to get people together. The real work begins with the slow interpenetration of personalities that follows acquaintance.”¹³⁷ Though the last sentence is hopelessly vague, it hints toward the psychological impetus of revolutionary work over the purely theoretical and linguistic. From this discussion, the author hopes an argument has been made for the adoption of new categories to analyze what propels radical thought into action.

What brought Har Dayal under tight surveillance of Hopkinson was his association with the bomb thrown at Lord Hardinge, the Viceroy of India at the time, in Delhi on December 23, 1912.¹³⁸ Hopkinson found evidence implicating one of Har Dayal’s friends as the perpetrator of the bomb conspiracy, leading to a direct report to the India Office in London about his activities in North America.¹³⁹ A campaign soon began to extradite the intellectual as Hopkinson and informants working for the same agency attended Har Dayal’s speeches which were of a totally inflammatory nature in their opinions. Hopkinson wrote “Of all Indian agitators who have visited the States and of all those whom I have a knowledge, I am led to believe that Har Dayal is the most dangerous.”¹⁴⁰ The most disturbing proof was the celebration of the attempted assassination of Lord Hardinge by Har Dayal and his student followers at Berkeley. Emily Brown asserts the news of the bomb thrown in India thrust Har Dayal into nationalist activities in North America, so the question arises of why this violent act in particular rattled the imagination of the turned anarchist and communist residing in the bustling city of San Francisco. Only a year ago, the Emperor of the British Empire George V announced shifting the capital of British India from Calcutta to Delhi, a city of enormous historical and cultural significance. With Delhi as the seat

¹³⁷ Letter from Har Dayal.

¹³⁸ Johnston, “The Surveillance,” 14.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 15.

¹⁴⁰ Brown, *Har Dayal*, 133.

of the British Empire, the act of violence stained the legitimacy and authority of this transfer of power to assert the untamable autonomy of the precious city for many Indians who called it home. The celebration by Har Dayal involving students incited controversy at universities in California as radicalized Indians converted the campus to a site of free expression and resistance.¹⁴¹ However, the threats of government and university surveillance outweighed the benefits, necessitating a shift to a new headquarters.

From this point on, a divergence in the narrative of the Ghadar movement appears in scholarship and hagiographies of the revolutionaries. The point of contention, as hinted before, centered around who was responsible for organizing the workers into a radical nationalist base: the migrant workers or the political intellectuals. Both groups had their respective sphere of influence in inspiring reform or revolution among a certain social group. But, as the timeline approaches towards the formation of the Ghadar party, it becomes unclear whether worker leaders or intellectuals exercised a greater influence on the predominantly illiterate Punjabi Sikh workers. Depending on the weight given to some sources over another, a comprehensible narrative is possible for both paths of radicalization. Besides the intermittent lectures of Taraknath Das and Har Dayal to the farmers, the trend of economic development along the Pacific West Coast in rural and industrial work secured networks among Sikhs necessary for political organization to rise out of the railroad camps, fruit orchards, and lumber mills. As mentioned before, Teja Singh advised Sikhs to live in independent agricultural communes. The development of Indian industry, despite the social and financial pressures imposed by lobbying white labor unions and exclusionary immigration policies, certainly had political implications for the nationalist movement. As written by an American economist in *Free Hindustan*,

¹⁴¹ Lal, "Detailed Account," 32.

independence as a political future for India is crucial to prevent mass deaths from British-manufactured famines because it allows for the autonomy and protection of home industries.¹⁴² A foreign economy directing Indian production is not simply a violation of political right and citizenship but thwarts a human-centered approach to distributing resources in a country. Otherwise, the argument posits, exploitation is inevitable.

Unsurprisingly, the premature beginnings of the Ghadar movement simultaneously brewed in the lumber mill camps of Portland, Oregon.¹⁴³ An application of Antonio Gramsci's distinction between traditional and organic intellectuals made by political scientist Harish K. Puri is useful to interpreting the two different strands of Ghadar leaders.¹⁴⁴ Har Dayal, Taraknath Das, and Bhai Parmanand are examples of traditional intellectuals because of their capacity to travel across the world for the purpose of obtaining an academic degree or writing revolutionary literature. Essentially, their migratory tendencies and higher-educational backgrounds constituted these intellectuals as part of a historical tradition, and they conceived themselves as having no basis in a social class. On the other hand, organic intellectuals are directly related to the economic structure of their society and serve to increase awareness of the function of a social class.¹⁴⁵ A major difference between these intellectuals is how consent is acquired from the masses: the traditional intellectuals work to obtain spontaneous consent while the organic intellectuals pursue direct consent. Spontaneous consent is an ideological force implicated in the prestige of the traditional intellectuals, whereas direct consent requires a deep understanding of

¹⁴² *Free Hindustan*, Issue of November/December 1908.

¹⁴³ Gurdev Singh Deol, "The Role of the Ghadar Party in the National Movement" (PhD diss., Panjab University, 1965), 56.

¹⁴⁴ Harish K. Puri, *Ghadar Movement: Ideology, Organization, and Strategy* (Amritsar, India: Guru Nanak Dev University Press, 1983).

¹⁴⁵ Valeriano Ramos, Jr., "The Concepts of Ideology, Hegemony, and Organic Intellectuals in Gramsci's Marxism," *Theoretical Review*, no. 27 (1982).

the social and economic conditions underlying the class struggle. Organic intellectuals rose from the ranks of Punjabi laborers who typically worked in gangs of 3-50 members under a leader who spoke English and acted as an interpreter.¹⁴⁶ These itinerant gangs of laborers were common among immigrants and especially beneficial for Indians systematically discriminated by employment agencies. The gang of laborers was a manifestation of the informal system of kinship adjusted to the unpredictable demand of labor in the local economies of North America.¹⁴⁷ In fact, the structure of these gangs was somewhat democratic since exploitation between the foreman and those he employed was rare because their social conditions came to be defined by class over any other identity.¹⁴⁸ A myriad of factors contributed to the democratic structure, including minimal income differences, general economic independence of Punjabi laborers, shared communal spaces, and absence of commission of wages for gang leaders.¹⁴⁹ A sociology of Punjabi Sikh laboring habits illuminates the centrality of labor in its historical and cultural dimensions for political radicalization. A continuation of this discussion will follow the section on the ideology and ethos of Ghadar.

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The Sikh laboring community faced numerous environmental, political, and economic risks while living in British Columbia, Washington state, Oregon, and California. To defend themselves against the violent retaliation of American laborers, some acquired pistols and rifles.¹⁵⁰ The usage of weapons by Indians in North America reached its peak during the summer of 1914 due to the controversy of *Komagata Maru*, to be discussed later, and the start of World War I. Revolutionaries in the United States attended classes in military training as early as 1907.

¹⁴⁶ *Immigrants in Industries*, 336.

¹⁴⁷ Das, *Hindustani Workers*, 29-30.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 31.

¹⁴⁹ Discussion of sources (immigration report (1910), economic survey (1922))

¹⁵⁰ Deol, "The Role," 55.

For example, Taraknath's friend Pandurang Khankhoje was a protégé of Bal Gangadhar Tilak who advised him to seek out military training in a foreign country to assist in the Indian nationalist movement.¹⁵¹ Taraknath himself went to a university in Vermont with Khankhoje where they trained alongside U.S. soldiers.¹⁵² While these forms of militancy remained latent in the years 1912-1913, certain leaders of the laboring community sought to direct the grievances of ex-soldier Sikh farmers to an explicit political goal. Sohan Singh Bhakna and Kanshi Ram were notably active in the lumber mills and must have developed personal relationships with workers to secure their trust before sowing the seeds of *swaraj*.

A group of radicalized Punjabis employed in the lumber mill industry – Harnam Singh, Kanshi Ram, Ram Rakha, Sohan Singh Bhakna, and Udham Singh – formed the Hindustani Association of the Pacific Coast in the early half of 1912.¹⁵³ Factory workers attended the meeting and listened on as the leaders proposed a vernacular paper named *Hindustan* that would advocate the liberation of India through armed revolution. The aims of the party included spreading papers from India to the Punjabi laborers, importing youth from India to America for education, and dedicating one's life to nationalist work.¹⁵⁴ Since some of the Sikh laborers were involved in nationalist activity in Punjab such as Sohan Singh Bhakna, it is clear this influenced the stated goals of the organization. Despite the breakdown of the association because the chief secretary G.D. Kumar fell ill, the hopes for a radical revolution did not diminish, especially for Bhakna.¹⁵⁵ Additionally, the proto-Ghadar meeting held by the coalition of worker leaders in Portland demonstrated the local dimension of radical tendencies among the laboring class and

¹⁵¹ Mukherjee, *Taraknath Das*, 9.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 55.

¹⁵³ This meeting has been alluded to in many works including Bhai Parmanand, Kartar Singh Sarabha, and Sohan Singh Bhakna.

¹⁵⁴ Deol, "The Role," 57.

¹⁵⁵ Josh, *Baba Sohan Singh Bhakna*.

therefore the role of the meeting as emerging naturally from the needs of the laboring class. Given the time frame in which this meeting occurred, the discussions taking place at the university and other public forums would likely not have penetrated into the physically isolated and unassimilated life of Sikh laborers. Moreover, their goals deviated from the ones set by the Sikh deputations of the Honduras proposal and continuous journey clause since they abandoned legal methods to attain political representation after years of court refusals and silence towards the systemic discrimination by the Canadian, British, and American governments. The failure of the reformist program required new methods to address the local needs of the laboring population, which meant addressing them at their place of work. Instead of a gurdwara or university hall, the persecution of the laboring class by imperial, racial, and economic forces lent it a strong voice for the somewhat prosperous organic intellectuals. The dingey establishments of lumber mill camps transformed into centers of political activity, calling forth the political celebrity Har Dayal from his busy life in San Francisco to one possessing a sordid appearance compared to the town halls and universities he was accustomed to.

A man by the name of Lala Thakur Das, in which another document reveals to be Ghulam Hussain, advised Bhakna and Kanshi Ram to send for Har Dayal from California and entrust him with the association.¹⁵⁶ He arrived at Portland in March 1913 alongside Bhai Parmanand to meet with the Punjabi workers.¹⁵⁷ At this meeting, Har Dayal made formative choices for the political structure of the revolutionary organization-in-the-making. Since the decisions of the meeting are all recorded second-hand by scholars or attendees at a much later date, they are not completely verifiable. However, it does allow for an analysis of broader

¹⁵⁶ Deol, "The Role," 57; Isemonger and Slattery mentions Thakur Das was an alias for Ghulam Hussain. There is no reason given for why an alias was given. One can assume the intense surveillance of anyone associated with Indian nationalism required code names to save one's reputation and temporary residence in the United States.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.; Josh, *Baba Sohan Singh Bhakna*, 26.

questions on who directs politics and the extent of cross-class participation in a popular movement. The meeting clarified the goals of the prospective organizations: to terminate British rule by an armed revolution. The government to be adopted in independent India would be modeled on the American type of democracy. To fulfill these goals, Har Dayal took inspiration from his time in London and possibly from the initial worker coalition in calling for a weekly newspaper and a headquarters in San Francisco. Significantly, Har Dayal names the newspaper *Ghadar*, or mutiny in English, which refers to the first major act of resistance against the British Raj: the Indian Mutiny of 1857.¹⁵⁸ The headquarters would be called Yugantar Ashram in recognition of the infamous secret Bengali revolutionary group Yugantar, alternatively spelled Jugantar. With these decisions, the emotional fervor of revolution consolidated itself into the organization of laborers at their place of work and expanded the operations fundamental to the pursuit of revolutionary goals to locations in San Francisco for the headquarters and newspaper.

A string of meetings follows in March, all with Har Dayal listed as the primary speaker to a group of Punjabi laborers. He is the prime suspect by British intelligence agents and police inspectors from Punjab as disseminating the propaganda associated with the Ghadar movement to Indians on the Pacific West Coast of the United States. Hopkinson, Isemonger and Slattery, and James Kerr all attach great importance to his radical activities. Ironically, so did the educated leaders of the Ghadar party and American newspapers. The degree of publicity of a leader in his or her interactions with a community should not ultimately define a political organization due to the inconspicuous, secretive, and unrecorded activities that slipped from the public eye but nevertheless hold considerable influence over the development of the Ghadar party. The historical record for the Ghadar movement in that respect is quite limiting because there is little

¹⁵⁸ Deol, "The Role," 58.

information on what occurred behind the scenes, internal conflicts, and structural constraints due to the hagiographical genre of writing associated with it that even spills into contemporary scholarship. By focusing on the incentives of the various social groups involved with the movement, reasonable inferences can be made regarding the intended and unintended effects of radicalization. Such an analytic shift means challenging the “cosmopolitan” and “utopian” categories for anti-colonial movements made by Ramnath and Manjapra, and also Gobind Behari Lal’s statement that Ghadar “began as a highly intellectual movement and became quite a mass movement.”¹⁵⁹ These impositions of visionary agency to intellectuals mischaracterize and even distort the facts directly accessible from the primary sources. For examples, the workers had to some extent been organized prior to the arrival of Har Dayal and exhibited tendencies towards radicalization given by the rise of Sikh worker leaders or organic intellectuals. Therefore, it is not one individual who directs politics but a socially embedded negotiation between groups with distinct sets of histories and incentives. The workers’ incentives to participate in the movement stemmed from the history of their exposure to seditious and constitutional activities directed against unjust faces of authority. Har Dayal consolidated these incentives into the Ghadar organization itself at a large meeting in Astoria on April 21, 1913, by directly calling for volunteers to join the cause of armed revolution, establishing elected committees at every factory, and setting a \$1 minimum contribution requirement.¹⁶⁰ In specifying what role the workers would play in the Ghadar movement, Har Dayal positioned workers as active participants in the pursuit of political independence rather than passive receptacles of ideology. However, his capacity to make these arrangements predicated on cooperation with the labor gang leaders and growing militancy among the laborers.

