THE GHADAR MOVEMENT

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Front Matter

Special Issue: The Ghadar Movement

One of the pleasures of editing *Socialist Studies* is the opportunity to publish Special Issues with guest editors on topics, people, or historical events that are often overlooked or forgotten. This issue brings to life and light the Ghadar Movement of the early 20th century. "Ghadar" literally means rebellion, but if I were to assign a title to this issue, I would draw from the wonderful introduction by the Guest Editors, Drs Radha D'Souza and Kasim Tirmizey, and name it "Revive, Retheorize, Repoliticize". This Special Issue revives the Ghadar movement, retheorizes what it meant in historical and theoretical terms for socialist resistance and anticolonial movements, and it calls on us all to repoliticize our own ideas and commitments in light of a time where there is a very real return to authoritarian and fascist politics.

This special issue was initiated by its guest editors and I am indebted to them for their time and commitment to this project. They also assembled a set of contributors who have each enriched our understanding of who and what constituted this internationalist movement.

About the Guest Editors

Dr. Radha D'Souza teaches law at the University of Westminster, London. She is a social justice activist, a writer, critic and commentator. Her most recent book is *What's Wrong with Rights? Social Movements, Law and Liberal Imaginations* (Pluto Press, 2018).

Dr. Kasim Tirmizey has a PhD in Environmental Studies from York University. His recent research examines the history of radical anticolonial movements in relation to the emergence of the Pakistani nation-state. He is currently teaching at Concordia University.

Article

THE GHADAR MOVEMENT: WHY SOCIALISTS SHOULD LEARN ABOUT IT

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York University

Exile did not suit me, I took it for my homeland
When the noose of my net tightened, I called it my nest.

Mirza Asadullah Khan "Ghalib" [b. December 1797, Agra, India, d. February 1869, Delhi, India][1]

I

In May 2016 Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau formally apologized on behalf of the Government of Canada for the 1914 Komagata Maru incident, a singular event in the anti-colonial struggle against the British Empire launched by the newly formed Ghadar Party in North America. The apology came even as the anti-migrant vitriol in the wider society amplified. In late 2013 and again in early 2014, a memorial for the Ghadar martyrs in Harbour Green Park in Vancouver was vandalised twice within months. Notwithstanding the antagonism against immigrants in the public domain, Trudeau's apology had settled Canada's accounts with history and able to "move on." The Trudeau government appointed Harjit Sajjan, a retired Lieutenant Colonel and war veteran in the Canadian Army as the defence minister, the first South Asian to hold the position. In 2011, Harjit Singh was interestingly made the commanding officer of one of the Canadian Army regiments that was historically involved in preventing passengers aboard the Komagata Maru from disembarking. Harjit Sajjan was deployed in Afghanistan where he used his familiarity with language, culture and traditions of the region in favour of imperialist agendas in the region, the very Afghanistan where the Ghadarites from his home state were instrumental in establishing the first government-in-exile of free India a hundred years ago. The dialectical interplay between diaspora, (neo)colonial and imperialist politics has never been absent since the beginnings of

[1] Quoted in (Hyder 2006, 462).

capitalism, imperialism and colonialism. However, in the brave new world of "multiculturalism" and legal "non-discrimination" in the imperialist centres and "decolonisation" and legal independence in the neo-colonies, the conceptual tools and vocabulary for taking on and directly engaging with this dialectical interplay between diaspora, (neo)colonial and imperialist politics have become scarce in contemporary politics, scholarship and discourse. These relationships between diaspora and colonial/imperialist politics is much more complex in the case of South Asians who, for historical reasons, occupy preeminent positions in the institutions of neo-empire as they did in the old empires (Watch Nikki Haley, a Sikh diaspora perform in the UN for the Trump administration and recall too, the princes and maharajas of yesteryears!). The Ghadar movement offers a rich repertoire of concepts, theories and vocabulary for reviving, re-theorising and re-politicising the relationship between diaspora and neo-colonial/ imperialist politics. This special issue on the Ghadar movement hopes to contribute to such a revival in a small way.

At the turn of the 19th century and early 20th century, Britain attempted to consolidate imperial governance by forming alliances with "the princes, the chiefs and the landlords" on the one hand and on the other "the small class of highly educated natives" who were "mature, competent, moderate and loyal" (Briton 1967, 70). The need for political alliances and power sharing became necessary after the apparently invincible British Empire was shaken to its very foundations by the Great Ghadar of 1857 – an event that British historiography describes as the Indian Sepoy Mutiny and South Asian historiography as the First War of Independence. The events of 1857 marks what scholars have described as the shift from liberal imperialism to late imperialism (Mantena 2010). The embers of the Great Ghadar, literally the Great Rebellion, never died down on the sub-continent. By the turn of the 20th century, the embers leapt up to become another conflagration, on a global scale this time, one from which the British Empire never really recovered. The fact that the Ghadarites of the early twentieth century gave themselves the same name as the Great Ghadar is testimony to the extent to which they were inspired by the 1857 events. Indeed, their call for another "ghadar" (rebellion) was to complete the task that was begun by the Great Ghadar of 1857.

After independence British and Indian scholars alike were reluctant to acknowledge the Ghadar movement's contributions to the freedom movements in the subcontinent. Official British accounts described the Ghadar movement as the "Punjab troubles" thereby localising the global scope of the movement and later as "anarchical activities" thereby deflecting attention away from agrarian policies and state violence and attributing the causes of the movement to external Russian influences (see: Isemonger and Slattery 1919; Mitra 1921). It was Britain's agrarian policies however (see: Barrier 1967) that set into motion the out-migrations of agrarian populations from their ancestral homeland in the Punjab, thus fanning diverse migratory routes across the Empire from Burma and Malaya to Hong Kong and Shanghai. The lure of America and Canada was the strongest. On the eve of World War I 15,000 Indians, mostly from the Punjab, had migrated to the west coast of North America establishing settlements in California, British Columbia and elsewhere. The economic crisis and wage-cuts in America in 1907 invited the wrath of the white unionised workers. Racist attacks in the host states on the one hand and the continued supply of

migrant labour by the agrarian crisis in the subcontinent on the other brought about a convergence of the resistances to the agrarian crisis at home and the racial and labour discrimination in host countries.

Many Ghadar activists carried with them their experiences of popular struggles against land colonisation laws and colonial agrarian policies to their new homes in North America. Prominent amongst them was Ajit Singh. Arrested and imprisoned in Burma for his agitations against colonial land colonisation policies, Ajit Singh escaped to Europe where he organised the diaspora, and later travelled to Latin America to expand Ghadar networks across British colonies (see: Pal 1992). Biographies of men like Ajit Singh and others remain to be written. Barring a few exceptions (e.g. Deepak 1999; Deepak 2012; Noor 2011; Sawhney 2008; Yin 2016) very little is known about Ghadar activities in Latin America, Africa, South East Asia and the Middle East. From what is known, it is possible to say that the Ghadar movement was the first *real* international of working people because of its spread across all continents and connections to a wide range of anti-colonial movements. The political mobilisation of diaspora brought about a meeting of the anti-colonial movements in the subcontinent with other liberation movements elsewhere: the Irish, the Egyptians, the Russians, the Chinese. The realisation that imperial expropriation and colonial violence was not limited to Britain or the Indian subcontinent but that it was a wider, more universal phenomenon had a profound influence on all anti-colonial movements. Not surprisingly World War I unleashed unstoppable forces of resistance against colonialism. World War I was fought *by* colonised men and women *for* their colonial masters. *What for?*

If British historiography preferred to ignore the radical strands in the independence movements as actions of unreasonable madmen, extremists and fanatics, post-independence historiography of the independence movement remained equally reticent about acknowledging the role of the Ghadar movement. Recognised as legitimate leaders of the independence movement by imperial administrators, the "small class of highly educated natives" who were "mature, competent, moderate and loyal" became the spokespersons for the subcontinent's aspirations for freedom from colonial oppression. With recognition came seats at negotiating tables. Recognised as "moderate" and "reasonable" the leaders were perforce required to live up to the standards of moderateness and reasonableness set by imperial administrators. How could they keep their reputations as moderate and reasonable leaders and at the same time reconcile with the memory of revolutionary strands in the anti-colonial movements like the Ghadar movement? Every repressive law that the colonial administration introduced to suppress the revolutionary strands in the freedom struggle was countersigned by the members of the "educated classes." For example, the Indian members of the Sedition Committee which drafted the notorious and much hated Rowlatt Act (The Anarchical and Revolutionary Crimes Act, 1919) recommended the law that was directly used to suppress the Ghadar and other radicals (Rowlatt 1918). The converse is also true however. It is precisely because the revolutionary strands in the freedom struggle such as the Ghadar movement launched an uncompromising struggle against colonial rule that the "educated classes" found their status as "moderate" and "reasonable" spokespersons for the people of the subcontinent. Their reticence after power was transferred to them in 1947 was not surprising

therefore. The question "*what were these post-independence leaders doing when the Ghadarites and other revolutionaries were being martyred"* continues to loom large in public consciousness decades after independence. In the dominant accounts of the independence movements in the subcontinent the Ghadarites were at best "romantic" and/or "misguided" idealists and at worst "terrorists" who engaged in violence.

The transfer of power came in ways that the Ghadar leadership never envisioned, indeed, it was directly opposed to their vision for a free India. Transfer of power came with divisions of power between the old native elites, the erstwhile "the princes, the chiefs and the landlords" and the new national elite, the "small class of highly educated natives." After 1857 the two groups had become the principal beneficiaries of Britain's communal electorates in the name of representative politics and racialised armed forces organised on ethnic, caste, and religious lines (see: D'Souza 2017). In suppressing the Ghadar vision of a democratic and egalitarian India for workers, peasants and the working people of the subcontinent the British administrators, the "educated classes" and the "princes, chiefs and landlords" shared common cause. In the power sharing arrangements after independence, they fell apart. Independence came with bloody partition of the subcontinent into India and Pakistan. The bloody partition was preceded by the equally bloody repression of the anti-colonial movements of workers, peasants, indigenous and working people of the subcontinent amongst which the Ghadar movement was foremost. The sequence in the blood-baths are important. *Could "the princes, the chiefs and the landlords" and the "small class of highly educated natives" have taken over the reins of the colonial state after independence without the first blood-bath?*

The power sharing between elites of the subcontinent was enacted within a wider global transfer of the imperial baton from the British empire to the emerging American empire. The United States which did not so much as have a toe-hold in the subcontinent until 1947, was the first to recognise Pakistan and make it the centrepiece of two military alliances the SEATO and CENTO agreements that gave the US sway over the region throughout the Cold War years. Equally, the US gained access to India's vast and expanding markets for industrial goods and commercial services, which continued throughout the Cold War and increased after globalisation and liberalisation. The new power-brokers in the divided subcontinent were understandably uneasy about the Ghadar movement, rooted as it was in a universal humanist ethic and an egalitarian vision for society. It did not help the new power-brokers that the Ghadarites recognised them for who they were – power-brokers - and riled against them as traitors and collaborators with the colonial masters. These formative forces, structures and strands in the independence movements are crucial to understanding contemporary politics of diaspora, neo-colonialism and neo-imperialism. The formative forces create the structural contexts which has shaped and nurtured the South Asian diaspora as well as their engagement with struggles for social, economic and political justice at home. Equally the histories of anti-colonial movements in imperial centres are important for the revival of movements for justice, freedom and an egalitarian international order, call it socialism, neo-socialism, decolonisation, democratic-confederalism or whatever else.

Official British histories write about the Ghadar *Party* which they portray as a "terrorist" organisation (see: Isemonger and Slattery 1919; Mitra 1921; Hale 1937). Launched formally in San Francisco in 1913, the organisation was smashed and its members brutally exterminated and hanged between 1914-1916 invoking wartime regulations. Indeed, the colonial government saw their confrontation with the Ghadar movement as a war to keep India. The Ghadar movement is not reducible to the Ghadar Party however. Ghadar as a movement continued to influence in the freedom struggle in myriad ways especially in the Punjab. Ghadar memory was kept alive during the years leading up to independence and partition in 1947 by the political activists themselves who articulated a different vision for free India from the "moderate" leadership recognised by Britain. It is now part of the legend of martyr Bhagat Singh, the Che Guevara of the Indian subcontinent, that he carried a photo of Kartara Singh Sarabha in his pocket when he went to the gallows. Sarabha was a prominent Ghadarite who became politicised in America and hanged for waging war against the colonial state. Ghadar memory was kept alive in pamphlets, hagiographic literature, poetry and local celebrations of heroes after independence. Even before independence there was anxiety that the new power-brokers could well erase Ghadar memories and that memories of the movement need to be preserved for posterity. Randhir Singh's *The Ghadar Heroes: Forgotten Story of the Punjab Revolutionaries of 1914-15* (1945) stands out as an early example of the refusal to allow marginalisation of Ghadar history by the reformist nationalist leadership.

For historians of the sub-continent, partition brought with it new challenges. Hindus and Muslims, whose histories were entwined for over fourteen centuries and had matured to become inextricable as Siamese twins were suddenly surgically separated in their advanced years. They were now forced to create new identities and lives for each without the other twin. The subcontinent's history had to be reinvented and retold in new ways (see: Ahmed 2013). Even as historians in India and Pakistan busied themselves writing revisionist histories of their newly independent states, a steady dribble of books by activists, critical scholars and journalists kept memories of the Ghadar movement alive in the two new countries. Published by small local publishers, often by relatively unknown authors, the steady stream of publications throughout the sixties, seventies and eighties, written in local languages as well as English, reminded the people of the subcontinent about the unfinished task begun by the Great Ghadar of 1857 and continued by the second Ghadar at the turn of the twentieth century (e.g. Banerjee 1969; Deol 1969; Ganguly 1980; Iẓhārulḥaq 1986; Josh 1970; 1977-78; Mathur 1970; Puri. 1983; Sareen 1994; Singh 1966; Singh and Singh 1989). These books may not have succeeded in competing with the official histories written in British, Indian and Pakistani universities, but they did keep the memories of the movement alive among new generations of activists and post-independence social movements in the subcontinent. As the post-independence regimes in the subcontinent faltered and neo-imperialist stranglehold increased so did the relevance of Ghadar histories in popular imaginations.

By the turn of the twenty-first century, fears of new imperial wars, new modes of expropriation branded as "globalisation," new forms of colonisation, racism, discrimination and

national oppression revived interest in building global solidarities. Against that backdrop there was a resurgence of interest in the Ghadar movement amongst South Asian diaspora as well as social justice activists and critical scholars in North America. The centenary celebrations of the Ghadar Party in 2013 and 2014 helped to organise the resurgence. In India, Pakistan, United States, Canada and United Kingdom, across cities in Vancouver, Victoria, Calgary, Winnipeg, Toronto in Canada, London, Manchester, Birmingham and Bedford in Britain, in San Francisco and Stockton in the United States, in Lahore, New Delhi and Amritsar events, documentary films, memorial museums, and much else energised the revival. The active role of organisations like the India Defence League in Canada and the Indian Workers Association GB in Great Britain, both founded in the 1930s to support the Indian independence movement, organised commemoration events. These organisations provided a direct link to the Ghadarites who were associated with the organisations during its early years and highlighted the need for renewed solidarities with movements for justice in the subcontinent. The international scope of Ghadar organisation and movement, as well as the continuation of old problems such as racism, discrimination, renewed national oppression and imperialist wars were amplified in the wider context of globalisation, wars and racism. There was revival of academic interest in the Ghadar history. Maia Ramnath's seminal work: *Haj to Utopia: how the Ghadar movement charted global radicalism and attempted to overthrow the British empire* (2011) could not have come at a better time on the eve of Ghadar Party's centenary commemorations. Ramnath was not the only one though (see: Aziz 2017; Grewal, Puri, and Banga 2013; Kaur 2016; Oberoi 2009; Ogden 2012; Puri 2012; Puri 2011; Singh 2013a; Singh 2013b; Singh and Chakravarty 2013; Singh 2014; Sohi 2014; Tatla 2003).

The transfer of Ghadar scholarship from its former custodians: activists and public intellectuals to critical scholars in the academy presents new challenges for describing, evaluating and characterising the movement. In the eyes of the old custodians of Ghadar memory characterising the Ghadarites or the movement was never an issue. They were quite simply heroes who sacrificed their lives for freedom, an undertaking that remains an unfinished task for people today. Hence, the need to know, understand and remember the movement. This simple, yet profoundly inspiring analytical framework, is by its very nature unsuited for academia. Academia is founded on disciplinary, theoretical and epistemological segmentation of the world (see: D'Souza 2009). Within the portals of academia, theoretical framings of the Ghadar movement has become an important problematic in its own right. Scholars attempt to frame the Ghadar movement within familiar theoretical frames such as anarchism, socialism, religious nationalism and secular nationalism (see: Ramnath 2011). How do we hem-in a movement as diverse, complex and global as the Ghadar movement? In 2014, *Sikh Formations* published a special issue on the Ghadar movement. Articles in the special issue explored the influence of religion on the Ghadrites but struggled to hem the movement into religious nationalism as the analytical framework. The articles in this special issue of *Socialist Studies* explores the influence of socialism which competes for a place alongside religious nationalism, secular nationalism and anarchism in framing the Ghadar movement. *Is it possible then to hem-in the Ghadar movement within a socialist analytical*

framework? This special issue of *Socialist Studies* on the Ghadar movement highlights the complex relationship between the movement's relationship with Euro-American socialism.

II

As parallel and concurrent movements at least since 1848, the relationship between socialist movements in the capitalist First World and anti-colonial movements in the (neo)colonial Third World has been a difficult one at the best of times. Whereas class takes a prominent place as a categorical concept and as an organising principle of capitalism in Marxist analysis, the position of colonialism in the constitution of capitalism has remained relatively opaque and on the margins (see: D'Souza 2012). The hey-days for the dialogue between anti-capitalist socialism and anti-colonial national liberation was the period after the second congress of the Third Communist International or the COMINTERN. The Ghadarites were proactively engaged in bringing about the meeting of socialist movements against capitalism and national liberation movements against imperialism. Attempts to revive, retheorise and re-politicise the relationships between diaspora and struggles against imperialism and neo-colonialism in the Third World must necessarily revisit Ghadar engagement with socialist movements therefore. The revival of the dialogue between struggles against capitalism in the First World and the anti-imperialist movements in the Third World is a necessary condition for human emancipation in the present context. However, the need to re-consider socialist orientations of the Ghadar movement does not do away with the problem of theoretical framings. Instead, it exacerbates the problem of theoretical framings. *Whose socialism and what kind of socialism?*

Locating stories of individual Ghadarites like Jodh Singh (Chopra), Sohan Singh Josh (Jan), Udham Singh (Webb) and others within the wider contexts of the anti-colonial struggles, the articles in this volume highlight the ways in which lives of less known Ghadarites intersected with the wider political currents of national liberation and socialism. The articles weave the life-stories of individuals and the historical conjuncture in which they found themselves to exemplify diverse aspects of the movement as well as theoretical approaches. In one way or another the contributors seek to understand the synergy/affinity of socialism in the subcontinent and the Ghadar movement. What comes through is the wide variety of articulations of the conversations between socialism and anti-colonialism. The dialogue between socialist theories and anti-imperialist struggles operate at two levels in this collection of articles. The first is about the problems of theoretical framings within Marxist traditions. The articles in this issue use different Marxist/Critical Theory approaches to address very different aspects of the movement. Whereas Chopra draws on Michel Foucault and subaltern studies to highlight "small voices" of history, Tirmizey draws on Antonio Gramsci and Frantz Fanon to analyse how local social practices are adapted for transformative counter-hegemonic projects. Whereas Jan sees the national liberation and socialist movements as profoundly influential events that by-passed each other, D'Souza

examines the movement from the standpoint of comparative philosophy. Must socialism travel one single road? *Can there be diverse intellectual and theoretical roads to socialism?*

The second conversation is about the encounter between socialism and anti-colonialism, or rather in this case between socialist and the Ghadar movements. For Jan (*In The Shadows of the Ghadar)* the relationship between anticolonial movements and the European socialist movements, Marxism and anti-colonialism in the Punjab more specifically, was a "missed encounter." The "missed encounter" is examined through the life of Sohan Singh Josh. The "missed encounter" challenged socialism and national liberation and forced the acknowledgement of the other in ways that changed both. The single most important change was recognition of the peasantry as a political subject, something that European Marxism was forced to acknowledge as a result of the "missed encounter." For Tirmizey (*Learning from and Translating Peasant Struggles As Anti-Colonial Praxis)* far from being a "missed encounter" the Ghadar movement exemplifies Gramsci's ideas about translation and transformation. The Ghadar movement took from pre-existing forms of rebellion in society such as banditry and dacoity common in peasant societies and "translated" and "transposed" those practices for the counter-hegemonic project of national liberation against imperialism and colonialism. This translation was the result, precisely because of the encounter of the Ghadrites with Western socialists. For Radha D'Souza (*The Conceptual World of the Ghadarites)* it is wrong to assume that progressive politics originates exclusively as reactions to modernity and capitalism. The Ghadarites were attracted to socialism and the politics of human emancipation because of the deeply embedded progressive intellectual traditions in South Asia, what she calls the "Indic Enlightenment" that canvassed equality, justice, freedom and egalitarianism. These traditions addressed the "lower classes" and continues to be remembered by them. If the Ghadarites were attracted to socialist ideologies it is not because of religion per se but because of the traditions of dissent in South Asia that the Indic Enlightenment cultivated in popular consciousness. Rohit Chopra (*The Madness of Jodh Singh)* seeks to retrieve "the small voices of history" by recovering the life-story of the hitherto unknown Jodh Singh from the depths of the archives. Jodh Singh was tried in the US for his alleged part in the Hindu-German conspiracy trials in 1917-18. Chopra uses the "small voice" of Jodh Singh to highlight the plight of individuals in the hands of two competing modernities. The first is the dominant liberal colonialism underpinned by the "juridical-medical-legal framework" during the trial. Equally the "small voice" of Jodh Singh reveals the hegemonic tendencies latent in the national liberation project organised along political party lines and hierarchies of "leaders" and "rank and file" foot soldiers.

Whatever the nature of the dialogue between socialism and national liberation both left indelible marks on politics in the subcontinent. The legacies of the movement are also as diverse and wide ranging as much else is about this movement. Suchetana Chattopadhyay (*Workers and militant labour activists from Punjab in Bengal (1921-1934)* makes the direct link between the *Komagata Maru* incident in Vancouver and its impact on the labour movement in Bengal. The participants in the *Komagata Maru* rebellion in Vancouver against the discriminatory immigration law that Canada had enacted directly targeting migrants from South Asia, were

forcibly returned to India. Their ship landed in Calcutta. What did they do after returning? Many of the returnees did not go back to their native Punjab fearing state repression and penury. They dissolved into the urban labour classes in Calcutta and became a militant force in the labour movement there. Their experiences in North America and elsewhere brought an internationalist orientation to the labour movement and helped to join the dots between labour movements, national liberation and socialist movements. Sara Kazmi (*Of Subalterns and Sammi Trees)* brings into focus the intersection of the politics of nation-building and the politics of language in post-Independence Pakistan – i.e. the elevation of Urdu as the national language and marginalisation of regional languages such as Punjabi. The marginalisation of Punjabi is as much a class project as a nation-building project. Peasants in Punjab continue to speak Punjabi. Ghadar poetry and writings much of which is in Punjabi is erased from historiographical discourses which focus on Urdu and English literatures. For present-day activists in Punjab, which Kazmi exemplifies by the activities of a street theatre group, Ghadar history is a triple whammy so to speak – it facilitates the revival of Ghadar memory, revives Punjabi language and the peasant idioms that Ghadar poetry uses and takes the nationalism out of Punjabi politics by replacing it with class. Thus, for present day activists, Ghadar history helps to keep Ghadar history alive, bring class politics back to centre stage and problematises the opacity of class in nationalist discourses. Beyond the subcontinent, the legacy of the Ghadar movement survives among the diaspora through the activities of organisations such as the Indian Workers' Association Great Britain as Silas Webb ("*The Typical Ghadar Outlook")* argues. As new migrants arrived in thousands in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, organisations such as the Indian Workers' Association Great Britain which was born among diaspora as a result of the union of socialist and anti-colonial struggles, would "anchor far left politics and industrial action in London and the Midlands throughout the postwar period and era of deindustrialisation." We are back to where we began: the need to revive, re-theorise and re-politicise the relationship between diaspora and neo-colonial/ imperialist politics.

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Article

THE CONCEPTUAL WORLD OF THE GHADARITES

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Abstract

The Ghadar movement is framed by scholars variously as socialist or proto-communist, anarchist, secular or religious nationalist. These theoretical frames developed in the European historical contexts to oppose liberalism and modernism. Framing historical experiences of colonialism and resistance to it by using theories developed in radically different conditions of European capitalism and Enlightenment, disrupts history-writing and the historical consciousness of people in the Third World. This article examines the historical consciousness that guided Ghadar resistance to colonial rule. How are we to understand the distinction between system and "lifeworld" that Jurgen Habermas makes in a context where the "system" is capitalist /imperialist/ modernist and the "lifeworld" is South Asian/ Indian Enlightenment/ colonial? What was the "lifeworld" of the Ghadar leaders that informed their understanding of nationalism and state, secularism and religion, liberation and justice? Theories contribute to creating historical consciousness and identity by showing us a view of the world that we can identify with, by providing a sense of continuity with the past. Disruption of South Asia's historical consciousness has had profound consequences for the people of the subcontinent. This article locates Ghadar consciousness in the structural transformations of South Asia after the end of the First War of Independence in 1857 known as the Great Ghadar. The paper takes common theoretical lenses used to analyse the Ghadar movement in academic scholarship: secular and ethno-religious nationalism, anarchism and socialism as its point of departure to sketch the theoretical and philosophical routes through which Ghadar leaders arrived at comparable values and political positions. It shows how they could be secular, religious, anarchist and socialist simultaneously. The Ghadar movement is important because it is the last major resistance movement that saw South Asia through South Asian lenses and attempted to address problems of colonialism and national independence in ways that was consistent with Indian historical consciousness and cultural and intellectual traditions.

Keywords

Ghadar movement; historical consciousness; colonialism; social theory; Indic Enlightenment; non-dualism; secularism; federalism; anarchism; socialism; communism; resistance

Whose History?

Writing about the Ghadar movement nearly a century and quarter later requires invoking historical memory. Whose memory? Is it the memory of citizens of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, nation-states that did not exist when the Ghadar movement first began mobilising expatriate South Asian communities in the west coast of the United States and Canada? Is it the memories of the Punjabis, Sindhis, Bengalis, Baluchis, Afghans, Pathans who were (are?) violently torn apart by political fratricide? Is it the memory of Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs competing for claims to state power in a modern "democratic" state? Is it the memory of colonial subjects and their shared experiences of colonial rule defined in terms of the "Other", the coloniser? Is it a universal memory of abstract anticolonialism that privileges the moment of resistance over the historical consciousness that gave rise to the resistance? Whichever history we choose to tell, it can only be done by omitting some aspects of the movement and privileging others.

Historical memory and historical consciousness, writes Rüsen J "welds experiences of the past and expectations of the future" and helps to make sense of the world and our place in it. Historical consciousness, "through individual and collective memory and through recalling the past into the present" achieves identity formation that is necessary to locate ourselves in the world. The passage of identity formation cannot be left to the "natural chain of events" but must be "intellectually comprehended and achieved" (Rüsen 2002, 1-2). "Even a historiography based on methodologically controlled research is determined by the political and social life of its time and by the expectations and dispositions of its audiences" (Rüsen 2002, 3). The disposition of audiences of *our* times expects historians to help them claim the Ghadar movement variously as Hindu, Sikh, Muslim or secular nationalists, anarchists or communists but rarely as a movement with an alternate vision for South Asia, an alternate modernity anchored to South Asian historical consciousness.

Intercultural approaches to historiography of the Rüsen type that seek to reset universalist European historiography on intercultural foundations, or postmodern approaches that emphasise the specificities and micro-histories of groups and places, simply do not work for societies with colonial histories. Colonialism and imperialism, old and new, disrupt identity formations by sundering relations to locality, place, communities, culture and history. Equally, the theories and practices of scholarly history-writing make it difficult for people to "intellectually comprehend" the experiences of the past and the passage to the future. It is immaterial whether the historian is South Asian or European. The fact remains *Indian* history has become *South Asian* history through a temporal passage. The temporal passage fractures the capacities of South Asians to "intellectually comprehend" the past. It challenges historians to write "South Asian" history of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh within nation-state frameworks born from the dim-lit historical passage.

The problem is deeper than establishing an intercultural basis for universal history-writing in the comparative history sense or about researching the empirical specificities of groups, communities and localities. The problem lies with theory building processes and the theoretical

lenses that come to be ground and polished in the process. Theories also develop under historical conditions. There is, as Ranjan Ghosh argues, an "institutional overpowering" by American (and Western universities more generally), that emanates from the very requirement for "openness, the spirit of reaching out and listening to the voice of the other." This is compounded by the ideal of "modernization" in post-Independence national scholarship (Ghosh, 25). In the geographies of knowledge production since colonialism and imperialism, theories are developed in the colonial imperial centres while (neo)colonies provide the "data" for theorising. There is thus a skewed spatial dialectic in South Asian history-writing that is inbuilt in the theoretical framings.

Theoretical framings of Ghadar history, in the limited scholarship on the subject, view the movement variously as proto-communist, socialist, anarchist, secular nationalist, and religious/ethno (Sikh and Muslim) nationalist. Socialism, anarchism, ethno/religious nationalism and secular nationalism are theories that developed in the European historical context of capitalism. Those theoretical framings come to be extended to South Asian history which was the very antithesis of European capitalism as colonialism, its external dimension (D'Souza 2012). Theories contribute to creating historical consciousness and identity by showing us a view of the world that we can identify with, by providing a sense of continuity with the past. Framing historical experiences of colonialism and resistance to it by using theories developed in a radically different context of European capitalism and European Enlightenment, disrupts history-writing and the historical consciousness of people in the Third World. How then should we recall memories of the Ghadar movement in ways that can enable South Asians to make sense of their world today and help to heal the ruptured historical consciousness?

The sections below explore the problems of theoretical framings the Ghadar movement using modernist theories such as anarchism, ethno/religious nationalism, modern/secular nationalism and communism. These theories developed in opposition to and in engagement with European liberalism. A liberal state is the point of reference, the target of critique for anarchism, socialism, secular and ethno-nationalism. Applying these frameworks in countries with colonial histories presupposes the existence a liberal state and society comparable to Europe and/or reifies liberalism as the normative standard for evaluating state behaviour and deviations from liberal norms. Presupposing liberalism as the normative standard for evaluating British colonialism skews our understanding of the Ghadar "moment" in South Asian history. This article seeks to throw light on that moment by illuminating how the Ghadarites themselves understood their world and how their own understandings of the world as the point of departure disrupts the theoretical frameworks used to analyse the movement. How did they make sense of the world and their place in it? What concepts, theories and intellectual traditions influenced their thinking?

The Ghadar movement marks a cuspal moment in the structural transformations underway in South Asia after the end of East India Company's (EIC) rule. It was a fluid moment of transition from liberal to late imperialism marked by the transition from Company Rule to Crown Rule – i.e. from the East India Company's rule in India to direct rule by the British parliament after the Indian War of Independence in 1857. It was a moment when the ideologies of modernity were emergent and popular consciousness continued to be informed by Indian

historical consciousness inherited from India's past. What was it in India's past therefore that prompted the Ghadarites to become the most powerful anticolonial, egalitarian and humanist resistance movement? The historical consciousness that guided the Ghadar movement came from a long tradition of humanism and dissent within South Asia, what J.P.S Uberoi calls alternate non-dualist modernity (Uberoi 2002, ix). The Ghadarites drew on the alternate non-dualist modernity to challenge colonialism. South Asian Sufism, *bhakti*, Sikhism amongst others, have a long tradition of internal critique of power and wealth, injustice and oppression within the religious and political establishments that prevailed in the pre-colonial era. This tradition, best articulated by numerous poet-saints, is, what I shall call the Indic Enlightenment. Indic and not Indian because, as already noted, Indian history has transformed into South Asian history through dim-lit unenlightened temporal passage that has turned Indian history into South Asian history.

The Indic Enlightenment had its influence across the subcontinent spanning at least four centuries from the twelfth century onwards, extending back to Nizamuddin Auliya (b.1238,Uttar Pradesh d. 1325, Delhi), Sant Kabir (b.1398 Varanasi-d.1518 Maghar),[1] Guru Nanak (b. 1469 Punjab in Pakistan, -d. 1539 Punjab, Pakistan, founder of Sikhism), Emperor Akbar (1548-1605) (patron of the emerging syncretism in culture and politics), Sant Tukaram (b. 1598 [1608?] – 1649 [1650?]) in Maharashtra, Bulleh Shah (1680 – 1757) in the Punjab, Chokemela (fourteenth century) in Maharashtra, women like Mirabai (b.1498 –d. 1646) in Gujarat, Lal Ded (fourteenth century) in Kashmir, Akka Mahadevi (twelfth century) in Karnataka, to name a few influential figures picked randomly from across the subcontinent and the centuries. The implosion of the Mughul Empire after the death of Emperor Aurangazeb in 1707 opened the way for European traders to intervene amongst various fractions of the imploding empire. In turn the political uncertainties gave rise to numerous Indian thinkers, scholars and social reformers like Shah Waliullah Dehlavi (1703-1762), known variously as the Montesquieu, Gibbon and Vico of South Asia (see Abbott 1962, Amir Khan 2014, Syros 2012), Jyotiba Phule (b. 1827-d. 1890, Maharashtra) as well as political responses like the Satnami movements (late seventeenth century) and the sanyasi-fakir rebellions (mid-eighteenth century). These movements responded to the disintegration of the political order on the one hand and the incursions of the EIC on the other.

These intellectual and political developments had formative influence on the Ghadar leadership. The Ghadar movement is revolutionary because it recognised what is at stake in the emerging modernist colonial knowledge frameworks: the Hindu-Muslim binary leading to ethno-centric nationalism or liberal modernism leading to a rupture with India's past. The Ghadarites turned instead to the Indic Enlightenment drawing on the cultural and historical resources of the poet-saint traditions to mount radical opposition to the atavistic conservative revivalism of religious nationalists on the one hand and the anti-historicism of liberals on the other. They strived to broaden and enrich the Indic Enlightenment by learning from other dissident, egalitarian strands in European intellectual and political traditions, using them to refine their own critique.

[1] The birth of Sant Kabir is dated variously between 1398 and 1440 and his death as 1518 to 1540. He is reputed to have lived a long life.

The sections that follow consider in turn, the attempts to frame the Ghadar movement within anti-liberal modernist theoretical frames such as anarchism, socialism and secularism and republican nationalism. The sections illuminate the conceptual world of the Ghadarities and the possibilities of arriving at certain values cherished in the dissident modernist thought through very different theoretical routes. The possibilities of arriving at common political destinations through different theoretical and ideological routes is important if popular politics is to reconnect with historical consciousness of South Asian peoples.

Anarchism, Resistance and Rebellion

The significant influence of post-colonialism and critical theory has opened up spaces to use anarchism as a theoretical lens to analyse the Ghadar movement (e.g.Oberoi 2009, Ramnath 2011a). British administrators were the first to label the Ghadarites as "anarchists" in 1908 explicitly linking them to Russian anarchists (Heehs 1993, 475). The Anarchical and Revolutionary Crimes Act 1919 (popularly, the Rowlatt Act) incorporated the term anarchism into Indian statute books. The label deflected attention from the injustices of British rule and attributed the causes of resistance to outside in particular, Russian influences. In contrast, in the eighteenth century, when anarchism had not emerged as a competing modernist ideology, resistance to Company Raj was described by administrators variously as "dacoity," "thuggery" and "vandalism." Later day post-colonial scholarship "reversed the gaze" as it were and retrospectively extended to the Ghadar movement the theoretical respectability that anarchism had acquired in critical and radical Euro-American scholarship. These post-colonial readings reify the rupture with history, attributing Ghadar historical consciousness to the rise of Russian and Irish anarchism, and like them, with social roots in the peasantry. The readings rely on descriptive and empirical comparisons to theorise the movement in *a*historical ways. This way of reading the movement marginalises pre-existing philosophical lenses in Indian political thought and its influence on Ghadar consciousness, privileging instead the influence of Irish, Russian and other anarchists during their brief stays in North America. If the Ghadarites invoked Islamic, Sikh and Hindu texts, history and parables for their inspiration and opposition to colonial rule, their invocations are often seen as idiomatic devices and the uses of cultural vocabulary as mass communication strategy (e.g. Gill 2014; Puri 2012). These frames marginalise and undermine South Asian intellectual and social traditions of resistance in the Indic Enlightenment and the Ghadar leadership's capacities for creative adaption and reinterpretations of Indian concepts and ideas when confronted by modern capitalism and colonialism.