¹⁵⁹ Lal, “Detailed Account,” 20.

¹⁶⁰ Deol, “The Role,” 60.

Administrative rules point to the secrecy of the organization, despite being in contradiction with the public format of spreading the radical nationalist agenda. Testimony by Harcharan Das in the Lahore Conspiracy Case, which prosecuted Ghadarites who returned to Punjab to start an insurrection, gives evidence of the idiosyncratic administration of the Ghadar party. There were three regulations all members had to abide by: a member must be recommended by two members, waiting period of six months from start of membership to know party secrets, and punishment by death for leaking secrets or misappropriating the party's name.¹⁶¹ Though the party had unlimited membership, these strict rules - which went beyond confidentiality and construed unorthodox social rules on free marriages - exemplified the lack of transparency of the internal workings of the organization.¹⁶² In many ways, the public work of recruitment, monetary collection, military training and publishing prints deviated from the unorthodox mechanisms employed to consolidate power in the realm of private administration. These struggles may be inevitable for a radical organization lacking a historical precedent. Under such circumstances, internal tensions over leadership arose concerning who was the legitimate authority to direct the course of action for the popular movement: illiterate Sikh laborers or imported Indian intellectuals. This question posed by the scholarship is reductive in that it obscures the mutually responsible roles of both groups; nevertheless, the intellectuals appropriated the cause of grievances held by the laborers towards a nationalist cause through written and oral propaganda intended to evoke a psychological response. In this respect, Har Dayal had absolute authority over what idea to exploit for psychological affect among his

¹⁶¹ "Lahore Conspiracy Cases I and II," 1915, in *Ghadar Movement Original Documents*, ed. Malwinderejit Singh Waraich and Harinder Singh.

¹⁶² Brown, *Har Dayal*, 142-143.

working-class followers. Then, the party's doctrine gradually shifted to a general critique of colonialism rather than particular conditions of labor.

To conclude this section, I will include a brief discussion of an underlying element to the formation of the Ghadar party: the consolidation of capital. Here is another example of invisible or less noticeable forces which shape the direction of politics and the incentivization of certain classes to participate in an alternative, radical form of politics. The founding of the Guru Nanak Trust and Mining Co. in 1908 with \$50,000 of capital along with the purchase of 172 acres of land in North Vancouver signifies a material development in the conditions of the Punjabi community.¹⁶³ While the Ghadar party centralized its activities in San Francisco, laborers across the Pacific West Coast were traveling continuously north and south to seek out the most ideal conditions for their occupation. The formation of this corporation led to less employment among Indian laborers, proving the fruits born out of entrepreneurial activity representing a marginalized ethnic group. With financial stability secured for an emerging rank of landowning Sikhs, one can measure the allegiances of the local farmers toward the Ghadar party by their donations that exceeded the monetary requirements.¹⁶⁴ In December of 1913, Har Dayal mentions in a letter that laborers have subscribed about \$2000 for the revolutionary movement, seemingly beyond his own predictions.¹⁶⁵ Not only did the obtainment of funds for the organization signal a profound duty and consciousness among laborers, but the Ghadar party also enabled the creation of direct consent for those representatives at the lumber mills who were unable to attend the original meeting outlining the party's goals. These representatives held their own meetings to endorse the decisions, allowing for democratic participation across class

¹⁶³ Mentioned in Bose *Indian Revolutionaries Abroad* and Das *Hindustani Workers*.

¹⁶⁴ Josh, *Baba Sohan Singh Bhakna*, 37.

¹⁶⁵ Letter from Har Dayal.

lines.¹⁶⁶ Sohan Singh Bhakna himself said the Ghadar constitution embodied principles of democratic centralism, however a further discussion will reveal how socialist thought was imbued in the action and ideology of the movement. The end of 1913 culminated with key developments for the Ghadar party, including the first publication of *Ghadar* on November, 1 1913 leading to the replacement of the hand machine with an electric machine (Bhakna, 29; Deol, 61).¹⁶⁷ News of the Ghadar movement spread to the nearby farms of California to remote corners where Indian immigrants resided, from South Africa to Hong Kong. The distribution of the revolutionary literature of *Ghadar* was crucial to the dissemination of this unabashedly radical ideology, and negatively alerted the British intelligence officials of disturbing seditious activities on the West Coast. While Har Dayal bore the badge of infamy associated with *Ghadar*, the next section will explore the rebranded Punjabi Sikh laboring ethos as depicted in the poems, articles, and letters flying from the hot press of San Francisco to countries in Asia, Europe, and Africa.

Poetry, Martyrdom, History: The Ethos of Ghadar

Many scholars of the Ghadar party focus on the production of revolutionary literature and propaganda from 1913-1915. The ideology of Ghadar is anything but a clear manifesto on methods, goals, and purposes. Due to the overwhelming emotional and historical undercurrents interspersed, the *Ghadar* literature is incomparable to the propaganda of major political parties in colonial India, such as The Indian Congress and Muslim League. Because of this, the categories generally used to analyze ideology must be replaced with ones that are better fitting for this

¹⁶⁶ Josh, *Baba Sohan Singh Bhakna*, 27.

¹⁶⁷ Josh, *Baba Sohan Singh Bhakna*, 29; Deol, "The Role," 61.

specific case. The literature produced by the Ghadar party is closer to a psychological expression of a rekindled and reconstructed ethos, lacking an intentional political design to categorize it as political propaganda. This analytical shift diverges from trends in the modern-day scholarship. For example, it is typical for scholars who promote a cosmopolitan framework to interpret anti-colonial ideology as utopian. By utopian, the scholars are referring to the limitless imagination posited by the radical literature which overhauls all oppressive social, economic, and political structures in a moment of revolutionary transcendence. The scholars' automatic attribution of all words and actions of Ghadar members to a static and teleological anti-colonial agenda is grounds for re-evaluation at the very least. Under the "utopian" framework, the written work of *Ghadar* acquires meaning only in hindsight as a contributor to the anti-colonial movements leading up to 1947, when the end goal was achieved. It is more constructive to interpret Ghadar as representative of a mentality shaped by and in pursuit of historical myths, psychological violence, and social reorganization. Each of these terms will be described further in the following paragraphs.

First, the significance of *Ghadar* for diasporic and local Indian communities must be elaborated. Though the newspaper was prohibited by the Sea Customs Act of 1910, earlier copies slipped through, and other copies escaped interception by officials.¹⁶⁸ By the middle of 1915, some 3000 copies of *Ghadar* were sent from San Francisco to international locations such as the Malay States, Dutch East Indies, and Siam. A British official noted "the whole circulation of the paper at this time must have reached a formidable figure".¹⁶⁹ The popularity of the paper stems from the fact it was published in numerous Indian languages. The first issues were in Urdu and Punjabi, but educated Indians involved with *Ghadar* translated it into other languages, including

¹⁶⁸ Ker, *Political Trouble in India*, 123.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 124.

Gujrati, Bengali, and Marathi. Students at Berkeley who joined Ghadar formed a hostel called Nalanda Hostel and contributed to office work, writing articles, and dispatching newspapers.¹⁷⁰ One esteemed student by the name of Kartar Singh Sarabha, the hero of the most famous martyr in India Bhagat Singh, looked after administrative work, edited the newspaper in Urdu, translated it into Punjabi, and ensured its delivery by mail.¹⁷¹ Harish K. Puri rightly emphasizes the power of the vernacular in uniting Indians across national borders and exposing the transnational communities to revolutionary rhetoric in a familiar medium of expression. Previously, most foreign and Indian revolutionary journals published in English because the educated classes were viewed as solely responsible for propagating the nationalist cause whereas the masses would follow along unconditionally. The *Ghadar* newspaper symbolized an assertion of public participation in politics among all classes regardless of one's regional or educational background. Gobind Behari Lal notes Har Dayal had these intentions prior to his arrival to the United States, as he tended to use Hindustani language – commonly spoken at the time in North India – over the parochial and pretentious vocabularies of classical Hindi and Urdu that restrictively relied on literary words of Sanskrit and Arabic/Persian origin, respectively.¹⁷² As Gobind writes “Har Dayal concerned himself with his own people, whom he was trying to arouse to effort, to regain their lost faith in themselves, in their historic destiny, in their national genius”.

History was not an analytic tool in the *Ghadar* literature to teach and spread knowledge, but a psychological stimulus to regain a mythic national consciousness for the laboring Punjabi Sikhs. The inaugural issue famously stated “today there begins in foreign lands, but in our

¹⁷⁰ Box 4, Folder 3. BANC MSS 2002/78 cz . SANA 392. Darisi Chenchiah. "History of the Freedom Movement in India: The Ghadar Movement, 1913-1918." Undated.

¹⁷¹ Chaman Lal, *Ghadar Party Hero Kartar Singh Sarabha*, trans. Hina Nandrajog (New Delhi, India: Director, National Book Trust, ©2009, 2011.), 11.

¹⁷² Lal, "Detailed Account," 28.

country's language, a war against the English Raj... What is our name? Ghadar. What is our work? Ghadar. Our name and our work are identical".¹⁷³ To remind the reader, ghadar translates to mutiny. In this issue, the author describes the point of the publication: to mentally prepare the Indian readers and followers for a mutiny planned to overthrow the British in India. There is historical significance to the mutiny as the issue notes "56 years have elapsed since the last mutiny of 1857, another one is urgently needed."¹⁷⁴ Additionally, there were translated installments of V.D. Savarkar's famous work *The Indian War of Independence of 1857* in every issue, a work of Indian nationalist history written by a revolutionary who developed Hindutva ideology and was ordered to be extradited to India for his connections with the aforementioned India House in London.¹⁷⁵ In a pamphlet published in *Ghadar* titled *Why India is in Revolt Against British Rule*, the author lists out historical events of the year 1907-1908 to expose "that the hands of British are never free from blood and tyranny."¹⁷⁶ Specific dates are listed in which editors of newspapers classified as seditious were arrested. The chronology serves as a damning indictment of the unjust suppression of the press in India. History is a repository of sufferings committed by the British Empire against the Indians, and the absence of nuance in this conception is proof of the psychological purpose it carries. These mythic reconstructions provide ideological security for the colonized and racialized Punjabi Sikh laboring subject in North America whose past military loyalty loses significance due to social insignificance and the

¹⁷³ Box 3, Folder 1. BANC MSS 2002/78 cz . SANA 374. *Pahili Navambar:: Gadar Parti Da Janam Din*. San Francisco: Hindustan Gadar Press. 32 pp. (Punjabi) (2 photocopies) [1920].

¹⁷⁴ "Lahore Conspiracy Cases I and II," 1915, in *Ghadar Movement Original Documents*, ed. Malwinderejit Singh Waraich and Harinder Singh, 1:73.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 37.

¹⁷⁶ "Why India is in Revolt Against British Rule," in *Select Documents on the Ghadr Party*, comp. Tilak Raj Sareen (New Delhi, India: Mouton Pub. House, 1994), 121.

influence of revolutionary rhetoric. Now, British employment became synonymous with an oppressive bureaucratic and imperial structure.

To counteract any lingering prestige felt by Sikhs toward the British empire, *Ghadar* makes explicit that violent rebellion initiated by soldiers is imperative to achieve political, religious, and psychological salvation. In *Zamana Bhagwat Hindustan* (Time for Rebellion in India), the only way for “young men who desire self-government” to serve their country is to rebel against “the tyrannous and treacherous English Government”.¹⁷⁷ Written after World War I had begun, the geopolitical situation is relevant to Indian nationalism as the pamphlet notes that “German swords are doing good work these days” and “[t]he strong neighboring Afghan government is full prepared and eager to attack the English as soon as troubles begin in India”. In multiple excerpts of *Ghadar*, the Indian nationalist movement allies its own interests with those of the Germans. In the November 15, 1913 issue, there is an early reference to German aid: “The German have great sympathy with our movement for liberty, because they and ourselves have a common enemy (the English). In future Germany can draw assistance from us and they can render us great assistance also.”¹⁷⁸ Though it is Har Dayal and other intellectuals orchestrating the Indo-German alliance behind-the-scenes, the interweaving of an internationalist outlook in the poetry and defamations of *Ghadar* demonstrate political resistance transcended cultural markers. One should not confuse this with a cosmopolitan outlook because the intellectual orientation of ordinary Indians participating in the movement deviated little from the local conditions in which they worked and participated in the Ghadar movement. Therefore, the relationship with other countries’ freedom struggles or political affinities always tied back to the Indian nationalist cause. Also, though *Ghadar* regularly supported the nationalist struggles of

¹⁷⁷ “Zamana Bhagwat Hindustan,” 171.