Anarchism as a theoretical lens distracts attention from the philosophical underpinnings of an uninterrupted tradition of secret societies and revolutionary violence against tyranny and injustice in South Asia that had a profound influence on Ghadar thought. These societies were amongst the first to oppose Company Raj after the Battle of Plassey in 1757. By the late nineteenth century there was a revival on a national scale of revolutionary societies engaged in violent political

actions in Eastern, Western and Northern India. One feature of South Asian societies, J.P.S Uberoi (1994) argues, is that alongside the priestly classes of the brahmins and the mullahs, there has always been widespread presence and active participation of mendicant preachers, jogis, sects, panths, religious societies and associations. These groups, often with their roots in "lower" socioeconomic orders, frequently challenged abuse and misuse of political *and* priestly power and acted to "check and balance" the exercises of power *without* aspiring for power. J.P.S Uberoi writes (1996, 16),

> […] until we can fully understand the developmental cycle of medieval mendicant orders we cannot place the *political* phenomena of the 'fighting Jogis' of the sixteenth century and seventeenth centuries, the long contemporary militant struggles of the Islamic Roshaniyya sect (founded by the Bayazid, Pir-I-Roshan, b. Jullundar, 1525), the Satnami revolt of 1675, or the plunder of Dacca in 1763 by the Sannyasis, etc in their proper structural perspective. The analytical paradigm proposed must account under *one and the same theory* for cases, types or phases of political quietism as well as of political activism and conflict. (italics added).

Movements spearheaded by "fighting jogis", fakirs, Sikh khalsas, jihadists were founded on ontological conceptions about nature, society and people, about internal and external lives, "this" world of economy and politics and "other world" of ontology and cosmology, and about truth, justice and power. In contrast to the Brahmanical priesthood and Islamic clergy, the "fighting jogis", fakirs, sanyasis, sufis, khalsas, panths and jihadists preached the unity of human beings, equality between men, between men and women, social justice, oneness with nature and most importantly, the duty to rebel against oppression and tyranny when it endangered the survival of society and cohesion of social life. It is to these traditions that we need to turn to grasp the synchronic dimensions of "secularism" and "anarchism" in Ghadar thinking - why many amongst them were simultaneously deeply "religious", "secular", "anarchists" and "communists", why so many of their writings were informed by the poetics of the poet-saint traditions, why they affirmed their faith and worked in solidarity with all faiths and non-faiths for a "just cause" to oppose colonial tyranny and oppression. It explains too, the reason why, in contrast to European representations of natives, their opposition to British rule never took on racial, religious and ethnic justifications. In their vitriolic writings against British rule, the reasons to fight the British are never attributed to their race, religion, ethnicity or nationality, but rather to the injustices, tyranny, oppression, betrayal and failed promises of successive British governments.

In South Asia, non-dualism is the dominant philosophical influence. Non-dualist ideas like "unity in duality" (Buddhism), the principle of "non-onesidedness" (*anekantavada*, Jainism), the unity of the Universe (Sufism), the transient nature of time and place, the interdependent nature of life and non-dualist conceptions of universal and particular, form the basis for diverse influential schools of thought since ancient times (see Ramanujan 1989; Matilal 2004; Barakatullah 1895).

Sikhism, JPS Uberoi argues, seeks to annihilate the categorical partitions, in particular the divisions between temporal power and spiritual power by "refusing to accept them as separate distinct modes of existence" (Uberoi 1996, 16). Barakatullah writes about Sufi Islam: "the source of multiplicity in the universe is but unity" (Barakatullah 1895, 676). Rebellion and resistance has a very different place in political systems dominated by philosophical non-dualism.

Within non-dualist intellectual traditions, resistance and rebellion are necessary, indeed a duty, when kings and priests deviate from universal ontological realities, when they disrupt the conditions for social life. In South Asian traditions the purpose of rebellion is always to restore the ontological "balance," social cohesion and the authority of just kings and priests. J.P.S Uberoi notes that since Kabir (1440-1580) at least, the poet-saints never preoccupied themselves with questions of power of political or priestly classes. Instead they focused on inculcating in people the centrality of self-rule, autonomy and self-respect (Uberoi 2002, x). When these necessary conditions of social life are violated by kings or priests they must be restored through collective rebellion. As the purpose of rebellion is not to take power and establish alternate power systems, rebellion operates as social corrective. The purpose of rebellion is achieved when conditions for social life are re-established. Rebellion is about restoring power to its ontological, cosmological, sociological and ethical moorings.

Rebellions to restore the place of human beings in the universe is vastly different from dualist framings of state versus community in anarchism or the anarchist idea of "changing the world without taking power" (see Holloway 2010) where community as well as political and priestly rulers stand as adversaries. Anarchism evidences the adversarial relations of state and community with empirical facts and statistics but remains disconnected from ontological and cosmological conceptions of reality that unifies the adversaries. British administrators in the eighteenth century grasped the place of rebellions in Indian society more clearly than contemporary post-colonial scholars seeking to "decolonise" theory. James Mill, head of the EIC's Examiner's office, a Benthamite, utilitarian thinker, historian, economist, and father of English liberal John Stuart Mill, giving evidence in 1832 before the House of Commons select committee on the affairs of the EIC stated,

> The substance of the engagement we make with these princes is this: we take their military protection upon ourselves, and the military power of the state into our own hands. Having taken from them the military powers of the government, that is, all the power, we then say to them, We give up to you the whole of the powers of civil government, and will not interfere with you in the exercise of them. It is well known what the consequences are. [...]: *In the ordinary state of things in India, [...], the princes stood in awe of their subjects. Insurrection against oppression was the general practice of the country. The princes knew that when mismanagement and oppression went to a certain extent, there would be revolt, and that they would stand a chance of being tumbled from their throne, and a successful leader of the insurgents put in*

> *their place.* This check is, *by our interference*, totally taken away; for the people know any attempt of theirs would be utterly unavailing against our irresistible power, accordingly no such thought occurs to them, and they submit to every degree of oppression that befalls them (Court of Directors 1833, 8) (italics added).

The fakir-sanyasi rebellions after the Battle of Plassey in 1757 were the first serious challenges to Company Raj to bring princes and priests back to their ethical moorings as understood in South Asian historical experience. They were by no means the only ones.[2] Leading members of the Ghadar movement were profoundly influenced by the traditions of revolt and histories of rebellions against oppression, injustices and tyranny in South Asia. They believed it was possible to wean the "stooges of the British" away from the lure of Western liberalism back to Indian socio-historical anchors. In contrast, the point of departure for anarchism is state oppression where the oppressor state and oppressed communities stand in opposition as adversaries.[3] The Ghadar call to arms for the defence of the motherland was an attempt to project on the international stage, deep rooted South Asian ideas of universal humanity, cultural pluralism based on ideas of "unity in diversity", justice and the duty to rebel against tyranny always and anywhere.

Socialism, Secularism and Republican Nationalism

Socialism

Another modernist framing projects the Ghadar movement as a socialist or proto-communist movement. A common reading of the Ghadar movement is that around the mid-1920s the Ghadarites turned to communist ideology (Puri 2012, 40) perhaps after unsuccessfully trialling European anarchism and syndicalism (see Ramnath 2011b). In understanding Ghadar sympathies for socialist ideology and internationalism there are chronological issues that need straightening. Socialist framings present the socialist movements as antecedent to the Ghadar movement. European theoretical lenses force a linear, sequential relationship between the Bolsheviks and the Ghadarites where the Bolsheviks influenced the Ghadarites. The formative years of the Ghadar movement were between the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Socialist movements in Europe developed concurrently and parallel to the anticolonial movements (D'Souza 2017).

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[2] For a general survey of millenarian movements see Stephen Fuchs (1965). On the renunicates led sanyasi-fakir rebellions against the EIC see (Lorenzen 1978). On the Kuka rebellions, the forerunners of the Ghadar movement in the Punjab see (Singh and Singh 1989). For precursors of anti-British movements in Western India see the life and times of Vasudeo Balvant Phadke (b. 1845 Panvel, Maharastra – d. 1883 Aden, Yemen) (Joshi 1959).

[3] A more nuanced analysis of the differences between European anarchism and Indian duty to rebel from intercultural philosophical and historical perspectives must remain a project for the future given the scope of this article. For a review of literature on anarchism see (Adams 2011). For evolution of anarchist thought in contemporary times see (Graeber 2002). On the need for dialogue between postcolonialism and anarchism see (Ramnath 2011a).

Socialism, yet a nascent ideology in Europe, emerged in opposition to European capitalism and its impact on the European social order. India was a colony when the Ghadar movement was born. Until the Second Congress of the Third International held in 1920, the colonial question was a peripheral one for the European socialist movements, focused as they were on European revolutions. In the context of an imploding Russian state after World War I, the shift in the position of the Third International in 1920 came about *because* of the sustained campaigning and influence of the leadership of anticolonial movements, amongst who the Ghadarites were prominent (Khan and Kamal 2008; Patnaik 2008). Expatriate Indian nationalists like M.N Roy and the Berlin India Committee gave anticolonial readings of Marxism. After the October Revolution when Britain conducted subversive activities in the Central Asian Republics pitting Muslim nations against "atheist communists" (see Russian Administration for Religious Affairs of Russian Moslems 23 May 1923), the Ghadar nationalists played a critical role in mobilising the support of Russia's Central Asian nations for the nascent Soviet state (Ansari 2014; Khan and Kamal 2008; Patnaik 2008). In doing so the anticolonial struggles played their part as important actors in their own right. They succeeded in persuading the nascent Soviet state of the importance of anticolonial movements and the need for the nascent Soviet state to recognise cultural diversity, religious freedoms and the status of different nationalities for the success of socialist project (Ansari 2014; Joshi and Josh 2011 [1992]; Khan and Kamal 2008; Patnaik 2008).

The sequential order of influence conceals two important realities. First, it conceals the fact that there was something else in the intellectual milieu of South Asia that inspired the Ghadarites to confront the British Empire, and to do it with internationalist, humanist and egalitarian orientations building solidarities right across the British empire. Projecting the socialist theoretical frame on the Ghadar movement renders opaque the conceptual world of the Ghadarites. Secondly, the Ghadarites, and Indian nationalists more broadly, also influenced the consolidation of the Bolshevik revolution in the Central Asian Republics comprising Muslim nations with cultural and historical affinities to South Asia. Their influence moderated and adapted socialist thought beyond European and Slavic cultural contexts. The reciprocity of the Ghadar movements was possible precisely because the Ghadar leaders found a uniquely Indic way of understanding communism.
The intellectual route to communist ideas is as important as the political support for communist parties and movements. Key elements that explain Ghadar affinities for the Bolshevik revolution were the imperatives of the Indic Enlightenment to eschew, or at least limit acquisition of property and power as the preconditions for community life and collective survival. Inherent in this approach is an inbuilt humanism and egalitarianism. In an interview to the *Petrograd Pravda* in 1919, Mohammed Barakhatullah, a prominent Ghadarite, reputed Islamic scholar and the first prime minster of the first free Indian government-in-exile in Kabul said,

> I am not a communist or socialist… but my political programme at present is the expulsion of the English from Asia. I am an irreconcilable enemy of European capitalism in Asia whose main representative is the English. In this I concur with communists and in this respect we are genuine allies (Khan and Kamal 2008, 9).

For Barakatullah, capitalism was opposed to Islam. He saw no inconsistency between being a Muslim and a communist if we consider their core values and aims. Both advocate equality, social justice and put community and society at the centre of economic and political life (Barakatullah 1903, 1925 [1924]). Ubaidullah Sindhi, another prominent Ghadarite and the first foreign minister of India's government-in-exile, invoked Islamic texts to insist that Muslim landlords should give up land for redistribution (Anjum 2013, 166). Sikhs inspired by the October Revolution saw no contradiction between their religious beliefs which preached egalitarianism, social justice, and martyrdom and the ideals of communism (Raza 2013, 321). Uberoi (1996) argues that Sikhism made it a duty of Sikhs to resist oppression and tyranny anywhere. Sikhism was successful in undertaking social protest and critical reform because it recognises the world as a reality, negates rich/poor and caste differences, advocates the primacy of community, respect for manual labour, and the duty to defend community by elevating martyrdom against kingdom (Uberoi 1996). These ways of understanding communism must be seen against the wider backdrop where liberal Hindu leaders, drawing on the Bhakti poet-saints, invited attention to the egalitarian traditions in India in the pre-colonial India (see Hawley 2015, ch.1). Hasrat Mohani, a Muslim communist who addressed the first Communist Party of India conference in India in 1925 made a distinction between Indian Communists and Bolsheviks. Bolshevism according to him was one form of communism, there could be other forms and Indians had the right to develop their own variant that was appropriate for Indian cultural and social conditions (cited in Ramnath 2011b, 298 fn 150).

Inspired by the October Revolution, in the aftermath of the bloody suppression of the Ghadar movement during WW1, there was a proliferation of Workers and Peasants parties in different parts of the subcontinent (Joshi and Josh 2011 [1992], chs 3-4). For example, the rump of the Ghadar organisations after their brutal suppression in 1914-15 put their energies into organising the Kirti Kisan party in the Punjab, one of the many workers and peasant parties around the country. These parties were unique in that they were socialist inspired, loosely knit regional political parties with broad social base in the peasantry and urban workers and rooted in local traditions and cultures. The Meerut Conspiracy Case (1929- 1933), Ali Raza (2013) argues, forms a watershed moment for the communist movements in India. The British colonial government brought charges of sedition and subversion against thirty leading communists making explicit links between the emergent communist movement, the Comintern and atheism to discredit the swell of popular opposition to colonial rule that was outside the influence of the state recognised Congress nationalists (see Joshi and Josh 2011 [1992]). Linking atheism and the Comintern (which, in fact, never took any official position on religion) were at the heart of the attempts by the colonial government to discredit the particular form that communism was taking in the subcontinent. The onset of World War II nipped the development of what one might call "pluralist communism" (Joshi and Josh 2011 [1992], Vasudevan 2014). The turn that the communist movements in the subcontinent took later ought not to cloud the moment of theoretical and

ideological innovation and engagement with modernity that was grounded in the subcontinent's history and intellectual traditions.

Secularism

Turning to secularism, it is another important theoretical frame for understanding the Ghadar movement and the central plank of Enlightenment liberalism. Secularism in liberal ideology means the separation of institutions of state and religion. European Enlightenment thinkers and bourgeois democratic political movements saw the entwinement of church and state as tyranny and demanded institutional separation of church and state. Enlightenment thinkers went on to challenge the theological basis for politics replacing theology with science and the authority of the church with a non-religious, "secular" state. Neither centralised institutions of religions, nor the entwinement of institutions of religion and state, or the theological justifications for kingship comparable to divine rights existed in pre-colonial Middle East, Persia or Asia. When modern scholars speak of the Ghadar leadership as "secular" or "religious," they refer to the Ghadar commitment to keep religion out of politics. Diverse cultural groups in the subcontinent derived the separation of religion and politics through different intellectual routes. Of these, I refer to the writings of Mohammed Barakhatullah Bhopali not least because he is one of the prominent Ghadarites who has written explicitly on the subject in a pamphlet titled *The Khalifet* published in 1925 (Barakatullah 1925 [1924]). The pamphlet reveals the intellectual route through which he arrived at his justification for the separation of religion and politics.

Writing in response to the extreme turmoil in the Muslim world that followed the dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire and the occupation of Turkey by Britain, France and Italy, Mustapha Kemal Pasha's abolition of the khalifet, the spiritual seat of Islam after a coup to salvage the Turkish state, and the machinations of the British and French powers to mobilise the Muslim world to set up a puppet khalif at the conferences in Mecca and Cairo, Barakatullah, the erudite Islamic scholar and Ghadarite (Ali 2008; Aslam 2008; Khan 03-10-2010; Khan 2014; Khan and Kamal 2008), anchored his arguments in the historical experiences of Muslim nations. In the pamphlet he highlights a rupture in the history of Muslim nations as a defining moment. The rupture introduces a hiatus between the first three decades of the Islamic commonwealth during the lifetime of Prophet Muhammed and his comrades, and the period after 661 AD when Moaviyah, following the example of Roman emperor Constantine, attempted to subsume the spiritual authority of the khalifet under the temporal authority of kingship (sultanate). Unlike Constantine, Moaviyah was unsuccessful in his endeavour (Barakatullah 1925 [1924], Ch IV). Muslims must acknowledge the historical rupture and what it entails. Acknowledging the turns in their history means Muslims must seek inspiration for democracy, socialism, racial and gender equality, just public administration and property relations from the example of the early Islamic commonwealth during the first three decades of its existence. Grounding his arguments in the historical rupture within Muslim nations, Barakatullah makes three important arguments for the separation of the khalifet from kingship.

First, Barakatullah argues, the Holy Koran directs that the Islamic community must make appointments to the office of the khalif by consensus. Management of the khalifet and commonwealth of Islam during the first thirty years was based on consultation and consensus which is "the manifestation of liberty, equality and fraternity" (Barakatullah 1925 [1924], 27). It is impossible to appoint khalifs through a consultative process in the contemporary context where there are deep divisions amongst Muslims. Second, no contemporary ruler is capable of defending the lives, livelihoods, property and honour of Muslims, the prime duty of a khalif in the Holy Koran. Therefore, no individual should be burdened with a responsibility that they cannot discharge. Third, and more importantly, he argues,

> [T]they [Muslim rulers] are bolstered up by the foreign monetary and military props. So long as they are dependent for their very existence upon such foreign aid they are creatures of a non-Moslem power. If the Shereef [of Medina] be elected as the Khalif, it will amount to this, that up to now the Khailfet had been an engine for the aggrandisement of Islamic despotism and henceforth it will become an instrument for the aggrandisement of a non-Islamic imperialism (Barakatullah 1925 [1924], 57).