¹⁷⁸ *Ghadar*, November 15, 1913, 84.

Egypt, China, and Ireland, these all fell under British colonialism. The universal anti-colonial vision projected by scholars onto the Ghadar movement obscures the geopolitical considerations made by Indian nationalists in supporting anti-British revolts and revolutions. Germany held colonies in various regions across Africa, however intellectuals like Har Dayal fail to mention this since it logically weakens the argument for exhorting German aid delivered to their movement.

A contextualization of the praise of violence and self-sacrifice is necessary to understand the political and religious significations of bloodshed and death in the minds of Indian revolutionaries and laborers alike. At the first southern meeting in Sacramento on December 31, 1913, portraits of renown seditions and murderers were displayed by means of lantern-slides and Har Dayal spoke of the decline of the British Raj.¹⁷⁹ The outright praise of violence is also pervasive in leaflets and poems, with *Zemana Baghawat Hindustan* declaring “destroy railways, cut the telegraph wires, set fire to offices and record rooms, blow up the magazines, take possession of arms, loot the treasuries, refuse to pay taxes, knock down their churches, and courts.”¹⁸⁰ In this sense, violence serves to destruct the material apparatus of the British Empire along with uniting Indians in the common cause of participating in this destruction since the leaflet demands “the need of a united effort.” Violence also is a psychological tool since it demands the attention of bystanders to recognize their irrepressible autonomy. Once legal and political institutions are perceived as violating the autonomy of Indians at home and abroad, the use of violence serves to delegitimize these institutions by relocating autonomy at the division between body and space rather than abstract notions of status and citizenship mediated by law.

¹⁷⁹ "Lahore Conspiracy Cases I and II," 1915, in *Ghadar Movement Original Documents*, ed. Malwinderejit Singh Waraich and Harinder Singh, 1:77; Deol, "The Role of the Ghadar Party," 61.

¹⁸⁰ "Zemana Bhagwat Hindustan," Sareen, 172.

Violence is a means to radicalize the situation between the subject and the state in a public setting. A poem demonstrates the performative aspects of violence, using the lion as a metaphor for Indians: “Think not of saving your life/The war demands our sacrifice!/Roar a challenge like a lion will/When the lions are in danger, do they turn tail?/Grab a sword, leap into the battleground/Kill! Kill! Smite the enemy down!... With pomp and show, we’ll get martyrdom or jail.”¹⁸¹ The symbol of the lion relates to the common last name among Sikhs translated as Singh, essentially synonymous with the Sikh community. The lion represents royalty and courage, greatly praised in Sikh religion. For the symbolic lion to be downgraded to a passive subject of an empire characterized as oppressive and dehumanizing signals an identity crisis for Sikhs. The Ghadarite ethos exploits this identity crisis as an opportunity to assert autonomy through violence.

The political and religious connotations surrounding martyrdom figure in Ghadar as a path towards rebirth – of the individual and the nation. In *Zemana Bhagwat Hindustan*, the author points out “God is in your side” and “May God preserve [revolutionaries] from every calamity.”¹⁸² A verse in a poem delivers a similar message “Let us go to our country to fight, this is our last compact and the command.”¹⁸³ Resorting to violent methods is not only a rejection of constitutional means but an embrace of a heroic tradition of self-sacrifice prominent in Hinduism, Islam, and Sikhism – the three predominant religions of Punjab. In accordance with the ethos of the Ghadar revolutionaries, to die for one’s people is a mark of grace because it is the ultimate sacrifice one can deliver. A *Ghadar* poem states “Men have swung from the gallows for the sake of their motherland,” which means the long list of martyrs who died at the hands of

¹⁸¹ Lal, *Kartar Singh*, 79.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 72.

¹⁸³ “Lahore Conspiracy Cases I and II,” 1915, in *Ghadar Movement Original Documents*, ed. Malwinderejit Singh Waraich and Harinder Singh, 1:78.

the British did so to revitalize or “recover [their] country.”¹⁸⁴ For political and religious reasons, death does not signify termination or defeat but symbolic victory since martyrs prevail over the traditional notions of death. Moreover, martyrs purify and cleanse the shame associated with colonialism. So, martyrdom engenders a spiritual and political rebirth because participating in the struggle for an independent India guarantees a spot in paradise as the poem *Ghadar di Mahima* (The Glory of Ghadar) concludes in a verse “Those who die for the community live forever, This is the message you carried from home to home.”¹⁸⁵ In a leaflet called *Ailan-i-Jung* (Declaration of War), the author asks two rhetorical questions: “When you have to die some day, why not act according to God’s wishes? Having died in battle why not go to Paradise?”; the answer is given that paradise is an automatic gift for martyrs.¹⁸⁶ The cultural aversion toward death prevalent in Indian culture is also subverted as another poem exclaims “We embraced the noose for the country, Don’t be afraid to look at us. Death is ours, life belongs to the nation, We shall redeem our debt.”¹⁸⁷ National freedom bears an equivalent meaning with life, imbuing life with an incorporeal political sentiment in which the bodily medium is exchanged for attaining a spiritual and political climax like the idea of *moksha*, a central tenet of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Sikhism. *Moksha* is a complex term in the context of the religious and intellectual history of India, but the translation “liberation from the cycle of rebirth” will suffice. The means of achieving liberation is through a mutiny because it symbolizes the disruption of the social order, a point of shared disagreement between the laborers and intellectuals.

Freedom as conceived by its soteriological aims coincided with ideas of democracy in the ideological writings of the Ghadar party. An early study of Ghadar propaganda by Mark Naidis

¹⁸⁴ *Ghadar di Goonj*, Sareen, 173-174.

¹⁸⁵ Lal, *Kartar Singh*, 79.

¹⁸⁶ “*Ailan-i-Jung*,” Sareen, 173-174.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

stresses the connections between the American model of government with the Ghadar party's imagined political state for independent India. One document published by Ghadar equates the bomb thrown at Lord Hardinge to the "American patriots... on the battle field of Massachusetts" since they both symbolize a radical emancipatory act.¹⁸⁸ The Ghadar party, however, employed many models as examples for what a free India would look like, undercutting the ideological clarity and coherence across their writings. More importantly, the Ghadar party interpreted liberty as a fundamental human right, regardless of the form in which it was espoused.¹⁸⁹ The diverse references made in the poems from "the dictator of China" to "the Russian Tsar" demonstrates their fervent opposition against any autocratic leader who blatantly disregard the natural right of liberty bestowed to the people.¹⁹⁰ As the same poet fervently writes about Ghadarites: "Snatched the kings' crowns from their heads; showed the power of the people... Shame upon the oppressors; opportunity to the people." The critiques of imperialism in this era of instability and war parallel ideas presented by anarchists in calling for the abolition of all authorities. At the time the *Ghadar* press was publishing and distributing tens of thousands of copies, Har Dayal was planning to establish the Bakunin Institute, named after the famous Russian anarchist Mikhail Bakunin, which he referred to in a letter as a "monastery of anarchism."¹⁹¹ This institute intended to gather radical intellectuals and develop new theories on radical action, which differed from the *Ghadar* publications' use of emotionally imbued language to interact with the working-class. This language relied on religious allusions, simple

¹⁸⁸ *Select Documents on the Ghadr Party*, Sareen, 182.

¹⁸⁹ Oberoi, "Ghadar Movement."

¹⁹⁰ Lal, *Kartar Singh*, 80.

¹⁹¹ Letter by Har Dayal, December 23, 1913, Ms. Coll 650, Folder 716, Van Wyck Brooks papers, Kislak Center, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA.

characterizations of the British Empire as “enemy” and oppressor,” and words stressing honor, shame, and sacrifice.

As mentioned before, the social order in general was an issue for laborers and intellectuals since both groups were familiar in direct and indirect ways of its systemic exclusion and debasement of Indians. Statistics were a powerful rhetorical and psychological tool to re-examine and redefine the social order in accordance with the beliefs and practices of the Ghadarite ethos. These beliefs and practices combined to create a mythic national consciousness grounded by egalitarian ideals and negated by the divisive and exploitative tactics of the Raj. On the front page of every issue, *Ghadar* printed a set feature called “Angrezi Raj Ka Kaccha Chittha” – The Balance Sheet of British Rule in India.¹⁹² This feature indicted the British government of draining the wealth and resources of India, propagating plague and famine, and causing general disorder.¹⁹³ Some statistics used include numbering the amount of money drained from India by Englishmen at 50 crores of rupees every year (167 million dollars) and comparing the big gap between expenditures on army at \$97 million to low numbers for education and sanitation at \$25 and \$6 million, respectively. In numerous other *Ghadar* documents, authors emphasize the economic disparities in India through methods typically used by experts in political economy. However, these discussions on famine, poverty, and labor in the political economy is not for the purpose of educating people to better understand India’s economy. Instead, facts are appropriated by the newspaper to reinterpret the nature of power relations and economic resources to the benefit of the Indians supporting a revolutionary struggle. Now, power and resources are seen as completely opposed to the interests of Indians whereas the general opinion in Punjab for Sikh soldiers was that the British empire justly

¹⁹² Lal, "Detailed Account," 36.

¹⁹³ *Select Documents on the Ghadr Party*, Sareen, 177.

administered the economy and state. As asked in the *Ailan-i-Jung*, “Which country is the most fruitful in the world? This country’s children today are dying of starvation... Your riches have been stolen by the *Firanghis* (foreigners) who are now tasting them.”¹⁹⁴ The persistent mention of plague, famine, and starvation in India serves as a reminder to readers of a reconstructed historical image of India before the British had taken control of the distribution and production of resources. Though British policies manufactured multiple humanitarian disasters in India due to lack of foresight on development methods implemented on the land, the writers’ non-analytical purpose is to assert the right of India to direct the social order and economy. These specifically impact the lives of workers and farmers who don’t have economic protections, so *Ghadar* puts these issues into particular focus. Their agenda is to attack the British for undermining the autonomy of ordinary people. Also, statistics are not facts up for debate and provide inconclusive proof, in theory, of the inequities of British rule and the unrealized and in many ways imagined potential of India.

One crucial part of the ethos of the radical nationalist party was their secular and anti-caste principles. As communalist beliefs divided the parties back in India on the basis of religion, the Ghadar party condemned this form of politics because it weakened the nationalist cause. The communalization of the Indian people is another issue viewed as a product of British rule as a poem published in 1914 states “Hindus, Muslims – all exploited, ever since the firangi came... Born in the same nation, but gripped by evil communalism.”¹⁹⁵ The Ghadar party consistently criticized the “divide and rule” policy because it broke the radical unity the party sought to create through its movement. A political unity among Indians regardless of their religion and caste was central to socialist and communist parties inspired by Ghadar in the post-war period because it

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 180.

¹⁹⁵ Lal, *Kartar Singh*, 83.

challenged the pre-existing social order idly accepted by Indians and enforced by the empire. Such a social order put one's status at birth above the human right to live, work, and resist. The student-revolutionary Kartar Singh Sarabha writes in one of his original poems "I'm an Indian, pure Indian, blood Indian, caste Indian, This is my religion, my community, this is my family history."¹⁹⁶ By abandoning social customs concerning ethnicity, caste, and religion, Sarabha places the Indian identity as the only identity to truly exist. Such language is extremely orthodox since Indians at that time and today commonly identify themselves as part of a certain caste, religion, and family because it considerably shapes one's social and economic conditions, though outside of one's choice. Sarabha's exaltation of a unified Indian national identity is part of a radical consciousness brewing in North America that defied social norms, demanded for an alternative form of politics, and openly criticized colonial capitalism. As Sarabha writes in another place "Say that your name is Rebel/ To erase oppression is our profession/ To revolt is our work/ This is all our *namaaz* (prayer)." The posthumous mythic character associated with Sarabha, who was executed after setting off riots in Punjab, is understandable given the idolization of revolutionary work present in his and many other revolutionaries' writings. People viewed these martyrs less as mortal beings but more as embodiments of the revolution that lived through and after them.

Socialist Experimentation in Action

The significance of the *Ghadar* newspaper is best demonstrated by the popular participation it endorsed and expanded. One quote from *Ghadar* precisely encapsulates this:

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 85.

“after fleeing from the Punjab of slavery, [we] founded another Punjab in California, where brothers are free to talk, to deliver lectures, to publish newspapers and form their own land.”¹⁹⁷ This statement is indicative of the Punjab-centric atmosphere surrounding Ghadar, rather than a distinctly cosmopolitan one as some scholars have argued. Orations were common for Indian intellectuals to use to incite the working-class Punjabis to revolt, but the violent rhetoric of orations in a temple would seem strange prior to the formation of the Ghadar party and *Ghadar* press. On December 27, 1913, several speeches took place expressing vengeance toward the immigrant officials at the Sikh Temple or gurdwara in Vancouver.¹⁹⁸ At this meeting, a poem from *Ghadar* was read out with the familiar theme of driving the British out of India. The poem provided a pretext to discuss the hardships of Indians under British rule and to praise the Delhi bombing that occurred that month. Poetry as a medium for radical political expression aided in uniting the struggles of Indians at home and abroad since the language of oppression remained in the vernacular and played with social and religious themes integrated in the lifestyles and mentalities of the working-class. One Tamil member of the Ghadar party, Darisi Chenchiah, notes that Punjabi laborers contributed articles and poems to the newspapers. He believes this happened because they became politically conscious, implying the ideas took root in the working-class to the extent they contributed to the paper and their ideas were accepted by the editors.¹⁹⁹ Cross-class participation in the publication of the newspaper approached a social organization mirroring the doctrines of socialism and communism explicitly adopted by Punjabi nationalist groups a decade later. Analyzing and tracing the trends of social reorganization and experimentation between once distant classes and castes in North America is a necessary task to

¹⁹⁷ Lal, "Detailed Account," 47.

¹⁹⁸ Ker, *Political Trouble*, 236.

¹⁹⁹ Box 4, Folder 3. BANC MSS 2002/78 cz . SANA 392. Darisi Chenchiah. "History of the Freedom Movement in India: The Ghadar Movement, 1913-1918." Undated.

understand how the ethos of Ghadar found a new social reality for Indian laborers, students, and political intellectuals.

As mentioned before, the *Ghadar* newspaper reached far corners of the earth to carry the message of attempting a mutiny in India and the human right of self-determination to diasporic and local Indian communities. The perseverant efforts made by members to distribute *Ghadar* copies across oceans perturbed British officials, as the Commissioner of Police in Bombay wrote to the U.S. Consul of Bombay referred to it as “A source of continual anxiety to the Government of India.”²⁰⁰ Letters intercepted from predominantly Punjabi Sikhs in North America to India demonstrate why the British perceived the Ghadar party as a destabilizing force due to its geographical reach and violent doctrines. The letters abounded with anti-British sentiment, protesting the British encroachment on sacred Sikh institutions and temples, Turkish autonomy, and movement of immigrants. In their letters, they found justification for armed revolution, aimed at recovering the lost power of the Sikhs stolen under British rule by the deprivation of rights.²⁰¹ In these letters, copies of *Ghadar* were packaged. The devotion of members to send letters with copies back to friends and relatives about purely political issues reveals the extent to which workers were embedded in the radical politics emanating from the top and bottom in the new social atmosphere emerging in cities in North America.

Sohan Singh Bhakna noticed a cultural shift among Punjabi laborers after the establishment of the *Ghadar* newspaper. A major impact to the social life of workers was alcohol abstinence, who appear to have consumed alcohol at alarming rates as written in an economic survey.²⁰² The consumption of alcohol sometimes led to public disturbances, personal financial

²⁰⁰ Bose, *Indian Revolutionaries*, 62.

²⁰¹ Isemonger and Slattery, *An account*, 121-125.

²⁰² Das, *Hindustani Workers*, 84.

loss, and violent crimes. Eliminating this intoxicant from the workers, who may have depended on alcohol in times of trouble, meant they found a new source of meaning in their life: the Ghadar movement. Bhakna argues an elevated comradeship among Indians reduced the likelihood of social disarray because the Ghadar movement offered a united mindset and plan toward the shared issue of Indian nationalism (Bhakna, 29).²⁰³ Another sociocultural impact experienced by Punjabi workers could be described as a cultural rebirth since the Punjabis became poets in reciting the *Ghadar-di-Goonj* (Ghadar poems) in fields and factories. Bhakna, a spokesman for the working people, knew poetry was integral to Punjabi culture given the prominent history of Sufi Qisses concerned with romance and heroism in Punjabi literature. The Ghadar movement marked a unique political, social, and cultural movement for Punjabis, but this time among a diaspora of workers and farmers settled across the Pacific West Coast. Even a document made by an official from Washington to Sir Cecil Spring-Rice, British Ambassador in the United States to the Secretary of State, records in an account of the seditious activities of the Ghadar party “revolutionary songs which they sing have been committed to memory, and they sing them with great fervour. They do not know the meaning of what they are singing, but they almost treat it as a religion.”²⁰⁴ The origin of the revolutionary tendencies is passively attributed to the intellectuals who “go out to the ranches, where poor labourers are working, on Saturdays and Sundays; they preach revolution to them until these poor and illiterate people think they must drive the English out of India or kill them.” In two very different interpretations, the laborers’ participation in the Ghadar movement is either out of blind indoctrination by Indian agitators or a homegrown radical consciousness asserting the political right of autonomy. The

²⁰³ Josh, *Baba Sohan Singh Bhakna*, 29.

²⁰⁴ *Select Documents on the Ghadr Party*, Sareen, 72-73.

sentiment of the poems and early historical interactions between farmers and students may shed further light on this disagreement.

The poems disregarded all social classifications and expressed staunch opposition toward elitist views and subordination to any form of authority.²⁰⁵ These sentiments embodied proto-communist views through not only a vigorous criticism of the prevailing social and economic conditions but the implementation of these views into the movement's social organization. Two of the major worker leaders, Kanshi Ram and Mangoo Ram, were part of the Dalit caste, socially excluded by all castes in India due to a taboo inherited for generations regarding untouchability. The anti-caste rhetoric in the poems found expression in the very leadership of the Punjabi workers who would be accustomed in their own land to not sit, share food, or pray with people considered lower caste. However, in the states of Washington, Oregon, and California, Punjabi workers mostly from the Jat caste not only interacted with Dalits at the lumber mills and gurdwaras, but some even gravitated toward them as figures of the nationalist leadership in North America. These Dalit leaders must have had considerable influence over the radicalization of certain worker gangs they were a part of, and one returned to Punjab to start an anti-caste movement. Reciting the *Ghadar* poems at their places of work and worship ingrained into the minds of Punjabis the equality of all men and women since excluding one Indian in the nationalist cause meant splitting the unity of India and reducing the cause to a tribal affair over status rather than a revolution for the sake of attaining independence of an entire people.

The scholar A.C. Bose remarks Indian students lived closely to the discriminated Sikh workers and farmers. In a foreign land, the social barriers of education, caste, and religion carried less meaning and strengthened ethno-national solidarity.²⁰⁶ The significance of student-

²⁰⁵ Josh, *Baba Sohan Singh Bhakna*, 29-30.

²⁰⁶ Bose, *Indian Revolutionaries*, 48.

farmer relations, underestimated by the dominant opinion in the historiography, is surprising given the number of sources and the testimonies originating from people of various backgrounds. In comparison to reports on the ideological and militant aspects of the Ghadar party, the social relations of the radical movement attracted the attention of someone neither affiliated nor antagonistic to the party. Mrs. Padma Chandra, the wife of the editor following Har Dayal variably referred to as Ram Chand or Ram Chandra, delivers a portrayal of the party on the ground and it lacks a tone of ideological vigor pervasive in the writings of Ghadarites and anti-Asian immigrant officials. In an interview, she notes “these people [migrant farmers] ...weren’t educated themselves but they appreciate Indian students who were receiving an education.”²⁰⁷ The farmers perceived education as a social good rather than a spiteful attachment for those not engaged in manual labor. It appears the feeling was reciprocated as she continues “in the summertime, the students used to go, some of them, into the country and they give them very easy job – pick fruit, or do something and they made their [redacted] that way.” The students from the “Nellunda Club,” mentioned before as a hostel for Indian students assisting with the Ghadar party operations, offered services valuable to the farmers. Gobind Behari Lal, a member of the Ghadar party, participated in this work and attributed it to a “peculiar American system” in which self-supporting American students could earn a living and pay for expenses by doing some work on the side. Oftentimes, Indians ended up in the company of Indian farm workers.²⁰⁸ Whether the students chose to work at farms where Indians worked or the system assigned them to those farms arbitrarily, the strict hierarchy of the social structure loosened in North America as the ideas of the Ghadar movement spread from the print to the universities, and finally to the lumber mills and farms. Students experimented with their social roles in participating in

²⁰⁷ Box 4, Folder 1. BANC MSS 2002/78 cz. SANA 391. *Padmavati Chandra. New York City. Interview May 1974, 43.*

²⁰⁸ Lal, "Detailed Account," 32.

farmwork and the farmers who supported the *Ghadar* newspaper stepped out of the daily cycle of economic survival to contribute to the nationalist movement. Experimentation of such a kind resonates with a socialist design put into practice in which a possible reversal of the social order is planted by the ordinary and serendipitous conditions shaping the Indian community in North America.

The communal style of living supports the claim of socialist experimentation within the Ghadar movement. In spaces owned by the Ghadar party where anarchists, farmers, and students passed each other frequently, the practices adopted by members embraced unorthodoxy with respect to the unconscious patriarchal and caste-based rules that dictate familial life. At the Yugantar Ashram, “staff workers were to live together, taking turns in cooking meals, cleaning the rooms and so forth; no servants were even thought of.”²⁰⁹ Typically, people responsible for such household and manual tasks would be hired servants of a lower caste. By challenging these social customs, the movement attacked a submissive acceptance of the designation of tasks and prematurely set in motion a call for total reorganization. A bold goal as this manifested itself in role transferal between members of the Ghadar party in which antiquated roles bore no meaning when the task was complete revolution and liberation for Indians. Thus, the specific social organization discovered and pursued by Indians in the Ghadar movement made it conducive for explicit political ties to be formed, thereby situating the socialist undercurrents of the writings in action.

The writings of Har Dayal, as a famous orator in the fields who aroused the political consciousness of Sikhs, express radical sentiments in an original social philosophy prefiguring the radical action of the Ghadar party. One famous essay of his titled “Ghulami Ka Zehr” (The

²⁰⁹ Ibid., 36.

Poison of Slavery) blasphemes India's culture as contributing to the enslavement of a sizable part of the native population through religious, social, literary, and political indoctrination. These criticisms find lucid articulation in another essay titled "The Indian Peasant."²¹⁰ Parting from the implicit valuation of social classes in the caste system, Har Dayal attaches importance to the peasant and urban classes rather than the ruling priestly class because of their large numbers and the fact they produce the wealth of the country. He finds India's debasement of the laboring classes as illogical from a sociological perspective since it is the result of the skewed development of an inequitable system that empowered a class who minimally contributed to society. He traces these prejudiced ideas and practices back to Indian literature which idealized kings and warriors over the peasant. The metaphysical hold over Indian philosophy similarly demoralized the social status of peasants in the practicing monks' renouncement of worldly affairs and a materialistic conception of the world. However, the Indian intellectual fails to deliver a practical solution for the social inequities and strays from advocating for economic distribution or transferring property ownership since he views the issues as psychologically rooted, not economic. Following World War I, the Ghadar party and its successors in Punjab adopt the rhetoric of the Bolsheviks in the Soviet Union as communism emerges as the proper means to attain liberation for colonized Eastern countries. Har Dayal posits education as one tool to stop the exploitative colonial practices, yet it is unclear what this education entails. While Har Dayal rightly points out the social issues oppressing Indian society, his vision for social change lies in the realm of imaginative possibility rather than conceivable institutional transitions. Scholars contributing to the utopian trends in the historiography of anti-colonial movements view the realm of imaginative possibility as a reality of political actors and situations. However,

²¹⁰ Box 1, Folder 36. BANC MSS 2002/78 cz. SANA 344. Har Dayal. *The Indian Peasant*. [San Francisco]: Hindsutan Gadar Party, 4 pp. (Punjabi) Undated.

such naïve views reduce radical politics to an arbitrary figment in one person's mind. More accurately, radical politics in North America and Punjab required active involvement, contestation of ideologies, and restricted interactions. While the content of revolutionary writing is rich during this period, innumerable constraints faced by Indian revolutionaries operating in British and foreign territories meant the ideas pulled more weight than action, leading to disastrous plans, internal disarray, and the prosecution of conspiratorial plots.

CHAPTER 3: Return to Punjab and Communist Travels

Komagata Maru: Exclusion, Conspiracy, Riots

The internal breakdown of the Ghadar party in America was set into motion by the deportation charge brought before Har Dayal in March 1914. Revealed by the infamous immigration inspector Hopkinson, the campaign to get Har Dayal deported began as soon as the Indian Government paid him a conditional stipend to his salary. Though this clearly was a conflict of interest, Hopkinson's politically important work of surveilling Indian nationalists in Canada sought to defame a class of people anyways deemed as inferior and dangerous within popular opinion. As he attended the revolutionary's speeches to workers and anarchists months prior, he searched for anything that would incriminate Har Dayal not only as a nationalist but as an anarchist and socialist.²¹¹ Har Dayal's fate would ultimately be decided by American immigrant officials, not British intelligence officers, so Hopkinson performed his duties to appease the anxieties of both governments, despite working officially only in the capacity of the Canadian immigration department.