The institution of the khalifet could be and ought to be separated from imperialist politics that was everywhere. Intrigues and suspicions were rife, including secret meetings between Gen. Harrington, commander-in-chief of the Allies in Constantinople and the khalif, bribery of the Shareef of Mecca, lobbying in Hejaz, Transjordania, Iraq on behalf of a puppet khalif and much else. Given this context it would be a folly to elect another king as khalif.

What then of other religions and the unity of Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs in their struggle against British colonial rule? Drawing on Koranic verses, Barakhatullah argues that Islam's understanding of truth, justice and righteousness is broad enough to encompass all faiths and schools of thought (Barakatullah 1925 [1924], 16-17). The problem with modern Jews and Christians is that they have cut their moorings from the core principles and teachings of Judaism and Christianity (Barakatullah 1925 [1924], 65) and Muslims must not follow in their footsteps. Transposing the conceptual lens of "secularism" developed in the historical context of Europe to a radically different historical context conceals i) the possibility of arriving at comparable ideas through different intellectual routes; ii) dismisses the historical consciousness that informed the Ghadar movement as irrelevant; iii) dismissing the intellectual history of the Ghadar movement disempowers contemporary South Asians from the theoretical and conceptual tools needed to address contemporary problems, in particular the uses of religion by imperial powers to reinforce imperial domination.

Republican Nationalism

In a similar vein, greater caution is necessary before unproblematically projecting modernist ideas of nationhood, particularly federalism and republicanism, on to the Ghadar movement. Language becomes the first challenge in translating from one conceptual world to another. We have some insights into Ghadar ideas of democracy, federalism and republicanism from the writings of Ubaidullah Sindhi who drafted an alternate constitution for free India in 1922/1924 as the convenor of the Mahabharat Sarvarajiya Party translated as All India People's Republican Party. Whether *sarvarajya*, literally "all states" can be translated as the anti-monarchical concept of "republicanism" is questionable (cf Ramnath 2011b). Copies of Sindhi's proposed constitution were proscribed in India and confiscated by the British government (Anjum 2013, 165). Ubaidullah's *The Constitution of the Federated Republics of India* outlined a social and political vision for the subcontinent that is radically different from the constitutions that came to be adopted by India, Pakistan and Bangladesh after partition and independence. Given the fissiparous politics that continues to challenge the subcontinent, Ubaidullah's vision has continued significance.

Rejecting the settler-state model of federalism in the United States, Canada and Australia and the ethno-nationalist model of European nation-states, Ubaidullah insisted that the cultural diversity of the subcontinent must be the basis of a new confederation of the nations of the subcontinent (Shahjahanpuri 1995, appendix).[4] Ubaidullah recognised that diversity within India cuts across religious, linguistic and cultural lines such that it was not possible to speak of a unified Muslim or Hindu nation, nor was it possible to eliminate regional and cultural differences (Khan 2013). Ubaidullah remained a vocal opponent of partition of the subcontinent as well as the centre-provincial relations in the administrative reforms introduced by the colonial government. Ubaidullah's constitution for India does not emulate the American federal system as critics and sympathisers alike have claimed. Instead it proposes a democratic and anti-imperialist constitution that recognises the diversity of the subcontinent (Anjum 2013; Khan 2013).

Ubaidullah's ideas of a confederation of Indian republics modernised South Asian concepts of "*quom*" and "*watan.*" "*Quom*" is a difficult word to translate into English. What is pertinent is that a *quom* is a historically constituted community that may or may not be affiliated to territory. *Watan*, translated as "homeland" denotes affinity to place of one or several *quoms*. In the European idea of nation-state, historically evolved nations were co-terminus with defined territories. The hyphenated nation-state recognises the authority of the modern institution of statehood to represent the historically evolved European nations. In contrast, in South Asia, a *quom* may or may not belong to a defined territory and many *quoms* may share a common *watan* or territorial homeland. A confederation of *quoms* as self-governing republics with India or Hindustan as their shared *watan* or homeland was thus both an adaptation of ideas of republicanism, federalism and

[4] A copy of the constitution is appended to Shahjahanpuri's book. Another version of the draft constitution is appended in (Shaikh 1986).

nationalism and an advancement of those ideas in the context of colonialism and imperialism. The multiple and varied relations between nations and homelands meant, historically, identities in South Asia were fluid and plural. Barakatullah describes his identity in the following way, "I belong to two circles of equal size, but which are not concentric. One is India, and the other is the Muslim world…We as Indian Muslims came in both circles. We belong to these two circles, each of more than 300 millions, and we can leave neither" (quoted in Khan 2014, 62).

The Conceptual World of the Ghadarites

The Ghadar movement was a response to the aftermath of the 1857 war or the Great Ghadar and takes its name after it. In the five to six decades following the 1857 war, social relations were, as Eric Stokes writes, "decisively modified by economic action" (Stokes 1970, 117). The Ghadar movement was a response to those changes. The Ghadar movement was the single biggest challenge to the British Empire after 1857. Equally, the 1857 war was the last of the traditional resistance movements (Stokes 1970, 48). The Queen's Proclamation of 1858 made peace with native princes, the educated Indians, the landlords and merchants. To the Indian princes it promised an end to territorial annexations, to the educated Indians it promised equal opportunities in the civil services and public services, to the merchants and landlords it promised new opportunities in trade and commerce and recognition of traditional privileges. Against the soldiers and peasants direct Crown Rule unleashed horrific state violence (D'Souza 2014a). The events of 1857 shook the confidence of the British in Indian soldiers and created the spectre of soldiers and peasants joining forces. In 1873 Alfred C. Lyall, the home secretary to the Government of India described the situation that awaited British administrators in these words: "you are treading upon fires hidden under deceitful ashes" (Wagner 2013, 170). As late as 1894 the British press continued to carry alarming news reports of intelligence failures and the possibility of having to re-conquer India for a second time (Wagner 2013).

In the aftermath of the Great Ghadar of 1857, economic centralisation became the organising principle of imperial administration under direct Crown rule. Economic centralisation, a key logic of a unified colonial state after the end of Company Raj was a radical break from the decentralised economic architecture with long and deep historical roots in South Asian society. Ghadar leaders grew up in the shadows of the most intrusive and direct legal and technological interventions in those social structures. The post-1857 British government established a centralised intelligence apparatus prompted by the fact that the 1857 war had taken the EIC administration by surprise (Popplewell 1995). The highly discriminatory Vernacular Press Act 1877 and Arms Act, 1878 became synonymous with the new repressive state apparatus. The most far reaching structural change in the governance of India following the 1857 war was the reorganisation of the army on ethnic/religious lines under the centralised command and control of the colonial state (Barkawi 2012).

The Ghadar movement, with roots amongst the soldiers and peasants, sought to overcome the institutionalisation of social divisions without denying religion, race or ethnic identities because the cultural resources were available to them. The poet-saints of the Indic Enlightenment composed their social philosophy in verse that could be sung by anyone precisely because their audiences were the marginalised and oppressed peasants, artisans and soldiers (D'Souza 2014b). The Ghadarites were not demanding "freedom of religion" that the Queen's Proclamation promised but rather recalling a social order that existed prior to EIC rule where religious differences did not impede economic, political and social intercourse between diverse social groups. This explains why they could be religious and communists simultaneously. In that precolonial order armies were affiliated to land and people and raised from amongst them by local leaders, for example the *polygars* (e.g. see Dua 1974) in the south, the *killedars* in the west (e.g. see Dispatch from Lieut-gen Sir T. Hislop 1820) and the *faujdars* established under Akbar's reign (e.g. see Siddiqui 1967). The *polygars*, *killedars*, *faujdars* and others of the old order were at the heart of the 1857 war against the EIC. Crown rule reorganised the army on ethnic lines by disestablishing traditional roles and sources of recruitment for the armies. The new imperial norms transferred the loyalties of soldiers from place and people to a central foreign authority through a system of employment contracts and army pensions. For the soldiers these changes introduced a deep schism in their ethical and moral universe, what Farish Noor (2011) calls a "bipolar relationship". The British demanded loyalty to contracts with the state whereas their communities and cultures demanded loyalties to people and place (*quom* and *watan*). This schism produced paradoxical results. It divided Hindu, Muslim and Sikh communities, especially in the Punjab, into those who rallied for the Ghadar cause against British rule and those that rallied to fight Britain's wars, from the Boer Wars to World War II.[5]

For the Ghadarites, the 1857 war was not a distant historical memory. They grew up in the shadows of its aftermath and were shaped by it. After the British retook control of India, guerrilla actions continued well into the 1860s (Stokes 1970) and fed into the rise of a new militant nationalist movement of which the Ghadar in the North, the Swarajists in the east and west are leading examples. The agitations against land colonisations in the Punjab under the Punjab Colonisation of Land Act, 1893 and the Punjab Land Alienation Act, 1900 were led by men who were to become prominent leaders of the Ghadar movement, most notably Ajit Singh, Sufi Amba Prasad and Lal Chand Falak (Kaur 2011). Ajit Singh was exiled to Burma's infamous Mandalay prison, the very same prison where Bahadur Shah Zaffar, the last Mughul emperor of India was imprisoned for his role in the 1857 war. On his release, with a second arrest warrant awaiting him, Ajit Singh escaped to Europe where he worked to organise expatriate Indians (see Pal 1992). There were others like him.

[5] Letters from soldiers on missions during World War I speak of their anguish over betraying the British after "eating their salt" (*namak harami*), the "salt" being state pensions (see Omissi 1999).

Representative democracy did not come to the subcontinent wearing the robes of universalism and secularism and waving liberty, equality and fraternity as its flag. It came wearing robes of economic rivalries masquerading as ethno/religious nationalism fanned by communal electorates to divide and conquer with the full connivance and participation of the landlords, merchants and what the British called the "educated classes." The Ghadar movement opposed these reforms as a "sell-out." The landlord and merchant classes and the "educated classes" engaged with the new opportunities open to them within the confined racialised, communalised spaces in the new state structures. Religion and class interests elided in the new forms of politics articulated in the new language of European Enlightenment (see Gilmartin 1991; Smith 1968). The types of ideological justifications and engagements that the new structural changes set in motion have become the points of departure for theoretical framings of the past, present and future of the subcontinent, in theory and political practices ever since. Whatever the value of these frames for subsequent understandings of South Asia, they could not have been the main influence and inspiration for the Ghadar movement participants. The new ways of representing Indian society in the language and vocabulary of European Enlightenment by the "educated classes" and a de-historicised atavistic religious vocabulary by the landlord and merchant classes reversed core ideas of the Indic Enlightenment.

Conclusion

Jurgen Habermas makes an analytical distinction between "system" as preconfigured modes of coordination, e.g. the bureaucracy, markets, money, institutions and "life world" as the shared cultural systems of meanings acquired from being members of a society (Habermas 1984). The pertinent question in relation to the Ghadar movement is this: how are we to understand the distinction between system and "lifeworld," if at all, in a context where the "system" is capitalist /imperialist/ modernist and the "lifeworld" is South Asian/ Indic Enlightenment/ anticolonial? What was the "lifeworld" of the Ghadar leaders that informed their understanding of nationalism and state, secularism and religion, liberation and justice? Whereas their actions were directed at modern colonialism, their frames of reference for ethical action, the essence of politics, was formed by Sikh, Sufi, Bhakti and other dissident world views as articulated by the poet-saint traditions in the subaltern social histories in Punjab, Sindh and Northwest regions of the subcontinent. The Ghadar opposition to imperialism interweaves two strands of thought therefore: one modern about political power entailed in ideas of secularism, republicanism, democracy, egalitarianism and such and another traditional, the ethical and moral basis for political action as articulated in the philosophical and intellectual traditions of Indic Enlightenment led most prominently by the poet-saints of the subcontinent.

The Ghadarites expanded the scale of critique in radical South Asian traditions and projected them on an international plane against colonialism. The internationalisation of the South Asian critical intellectual traditions mirrors the internationalisation of South Asian army and bureaucracy under colonial rule. That those traditions should have resonances or overlaps with

traditions of dissent and humanism in European intellectual traditions should not mislead us into hemming the movement within European theoretical straightjackets. The tendency to see the Ghadar movement within religious frames or European modernity writes-out five centuries of egalitarian, pluralist and humanist traditions in society, politics, philosophy and literature in the subcontinent. Using European categories and theories to frame Indian realities limits our understanding of the extent to which the Ghadar movements drew on the Indic Enlightenment to address contemporary problems presented by colonial oppression. Furthermore, it precludes the development of theories that advance the premises of the Indic Enlightenment in ways that are consistent with South Asian historical consciousness and capable of addressing contemporary problems. Without an intercultural vocabulary, modern historiography is forced to "squeeze" the ontological, philosophical, methodological and historical premises of Ghadar historical consciousness into a frame that makes it possible to attribute radically different orientations to the movement variously as secular and/or religious nationalism, or socialist and/or anarchist.

In *The Jewish Question,* a canonical text on the secular state, Marx argues that the secular state is an abstraction devoid of particularities of conflicting class, religion and race that characterise civil society (Marx 1987 [1843]). British rule introduced liberal *discourses* of religious freedoms first proclaimed in the Queen's Proclamation of 1858 but *institutionalised* religious identities into the very heart of the constitutional order and colonial institutions – the state, the army, education and communal electorates as representative government. The colonial state was, thus, the opposite of Marx's abstract, universal state standing in binary opposition to myriad competing interest-driven groups constitutive of civil society.

Superimposing theoretical frames that developed in European historical conditions on Indian realities introduces artificial categorical dualisms that are alien to South Asian "lifeworld." The dissident traditions in South Asia, founded on non-dualism as the dominant philosophy, emphasise the essential unity of the world that underpins diversity and plurality. The structural transformation that followed the repression of the 1857 war and later the Ghadar movement in 1914-15 introduced all manner of categorical partitions in the theoretical frames to interpret and understand South Asian society with disastrous political consequences that ruptured politics from history. The Ghadar movement is perhaps the last important movement in South Asia that saw the problems of the subcontinent through Indic lenses and attempted to address problems of colonialism and national independence in ways that was consistent with Indian historical consciousness and cultural and intellectual traditions.

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Article

"THE TYPICAL GHADAR OUTLOOK": UDHAM SINGH, DIASPORA RADICALISM, AND PUNJABI ANTICOLONIALISM IN BRITAIN (1938-1947)

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Abstract

Punjabis in interwar Britain, who had migrated for economic opportunity but had been politicized during successive upheavals at home, admired Ghadar's radical solidarities with nationalist and anticolonial movements. This article focuses on peripatetic Punjabi radicals, often working as pedlars and sailors, to enhance the current understanding of the vibrant relationship between the Ghadar Party and Punjabis in Britain. This article contextualizes Udham Singh's martyrdom by examining the uses to which his name and image were put in radical publications. Furthermore, the Indian Workers' Association, formed in the midst of the Second World War, was integral to articulating a Ghadarite anticolonialism in Britain, which was animated by the trial and memorialization of Udham Singh. Thus, this article argues that labor migration and the global transmission of Ghadar Party publications was integral to the Ghadar movement's influence on the struggle against imperialism in Britain in the 1930s and 1940s.

Keywords

Udham Singh; Indian Workers' Association; anticolonialism; labor militancy; Britain; Punjab

On the morning of 13 March 1940, a Wednesday, Udham Singh had planned to visit the India Office to see about getting a travel endorsement for his passport. But Sir Hassan Suhrawardy, advisor to the Secretary of State for India, was out, and Singh decided he had better things to do than queue for a colonial official. On his way out the door, he glanced at a notice about a joint meeting of the East India Association and the Central Asian Society being held later that day at the Caxton Hall in London. His interest was piqued enough to remember the details, or perhaps he wrote them down, but not quite enough to change his plan for the day. Later, he told police, "when I left home today I thought I would go see the Paul Robeson picture in the Leicester Square" (Azad 13 March 1940, MEPO 3/1743). But, as luck would have it, the cinema had not yet opened when he arrived. So, instead of viewing Paul Robeson's *The Proud Valley*, he went home, retrieved his .44 caliber Smith & Wesson revolver, and walked to the Caxton Hall. On arrival, he stood in the side aisle of a capacity Tudor Room, waited until the end of the remarks and approached the stage

with gun drawn. He discharged six bullets, one each into Lord Lamington, the Marquess of Zetland, and Sir Louis Dane, and two in the back of former Lieutenant-Governor of Punjab Sir Michael O'Dwyer, whose tenure oversaw the Amritsar Massacre in 1919, killing him in an instant.

The assassination of Michael O'Dwyer was an act of revolution and it was a product of the militant political philosophy of the Ghadar Party. Yet, much of the literature on Ghadar traces the short term impact of its failure without investigating the ways in which Ghadris continued to struggle against British rule up until the end of World War II (Juergensmeyer 1977; Puri 1983; Ramnath 2011; Upadhyay 2014). By focusing on the immediate ramifications of the failed mutiny, such scholarship neglects the global resonance that Ghadar had within the Indian diaspora. In the 1930s, Punjabi left politics was characterized by fluidity between Ghadarites, Communists, and Congressmen, which radicalized peasant politics in Punjab (Mukherjee 2004, 45; Raza 2013, 322). As this article demonstrates, Punjabis in interwar Britain, many of whom had migrated for economic opportunity but had been politicized during successive upheavals at home, admired Ghadar's radical solidarities with nationalist and anticolonial movements. Such peripatetic Punjabi radicals, often working as pedlars and sailors, illustrate how movement between India and Britain sustained the Ghadar Party for decades after its foundational failure.

This article focuses on these travelers and migrants to enhance the current understanding of the influence that the Ghadar Party had on Punjabis in Britain. Rattan Singh, who liaised between the Ghadar Party and the Communist International and established Ghadar Parties on three continents, was integral to Ghadar mobilization in Britain by corresponding with aspiring revolutionaries in Britain. Udham Singh had a twenty year career of traveling between India, Britain, and the United States, during which he committed himself to Ghadar militancy and was memorialized as a martyr for Indian independence. The Indian Workers' Association, with which the article concludes, was the organizational embodiment of the Ghadar Party in Britain and was established by pedlars and semi-skilled workers who were enamored by the examples of Kartar Singh Sarabha, Bhagat Singh, Udham Singh, and countless of their relatives and neighbours who had been jailed, transported, or executed while resisting colonial rule in Punjab. By foregrounding the importance of mobility, and examining complementary events in South Asia and Britain, this article argues that labour migration between India and Europe and the global transmission of Ghadar Party publications were integral to the Ghadar movement's influence on the struggle against imperialism in Britain in the 1930s and 1940s.