A member of the Ghadar party, Darisi Chenchiah, states the intelligence operations conducted by the "British Rulers" served to monitor and deter the revolutionary movement.²¹² Personal testimonies suggest Ghadarites were aware of Hopkinson's presence at public meetings. One damning example he provides is the British government's complicity in bribing political leaders in California to support the arrest of Har Dayal. Foreign election interference suggests

²¹¹ Johnston, "The Surveillance," 16.

²¹² Box 4, Folder 3. BANC MSS 2002/78 cz . SANA 392. Darisi Chenchiah. "History of the Freedom Movement in India: The Ghadar Movement, 1913-1918." Undated.

Indian nationalism brewing in California frightened the Raj immensely, leading them to adopt measures violating American sovereignty. The *Pacific Historical Review* states that Har Dayal was arrested as an undesirable alien following a speech before an anarchist rally in San Francisco and ordered to be deported.²¹³ The *SF Examiner* identifies anarchist associations as the motive for the deportation charge, specifically his establishment of “The Fraternity of the Red Flag” though it had minimal political support. To avoid criminal indictment, he fled to Switzerland, and he writes in a letter dated April 30 from Poste Restante in Lausanne “I escaped from U.S. after my arrest for deportation or perhaps extradition at the request of the British Embassy.”²¹⁴ He sees the entire legal case as a machination of the British government and seems to view the investigation as baseless. Nevertheless, the departure of Har Dayal necessitated a spontaneous meeting of the Ghadar party to decide on who the new editor would be. The Executive Council of Ghadar decided to nominate Ram Chandra as the successor to Har Dayal.²¹⁵

Around the time of Har Dayal’s departure, two major Ghadar figures who actively contributed to the Indian nationalist movement in East Asia arrived in California: Bhagwan Singh and Mohammad Barakatullah from University of Tokyo.²¹⁶ Ram Chandra, Bhagwan Singh, and Barakatullah formed the “Governing Three” - a triad of Indians comprising all three religions prominent in the immigrant community – Hinduism, Sikhism, and Islam. Under the new leadership, the party made a concerted approach to prepare for a return to India to start a revolution. Gobind Behari Lal indicates an interesting phenomenon occurred after Har Dayal left: namely, the Indianization of *Ghadar*, most likely due to reduced connections with other

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²¹³ Box 4, Folder 23. BANC MSS 2002/78 cz. SANA 605. Gary R. Hess. “The Forgotten Asian Americans: The East Indian Community in the United States,” *Pacific Historical Review*, 43, pp. 576-596. (photocopy) November 1974

²¹⁴ Letter by Har Dayal, April 30, 1914, Ms. Coll 650, Folder 716, Van Wyck Brooks papers, Kislak Center, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA.

²¹⁵ Lal, “Detailed Account,” 39.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 44.

ethnic groups after Har Dayal left and Ram Chandra's professed dislike for depending on German support. His wife notes that he refused to send Indians to Germany, while Har Dayal and prominent communist revolutionary Virendrenath Chattopadhyay worked through the anti-British Berlin Committee to pursue nationalist efforts. Her statement bears witness to the tension between the internationalist and worker-centric trends of nationalism: "He refused because why should they fight on foreign soil? If they fight, they gonna fight the British in India... If these boys want to go, he said, they go to India."²¹⁷ The role of the Ghadar party was to transmit ideas to *Indians* to fight for *Indian* independence based on the exclusions faced by *Indians*. If foreign revolutions or oppressive conditions in foreign countries induced an impetus for social and political change, this only added more determination to achieving freedom for India. Moreover, at this time, there was no Communist International (Comintern) officially linking the struggles of all colonized peoples, so it is an anachronistic error by historians to assume resilient transnational ties in the Global South during this period. Vague references in poems do not amount to anti-colonial political alliances.

The new leadership of the Ghadar party encountered a crisis months before the battle cry of World War I echoed across the globe. A long-remembered hero of the nationalist movement, Gurdit Singh, manufactured a plot to test the immigration policies of the Canadian government. An ambitious contractor from Malay, he mobilized the passengers of the Japanese steamship *Komagata Maru* during a violent confrontation with the Canadian government as they refused to allow the Punjabi migrants to cross the border. Such a crisis would test the political effectiveness of the Ghadar party, who organized the distribution of arms and literature onto the ship, in terms of how to protect Indian migrants in the absence of a government representing their political

²¹⁷ Box 4, Folder 1. BANC MSS 2002/78 cz. SANA 391. *Padmavati Chandra. New York City. Interview May 1974, 57.*

interests and safeguarding their lives. The plight of Indian laborers abroad aroused the dual entrepreneurial and nationalist instincts of Gurdit Singh. Arriving in Hong Kong, he did not shield his eyes from the hundreds of men from India, mostly illiterate and unemployed, searching for stable income to send back home.²¹⁸ Gurdit Singh's knowledge of the discrimination faced by Sikhs entering Canada at previous instances must not have escaped him since he intended not only to free his countrymen of temporary poverty, but systemic colonial injustices ingrained into their livelihoods for decades. As a result, he planned to charter a steamship individually and satisfy the provisions of the existing laws on immigration to successfully make a direct voyage to Canada. However, Gurdit Singh emphasized in his writings the enterprise was purely a business venture.²¹⁹ His awareness of the social inequities faced by his fellow Sikhs and Punjabis, under this argument, never crossed into the domain of political subversion or nationalist resistance. Instead, Gurdit Singh was a shrewd businessman who envisioned an active shipping industry with Punjabis employed across the Pacific Ocean. The limitations placed upon Indians by the Canadian and Indian governments pressured the business venture to be defined solely by the politics of exclusion and pushed Gurdit Singh into what the Committee of Inquiry in Ottawa would deem as an act of political agitation. The nationalist historiography, on the other hand, implicates Gurdit Singh's plan as an anti-colonial scheme from the very beginning, demonstrated by his later active participation and advocacy for the Indian nationalist movement. It is difficult to determine the validity of the opposing arguments because there are disagreements on almost every piece of evidence concerning the role of nationalist sentiment and activity during the voyage of the *Komagata Maru*. Such disagreements will be covered in the following pages. One

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²¹⁸ Hugh J. M Johnston, *The Voyage of the Komagata Maru: The Sikh Challenge to Canada's Colour Bar*, 2nd ed. (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2008), 25.

²¹⁹ Darshan Singh Tatla, comp., *Report of the Komagata Maru Committee of Inquiry and Some Further Documents* (Chandigarh: Unistar Books and Punjab Centre for Migration Studies, 2007), 8.

thing is certain: the fate of the *Komagata Maru* aroused feelings of compatriotism among the Vancouver Sikh community, a feeling at times exploited for politics, performance, and ploys.

Gurdit Singh's plan faced several constraints prior to the ship's departure, demonstrated by a disputed charge brought before him by the Hong Kong government for selling tickets for an illegal voyage in late March 1914.²²⁰ The charge was dropped because there was little evidence to support it. Early on, the *Komagata Maru* – the name of the Japanese ship to be chartered by Gurdit Singh – alerted the British officials stationed in Hong Kong, possibly due to the connections of Indian migrants with radical activity in North America or an explicit refusal to grant Indian British subjects freedom of movement across imperial territories. Though the paranoia of sedition lurked with disproportionate alarm in the minds of British officials, politics lay deep-rooted in Gurdit Singh's scheme. His tactics are expressed in this statement: "If we are admitted, we will know that the Canadian government is just. If we are deported, we will sue the government and if we cannot obtain redress we will go back and take up the matter with the Indian Government."²²¹ Gurdit Singh's voyage was not simply a physical transfer of merchants, preachers, and students to a new land, but a means to test the zeal of color prejudice abroad that undermined the equitable ideals of European legal systems. By checking at each stage whether his actions violated the law, he cornered the Canadian government into adopting a position that either accepted or rejected the law. In the perspective of the Canadian authorities, an interpretation of the law always lay available to exclude Indians from settling down on territory they had no political right to or legitimate sense of belonging – only white people from Western countries carried these privileges, based on the lenient examinations given to them.²²²

²²⁰ Gurdit Singh, *Voyage of Komagata Maru or India's Slavery Abroad*, ed. Darshan Singh Tatla (New Delhi: Unistar and Punjab Centre for Migration Studies, 2007), 50.

²²¹ Johnston, *The Voyage*, 30.

²²² *Ibid.*

One major controversy arose over the legality of the voyage as different governments produced contradictory replies on this question. The Hong Kong government permitted the departure of the vessel, confirmed by Gurdit Singh with a lawyer he befriended named Claud Severn; yet this did not guarantee permission to land in Canada since the latter government had not yet replied to the cables sent in late March-early April.²²³ After the ship had set sail, the Canadian Government declared that entry would be prohibited. The premises for such a prohibition did not lie in the realm of jurisprudence but a political agenda influenced by a diverse coalition: white laborers, British informants, and immigration officers. The coalition, divided in many ways, could unite on the issue of Indian migrants: to ban them for the sake of national security, the economy, and preserving the hegemony of white people in the West. However, the *Komagata Maru* incident exposed the much deeper resonance of color prejudice over issues of security and economy since the passengers of the ship were not political revolutionaries or prospective laborers, according to Gurdit Singh's memoir. In fact, Gurdit Singh made the innovative legal argument that none of the passengers aboard the *Komagata Maru* should be classified as immigrants since they were performing duties applicable to occupations excluded in the continuous journey clause: preachers, traders, students, tourists, and government officials (Gurdit, 82).²²⁴ As he notably remarks in a letter sent to the Immigration Department on the day of arrival "You know that I am a merchant and there is no law to prevent the merchants to go on shore" which verifies his stance as a non-immigrant.²²⁵

The validity of the limited sphere of Gurdit Singh's mercantile intentions encounters several doubts due to the influence of the Ghadar party at East Asian ports, marking the

²²³ Ibid., 28-29.

²²⁴ Singh, *Voyage of Komagata Maru Maru*, 82.

²²⁵ Ibid., 85.

intermediate stops taken by the *Komagata Maru* before reaching Canadian shores. At Shanghai and Moji, the ship docked, and Gurdit Singh and his lieutenants brought aboard bundles of the *Ghadar* paper and other revolutionary literature. Poems from *Ghadar-di-Goonj* were “read, recited, explained, paraphrased, and elaborated upon.”²²⁶ The fervent and nostalgic expression of language to provoke revolutionary thinking among the hundreds of predominantly Sikh passengers revealed the global influence of the *Ghadar* propaganda, churning out thousands of copies in a garage in San Francisco, and a commonplace receptivity toward radical thought on board. Despite a lack of familiarity for most in the nuances of Indian nationalism and leftist ideologies, the political cause of the Punjabis in North America produced an emotional response among the passengers who participated in vilifying England and calling for revolution. In contradiction to this claim, Gurdit Singh denied this allegation of bringing aboard revolutionary literature and blames the Vancouver port authorities for sending a bundle containing *Ghadar* to intentionally discredit his enterprise and label him as a revolutionary.²²⁷ Historical incongruences emerge since it is unclear whether *Ghadar* literature entered the *Komagata Maru* in East Asia or Vancouver. Prior to the arrival of the *Komagata Maru*, the new leadership of the Ghadar party had not yet risen to the ranks since Bhagwan Singh and Mohammad Barakatullah were residing in Japan and engaged in nationalist activities there. Bhagwan Singh jumped the ship in Yokohama and planned to return to North America after the government deported him for stirring up unrest with his fiery speeches. He stayed with Barakatullah, the militant pan-Islamist and later convert to Soviet communism, and they both visited the *Komagata Maru*, bringing the latest copies of the *Ghadar*.²²⁸ Another viewpoint stresses Gurdit Singh aimed to avoid

²²⁶ Johnston, *The Voyage*, 32.

²²⁷ Tatla, *Report of the Komagata Maru*, 10.

²²⁸ Johnston, *The Voyage*, 34.

associations with the revolutionary movement because of its financial drawbacks and he only made a formal acquaintance with the two Ghadarites, even refusing to shake hands with Bhagwan Singh because he shaved his hair, violating one of the core practices of Sikhism called *kesh* in which one allows one's hair to naturally grow out.

On May 22, 1914, the *Komagata Maru* anchored near Burrard Inlet in Vancouver. An article on the same day from the *San Francisco Examiner* noted "the Vancouver Hindus are looking for her any hour... and five Hindus hurried by automobile into Alberni, on the extreme west coast of the Vancouver island, and there chartered the launch *Salita Queen*... [to] attempt to intercept the Hindu excursion now approaching these shores."²²⁹ The object was speculated as either to aid in landing or provide the passengers with money. Therefore, the arrival of the *Komagata Maru* excited the local Indian community as the ship symbolized defiance toward the exclusionary laws of the Canadian government. In Gurdit Singh's memoir, he repeatedly denounces the color prejudice of Western democracies for the hypocrisy of their professed values of liberty and equality.²³⁰ Nevertheless, the humanitarian risks posed by sailing the *Komagata Maru* to the distant shores of Vancouver must have lingered in the back of Gurdit Singh's mind since Bhagawan Singh reminded him of the possibility of rejection. Though, he is adamant in his writings to declare that Indians are naturally afforded as British subjects to conduct business in Canada, at least under a fair interpretation of the law. Whether one takes this to be hard-headed naivete or political ingenuity, Gurdit Singh's ideological altruism in the domain of law does not find its match in measuring the potential risk to human life – or maybe the risk factor is exactly what his political scheme required.

²²⁹ "Coast News Notes; Vancouver (B.C.)," *San Francisco Examiner* (San Francisco, CA), May 22, 1914, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

²³⁰ Singh, *Voyage of Komagata Maru Maru*, 58.

As soon as the ship arrived and caught the sight of immigration officials and Vancouver residents, the lead Immigration agent Malcolm Reid did everything in his capacity to delay the processing of documents and health reports, a legal immigration case reaching court, and entry of any Indian on Canadian soil. Gurdit Singh notes the Canadian government broke with standard immigration procedures for the new batch of arrivals in 1914. For example, he was initially forbidden to deliver a report of the ship, despite this being a legal record useful for immigration officials to verify the owners and the maritime path taken.²³¹ Another exception made was forbidding the passengers to be kept under official supervision in a government building since Reid was determined to not let the ship land. Moreover, the Immigration Department exercised absolute authority over all correspondences and purchases of provisions, surrendering the humanitarian and political survival of the passengers to a department set on sending them back to Asia.²³² In terms of correspondences, Reid erected an invisible barrier between the *Komagata Maru* at sea and the bustling civil life of Vancouver by suppressing the spread of information, barring communications, and prohibiting the entry of press.²³³ While the dire state of the migrants' situation coerced him into loosening these restrictions, he employed extrajudicial methods of silencing, force, and intimidation to render the hopes of settlement and commerce held by the Indian migrants as a sheer impossibility.

The consequences of this artificially constructed invisible barrier were felt not only by the passengers lacking adequate food and water supplies, but legal representatives on the shore.

A Shore Committee consisting of prominent radical nationalists including Balwant Singh, Husain Rahim, and Bhag Singh extended support to the passengers.²³⁴ They contributed

²³¹ Ibid., 78.

²³² Ibid., 81.

²³³ Johnston, *The Voyage*, 38.

²³⁴ Tatla, *Report of the Komagata Maru*, 8-9.

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thousands of dollars to the cause and delivered anti-colonial speeches, condemning the discrimination against Indians by white governments.²³⁵ Reid feared possible rioting of white laborers who may have attentively looked at the *Komagata Maru* with an irrational fear built up by more than a decade of propaganda degrading Asian communities in Canada. Some white members of Canadian society, on the other hand, robustly supported the rights of the *Komagata Maru* passengers. On June 21, a meeting was held in which 400 Indians attended and 125 whites from the Socialist party.²³⁶ The topic for discussion was led by the lawyer representing Gurdit Singh and the passengers, J. Edward Bird. Bird remarks at the meeting that immigration authorities unjustly prevented him from taking to court a case on the legitimacy of allowing the *Komagata Maru* to land. Reid's sly tactics went beyond delaying justice; he also shunned responsibility for supplying minimal provisions to the ship because he believed it was the responsibility of the owners. In a letter written during this arduous waiting period for the 376 Punjabi men, including a few children, Bird writes to the Secretary of the Governor-General of Canada "Am not allowed to go on board nor him to come on land. Every difficulty thrown in my way of communication. Proceedings being delayed and obstructed."²³⁷ Moreover, the new charterers who gained possession of the ship – Rahim and Bhag Singh – from the previous Japanese owners continued to make payments in excess of traditional requirements yet were not allowed to step on board.²³⁸ Before any conclusions were made by the Committee of Inquiry, the immigration officials took advantage of the situation to assert the culpability of the passengers for their voyage rather than negotiate with Gurdit Singh on how to improve the well-being of the passengers.

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²³⁵ Johnston, *The Voyage*, 40-41.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, 48.

²³⁷ Singh, *Voyage of Komagata Maru Maru*, 87.

²³⁸ Johnston, *The Voyage*, 47.

With much delay, a test case reached the Court of Appeals in British Columbia focused on a passenger by the name of Munshi Singh to determine whether the ship full of immigrants could legally enter. The precedent of other cases with defendants of Punjabi descent was not in favor of Bird who defended the case. On July 6, the Court of Appeals unanimously dismissed the appeal made by the Indian delegation and affirmed the actions taken by immigration officials to prevent the landing of the *Komagata Maru* passengers.²³⁹ After this case, the law empowered immigrant officials to deport all the passengers. The following day, Gurdit Singh asks for the ship to be sent back to Hong Kong to prevent the Committee of Inquiry with continuing their investigation because it would lead to unnecessary legal obstacles. To the dismay of those hoping for a peaceful return, an escalation of tensions between immigrant officials and the passengers of the *Komagata Maru* led to an outbreak of violence. As expected, the Ghadar party, familiarized with militant practices, entered the scene yet again. Four Sikhs associated with the party crossed the border from the United States at Sumas to visit a friend who turned out to be Taraknath Das with Bhagwan Singh accompanying him.²⁴⁰ One of the men was arrested by the provincial police in the woods on the British Columbia side for carrying two automatic revolvers and 300 rounds of ammunition. Another major figure, Harnam Singh, was arrested with his compatriots for also carrying weapons and ammunition. There is little doubt these Ghadarites planned to smuggle arms onto the *Komagata Maru* since the legal situation worsened and violence was a logical option for revolutionaries who frequently adopted these methods of resistance to assert the autonomy of disadvantaged members of society.

²³⁹ "B.C. Court Refuses to Befriend Hindus," *San Francisco Examiner* (San Francisco, CA), July 7, 1914, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

²⁴⁰ Johnston, *The Voyage*, 74.

Reports of sedition and arms brewing among Sikh communities in Canada and the United States frightened the immigrant authorities, especially Reid who thought the passengers were plotting for an escape. A simple and direct transmission of supplies would not suffice, and extra measures would have to be taken. His anxieties find some credibility since the associates of Gurdit Singh had been accused in the past of bomb-manufacturing. Reid even feared for his own life, a legitimate fear given the string of assassinations of informants and radicals in the Indian community occurring in the years of the Indo-German conspiracy during World War I. Additionally, the ship remained docked on the inlet and had to be moved out further following the court's decision. A crew of police officers and a force assembled by Reid boarded the tugboat *Sea Lion* with provisions to supply the *Komagata Maru* and orders to move them out to sea, however the passengers on board held grievances toward the officials for their blatant mistreatment, thereby compromising a smooth transfer of goods. They waved clubs, threw stones and bricks, and even injured a few police officers pointing weapons at the ship.²⁴¹ The *San Francisco Examiner* reported "Several white men were seriously injured attempting to board the Komagata Maru and two or three Hindus shot."²⁴² Such a brazen attack by the Indian passengers inflamed the opinion of the white community, further racializing the issue. All attempts for a peaceful process of departure failed due to a mixture of influences: the intimidation tactics of the authorities, lack of access to commercial affairs of the *Komagata Maru*, and the interference of imperial interests with the legal process. Intimidation tactics heightened as the naval ship *Rainbow* was subsequently hired, using disproportionate force against a mass of mostly starving passengers.

²⁴¹ Johnston, *The Voyage*, 76.

²⁴² "Hindus Battle in Vancouver; Many Are Shot," *San Francisco Examiner* (San Francisco, CA), July 19, 1914, [Page #], ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

Moreover, the legal loopholes exercised by the government to prohibit passengers to land or acquire sufficient provisions demonstrated the legally unrecognized status of their anti-immigrant narratives. In other words, only a twisted and indirect interpretation of domestic law could engender and prolong the inhumane conditions present on the ship, revealing how cultural and racial biases slipped into legal judgements. Contemporary politics and culture in fact shaped the normative applicability of law, enabling the state to use law as an instrument for asserting hegemonic interests. The government avoided an explicit legal confrontation with Gurdit Singh in order to leave the Indian passengers in a state of limbo: affording them rights neither as British subjects, newly arrived immigrants, nor Canadian residents. Such a devaluation of the law in the case of the deeply politicized *Komagata Maru* voyage disclosed the Canadian government's implicit framework of racial classification operating within its institutions that empowered a decade-long fight to curb the Indian community's struggle to gain social, political, and economic freedoms abroad and at home. Isolated from their brethren, including religious communities such as the Khalsa Diwan society and radical nationalists like those part of the Ghadar party, the *Komagata Maru* lived in no man's land, stranded between a hostile government on one side and a colossal ocean where empire still reigned on the other. The court's decision underwent serious scrutiny in the historiography, along with the San Francisco Conspiracy Case prosecuting Indian nationalists in 1917, for permitting British imperial interests to interfere with domestic ones. Without protection from a British government who sought to alleviate the Indian migrants' sufferings and guarantee them basic rights, the Canadian government cemented into legislation an imperial agenda: consolidating and militarizing control over India and Indians, removing or weakening radical groups intending to destabilize the racialized colonial hierarchy, and strengthening Sikhs as a class for state patronage and foreign military engagements. Already, the

Sikh community in North America was a nationalist threat under the British intelligence radar due to the activities of the Ghadar party and dissemination of *Ghadar* publications. Accusations toward Gurdit Singh in the “Report of the Komagata Maru Committee of Inquiry” produced by the Raj tried to paint him as a revolutionary Sikh gone astray from the core imperialist principles, disregarding the commercial side of his activities and the legal discrepancies highlighted by their Dominion government’s court decision.

Nonetheless, the *Komagata Maru* incident increased hostility toward the British regime, especially in California where the Ghadar party delivered lectures in major cities demanding migrants to return to India and ignite a revolution by means of targeted military attacks. The ship’s departure from the Vancouver harbor on July 23 was followed by a fast-paced escalation in militant activities across the Pacific West Coast intended to expand the party’s operations in India and turn the public opinion against British rule.²⁴³ At the same time, the *Komagata Maru* traced back its journey across the Pacific Ocean with a group of passengers radicalized by the *Ghadar* literature, their non-responsive home government, and a dehumanizing performance by immigration authorities in front of their own Punjabi brothers. Whether they were politicized before or after the *Komagata Maru*’s standoff with the immigration authorities, the worsening conditions on board due to the accumulation of trash, lack of sanitation, and dehydration forced the passengers to reconsider their relationship with the government, generally silent on such matters. Moreover, it intensified the demands for a revolt since the *Komagata Maru* could be appropriated as a vessel for weapons to spark riots in India with the return of a newly mobilized group of Punjabis. One of the prominent Ghadar party figures who acted as President, Sohan Singh Bhakna, boarded the *Komagata Maru* at Yokohama on August 16 with 200 automatic

²⁴³ Singh, *Voyage of Komagata Maru Maru*, 53.

pistols, 2000 rounds of ammunition, and copies of *Ghadar*.²⁴⁴ Just under two weeks before, Britain declared war on Germany following the assassination of Franz Ferdinand that set the Great War into motion. The British government faced multiple wartime constraints and possible disintegration by belligerent rival empires. Taking note of this, a burgeoning relationship between German diplomats, Indian nationalists, and Irish republicans during the war transformed the anti-British sentiments of the Ghadar party into a reality, assisted by the activities of Har Dayal in Berlin who collaborated with the German embassy.²⁴⁵ Also, the *Ghadar* literature linked Indian communities across the globe and publication issues shared the message of revolution as an opportunity to weaken the empire on all fronts and attain liberation, for example by turning the *Komagata Maru* into a site of anti-colonial resistance with the armor of weaponry and nationalist thinking.²⁴⁶ However, it is difficult to determine the transnational scope of the Ghadar party because of the limited number of actors involved in the Indo-German conspiracy; also, copies of the *Ghadar* literature found in a foreign city do not suffice as evidence of political participation or ideological support. Another challenge is separating the efforts of workers and intellectuals since the latter group had the capacity to form international connections whereas the latter balanced economic constraints with political demands.

An article published on September 24, 1914 recorded the decisions reached at a radical meeting held in Fresno “urg[ing] Hindus to aid [an] uprising in [their] native land.”²⁴⁷ Ram Chand performed the duties of the chairman at the meeting. In his speech, he declared Britain’s

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

²⁴⁵ For more information about the wartime conspiracy involving networks between the German, Indians, and Irish, please look at Matthew Plowman, “Irish Republicans and the Indo-German Conspiracy of World War I,” *New Hibernia Review* 7, no. 3 (2003): <https://doi.org/10.1353/nhr.2003.0069>.

²⁴⁶ Johnston, *The Voyage*, 92.