The Indian migrants, whose stories, affiliations, and politics fill the following pages are not, for the most part, well-known to history. In the interest of reconstructing their networks and their struggle, I have made considerable recourse to surveillance and police documents because these are not individuals who were widely covered by the press nor did they bequeath their libraries and personal papers to archives. Nevertheless, I have made every attempt to use the intelligence apparatus in order to demonstrate the agency and intentionality of Indian migrant pedlars and workers in Britain rather than to rehearse the frantic search for a "Bolshevik Menace" that animated the official mind during the fraught years after the Russian Revolution of 1917. Thus, I have deployed the meticulous information gathering that the Metropolitan Police and the Indian

Political Intelligence service conducted to reconstruct the kinds of "affective communities" that Indians created abroad in pursuit of economic opportunity and anticolonial mobilization (Gandhi 2006). Characterizations of their politics or movement as extremist or devious by the intelligence community are instructive not only in terms of how they were perceived by the state, but also, and more importantly, because these documents reveal much about the materiality of migration. It is in that latter sense that I hope my use of government archives will be understood.

"Fighting the 'enemy' in the proper way"

The preponderance of South Asian lascars, pedlars, and students in Britain, rather than the farmers and soldiers that Ghadar ordinarily recruited, was alone sufficient to convince party leaders that expansion into Britain was untenable ("Report on Ghadr Party" 10 May 1939, IOR/L/PJ/12/285). The Ghadar Party of the late-1930s was a highly centralized, global organization that had been disciplined through cooperation and coordination with the Communist International and the University of the Toilers of the East in Moscow. As a result, the majority of Ghadris recruited in the interwar period came from established networks in South Asia, East Africa, South America, and California. The distance that these networks created between Ghadar and Indians in Britain, combined with the lack of effective mobilization of Indians by local political organizations, particularly the Communist Party of Great Britain and the Labour Party, which fueled their reputation as apolitical merchants, helps to explain the refusal of official expansion of the Ghadar Party into the colonial metropole. Yet, this skepticism about the mettle of Indians in Britain not only failed to deter Ghadar-inspired Punjabis from organizing eventually, if independently, but also revealed a thorough misunderstanding of the influence that homeland politics and anticolonial agitation had on enclaves of zealous Punjabis in Britain.

In her *Echoes of Mutiny*, Seema Sohi emphasizes the important ways in which Indians were incorporated into, and victimized by, global market capitalism in the first two decades of the twentieth century (Sohi 2014, 14-16). The creation of Indian migrant workers in the early twentieth century was an effect of colonial agricultural policies that maintained persistent undercapitalisation on Indian farms, particularly in Punjab, that fed into a cycle of debt and dispossession (Davis 2002, 312; Mann 2015, 173). Not only had small farmers been undermined by revenue systems that led to the concentration of farmland into fewer hands, but also the land promised to demobilized soldiers as a reward for service was dwindling. These policies had profound effects on Punjabi small peasants and contributed significantly to the emergence of a Punjabi diaspora, which, by the end of World War I, stretched from Hong Kong and Shanghai to the Pacific Northwest, Argentina, and Europe. Of particular interest for my argument are the forms of migration to Britain and the ways in which politics are produced through experiences before, during, and after migration. Sohi's conclusions about the politicization of Punjabi migrants in North America are instructive but insufficient for understanding early Punjabi migration to

Britain in the 1920s. The later wave of migrants to Britain had been politicized by nationalist and anticolonial insurgencies in Punjab that were buttressed by the returned Ghadar babas and they reproduced the changed political landscape of their homelands in the ports and industrial cities of Britain.

The two methods of escaping agricultural hardship in interwar Punjab that led to Britain were employment in the Merchant Marine and establishment of pedlar networks. Systems of recruitment into the Merchant Marine had become highly sophisticated by the end of World War I. According to Ravi Ahuja, recruitment of Indian seamen, typically called lascars, was facilitated by "spatial centralization" in the ports of Bombay and Calcutta. Moreover, zones of military recruitment in Western Punjab, particularly Rawalpindi and Attock, were gradually transformed into recruitment grounds for Muslim engine-room crews for shipping companies (Ahuja 2002, 47-49). Central Punjab, an area populated heavily by Sikhs, did not become a locus of recruitment into the Merchant Marine; however, the economic stagnation of the 1930s compounded long-standing issues around access to land in this fertile region led many Punjabis from Hoshiarpur, Jalandhar, and Ludhiana to use family and village networks to establish themselves as pedlars in places like Reading, Coventry, and Glasgow (Ballard and Ballard 1977, 21).

Although many of the Punjabi migrant workers who came to Britain in the interwar period came from central Punjab, a region described in 1942 as a "hotbe[d] of political agitation," their residence in Britain kept them out of Ghadar's established recruiting networks ("Proposed inclusion of certain Indians on the Suspect List" 15 May 1942, IOR/L/PJ/12/646). In 1922, the Ghadar Party forged a partnership with the Comintern's University of the Toilers of the East (KUTV) so that Ghadar Party members could receive formal education in revolutionary history, trade unionism, and military and vocational training (Mukherji 2011, 41-42). Over the course of this relationship there were two primary modes of recruitment to the KUTV. In the first instance, the Ghadar Party supplied the majority of the Comintern's Indian students from Argentina (Mukherji 2011, 68; Josh 1977, 28). In the second mode, beginning in 1936, the Comintern resolved that all Indians were to be enlisted in India and then sent to Moscow via "devious" routes: "These youths are to find their way from India in the first instance either to North or South America in the guise of labourer or to England as students. From these countries arrangements will then be made to send them to Moscow" (IPI Report on Ghadar Party. 3 November 1936, IOR/L/PJ/12/285, File 1392(A)/25). Importantly, this approach made Britain a central thru-point for Indian recruits, but in neither approach was Britain deemed an appropriate site for recruitment.

Any consideration of interwar migrant politics must acknowledge the distance between British political parties and colonial migrants in British cities. The Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) and its anticolonial work, especially whether it remained aloof from the colonies due to the working-class racism, or if it was, in fact, integral to the Indian independence movement, has been the subject of some debate (Sherwood 1996; Callaghan 1998; Smith 2008). Though the CPGB and the Red International of Labour Unions supported the International and Oriental Seafarer's Union and sought to use Indian seamen in European ports to smuggle arms and propaganda into India, both efforts were short-lived and non-systematic ("Indians in London" 25

May 1923, IOR/L/PJ/12/143; "DIB Report" July 1923, IOR/L/PJ/12/54, File 4968(C)/21). By attempting to segregate initiatives directed at British socialism and anti-colonialism, Indian workers in Britain were overlooked as potential Party members in the early 1920s and remained outside of the CPGB ambit until the period of mass migration in the 1950s. The inability or unwillingness of British political parties to recruit and incorporate Indian migrant workers into their ranks in the early interwar period contributed to the slow pace of political organization among migrants.

In interwar India the organized Left had contributed to making Punjab a site of revolutionary politics; yet, Indians in Britain have remained marginal to the debate surrounding the interaction between the British left and the struggle against imperialism. As London, Coventry, and Birmingham became bridgeheads for Indian settlement in the late-1930s, they were also provided with the opportunity to mobilize around community-specific issues, especially military conscription. While mutiny is foundational to Ghadar Party lore, and remained an animating force throughout the period, by 1937 the march to war had led to a new kind of military disruption in the form of anti-recruitment meetings in Punjab (Sharma 2010, 85). At the same time, Punjabi migrants in Britain were beginning to organize around the same principle and soon joined up with the Independent Labour Party, a staunch critic of the war ("Indian Notes September-October 1942", IOR/L/PJ/12/646). The confluence of settlement and increased participation in local political organizations provided a foundation that partially facilitated the emergence and articulation of Ghadarite zeal in Britain previously untapped because of ineffective political leadership and mobilization.

In May 1939, Charan Singh Chima, a Punjabi Sikh in Coventry who was "anxious to start a Ghadr [sic] Party group in the U.K," wrote on behalf of "four or five young men of his way of thinking" to Rattan Singh, one of the leading lights of the interwar Ghadar Party, for guidance on establishing a branch in Britain ("Report on Ghadr Party" 10 May 1939, IOR/L/PJ/12/285). Rattan Singh, listed as R-36 in the *Ghadr Directory* (1934), was "one of the most active and dangerous leaders of the Ghadr movement" (Intelligence Bureau 1934, 252). Chima was aware of Rattan Singh both due to his leadership role within the Ghadar Party and because of close family connections. Charan Singh Chima's uncle, Karam Singh Chima, had participated in the failed revolution of 1914 and, though restricted to his village, was an integral link between the Akali and Kirti movements in Punjab. For instance, in 1920 he was jailed for "fomenting Akali agitation" in Jullundur, and in 1924 he was arrested for serving on the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbhandak Committee, an Akali organization which had been banned. Subsequently, in 1927, he became the Vice-President of the *Desh Bhagat Parwar Sahaik* (Patriot Family Fund) Committee, which supported the families of Ghadarites who had been imprisoned, deported, or executed (Intelligence Bureau 1934, 154-56). Karam Singh Chima's overlapping political and social affiliations was unsurprising in a period of considerable upheaval. The strength of the Ghadar party, as well as the salience of Punjabi communism in the 1930s, was due in large part to the ability of its members to negotiate multiple alliances and leverage them for particular political ends (Sharma 2010, 3; Mukherjee 2004, 105).

In the late-1930s, a period when attempted unionization of sailors and factory workers was the primary mode of associational politics for Indians in Britain, Chima and his colleagues sought to harness the power of Ghadar to mobilize Indian migrant workers against imperialism, conscription, and unfair working conditions. Charan Singh Chima and his associates in the English Midlands had been raised in the ferment of Ghadar-Akali-Kirti agitation of the 1920s and early-1930s and upon arrival in Britain sought to contribute to these struggles. Yet, Rattan Singh did not enthusiastically endorse their goals because he believed that there were not enough Indians in Britain who were willing and able to participate in the struggle "in the proper way." Nonetheless, he suggested that Charan Singh Chima organize an "Indian Political Prisoners' Defence Committee," which was clearly inspired by, and potentially modeled on, Karam Singh Chima's Patriot Family Fund ("Report on Ghadr Party" 10 May 1939, IOR/L/PJ/12/285).

A few months later, Charan Singh Chima wrote to Rattan Singh and intimated that he had abandoned his plans to organize a distinct association but hoped to collect funds for remittance to Punjab from among the Punjabis in the Midlands and would endeavor to continue "studying the History of the Russian Communist Party" ("Report on Ghadr Party" 3 November 1939, IOR/L/PJ/12/285). Not only had Rattan Singh dissuaded Charan Singh Chima from establishing a Ghadar Party branch in the United Kingdom but also the onset of war thoroughly delayed any ideas of contributing to the militant struggle for Indian Independence in Britain. However, Punjabis in Britain were politically mobilized and the prospect of directly engaging with the Ghadar movement was reanimated in the midst of the trial, appeal, and execution of Udham Singh, to which this article will now turn.

"I bought the revolver from a soldier in Bournemouth": Udham Singh's revolution

Udham Singh occupies a contested place in Sikh, Punjabi, and Ghadar history. His singular act of political assassination has been dismissed as a "random incident" by a "vagrant Sikh," and his execution is often considered in the context of Sikh martyrdom (Tatla 1999, 91; Fenech 2002). Though Udham Singh's treatment as "shaheed" by historians of the Sikh diaspora reflects the legitimate embrace of a noteworthy Punjabi by the Sikh community, enhanced by his well-documented interaction with Sikhs at the Gurdwara in Shepherds Bush, London, such a representation reduces him to an ethnic identity and ignores his own statements about his political allegiances and his religious proclivities. Rather than a spontaneous act of individual terrorism, documents from the Home Office, India Office, and Metropolitan Police demonstrate that Udham Singh systematically targeted Michael O'Dwyer and other colonial administrators, revealing a deep attachment to the Ghadar Party and revolutionary anticolonialism (Singh 2007; Stadtler 2012).

Like many Punjabi migrants in Britain during the interwar period, Udham Singh came to Britain and earned his living as an itinerant merchant. He arrived in 1933 and, in 1934, the Metropolitan Police confirmed that "Udam Singh Sidhu," of 9 Adler Street, Stepney, London, had been granted a Pedlars Certificate in December (Metropolitan Police 5 December 1934, MEPO

2/5064). In 1937, police investigations revealed that "Udham Singh peddles hosiery and lingerie and uses a small car for the purpose; he does not appear to be short of money" (IPI to Mr. Silver 22 November 1937, MS2142/B/3/3). Peddling was a common occupation for Indian migrants in the interwar period because they were largely kept out of industrial work until the labour shortage that accompanied the onset of war and in 1934 this area of Stepney was home to "a large colony of British Indians." 9 Adler Street, a common lodging house, was among the many nodes of the Punjabi pedlar fraternity. According to Inspector L. Clark, nine British Indians had applied for Pedlars Certificates from this address in 1934, with five, including Udham Singh's, being granted. The building was a ramshackle former shop, where, "with the exception of a small portion left uncovered and painted, presumably to admit light, the shop window of No. 9 is permanently shuttered." When questioned by police, Banta Singh, the building manager, stated that the men who lived there were effectively self-employed pedlars who "as a rule purchase their goods from the local wholesalers and arrange their own sales" (Clark 26 January 1934, IOR/L/PJ/7/1007).

After a few lines deriding the residents of 9 Adler Street, characterizing them as "huddled as far as there was room" and "as being men of low intelligence and social order" appearing "unmistakably dejected and dismal," Inspector Clark noted that Indians were attracted to this part of Stepney largely because "the predominating Jewish population do not object to their presence" (Clark 26 January 1934, IOR/L/PJ/7/1007). Thus, to use Earl Lewis's (1995) felicitous phrase, Stepney was a neighborhood comprised of "overlapping diasporas." Here, Indians and Eastern European Jews created a community that was emblematic of Udham Singh's overarching commitment to the international labour movement and the degree to which he was able to transgress the boundaries of ethnicity. While explaining his chosen name to Divisional Detective Inspector John Swain, after he had been detained in Caxton Hall, Singh recalled that "when I was seven I call myself Mohamed Singh. I like Mohamedan religion and I try to mix with Mohamedans" (Swain 16 March 1940, MEPO 3/1743). Later, while testifying during his trial, he underscored his interest in moving beyond the Sikh and Punjabi communities in Britain: "I have nothing against the English people at all. I have more English friends living in England than I have in India. I have great sympathy with the workers of England. I am against the Imperialist Government" (Singh 5 June 1940, MEPO 3/1743). Prior to the events of March 1940, while living in Punjab in 1927, he proclaimed that "he had intended to murder Europeans who were ruling over India and that he fully sympathized with the Bolshevics [sic], as their object was to liberate India from foreign control" (Intelligence Bureau 1934, 267). Indeed, while staying in Bournemouth in late 1939, where he bought the revolver he used against O'Dwyer, he was known as an outspoken revolutionary and described as having "strong Communistic views" (Hants Constabulary 23 March 1940, MEPO 3/1743).

Emboldened by Soviet propaganda and the emphasis on military training from University of the Toilers of the East in Moscow, the Ghadar Party of the 1930s was newly determined to covertly arm Indians and start a revolution. Fear of arms smuggling was a high priority for the British authorities surveilling Ghadarites. In 1915, during the attempt to foment a mutiny among

Sikh troops in India, the Ghadar Party enlisted two ships, the *Annie Larsen* and the *Maverick*, to illegally transport guns (Bains 1962, 51). Twenty years later, after enlisting the help of Soviet tacticians, the *City of Christchurch*, a steamship, had been seized by police in Calcutta with a cache of arms and noted that "the Indian police have an idea that Gadaries [sic] are secretly gathering arms" (*Hindustan Ghadr* September 1940, IOR/L/PJ/12/757). In 1927, the intelligence apparatus was keen to learn that Udham Singh was arrested on 30 August under Section 20 of the Arms Act, which perceived his possession of two revolvers, one pistol, ammunition, and "copies of the prohibited paper, *Ghadr-di-Gunj*" as an attempt to smuggle weapons (Swain 16 March 1940, 3/1743). Udham Singh's subsequent arrest highlights the fact that his radicalization was the product of a long engagement with the revolutionary politics of the Soviet Union and Ghadar Party.

Indian communities throughout Britain and North America were mobilized in support of Udham Singh after his arrest and arraignment. Usually focused on the welfare of Indian seamen in British ports, Surat Ali, a Bengali ex-lascar, initially garnered support for Udham Singh by collecting funds for his defense (IPI to Mr. Silver 21 March 1940, MS2142/B/3/3). As the campaign to raise funds for Singh's defense began in Britain, the Sikh Temple in Stockton, California, a well-established wing of the Ghadar Party, sent a telegram to Indian representatives in London to enquire about the arrangements for Singh's legal counsel. Even though there was "no evidence whatever of recent direct communication between him and the Party," Udham Singh instructed his solicitor, Robert Clayton, to respond to the Sikh Temple and assured him that it "would bring in anything up to £1,000" (IPI to Mr. Silver 23 April 1940, MS2142/B/3/3). Engaging the Ghadar Party for funds seems to have irritated some Indians connected with Udham Singh's representation, but it was not, as Robert Clayton had understood, the result of a feud between Sikhs in the UK and those in California. In the India Office's view, "there is no reason to suppose that anything in the nature of a feud exists" but "the United Kingdom Sikhs are doubtless not anxious to give the appearance of having relations with a body so notorious as is the Ghadr Party" (IPI to Mr. Silver 23 April 1940, MS2142/B/3/3). Rather, the feud appears to have been between Krishna Menon and Surat Ali, both of whom vied to represent Singh. Ultimately, the Stockton Temple cabled £150 as an endorsement of Udham Singh's act and with a view to buttress the movement through coverage of the trial ("Udham Singh Case" 11 July 1940, MS2142/B/3/3).

As early as June, the India Office appeared convinced both of the political salience of Udham Singh's case among Sikhs and the utter lack of interest from the rest of the Indian community in Britain. To that end, the Office suspected that the Sikhs would seek a reprieve and, "if they failed, Udham Singh would die a martyr's death, and his photograph would be added to the...*Hindustan Ghadr*." However, "other sections of the Indian community in this country, of which the Sikhs form only some 20%, have no sympathy for, or even interest in, the condemned man" ("Note re Udham Singh" 24 June 1940, MS2142/B/3/3). Indeed, in late July 1940, one of Udham Singh's representatives, Krishna Menon, the leader of the India League and among the most prominent Indians in Britain at the time, worked with Shiv Singh Jouhal, alternately a pedlar

and a priest in London, to circulate a Petition for Reprieve throughout the country. Perhaps anticipating his career as an ambassador for and minister in the post-Independence Indian Government, Menon addressed the Petition to Sir John Anderson and wrote:

> We, the undersigned, loyal subjects of His Majesty George the Sixth, by the Grace of God, of Great Britain, Ireland, and the British Dominions beyond the Seas, Defender of the Faith, Emperor of India, humbly pray that you see fit to recommend to His Majesty that a reprieve be granted in favour of one Udham Singh, otherwise known as Azad Singh...We fervently believe that such act of mercy, in sparing the life of the aforesaid Udham Singh, will strengthen the bonds of union between the British and Indian peoples (Petition for Reprieve, HO 144/21445).

Though Menon ultimately declined to sign the document, nearly 300 Indians, mostly Muslim and Sikh Punjabis, and a handful of non-Indians from across Britain eventually did sign the document.

A month later, Shiv Singh Jouhal had begun to distribute the Petition for Reprieve, but the India Office remained convinced that "the general view is that outside the Sikh community, very little interest is being manifested in Udham Singh's life" ("Udham Singh: Petition for Reprieve" 26 July 1940, MS2142/B/3/3). Yet, a simple tally reveals that of the Indians who signed the petition at least 150, more than half, were Muslim. Interestingly, while Udham Singh may have been "well-known in certain Indian circles in London" and "equally well-known among Sikh pedlars who lived at Coventry, Southampton, and other places," it is remarkable that Ujagar Singh and Kartar Singh Nagra were the only two signatories from London and Coventry, respectively ("Udham Singh: Petition for Reprieve" 26 July 1940, MS2142/B/3/3). The misperception that the India Office had that Muslims lacked interest in Udham Singh's fate may have stemmed from the distinct lack of signatures from London's East End. Surat Ali, previously at pains to distance his associates from overt coordination with the Ghadar Party while raising funds for Udham Singh's defense, advised Indians in the East End, many of whom were escaped Bengali Muslim seamen, not to sign the Petition because supplying one's full name and address could have elicited unwarranted police attention to an already precarious community ("Udham Singh: Petition for Reprieve" 26 July 1940, MS2142/B/3/3). Instead, the highest number of signatures came from the Birmingham, Huddersfield, Southampton, and the Royal Air Force Camp in Melksham, underscoring that the primary activities of Punjabis in Britain as soldiers, pedlars, unskilled labour, and escaped seamen.

The moral and monetary support that he received from the Indian community in Britain did not lead to his immortalization. Surely, firing two bullets from a .44 caliber Smith & Wesson revolver into Sir Michael O'Dwyer, former Lieutenant-Governor of Punjab, at the Caxton Hall in London on 13 March 1940 and his subsequent hanging on 31 July 1940 at the Petonville Prison, gained him notoriety. But the uses to which his name and image were put in radical publications such as the *Hindustan Ghadr* and *Kirti* made him a martyr.

Memorials and their uses: "A prominent place in the *Hindustan Ghadr's* picture gallery"

The *Hindustan Ghadr* took a keen interest in Udham Singh's case and both helped to galvanize transatlantic support for him in the days before his trial and, after his execution, attempted to cement Udham Singh's reputation as a revolutionary icon. In May, while Udham Singh sat in Brixton Prison, the *Hindustan Ghadr* published an editorial comparing him to Madan Lal Dhingra, who, in 1909, assassinated Sir William Hutt Curzon Wyllie in London. It then noted that, "in the eyes of crores of inarticulate Indians, Udham Singh has attained the dignity of martyrdom" ("Report on Ghadr Party" 17 July 1940, IOR/L/PJ/12/286). The India Office was outraged that the paper would favorably compare these two incidents and present them as "worthy of emulation." Indeed, the Office suggested that it was engaging in "indirect incitement to further acts of assassination" (IPI to Mr. Silver 27 June 1940, IOR/L/PJ/12/758). Later, in the September 1940 issue, commenting on Udham Singh's execution and its ramifications for British imperial rule in India, the Paper asserted that:

> The 31st July 1940 will ever be remembered in Indian history. On this day Comrade Udham Singh Ji achieved martyrdom. By hanging Comrade Udham Singh Ji the Farangis...have further augmented their oppressions. The sigh of the oppressed Indians will ultimately destroy the oppressive Farangis (*Hindustan Ghadr* September 1940, IOR/L/PJ/12/758.).

Underscoring the excesses of colonial rule, and the extraordinary power of the insurgent "sigh of the oppressed Indians," this article suggests that Udham Singh's execution was an example of British tyranny. The full appreciation and canonization of Udham Singh's martyrdom, however, seemed to require a different genre altogether.

Poetry was an important mode of revolutionary expression and political education throughout the Ghadar Party's history. Both the *Hindustan Ghadr* and the *Ghadr-di-Gunj* routinely published verse written by its members. Similarly, Udham Singh included some lines of "national poetry" in a prepared statement that he attempted to read before the judge sentenced him. An India Office functionary, who attended Singh's trial and who would have been familiar with Ghadar publications, remarked derisively that writing and reciting poetry was "not an uncommon hobby among Punjabis...it is in fact one of the most effective ways of influencing the ignorant and semi-ignorant, for statement of fact is made subordinate to emotion, rhythm, rhyme and the interplay of words" ("Note re Udham Singh" 24 June 1940, MS2142/B/3/3). Yet, for the Ghadar Party, the violence of colonial rule in India could only be met with violent resistance and for that reason Udham Singh was exemplary. The December 1940 issue of *Hindustan Ghadr* published an unsigned poem that caused an Indian Political Intelligence agent to declare that "it is a long time since the *Hindustan Ghadr* has appeared with anything so strongly supporting the cult of assassination" (IPI to Mr. Silver 28 January 1941, IOR/L/PJ/12/758). As an ode to revolution,

any question of fact is secondary to the possibility of "making sinners pay the penalty." For instance:

> By striking with your hand you have made the tyrants pay the penalty/a fine garland of martyrdom is place round your neck. / You are the perfect hero in the matter of freedom/ You have struck down the chains of slavery… / Hands such as yours seizing the sword / washing away the mark of slavery from the brow… / Arise, heroes, be steady / the time to introduce freedom has come. / Expel the tyrants, pacify India / there is no time left for delay. / Come, let us annihilate cruel England / you who want to introduce freedom. / Expel the cruel Farangis from your house / consider how to bring about rebellion (*Hindustan Ghadr* December 1940, IPI to Mr. Silver 28 January 1941, IOR/L/PJ/12/758).

Echoing the Ghadar critique of British tyranny, the poem places Udham Singh in a lineage of "the greatness of those who became martyrs for their country," which included Kartar Singh Sarabha, a Ghadarite who was executed in 1915, and Bhagat Singh, Rajguru, and Sukhdev, executed together in 1931, among others. In this way, the poet indicates that the spirit of militant anticolonialism had been embodied many times before and that Udham Singh should not be the last.

The international circulation of its publications was integral to the dissemination of Ghadar politics to Europe and India. As has been mentioned, Udham Singh was arrested in 1927 under the Arms Act, with the further incriminating evidence of his possession of copies of *Ghadr-di-Gunj*. In the months prior to the assassination he was evidently in "regular receipt" of the *Hindustan Ghadr* ("Report on Ghadr" 17 July 1940, IOR/L/PJ/12/286). These two instances of his consumption of Ghadarite publications buttress claims about Udham Singh's personal connection to the movement and his underlying revolutionary tendencies. They also indicate the ease with which these publications were distributed. Because the Ghadar Party intended to disrupt British Indian soldiers and encourage them to dessert, the India Office sought to monitor how and where their publications were distributed. In February 1942, for instance, the India Office realized that the *Hindustan Ghadr* had "played no small part in inducing a general atmosphere of disaffection" among Sikh soldiers in the Far East" (IPI to Mr. Silver 28 February 1942, IOR/L/PJ/12/758). Thus, even as the British authorities noted the presence of *Hindustan Ghadr* and *Ghadr-di-Gunj*, especially in such sensitive areas as war-zones, the route that the papers took was difficult to discern and, therefore, difficult to stop.

The India Office acknowledged that the effort to reduce the circulation of the *Hindustan Ghadr* was exacerbated because those in receipt of the paper exceeded the names on subscription rolls. In 1940, for instance, although no active subscribers lived there, the United Kingdom "receives two or three dozen copies every month." The publishers' goal, evidently, was not for the paper to garner subscription fees for the Party but simply to maximize circulation. Indeed, the

production of the paper not only served as the Ghadar Party's principal contribution to the struggle against imperialism during World War II, but also, more fundamentally, it helped "to keep alight the flame of...extreme nationalistic ardour of Sikhs abroad" (IPI to Mr. Silver 28 February 1940, IOR/L/PJ/12/758). In Coventry, which received bundles of the paper up until at least 1947, access to the *Hindustan Ghadr* and the tenets of the Ghadar Party played a significant role in the political consciousness and subsequent organization of Charan Singh Chima and his clique of "extremist Sikhs," to whom this article will now return ("Report on Ghadr" 1 December 1947, IOR/L/PJ/12/286; "Review: 1942-43" 19 November 1943, IOR/L/PJ/12/646).

A "band of extremist Sikhs": the formation of the Indian Workers' Association

The Indian Workers' Association (IWA), the expatriate organization that Charan Singh Chima ultimately helped to establish after consulting with Rattan Singh in 1939, was integral to articulating an anticolonial politics in Britain that were informed by the Ghadar movement and animated by the trial and execution of Udham Singh.[1] From its earliest history, the Indian Political Intelligence service was concerned that the IWA could have been a destabilizing force among Indians in the Midlands and feared that "under invasion conditions some of them, particularly the Sikhs, might present considerable danger" (IPI to Mr. Silver 15 May 1942, IOR/L/PJ/12/645). Such alarm was founded on the observation that the overwhelming majority of its members were from Hoshiarpur and Jalandhar in the central Punjab, which, the IPI was quick to note, "have for many years past been hotbeds of violent political agitation, and in fact represent the birth-place of the Ghadr Party" ("Indian Workers' Association" 14 April 1942, IOR/L/PJ/12/645). Furthermore, the Intelligence agency believed that "it is quite clear...that the leaders of the Indian Workers' Association regard it as one of their functions to educate the Indian workers in this country politically, so that when the time comes for them to return to India they may be able to take their part in the revolutionary movement." Thus, the India Office coordinated with the Home Office and Chief Constable of Birmingham to maintain a close watch on the work of the association, most of whom had congregated in the Midlands for economic opportunity.

An immediate response by the surveillance apparatus was to develop dossiers on the "leading personalities" of the association so that "disaffected Indians" might be easily interned in the event of an invasion. Of the few dozen Indians in Coventry and Birmingham who routinely attended the Association's meetings, particular attention was paid to six: Thakur Singh Basra, Charan Singh Chima, Karm Singh Overseer, Kartar Singh Nagra, Vellala Srikantappa (VS) Sastry, and Chowdry Akbar Ali Khan. A demobilized soldier, Thakur Singh Basra was known to subscribe to the *Hindustan Ghadr* and was reputed to have been "very prominent" in the course of raising funds for Udham Singh's defense. As already noted, Charan Singh Chima, the nephew of Karam

[1] Based on all available documentary evidence that I have seen, Udham Singh's relationship to the IWA was exclusively as a mobilizing icon. He was not, as Hiro (1973), Clark (1975), and Sivanandan (1981) have asserted, a founder-member of the Indian Workers' Association.

Singh Chima, "one of the most prominent of the Ghadr Party leaders in the Punjab," had used his uncle's position and influence to facilitate the establishment of the IWA. Karam Singh Overseer was a devotee of Udham Singh and had held a subscription to *Kirti* the journal of the Kirti-Kisan Party in Punjab. Mentioned earlier as the only signatory from Coventry on Udham Singh's Petition for Reprieve, Kartar Singh Nagra subscribed to the *Kirti Lehar* and the *Hindustan Ghadr* and "had obviously been interested in revolutionary Sikh activities before he sailed from India." The only non-Punjabi in the leadership, VS Sastry, a Madrasi, worked with the IWA for the chance to educate Indians in Britain and prepare them for the militant struggle for independence in India. Finally, Chowdry Akbar Khan, who lived with Thakur Singh Basra in Coventry, was an ardent nationalist and helped Indians in Britain to avoid conscription (IPI to Mr. Silver 2 May 1942, IOR/L/PJ/12/645). Though the IPI noted that the first four men had the "typical Ghadar outlook," neither Khan nor Sastry appear to have been orthodox Ghadarites. Nonetheless, they coordinated and helped to lead the IWA because their politics overlapped with that movement in key areas, especially militant anticolonialism and the effort to undermine the British war-effort.

Public meetings served important functions for the pedagogic mission of the Association because they provided a discrete space to disseminate Ghadar Party politics, through rousing speeches, recitation of poetry, chants of *inquilab zindabad*, and eulogies for Udham Singh. For instance, at a February 1942 meeting in Bradford, Karam Singh Overseer proclaimed that Udham Singh "did not care for his own life" and Banta Singh echoed these remarks and entreated all in attendance that "Everybody should be like Udham Singh. If a man dies after shooting a man or two, his name will be inscribed in golden words in the pages of history." Additionally, the meeting displayed a deep distrust of the British military apparatus. Banta Singh noted that Indians had registered for national service but subsequently attempted to attain the status of Conscientious Objector but were instead jailed for insubordination. Chowdry Akbar Ali Khan added to this sentiment by observing that "whenever the British had wanted to make other countries slaves" they had used Indians to do so. "When Indians can fight for another nation to make others slaves," he continued, "then they can fight for themselves" (IPI to Mr. Silver 20 March 1942, IOR/L/PJ/12/645.). Thus, this event allowed IWA members to valorize Udham Singh as an exemplary revolutionary and agent of the Ghadar movement. Moreover, it underscored the Ghadar mission to persuade Indian soldiers to abandon their posts and undermine the British military's imperial project by refusing to maintain the oppression other subject nations.

In addition to exalting Udham Singh and imploring Indians to disengage from imperialist military campaigns, the Indian Workers' Association closed ranks with the Ghadar Party by soliciting funds for the Desh Bhagat Parwar Sahaik Committee, which distributed money to the families of those imprisoned or executed for participating in the Ghadar and Akali movements in Punjab. As mentioned earlier, Karam Singh Chima, Charan Singh's uncle, worked closely with this Fund in Punjab and the Indian Workers' Association would have emerged as the "Indian Political Prisoners' Defence Committee" had the war not slowed its development. As early as 1934, the Ghadar Party made special requests for funds, having already distributed nearly Rs. 100,000 from

1922-1934, noting that "it is our foremost purpose to help the orphans and the aged parents of those national heroes who sacrificed themselves to have us freed and to make us happy" (*Hindustan Ghadr* October 1934, IOR/L/PJ/12/757). By 1942, the IWA took up this initiative and remitted Rs. 2,000 to aid "the families of the Ghadr party leaders" (IPI to Mr. Silver 20 March 1942, IOR/L/PJ/12/645). However, support for the Fund was not uncontroversial. Later that year, the Coventry IWA leadership unilaterally sent "considerable sums" to India without the input of the membership. Evidently, some argued that such money should be spent primarily on programs to improve conditions for Indians in Britain, which was a foundational, if competing, concern for the organization ("Indian Notes" 14 November 1942, IOR/L/PJ/12/646). Yet, factional disputes notwithstanding, the IWA continued to send support to the Desh Bhagat Parwar Sahaik Committee for the duration of the war.

In 1945, having taken some time to establish itself within the landscape of Indian organizations in Britain, the Coventry IWA brought out a newsletter titled *Azad Hind*, or "Free India." Under the direction of Kartar Singh Nagra and Vidya Parkash Hansrani, the paper adopted the militant anticolonialism detailed in other Ghadar Party publications, making it, in the eyes of the British intelligence apparatus, "as extreme as anything which has yet appeared in this country in any Indian language" ("Indian Activities" 1 June 1945, IOR/L/PJ/12/646). Indeed, during a meeting of the leftwing Federation of Indian Associations in Great Britain on 14 April 1946, Kartar Singh Nagra stated that *Azad Hind* was modeled on the *Hindustan Ghadr* and that he hoped to emulate the latter (IPI to David Petrie 18 April 1946, HO 45/25460). An evocative example of this confluence can be seen in the reprinting of Banka Singh's hagiographic verse eulogizing Udham Singh as "Bawa," which had been previously published in *Ghadar* (*Azad Hind* December 1945, HO 45/25460; *Hindustan Ghadr* August 1940, IOR/L/PJ/12/758).

The violent anticolonial rhetoric of the paper, which circulated in "the London area, the Midlands and the industrial North," won it the attention of MI5 and, later, the Home Office sought to bring charges against it. However, as one government minister lamented, "it was doubted whether, in the event of a prosecution, an English jury could be convinced that the questionable matter amounted, in fact, to incitement to murder" (Minute 23 January 1946, HO 45/25460). In any case, the fears that "a second Udham Singh should arise" due to the encouragement of the paper, led to its characterization as "insidious and poisonous propaganda which aims at corrupting the political views of the working-class Indian in this country and at instilling revolutionary and terrorist ideas" (David Petrie to Alexander Maxwell 15 January 1946, HO 45/25460.). The national distribution of *Azad Hind*, which was facilitated by the pockets of anticolonial radicalism that had emerged out of the formation of the Indian Workers' Association, helped it to become one of the most prominent instruments for introducing Ghadarite militancy to hundreds of working-class Indians in Britain.