²⁴⁷ Box 7, Folder 18. BANC MSS 2002/78 cz. “Urge Hindus to Aid Uprising in Native Land.” *Fresno Republican* September 24, 1914.

engagement in war as the perfect opportunity to strike the empire and revolt. Two other speakers, one being Bhagwan Singh, echoed the calls for revolution and assured the crowd of German assistance. The extent of financial assistance from the Germans is a source of controversy in the scholarship, though it is important to note the much larger impact of wealthy Sikh landowners in California who contributed considerable amounts to the movement. \$2000 was collected from the 350 Indians who attended the meeting to send literature to Indians throughout the country, bidding them to return to India and take arms against England. The ship *Manchuria* planned to deliver a shipload of Indian migrants from San Francisco to India. The party recruited men across the coast to start a mass revolt in India, preparing their departure from Victoria and Vancouver on the *Empress of India* and *Shidzuko Maru*, respectively.²⁴⁸ The Ghadar leaders continued a tour across California to stir up the Indians, possibly settled down and acquainted with American life. After a few years of switching between industrial and rural occupations, Punjabi Sikhs built temples and integrated into society. A landmark study by Karen I. Leonard investigates the socio-cultural relations created by Punjabi-Mexican intermixing, an unexpected encounter between two cultures in the fertile regions of the Imperial and Central valleys in California.²⁴⁹ Though emotionally charged by the rhetoric of the *Ghadar* articles and poems for the past year, how could a farmer with little security residing in a land far away from his native one overcome the uncertainty of sacrificing a stable livelihood in America to engage in political subversion deemed criminal to the regime? The risk factor was nonnegligible, yet scholars in the field of Indian nationalism give little attention to the pragmatic circumstances of workers participating in a political movement and how they measured or compensated the risks and

²⁴⁸ Johnston, *The Voyage*, 95.

²⁴⁹ Karen Leonard, *Making Ethnic Choices: California's Punjabi Mexican Americans* (Philadelphia PA: Temple University Press, 2010).

sacrifices of taking on a radical militant role. The psychology of political resistance surely played a part in shaping the attitudes of workers and farmers toward the idea of independence, once a seditious activity endangering an ex-soldier's identity. The transmission of *Ghadar* propaganda imbued with cultural and religious metaphors replaced the nation as the most psychologically and politically necessary community, enabling ordinary Punjabi Sikh laborers to disrupt their subsistence-based cycle of work and seek liberation. A mutiny lay on the horizon for the Ghadarites, an assembly of converts to revolution armed with the spirit of self-sacrifice.

The British intelligence reports circulating between the American, Canadian, and Indian governments had their eye on the Ghadar party's activities since its inception. The sharp shift in the tone and immediacy of the leaders' rhetoric and the alleged ties between the nationalist group and German diplomats was a pressing issue of national security. The Raj employed all means necessary to delegitimize, suppress, and silence voices expressing nationalist sentiment, compromising the Indian perceptions of Britain's wartime goals and the loyalty of Sikh soldiers serving in the main theater of war in Europe and battles in the Middle East. As news came to the officers in Calcutta the *Komagata Maru* would arrive on the east Indian shores of the empire, mechanisms were put in place to prevent a riot breaking out in Bengal and Punjab in response to the inhumane treatment of the passengers disallowed from entering imperial territories. Michael O'Dwyer, the Lieutenant-Governor of Punjab during the war, frequently denounced the methods of revolutionary groups, specifically the Ghadar movement that wrought havoc on law and order in Punjab. With his approval, the Ingress Ordinance was passed on September 4, 1914 to grant extraordinary policing powers to the Punjab government as a safeguard against the "returning Ghadr conspirators" in a period of great instability for the empire.²⁵⁰ The ordinance targeted the

²⁵⁰ Michael O'Dwyer, *India as I Knew It* (New Delhi, India: Mittal Publications, 1925), 194.

returning Sikh emigrants by permitting arbitrary screening, detaining, and arresting of those bearing any association with the Ghadar party. Orders were sent to cities in East Asia where Ghadar affiliates may have resided to intern them since they posed immense risks to the administration of the military in Punjab. Despite the strict laws on censorship, literature secretly found its way to Punjabi villages and such ideas on militant revolutionary struggle had to be eradicated before domestic threats upstaged and compromised British international engagements.

The returning Punjabi migrants on board the ships of the *Komagata Maru* and others chartered to instigate a revolt wore the badge of conspiracy. The government's expectation of a political storm to rage across the Punjab with these arrivals vindicated the expansion of their policing, surveillance, and legal powers – all designated to suppress radical socialist activities originating from the Ghadar base located in North America and moving toward the prestigious administrative structure built in Punjab, prevalent in the canal colonies and military arrangements. The militant revolutionaries came from the same social class as these loyal Punjabi Sikhs stationed for deployment to Europe and Middle East, revealing the susceptibility of their inflammatory rhetoric to those sharing similar social, linguistic, and religious backgrounds who could swiftly dismantle the administration by rebelling against conscription and assaulting British-owned institutions. Such a consequence seemed unlikely given the limited impact of the Ghadar party following a premature suppression at Budge Budge, where the exhausted and bitter *Komagata Maru* passengers arrived. At Budge Budge in Bengal, empowered by the Ingress Ordinance, Deputy Commissioner Humphrey ordered the passengers to take a special train to Punjab that avoided a route through crowded cities. Why was this necessary? The government hoped to deter further agitation and believed the passengers to be directly collaborating with the Ghadar party, though evidence on this is contentious. Gurdit

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Singh viewed this act as silencing social issues facing Indians in British territories and affirming his belief the government did not represent their interests. Therefore, Gurdit Singh led an escape to avoid taking the train, a government scheme that sought to minimize publicization of the *Komagata Maru* incident. Many others followed suit, shots were fired by British police officers, and 19 passengers were killed and 23 wounded.²⁵¹ By October 11, it was confirmed that 201 passengers were captured, some facing internment and others released if no evidence linked them to the seditious activities of the Ghadar party.

Large numbers of disaffected Sikhs arrived from America to start a mutiny. These Ghadar returnees disseminated seditious literature to the villages, troops, and schools in Punjab to set off a rebellion against the colonial authorities using militant force. Their primary methods were dacoities, raids, and bombings. Major efforts went to stealing, collecting, and manufacturing methods. Moreover, a military outbreak was planned for February 1915 by the Berkeley student and Ghadarite Kartar Singh Sarabha who made his way to Punjab from Colombo, Ceylon. Details of his participation in looting, raiding, and collecting weapons figure in two hagiographies of the beloved revolutionary, hailed by the famous anti-colonial martyr Bhagat Singh for his revolutionary commitment.²⁵² The Ghadarites adopted tactics of revolutionary terrorists through loose leadership by Rash Behari Bose, V.G. Pingle, and Kartar Singh Sarabha who gathered people and planned raids in cities across Punjab. The criminal nature of their activity threatened the peace in Punjab which the British needed to preserve during the war. The strategic position of the Ghadarites gradually weakened due to unconsolidated leadership, failed raids and attacks, and a lack of popular support for their activities in Punjab. However, the disruption caused by a brute and steadfast group of migrants

²⁵¹ Singh, *Voyage of Komagata Maru Maru*, 53.

²⁵² Written by Chaman Lal and Sohan Singh Josh.

from America alarmed the British, as shown by the Rowlatt Report, Lahore Conspiracy Case, and Defence of India Act 1915. If order in the villages and towns could break so easily by radicalized and militarized parties of men, the British government had a reason to fear for its own legitimacy in Punjab. Their response was indicative of this fear since it sought to eliminate the seeds of sedition sowed by seditious literature through absolute censorship, indictments, and executions.

The Defence of India Act was passed in March, 1915 and gave the government special powers in authorizing the “arrest and internment of dangerous persons.” The Act was specifically designed for political threats in Punjab, a significant region as it formed a link to Turkey where many Muslim *muhajirs* (migrants) were travelling to support the preservation of the Ottoman Empire against the encroaching British imperialist regime. More significantly, government agents had sufficient information indicating a transport of men and arms to Punjab following the radicalization of Punjabi Sikhs in North America who returned to stir unrest and inflict violence on the state. The act effectively curtailed nationalist activities and legalized preventive measures targeted against Indians associated with political subversion and violence. The opinion of the Punjab authorities demonstrates their perspective: “had not Government been armed with extensive powers under the Defense of India Act and the Ingress Ordinance, the Ghadar movement could not have been suppressed so rapidly; and delay of preventive action and retribution in such a case would have increased yet more the amount of disorder to be coped with.”²⁵³

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²⁵³ British Parliament, *Sedition Committee 1918*, by S. A. T. Rowlatt (Calcutta, India, 1918), 161.

The wartime period in which nationalists attempted to overthrow the regime is related to a complicated network of diplomatic alliances, espionage, overseas arms flow, planned military attacks, imperial sovereignty and law. This lies outside the scope of my thesis and does not contribute to analyzing cross-class participation in radical socialist politics in late colonial Punjab since this era centers around contingent wartime alliances and military build-up that did not fundamentally express nor shape the ideological framework of Ghadar or other radical parties in Punjab. Moreover, there is a lack of primary sources to construct a narrative with a clear timeline. The most relevant consequence of the Ghadar mutiny was intense suppression of subversive political activity and a more intrusive colonial power in daily life. The First Lahore Conspiracy Case in 1915 permitted for the appointment of special tribunals for the trial of revolutionary crimes.²⁵⁴ In such cases, legal consideration for the demands made by revolutionaries was absent; instead, the courts effectively instrumentalized the law to brutally punish political actors in Punjab perceived as anti-government and seditious. Consequently, the trial prosecuted hundreds of Ghadarites and led to the execution of 42 mutineers. The swift erasure of the Ghadar party and its leaders following the trial judgements of Lahore and San Francisco seemed to sound the death knell for radical socialist politics. However, the psychological spell of their deaths invigorated the Punjabi public for decades, memorializing the martyrs through poems and folklore, and cemented the tradition of self-sacrifice as the true test of revolutionary heroism for anti-colonial radicals to come.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 156.



Portraits of Ghadar revolutionaries executed by the British government. ²⁵⁵

The Culture of Communism in Post-War Punjab

As the deadly hour of the Great War passed, the country coped with the deaths of at least 74,000 Indian soldiers who fought on the side of the British imperialists. The Raj embarked on another war at home against the radical revolutionaries through a series of conspiracy trials, specifically targeting the Ghadar party in Punjab. After the war, conducting nationalist meetings and riots in India would entail immediate and violent repression, so leftist radicals searched for a new base to shift their activities to. From 1918-1922, an emigration movement of Indians to Russia occurred in the aftermath of the October Revolution, which led to the rise of the Bolsheviks in the Soviet Union.²⁵⁶ The social revolution in Russia culminating in a radical transition of power and adoption of Marxist ideology had a powerful effect on Indian nationalists, notably because of the anti-imperialist stance of the Bolsheviks. Any writings

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²⁵⁶ M. A. Persits, *Revolutionaries of India in Soviet Russia* (n.p.: Progress, 1973), 17.

associated with communism or Bolshevism were listed as seditious under British legislation due to the incitement for the people of the East to overthrow their oppressors in these writings (30). In the post-1917 era, the ideological apparatus of the British empire conflated anti-British revolutionary activity with the importation of agitators from Moscow.²⁵⁷ Shalini Sharma, a scholar in Punjabi politics, expands on the British propaganda that construed communist ideology as anti-Indian because of its atheist principles, contrasting the strong religious identities of Indians.²⁵⁸ In delegitimizing communist politics as an importation of Russian ideologies and conspiracies, the British empire believed it had full authority to prosecute radical dissent that deviated from the negotiating style of elite politics led by the major parties, such as the Indian Congress.

However, the intricacies of Marxism in its critique of the social order seems to have been lost in the early stages of reception by the Indian nationalists. The scholar M.A. Persits makes a convincing argument, decades prior the cosmopolitan trend in historiography, that Indian revolutionary activities centered around military operations, especially for those in Punjab seducing troops and students to commit violence against their superiors as a symbol of resistance against colonial institutions. However, such activities prioritized the use of force and gave minimal attention in cultivating a radical consciousness among the peasants and workers in India. Without an understanding of the historical development of social classes in one's country, the meaning of political liberation lost its true purpose if it led to the replacement of the colonial power with a bourgeois democracy. Under such circumstances, the capitalist institutions would remain except with a new name and indigenous autonomy. A link between the socialist experimentation of the Ghadar party and the Bolshevik revolution emerges as the former acted

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 32

²⁵⁸ Shalini Sharma, *Radical Politics in Colonial Punjab: Governance and Sedition* (London: Routledge, 2012), 20.

more receptive toward a radical redistribution of resources because of the cross-class nature of participation in the political movement. While the differences exceed the similarities, the conditions enabling the rise of the Ghadar party allowed for a premature notion of socioeconomic organization as central to the formation of a radical politics.

The culture of communism loomed large in the minds of Indian nationalists, angered by the devastating social and economic consequences of an exploitative form of capitalism which profited the empire and starved the nation. With the experiment of Ghadar faded into ashes after wartime repression, people involved in Ghadar who evaded long imprisonment and execution viewed the Soviet Union as a haven for pursuing radical thought and modeling radical action. Barakatullah interwove communist ideology into his pan-Islamist affinities, deriving the connection from the egalitarian principles and communalizing tendencies shared by both intellectual disciplines.²⁵⁹ In 1917, he was the first Indian nationalist to establish relations with the Soviet Union.²⁶⁰ In the same year, he assisted the nationalist Mahendra Pratap established a Provisional Government in Kabul to be recognized as the official representative of Indian revolutionaries, however they lacked popular support and disbanded in 1919. After the war, Indian Muslims travelled across Soviet Central Asia in hopes of receiving an education from the Bolsheviks on how to topple the British regime. Most of the revolutionary emigres were landowning peasants from Punjab with a sizeable amount being illiterate, though they had a high degree of political consciousness.²⁶¹ At an auspicious meeting in 1919, Barakatullah met Vladimir Lenin and tried to convince him of establishing a Soviet-Afghan alliance to conduct a

²⁵⁹ Gangadhar M. Adhikari. 1971. *Documents of the History of the Communist Party of India. Vol. 1 1917-1922*. New Delhi: People's Publishing House.

²⁶⁰ Persits, *Revolutionaries of India*, 38.

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 82.

military raid and spread the ideas of social revolution.²⁶² These dealings failed to reach fruition due to the disunified front of Indian communists in Moscow. The most famous split put two Indian communists, M.N. Roy and Virendrenath Chattopadhyaya, at odds with each other in terms of how to implement a transition to a communist independent government in India. It is important to note these discussions occurred between educated elites in foreign countries due to the extension of judicial and policing powers after the war in India, confining the intellectual discussions of communism in universities and forums across the Soviet Union.

Indian emigres received ideological training in communism, notably at the Communist University of the Toilers of the East located in Tashkent. Ali Raza gives an account of Ghadarites who travelled to the Soviet Union to receive an education. The curriculum, as communicated between two British officials expressing concern about these communist training schools, included: "Marxism, Leninism, historical materialism, Marxian economics, economic geography, Marxian history... agitation, building up of cells, public and secret, military tactics; field work; and musketry."²⁶³ Scholarship on the reception of these Soviet courses catered to nationalists from Eastern countries is extremely limited currently and the contemporary Indian historiography renders the entire dialogue as a cosmopolitan and transnational wonder of the early 20th century. An example given by Persits attempts to measure the increasing ideological vigor of the students who used the analytic methods taught in the communist universities to deliver coherent theses on the state of social classes in their country. One student who displayed a high degree of analytic clarity by the name of Abdul wrote on the historical development of

²⁶² Ibid., 40.

²⁶³ Ali Raza, "Looking Towards Moscow: Ghadar Party's Engagement with Communism," in *The Ghadar Movement*, 378, https://www.academia.edu/27685844/Looking_Towards_Moscow_The_Ghadar_Partys_Engagement_with_Communist.

social classes and the rise of capitalism in India.²⁶⁴ After submitting his paper, he officially joined the Communist party the same day and gained possession of a Party card. Ordinary Indians who traveled to the Soviet Union – carrying former associations with the Ghadar party, leftist nationalism or pan-Islamism – received a political education unavailable in their home country or in Western countries because the social sciences courses radically reframed the students’ understandings of power, class, and labor. In the historiography, most attention centers around the prominent communists like M.N. Roy who came to the Soviet Union with prior interpretations of Marxism. One new strand of research for historians specializing in Soviet Union and/or colonial India should be how communist doctrines delivered by the Soviet educational apparatus shaped the political scene for communists and socialists in Punjab during the 1920s and ‘30s. As of now, it is unclear how an ideology as exacting as communism adapted to the Indian social context and what were the conditions that shaped criticisms of the social order by less known Indian communist students and leaders.

The life and work of Santokh Singh, a Punjabi migrant in North America at the forefront of organizing the Ghadar rebellion, concludes the era of socialist thought and activity from 1906-1926. Less known than the nationalist martyrs memorialized in folklore such as Bhagat Singh and Kartar Singh Sarabha, his time in prison introduced him to “Marxism and the ideals of the October Revolution by fellow inmates, some of whom were professed communists.”²⁶⁵ He left for Russia with other Indian revolutionaries after he was released “to take to and learn from the Russian path, organize the workers and peasants and work for preparing them for the proletarian revolution.”²⁶⁶ In Russia, he attended the fourth congress of the Communist International and

²⁶⁴ Persits, *Revolutionaries of India*, 99.

²⁶⁵ Raza, "Looking Towards Moscow," 373.

²⁶⁶ Sohan Singh Josh, *My Meetings with Bhagat Singh and Other Early Revolutionaries* (n.p.: Communist Party of India, 1976), 71.

met the Bolshevik leaders, never letting go of the ideal the Russian Revolution throughout his journeys. His stay lasted from 1922-1923 and he returned to India with the “new revolutionary weapon of Marxism-Leninism.” Santokh Singh took many risks to finally establish the vernacular Marxist journal *Kirti* in 1926. *Kirti* translates to laborer and referred to the people of Punjab who did not have capital and earned their living by working for others. The first issue declared:

“The journal will be the voice of Indian workers living in America and Canada and will be dedicated to the sacred memory of those heroes and martyrs who have awakened sleeping India at a time when the price of service and sacrifice was much higher than it is now. The journal will work for all the workers throughout the world, the entire female sex, the subjugated, weak, and oppressed nations and subjugated India.”²⁶⁷

Santokh Singh cared deeply about the working-class struggle and wrote analyses of the capitalist system in India through the lens of Marxism-Leninism learned during his brief stay in the Soviet Union. The current scholarship is lacking a careful investigation of Santokh Singh’s thinking that for the first time brought forward explicit Marxist ideas: the nationalization of production and the inequities of the social order produced by historically constituted class struggles. In conclusion, the ties of the Ghadar party with communism must escape the “internationalist” and “cosmopolitan” lens that reduce the dialogue to a diversification of spheres of thought. Instead, the intellectual dialogue must be put in the context of the labor movement and the ideological rigor of the professed communists in 1920s colonial Punjab. Though no official communist parties interacting with workers and peasants existed in Punjab before 1926,

²⁶⁷ Ibid., 73.

it is necessary to study this intermediate period to understand why radical political leaders adopted the cultural and intellectual aspects of communism in their lifestyles and writings.

CONCLUSION

The sojourn of the Punjabi migrants in North America led to the formation of a radical and socialist-aligned politics. The absence of a workable historical model for the excluded and racialized Punjabis required the existing cultural networks to adapt to the existential crisis faced by the ethnic community. Unlike several other immigrant communities in America and Canada, the Punjabis had no government to protect them in the face of legal, political, and social exclusion manufactured by coalitions of British informants, immigration officials, and white working-class lobbies. While social and economic freedoms abounded for those allowed to pass inspection at the North American ports, the political right to move around and settle was either non-existent or fragile. Organizations formed by Punjabi Sikhs aimed to counteract the discriminatory legislation and publicize the situation of Indians abroad on British territory by traveling back and forth or sending letters to political officials who supposedly represented the Indian community. The legal route became increasingly untenable as a string of riots attacked the community and the government tried to deport or resettle the Punjabi laborers on insufficient grounds.

Yet, a potential new route for workers to protect their autonomy was emerging in California among radical political leaders. The Industrial Workers of the World, founded in 1905, mobilized workers against the oppressive conditions of the American capitalist labor market and shared an affinity for anarchist principles. Indian intellectuals arriving to America

from different parts of the globe took influence from and actively contributed to the radical thought developing on the West Coast. Many formed organizations and printed revolutionary journals, however the audience was limited to the educated and elite. New tactics, a new language, and a new psychology had to develop for the intellectual class to effectively mobilize the workers and farmers across North America. Their social and economic conditions made them conducive to revolutionary activity and public participation in radical politics, prompted by the founding of the Ghadar party. The ethos and social practices of the Ghadar party were novel though in a premature stage of nationalist resistance. Poems calling for militant self-sacrifice and expressing a mythic national consciousness delivered a compelling and emotional political vision to the Punjabi Sikhs in their native language. However, the written works of the Ghadar party should not be interpreted as an analytic framework for a proposed political theory or ideology since there was no intention by its leaders to deliver a coherent ideology. Instead, the works are embedded in a specific social, cultural, and economic context and used religiously imbued language *to make the unthinkable thinkable* among a group of laborers, who were once closely allied to the British empire through a system of state patronage and military service. As a psychological shift took place at the hands of Ghadar's revolutionary politics, the hints of a social revolution reveal themselves in the experimental practices of the movement's members. Cross-class public participation enabled a rethinking of social roles in which farmers and students not only sought to understand the other social group but materialize the radical ideas of social reorganization into action. The communalization of political life mirrors the organizational design of future socialist and communist movements, which incentivized unorthodox forms of socialization irrespective of one's caste, creed, or social class. Farmers and students contributed

to maintaining the headquarters Yugantar Ashram and *Ghadar* printing press, which provided access to the liberalizing pursuit of political freedom for disadvantaged members of society.

Wartime repression through the expansion of judicial powers and the prosecution of revolutionaries in conspiracy cases led to the decline of the Ghadar party in Punjab. The transnational scope of the Ghadar party's operations in the Indo-German conspiracy is difficult to tell with limited primary source evidence. However, such histories are more directly related to British intelligence and espionage than what the focus of this thesis is: the formation of a revolutionary politics. The broad nature of the argument means the Ghadar party must not be solely attached to the nationalist historiography. The Ghadar movement as a social phenomenon left an indelible mark on Punjabi cultural and political life, yet there is little to no scholarship on these impacts in post-colonial Punjab. One finding of the research pursued in this thesis is that nationalism as a metaphysical ideology can be a limiting construct for analyzing the historical development of radical political thought and action. Though the political schemes organized by the Ghadar party are explicitly confined to pursuing a nationalist goal, the formation of a revolutionary politics outlives the temporal limits of nationalism. One example is the militarization of identity as a response to political and agrarian crises in Punjab, which may not have the same positive allure as decolonization. The Ghadar movement also erected a new set of social relations that radicalized the relationship between the community and the state, one which was immediately perceived as more direct and brutal rather than shaped by democratic institutional norms. Therefore, the scholarship should move toward examining the influence of Ghadar's cross-class and militant revolutionary consciousness on changing relationships in Punjabi social and political life from colonial to post-colonial times. Raza and Ramnath are two scholars who have explored the connection between Ghadar and communism, but the

internationalist framework they use to study it is a limiting feature. Intellectual dialogues on the social conditions of India, of great interest to Marxist philosophers, occur within a confined set of principles and methods or else analytical clarity is unachievable. While theoretical adaptations are necessary when shifting from one country's context to another, the parallel modes of investigation shared between Soviets and Indian communists is an area of potential research for scholars who wish to investigate the transition of a proto-communist radical group to one that expressed allegiance for Bolshevism: namely, the Ghadar party. Finally, scholarly studies of socialism and communism in Asian countries would benefit from a more grounded approach in analyzing the relationship between workers and intellectuals, and whether the two groups share the same political demands for a better and more livable future.

By peering into the political pasts of Punjab's most venerated martyrs and propagandists, a certain dynamism surfaces that is commonly lost in traditional colonial Indian histories and evaluations of statecraft by political scientists. Politics lies at the center of the mind, heart, and breath. To translate this into academic terms, people's automatic gravitation and slavish fervor for politics arises from the implication of politics in psychological, social, and economic phenomena. Unlike most other disciplines or methods, the language of politics possesses a hold over all people without any distinctions for literacy, class, age, or religion. The raw expression of need, in all its contradictions and beauties, is best exemplified in political literature, like the newspaper *Ghadar*. Yet, politics isolated from historical undercurrents affronts the modern reader as totally absurd and incomprehensible in the actors' vagueness, virtuosity, and vigor. It is imperative for scholars to recognize the volatility of political categories and mentalities to better analyze the development of the complex web of relations between citizen, community, and state. Even these categories have no clear delineation, demonstrated by the radical reworking of social

relations and conditions in theory and practice by the Ghadarites. The absence of stability in the realm of politics puts a responsibility upon historians to weave together the disparate threads of the past into an image that at least promises to restore the dynamic and unresolved lives of those embedded in political and cultural worlds starkly similar to ours. While a mere surface look at history may present individual choices of dead actors as determining future outcomes, the commonality of the social condition – that invisible structure which surrounds us – reveals how enduring questions of identity and community are across all eras and regions. The deaths of the Punjabi political agitators in the 1910s and 1920s provoked active and perpetual deliberation on questions of rights and dignity by future generations. Their stories cast doubt on the finality of death, at least in the realm of politics, due to the resistance of historical ideas and figures to the winds of time seeking to extinguish all that passes through it.

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