Conclusion

The "typical Ghadar outlook," a trait that the intelligence community in Britain attributed to many early Indian Workers Association activists, is not capacious enough to easily apply to all prospective Indian agitators in Britain equally. Ordinarily, this trait was assigned as a kind of *fait accompli* in discussions of radical Punjabis from Hoshiarpur or Jalandhar – sites of regular anticolonial agitation throughout the interwar period. However, the category also applies more generally to Punjabis who were sympathetic to the aims and methods of interwar iteration of the Ghadar Party. It was a shorthand for those who trafficked in Ghadar Party publications and those of sibling organizations, such as the Kirti-Kisan Party or the Communist Party of India. As Maia Ramnath has shown, Ghadar was sustained by a confluence of political and social movements in the years after its 1914 *Ailan-i-Jang* – its declaration of war. It was neither exclusively a Punjabi movement or only a movement for national independence. In the midst of the Second World War, the "typical Ghadar outlook" is an evocative, and perhaps intentionally limited, method of naming a form of radical anticolonialism that had travelled back and forth between North America, Europe, and India for decades finally taking root at the centre of empire.

It is fitting, therefore, to return to the beginning and revisit Udham Singh's failed trip to the Leicester Square Theatre. The Robeson film that he had sought out on the day of the assassination, *The Proud Valley*, is emblematic of the revolutionary politics of the Ghadar movement globally and in Britain specifically. The film, which had opened just a few days earlier, chronicles David Goliath (Paul Robeson), an African American sailor, as he takes work in a Welsh coal mine, joins their choir, and forges friendships with the crew. Yet, as if to suggest that racial and labour solidarity were inapposite, Graham Greene complained in *The Spectator* that "too many red herrings scent the story lines...colour prejudice is dragged in for the sake of Mr. Paul Robeson who plays the part of a big black Pollyanna" (Greene 1940). But *The Proud Valley* was a unique achievement in its day. The "colour prejudice" that Greene lamented, was indeed a critical response to the racial anxieties, best encompassed when a white miner exclaimed "well, damn and blast it, man, aren't we all black down in that pit" (*The Proud Valley* Ealing Studios 1940)? Moreover, having lived in the Soviet Union in the mid-1930s, the peak of Ghadar enrolment in the University of the Toilers of the East, *The Proud Valley* was a testament to Paul Robeson's radical sensibilities. Indeed, if not for the outbreak of war in 1939, which necessitated a changed ending, as Matthew Sweet (2005, 172) has acknowledged, *The Proud Valley* "would have been the most uncompromisingly Marxist picture ever produced in Anglophone cinema." Thus, though Udham Singh arrived too early, this film's representation of anti-racist solidarity and militant worker mobilization were an apt corollary to the revolutionary anti-Imperialism of the Ghadar movement.

This article has argued that Punjabi migrant workers' political radicalization in Britain was made manifest the memorialisation of Udham Singh in globally circulated Ghadarite literature. The Indian Workers' Association emerged at the intersection of Punjabi militancy, the British Left,

and the struggle for national liberation. Its engagement with political violence, racial discrimination, and anticolonialism was rooted in the migrant experience and the example of the Ghadar Party. Though the politics of Indian workers in Britain has often been characterized as narrowly nationalist, a critique of imperialism was clearly articulated by representatives of the Federation of Indian Associations in Great Britain, whose leadership derived from the IWA. In 1946, a Subject People's Conference was convened to protest against "the reimposition of Imperialism" in Southeast Asia which was a joint effort of the Federation of Indian Associations in Great Britain, the Pan African Conference, and the Independent Labour Party ("Indian Societies in the UK" 6 June 1946, IOR/L/PJ/12/646). Such a commitment to emancipatory politics was the foundation on which Indian migrant workers, who arrived in Britain by the thousands in the 1950s and 1960s, would anchor far left politics and industrial action in London and the Midlands throughout the postwar period and era of deindustrialization.

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Article

IN THE SHADOW OF GHADAR: MARXISM AND ANTI-COLONIALISM IN COLONIAL PUNJAB

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Abstract

The Ghadr Party, an eclectic group of diasporic Punjabis, was perhaps one of the most significant political movements led by emigre Indians in the early twentieth century. Designated as one of the biggest threats to colonial rule in the 1910s, the Ghadr Party spread its operations over five continents, and repeatedly committed acts of sabotage aimed at colonial officials from India. By the 1920s, however, the birth of popular movements in India marginalized various groups that believed in the spectacular actions of a vanguard as a strategy for overcoming the stifling impact of colonial rule. Members of the party, eager to find a foothold in the changed political scenario, opened discussions for building a popular front in Punjab, with many returning to the country to participate in such an endeavour.

In this article, I study the encounter between the Ghadarite tradition and the communist movement in colonial Punjab through the writings of Sohan Singh Josh, who attempted to bring these two traditions together to produce a viable political project. I argue that Ghadar's encounter with Marxism not only influenced the former, but also radically transformed Marxism itself, particularly on questions of History, violence and volition.

Keywords

Anti-colonialism, Punjab, Marxism, Communism, Intellectual History

The relationship between Marxism and the colonial world can best be described as a missed encounter, since the political trajectories of late 19th century "social democracy" in Europe and the burgeoning critiques of colonial rule by anti-colonial intellectuals and organizations did not cross paths until the 1920s. Positivist Marxism, tied to a linear conception of history, could only view the colonial world as a permanent site of deficit, removed from the universal history of class struggle prevalent in the industrially advanced West. Such a conception of a civilizational hierarchy was not only a result of an ideological construction peculiar to 18th- and 19th-century[1] European

[1] This is not to make a simplistic binary between Europe and non-Europe. In fact, Lenin (and one can argue already Marx) emphasized the importance of subjective, strategic interventions on part of the communists in order to overthrow capitalism. The same argument can be extended to Antonio Gramsci and Walter Benjamin, who did not see History as inherently emancipatory. My argument is that this tension between History and volition in European

thought, but was also tied to an objective process of economic, political and ideological differentiation produced by the uneven development of capitalism across global space.[2] Yet, a missed encounter does not merely play the role of keeping apart political ideologies emanating from distinct historical contexts. Rather, this lack of historical correspondence between specific political ideologies becomes the condition of possibility for their encounter, overdetermined by contingent events, yet structured by the persistence of deeper, subterranean currents that allow for mutual translation.[3]

In this article, I interrogate the advent of communist ideas in colonial Punjab in the 1920s as a new ideological current in the Indian political landscape. I focus in particular on the simultaneous appropriation of the Ghadar Party history and European Marxism by Punjabi radicals to produce a specific communist praxis in colonial Punjab. My aim here is not to recount the complex reasons the Ghadar Party joined the communist movement in India. Instead, I write a history of the *intellectual trajectory* of communism in Punjab as a peculiar encounter between European Marxism and the anti-colonial struggle. Further, rather than asking the usual question of how Marxism entered and transformed the political landscape of colonial India, I seek to explore the ways in which political practices in colonial Punjab impacted Marxist ideology, rethinking and displacing its internal coordinates. The colonial deficit in Marxist thought was not only viewed by anti-colonial intellectuals as a limit to Marxism's global import, but also as a provocation to improvise and reconstitute its framework to permit its resonance in the colonial world.[4] Thus, I argue that a rupture from a pristine Marxism was not a sign of a "deviation" from "the idea", but instead was a vehicle for its inscription in a historically specific site, and, consequently, for its universalization outside its point of origin in Europe.[5]

Marxism was accentuated in colonial conditions, since the inaugural gesture of anti-colonial movements was a rejection of History. This had implications for Marxian categories such as the revolutionary subject, alienation, ideology etc., some of which I explore in this article.

[2] Contemporary scholarship convincingly argues against a conception of linear economic, social and political development within capitalist modernity. Instead, it posits uneven productive space as constitutive of Capital against its own fantasies of homogeneity. Unevenness produced disparate ideological and political practices, the result of which are finally being registered within intellectual history. See, for example, Neil Smith, *Uneven Development: Nature, Capital and the Production of Space* (Athens:University of Georgia Press, 2008) and Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Differe*nce (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

[3] See Louis Althusser, *Philosophy of the Encounter: Later Writings, 1978-1987* (London: Verso, 2006).

[4] For a similar argument, see Shruti Kapila, 'The Majority of Democracy', *Social Text Online* (2015), https://socialtextjournal.org/periscope_article/the-majority-of-democracy/ accessed 16th August 2015. Intellectual history must move beyond the global division of labor in which European intellectuals think and non-Europeans practice. Instead, we should study these practices as profound reconceptualizations of modern ideas in and of themselves. Bruno Bosteels has recently emphasized the theoretical importance of these innovative practices as "theoretical acts" or acts of theoretical production. See Bruno Bosteels, *Marx and Freud in Latin America: Politics, Psychoanalysis and Religion in Times of Terror* (London: Verso, 2011).

[5] Many Indian intellectuals were aware of socialism and Marxism during the 19th century. As a political project, however, Marxism became relevant in India only in the 1920s as it took root in the working class and the broader anti-

I explore these questions through the story and writings of Sohan Singh Josh, a communist from colonial Punjab and vocal defender of the Ghadarite tradition. Josh's oeuvre is ideally placed to delineate the convergence of Marxism and the Ghadar Party as he identified with, and worked through, both these traditions to formulate communist politics in colonial Punjab. By showing how he developed a new practice of Marxism, particularly on the question of the "revolutionary subject", I examine how such practice formed the basis for a new framework for Marxist theory itself. In other words, I consider communism in Punjab as a productive site for theoretical reflection, rather than merely a place for passive reception of European ideas.

Marxism and Ghadar: The Encounter

A detailed survey of the Ghadar Party's encounter with global communism is beyond the scope of this article. It is important, however, to briefly comment on the conjuncture that permitted these two project to intersect in the aftermath of the First World War.

The Ghadar Party was formed in 1913 to challenge British sovereignty over India. The party consisted of Indians (mostly Punjabis) living outside and aimed to ignite a rebellion across colonial India, particularly in the British Indian military to win independence. The party was able to build an impressive anti-imperial geography, with a network in countries as diverse as the United States (mostly California), Canada, Honduras, Afghanistan, China and the Soviet Union. Apart from doing propaganda work through a number of publications, the Ghadar Party sought alliances with anti-British forces, including Germany and Turkey. With bases in multiple countries and participating in "conspiratorial" activities, Ghadar was an integral actor in what Tim Harper has recently called the "Asian Underground", a global space consisting of exiles, rebels and criminals found in major urban centers of Asia during the early twentieth century.[6]

By the late 1910s and early 1920s, the Ghadar Party was politically and organizationally exhausted.[7] The party failed to induce widespread rebellion in the British Indian military, particularly with the defeat of the daring attempt to seize control of the Mian Mir Cantonment in Lahore, which the party hoped would trigger military revolt. The colonial state punished the architects of this botched attempt in the "Lahore Conspiracy Case" and concomitantly launched a crackdown on Ghadarite activities throughout the Empire, reduced its capacity to pose a substantial challenge to colonial authority.[8] In addition, after the US' entry into the war, Woodrow

colonial movement. See P.C. Joshi and K. Damodaran, *Marx Comes to India*, (New Delhi: Manohar Book Service, 1975).

[6] Tim Harper, 'Singapore, 1915, and the Birth of the Asian Underground' *Modern Asian Studies* 47 (2013), pp.1782-1811.

[7] The Indian intelligence community also felt that Ghadar activists had "little concrete result to show" during this period. See H. Williamson, *India and Communism* (Calcutta: Government of India Press, Calcutta. 1933), pp. 156-158.

[8] See Malwinder Singh Warraich and Harinder Singh (eds)., Lahore Conspiracy Case I and II (Chandigarh: Unistar, 2008).

Wilson's government outlawed anti-British groups, including the Ghadar Party in California,, decimating its organizational structure through a number of sedition cases. Finally, the defeat of the Axis in the war (a major funder and supplier of weapons to the Ghadar Party) removed a major global ally, making geopolitical realities increasingly bleak for transnational anti-colonial groups.[9] Top intelligence officials in Colonial India assessed Ghadar's political capacity by concluding that there was "very little concrete result to show" and the party was "rendered inoperative" after the "Armistice was signed".[10] The Ghadar Party continued its activities in the pacific and even in North America, but leading members of the group desperately searched for new ideological and geostrategic anchors.

During the same period, Bolshevik Russia found itself in the midst of a civil war, and faced hostile territories to the West. Furthermore, the failure of communist uprisings in Europe meant Russia needed to seek new allies beyond their traditional relationships with European communists. This conjuncture propelled the colonial world, and the anti-colonial movements germinating in it, as potential allies in the struggle for global communism.[11] Lenin's thesis on the colonial question, the holding of the Congress of the Peoples of the East at Baku, and the formation of the University of the Toilers of the East at Tashkent were tied to the transformed political possibilities presented by the post-war conjuncture, with the colonial world at the center of this new imaginary. [12] Ghadar Party leaders who were sympathetic to Marxist thought, such as Santokh Singh and Rattan Singh, became voting delegates and official observers, respectively, at the fourth Communist International Meeting, cementing relations between Soviet Russia and the anti-colonial movement in India.[13] Santokh Singh also enhanced his understanding of Marxism by studying the subject

[9] See Kris Manjapra, *M.N. Roy: Marxism and Colonial Cosmopolitanism* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010).

[10] H. Williamson, *India and Communism* (Calcutta: Government of India Press, Calcutta. 1933), p. 157.

[11] See Alexandre Bennigsen and Enders Wimbush, *Muslim National Communism in the Soviet Union: A Revolutionary Strategy For the Colonial World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979).

[12] The Second meeting of the Communist International witnessed the first in-depth debate on the role of the colonial world in global communism. Lenin presented his thesis on the "National and Colonial Questions", which he followed by presenting another document, that was written by the Indian delegate, M.N. Roy. It signalled the emergence of the non-European world as the principal theatre for communist politics during the twentieth century. See Vladmir Lenin, 'Draft Thesis on the National and Colonial Questions' *Selected Works* (New York: International Publishers, 1938), vol. x.

[13] The encounter between the anti-colonial movement in India and Soviet Russia occurred via three different trajectories. First, M.N. Roy attended the second session of the Communist International as an official delegate from Mexico and forcefully presented the case for including colonies in the global communist movement. Previously, he had been a member of the "terrorist" underground in Bengal targeting British officials. The second political tradition to encounter Soviet communism was political Islam, particularly those young activists who left colonial India to fight for a global Caliphate. Their interactions with pro-Soviet forces in Central Asia convinced them to begin the study of communism, eventually leading to the formation of the first Communist Party of India at Tashkent in 1921. The Third trajectory is that of the Ghadarite revolutionaries, as we discuss later. See Kris Manjapra, *M.N. Roy: Marism and Colonial Cosmopolitanism* (Delhi: Routledge, 2010), and Ammar Jan, "Islam, Communism and the Search for a Fiction", in *Muslims Against Muslim League: Critiques of the Idea of Pakistan*, eds. Megan Robb and Ali Qasmi (Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

closely during his stay in the Soviet Union, a continuation of his exploration of Marxist ideas from his stay on the East Coast.[14]

Santokh Singh was part of a number of transnational Ghadarite militants who had not only acquainted themselves with Marxist philosophy, but were also seeking avenues to enter the transformed political landscape of colonial Punjab. The 'Punjab Disturbances' of 1919-1920 and the violent response of the colonial state, including the Jallianwala Bagh Massacre, had not only solidified anti-colonial feelings in the province, but also opened a new sequence for political action, displacing the vanguardism of the previous decades with mass mobilization as central to the political imaginary in India.[15] As a Ghadar militant, Santokh Singh inhabited transnational spaces incongruous with imperial geography, but now he aimed to situate himself in mass politics inside Punjab. He returned to colonial Punjab in 1926 to organize a workers and peasants political party influenced by Marxism.[16] After a brief internment in his native village at Amritsar, he began publishing *Kirti* magazine, an organ given the twin tasks of disseminating "communist ideology" in vernacular idioms, and defending the legacy of Ghadarite heroes.[17] Singh's failing health compelled him to seek allies in political communities in the Punjab to continue his work, which is how he met Sohan Singh Josh, a young and emerging political leader in the Punjab and future editor of *Kirti* magazine.

Josh was born into a peasant family at Chetenpura village of Amritsar in 1896. To support his family, he took up a number of petty jobs before being appointed for a junior post in the Censor's Office in Bombay. He was assigned the task of reading letters from the Punjabi diaspora in order to prevent "seditious" literature from entering India.[18] In a move that would seem both ironic and embarrassing later in his life, Josh destroyed "hundreds of letters" written by Punjabi radicals to their relatives and comrades in Punjab, people whose activities he would later radically identify with.

> ...the Censor Office were merciless-- a cog in the machine working like automats, showing no sympathy or human emotions either for the addressers or the addressees. Rather, we were keen on collecting as much information as possible from those letters for the special files allocated in the name of patriotic Indians who

[14] David Petrie, *Communism in India* (Calcutta: Government of India Press, 1928), pp. 152-157.

[15] The "Punjab Disturbances" and the Amritsar Massacre could be seen as moments of the birth of "the political" in modern India.Not only did anti-colonialism gain mass appeal in colonial India, but the multiple contradictions forming the social body also found expression in the political domain, resulting in contestations over the place of religion, caste and class within the nation. For an excellent discussion on the colonial anxieties over the "disturbances", see Hussain Nasser, 'Towards The Jurisprudence of Emergency: Colonial Rule and The Rule of Law' *Law And Critique* 10 (1999).

[16] H. Williamson, *India and Communism* (Calcutta: Government of India Press, 1933), pp 159-160.

[17] See Ali Raza, 'Separating the Wheat from the Chaff Meerut and the Creation of "Official" Communism in India' in *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and Middle East* 33:3 (2013), pp. 316-333.

[18] See Sohan Josh, *My Tryst with Secularism* (Columbia: South Asia Books, 1991).

> were considered "conspirators, suspects or seditionists" by the British Government. I was a mercenary… I was a Sikh, and like other Sikhs was loyal to the government.[19]

The Akali movement in colonial Punjab radicalized Josh, turning him into a major proponent of anti-British views.[20] The movement had the overt aim of reclaiming control of Gurdawaras from corrupt, pro-British *mahants,* and also became the concentrated expression of anger amongst the once loyal Sikhs against the increasingly authoritarian British rule in the Punjab. In 1922, Josh was one of the prominent leaders of the Akali movement who were arrested by British authorities, and was sentenced after proclaiming in front of the magistrate that he had "little faith in British rule".[21] He gained further fame and notoriety after leading a group of political prisoners to engage in civil disobedience within the jails, questioning the sovereignty of colonial power on the bodies of the condemned prisoners.

> Our struggle in jail was part of the general struggle that was being waged throughout the country for religious and political reforms.… We knew that no improvements inside the jails could take place without struggles and sufferings; we knew how the *Ghadar* patriots had fought in Andaman and Indian jails, and had made great sacrifices for winning their rights for *kachcha* and *pagree*.[22]

Josh placed himself within the tradition of the Ghadar activists, the people he had spied on for years, and aimed to emulate their politics, an identification we shall dwell on later. In jail, he was torn in the struggle between "fanatical Akalis" who insisted on singing songs glorifying Sikh rule over India, and pro-Congress prisoners who protested against Sikh rule for being exclusive of the larger Indian nation.[23] He became increasingly dissatisfied with the parochial turn in Akali politics, claiming that a major challenge confronting the anti-colonial movement was to overcome identitarian divisions. After a number of clashes with the Akali leadership, both intellectual and physical, he began to search for alternative ideological and organizational anchors for his politics.[24] This is roughly the point (1927) when he met Santokh Singh, who immediately recruited Josh to *Kirti* as an editor, an encounter that would prove to be most enduring for Josh's political

[19] Ibid., p. 14.
[20] Ibid., p. 20.
[21] Ibid., p. 88.
[22] Ibid., p. 48.
[23]Sohan Josh, *My Tryst with Secularism* (Columbia: South Asia Books,. 1991), p. 51..
[24] Ibid., pp. 72-73.

trajectory.[25] He would later describe the political significance of *Kirti as a* "the continuation of the Ghadar Movement in a new way".[26]

He became the most prominent leader and intellectual of the communist movement in the Punjab in the 1930s and 1940s, being repeatedly arrested by the colonial state for his seditious activities, and served a 5-year jail term for the "Meerut Conspiracy Case".[27] Josh led an electoral campaign in 1937 against Sardar Raghbir Singh (a major landlord in Amritsar) on a platform calling for an end to "landlordism", defeating the latter by 12000 votes and becoming one of the 5 communist MLAs in the Punjab Legislative Assembly.[28] Josh remained a member of the Communist Party of India until his death in 1984, serving as a major chronicler of the radical tradition in the Punjab, giving special emphasis to the Ghadar Party and the Communist Movement as part of the continuum of perpetual rebellion.

Thus, we witness the intersection of three different political currents in the 1920s: Leninism's decisive move to explore revolutionary potentialities in the East, the Ghadar Party's attempts to find a foothold within colonial Punjab, and Sohan Singh Josh's search for a new ideological anchor for himself in mass politics in Punjab. Here, I am most interested in the third strand, i.e. Josh's attempts to place communist politics in Punjab as a continuation of the twin legacy of European Marxism and the Ghadar Party. In his writings, Josh does not view Punjab's radical tradition as a story of deficit due to its missed encounter with Marxism, a position that would make orthodox Marxism appear as the universal kernel of wisdom able to unlock the impasse of any particular situation. Instead, he develops a framework in which Marxism itself needed a particular, historically dense site that would not only make it relevant for political action, but in the process, would also change its own theoretical premises. Consider how Josh rather embarrassingly writes about his lack of knowledge of Marxism when he joined *Kirti,* a "Marxist magazine", as an editor.

> I did not know much of Marxist theory. I knew only what I had read and learnt from the *Liberty and the Great Libertarions,* which also contained excerpts from the writings of Marx, Engels and Lenin. Hence, whatever I knew was eclectic, anarchistic and communistic all mixed together and unsystematic.[29]

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[25] Ibid., pp. 101-102. Santokh Singh was impressed by Josh's statement in the Akali leaders' conspiracy case and approached him through his Ghaddarite comrade, Bhai Bhag Singh, a Canadian, to write articles for the newly found *Kirti* at the end of 1926.

[26] Sohan Josh, *My meetings with Bhagat Singh and Other Early Revolutionaries* (New Delhi: Communist Party of India, 1976), p. 13.

[27] See Sohan Josh, *Hindustan Ghadar Party: A Short History* (New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1977).

[28]Sohan Josh, *My Tryst with Secularism* (Columbia: South Asia Books, 1991),
p. 215.

[29] Ibid., p. 102.

I read this "unsystematic" thought not as a limitation, but as a vehicle for producing political novelty within the realm of communist praxis. Here, I take a methodological liberty. I study Josh (and other anti-colonial Marxists) as an author of a new practice of communism, without necessarily developing a theoretical or conceptual framework adequate to this novelty. I consider his oeuvre as an ideal site of this novelty, as he brought together disparate strands to build a viable project for political action in colonial Punjab.[30]

To explore this singularity, we must ask why someone who wished to situate himself in the tradition of the transnational Ghadar Party and "global communism" premised his politics on the peasantry, the archetypal figure of backwardness in modernist discourse. I examine this question through a study of transnationalism in the early twentieth century, as well as the socio-historical specificity of the Punjab.

Beyond Global and Local: The Broken Time of Politics in Colonial Punjab

My engagement with anti-colonial politics in "global space" is different from current scholarship on the subject that examines diasporic politics as a rootless "cosmopolitanism", dissolving the centrality of "place" with its historical, cultural and affective density, within a universalizing narrative of the "global".[31] As Tim Harper has argued, such a banal focus on flows and encounters risks obfuscating the anxieties and violence emanating from global migration, flattening such frictions by constructing a fiction of a seamless emergence of a smooth, "cosmopolitan" humanity. Such a methodological construction has an uncanny resemblance with colonial narratives that portrayed global revolutionaries as external threats that required the tightening of imperial borders to prevent their intrusion into the imperial body politic.[32]

My own task is to restore the centrality of these transnational, anti-imperial networks to the imperial geography *from which* they emanated. For despite the global itineraries of Ghadar revolutions, they never could, nor in my opinion did they seek to, escape the history that compelled them to migrate from Punjab. Ever since its formation, the primary aim of the party was to influence political life inside India, while preparing revolutionaries to "return" to the country to carry out subversive activities. One of the primary tropes of the Ghadar Party was a call to acknowledge the trauma of the War of Independence of 1857, a gesture seeking to produce politics by a *confrontation* with History , rather than seeking a *flight* from it.[33] In this section, I first study

[30] I agree with Shruti Kapila's argument that the Indian political was formed less as a result of "applying" western ideas in India, and more through creating ruptures from received ideologies. Citations of European ideas in the works of Indian thinkers often functioned as a point of departure from, rather than a fidelity to a theoretical framework. See Shruti Kapila, 'Global Intellectual History and the Indian Political' *Rethinking Modern European Intellectual History,* eds. Darrin MacMahon and Samuel Moyn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

[31] For example, see Kris Manjapra, *M.N. Roy: Marxism and Colonial Cosmopolitanism* (Abingdon: Routledge,. 2010).

[32] See Nivedita Saxena and Siddharta Srivastava, 'An Analysis of the Modern Offence of Sedition' *NUJS Law Review* 7:2 (2014), pp. 121-147.

[33] See Sohan Josh, *Hindustan Ghadar Party: A Short History.* (New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1978).

both the peculiar historical conditions prevalent in colonial Punjab that facilitated the formation of the transnational Ghadar network. Second, I show how Josh attempted to constitute a political praxis adequate to the Ghadar legacy *inside* colonial Punjab to overcome the internal/external divide constitutive of colonial propaganda, finding in the figure of the peasant a potential embodiment of the emancipatory promise offered by transnational revolutionaries.

In colonial Punjab (much like the rest of the colonial world), capitalism, state formation and, consequently, political subjectivity, did not follow a linear trajectory. Instead, we are presented with a broken time that cannot be narrativized under a master-signifier such as Capital, colonialism or even less so, feudalism.[34] The special relationship enjoyed by the region with the colonial state meant that the imperatives of security, capital, and land were superimposed onto each other in a complex unity. The Land Alienation Act (1900) is a classic example of the contradictory tendencies existing in colonial Punjab that the British had to negotiate in order to reproduce their power. Punjab's landed elite felt threatened by the increasing encroachment of urban-based finance capital on agricultural lands. Yet, the resentment displayed by Punjab's landed elite against this process of land alienation greatly perturbed colonial officials since they required their support in maintaining stability in Punjab, as well as for recruitment for the Indian military. The result was a peculiar social arrangement in which "non-agriculturalist tribes" were barred from acquiring agricultural land, solidifying economic, caste and political barriers between urban and rural Punjab.[35] Simultaneously, the Punjab's peasantry, apart from producing for the world market, was physically assimilated into a global geography through their participation in the Indian military, traveling to disparate locales, from the Far East to the Middle East to the East Coast in the United States.[36]

A worrying factor for the British was the fact that, despite the integration of a surplus rural population into the military, the agrarian crisis affecting the middle and the poor peasants was too acute to be resolved through an absorption of the surplus peasantry into the state apparatus. Recurrent agrarian crises often led to localized peasant uprisings, such as the 1907 "disturbances" against the Colonisation Bill, the largest mass agitation by the peasantry against colonial rule.[37] Such specific arrangements meant that the peasantry represented the poor and backward "other" of industrial progress, while simultaneously being central to modern geo-politics due their critical

[34] In recent years, scholars as diverse as Jairus Banaji and Etienne Balibar have argued that there is no straightforward correspondence between "base and superstructure" or the content and form in capitalism. Beyond necessitating a detailed analysis of a particular formation, such an approach also keeps open the possibility of historical and political contingencies. SeeJairus Banaji, *Theory as History: Essays on Mode of Production and Exploitation* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2011).

[35] See Hassan Javid, 'Class, Power, and Patronage: Landowners and Politics in Punjab',*History and Anthropology* 22:3 (2011), pp. 337- 369.

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

[37] See Barrie Gerald, 'The Punjab disturbances of 1907: The Response of the British Government in India to Agrarian Unrest' *Modern Asian Studies* 1 (1967), pp. 353-358.

role in the British Indian military, creating a peculiar tension in assigning it a political temporality. It is not surprising, that the first truly "global" political movement from colonial India, the Ghadar Party, was fuelled by Punjabi peasants living in the diaspora, signifying this paradox.

Communism and the Peasant Question

The presence of multiple temporal rhythms made it impossible to decipher a singular socio-political logic for colonial Punjab. It meant that the question of "the global" had to be rethought and reconstituted in relation to the internal dynamics of the politically charged 1920s and 1930s colonial India. Josh locates the rise of the Ghadar Party rebellion within the double consciousness of the Punjabi peasantry, impoverished, yet globally mobile.

> The main reasons for Indians going abroad was economic… The economic conditions of the Punjab peasants had worsened during the second half of the nineteenth century due to the increased land revenue, heavy indirect taxes, sahukar's debts and fragmentation of land holdings. Land on which they were making their poor living had passed into the hands of the rich peasantry and banya sahukars. There was no employment for the peasant youth except enrolling themselves as military recruits in the British army….The Punjabi soldier had proved his worth in the wars of expansion of the British Empire. He had gone overseas, fought many battles in different countries under the British flag and seen people of different religions, colours and nationalities. This broadened his mental horizon to an extent, he acquired an adventurous spirit.[38]

According to Josh, the intersection of extreme misery and the acquisition of a transnational "mental horizon" imbibed the Punjabi peasant with an "adventurous spirit". The critical place occupied by the Punjabi peasantry within the coercive apparatus of the colonial state made it a special target for appeals by revolutionaries aiming to subvert colonial authority. For this reason, the planned rebellion by the Ghadar Party in 1914-1915 rested on the assumption that there would be a combination of military rebellion, beginning in the Mian Mir Cantonment of Lahore, and mass peasant support in the Punjabi countryside.[39] Josh argued that the reasons for the failed rebellion, known in the British legal lexicon as the 'Lahore Conspiracy Case" lay precisely in the inability of the Ghadar leadership to win over the active support of the peasantry.

> A wiser, more capable and far-sighted leadership with widespread organisation was needed to take advantage of the unrest prevailing among the peasantry and in the

[38] Sohan Josh, *Hindustan Ghadar Party: A Short History* (New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1977), p. 40.

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

> Sikh-Hindu and Muslim regiments, prepare them for a combined assault and start the revolution… But the above formula of men, money and arms was inadequate and insufficient. Because even if all these three were there, the revolution perhaps could not have succeeded without the mass backing and an organised central leadership and its far-flung branches following a strict discipline.[40]

The active support of the peasantry here appears as the "missing link" between the heroic but doomed voluntarism of the Ghadarite revolutionaries and a transformative politics in India. The formation of the Kirti Kissan Party in Punjab was meant to overcome this lacuna and to situate revolutionary politics in the midst of the agrarian crisis. Thus, communist politics began in Punjab by invoking the revolutionary potential of the "peasant masses", as Josh's reflections on the Kirti Kissan Party conferences demonstrate:

> ...I spoke at great length about the starving and famished conditions of the working masses, especially the peasant masses…. We wanted to wean away the poor and the middle peasantry from the influence of the Zamindara League and expose the pro-landlord politics of Choudhry Chhotu Ram… The agenda of the Rohtak conference was almost the same as that of the Lyallpur conference...The main task was to meet the land needs of the peasantry.[41]

The seamless insertion of the peasantry as the principal vehicle for radical politics is apparent from these lines. In fact, the primary activities of the Communists in Punjab revolved around the "Qarza committees" formed to organize against increasing rural indebtedness and high rates of land revenue.[42] This also explains why the first (successful) electoral campaign of communists in the Punjab was entirely centered on the agrarian situation. Josh's electoral campaign against Sardar Raghbir Singh was also premised on fighting the problems faced by middle and poor peasants.

> But he [Raghbir SIngh] was not all virtue, and he was a known oppressor of peasants of villages in his possession and under his domination, depriving them of their share of irrigation water and harshly raising rents from them. Further, he was a lackey of the British who had never raised his voice against the Jallianwala Bagh Massacre, and in fact favoured the continuation of British Raj. All these factors provided us with enough ammunition to expose him throughout the length and breadth of the Tarn Taran.[43]

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[40] Sohan Josh, *Hindustan Ghadar Party: A Short History* (New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1978), pp. 269-270.
[41]Sohan Josh, *My Tryst with Secularism* (Columbia: South Asia Books, 1991),
p. 121.
[42] Ibid., p. 200.
[43] Ibid., p. 209.

Josh links the destitute conditions of the peasantry with colonial exploitation (an oppressive landlord who was also a "lackey of the British"), placing the two within a continuum. As stated above, Josh went on to achieve a historic win against Raghbir Singh, with a margin of 12,000 votes. Gains such as these made by communists in the 1930s, are often attributed to the "global" appeal of communism during the inter-war and post-war periods.[44] While broadly correct, such an analysis nevertheless carries the risk of depicting anti-colonial politics as either a mere reiteration of ideas already developed *elsewhere*, or at best local "modifications," denying the possibility of intellectual autonomy to the non-European world.

Borrowing from Dipesh Chakrabarty, I posit that European ideas, including Marxism, had to be stretched each time they were deployed in colonial India, displaying both their utility, but also their imprecision when dealing with novel political practices outside the sites of their origin.[45] To this sharp analysis I make one addition; not only does historical difference force us to expand upon existing theoretical frameworks, but it also compels us to reconstitute such frameworks, challenging the very idea of an original site. I, therefore, argue that the elevation of the peasantry as the principal revolutionary subject in colonial Punjab, far from being a particularistic *deviation* from a pristine Marxist theory, provides us with tools for rethinking Marxism on the basis of a *new practice of theory*.

Peasant Deviation Or Anti-colonial Innovation?

Rochona Majumdar has powerfully argued that the primary displacement in revolutionary thought in colonial India occurred through the politicization of the peasantry during the anti-colonial movement, a social group deemed "pre-political" in the most radical canons of European thought. Yet, the stubborn persistence of the peasantry in the social body, and increasingly visible presence in Indian political life, interrupted linear representations of socio-political development.[46] As Majumdar rightly points out, however, "peasant" was less of an empirical, objective category, than a master-signifier for social groups and classes (such as tribals, unemployed, urban poor, etc) marginalized by the process of primitive accumulation, but without a proper name in political thought. She places this importance attached to the peasantry as part of the "romantic" search for a non-industrial "revolutionary subject" in the twentieth century.[47]

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[44] See for example, Joachim Haberlen, 'Between Global Aspirations and Local Realities: The Global Dimensions of Interwar Communism', *Journal of Global History* 7 (2012), p. 415.

[45] Dipesh Chakrabarty, 'Belatedness as Possibility: Subaltern Histories, Once More' in *The Indian Postcolonial: A Critical Reader*, eds. Elleke Boehmer and Rosinka Chaudhuri, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011), pp. 163-176.

[46] Rochona Majumdar, 'Subaltern Studies as a History of Social Movements in India',*Journal of South Asian Studies* 38 (2015), p. 50.

[47] The same question found its most forceful expression in the Chinese countryside, where the Communist Party of China decided to mbiize the peasantry into a fighting force. Yet, Mao Zedong's contribution to the rethinking of revolutionary subjectivity, particularly with respect to the peasantry, remains one of the most unacknowledged aspects

The framework developed by Majumdar is useful in highlighting the political significance of processes and social groups that produced the modern political in India through the *interruption* of a specific modernity imagined by colonial (and colonized) elites. One of the key contributions of Subaltern Studies has been its focus on the peasantry as introducing a gap between Europeans notions of an ideal modern citizenry and the actual practice of modern subjects, a productive space between *imagining* and *inhabiting* modernity. I build on this framework to posit that a praxis premised on the interruption of capitalist modernity rather than its maturation, the excluded remainder of the historical process, in this case the peasantry, threatened the disintegration/transformation of the political order. Consider Josh's analysis of why the peasantry provided communists an opportunity to establish a foothold within the political landscape of colonial Punjab.

> The (Zamindara) League stood for the interests of the landlord and the kulaks: the Chaudhuri used the word zamindar to cover over the entire peasantry, including the poor and the middle peasantry. The provincial Congress committee was also holding its conference to defend the interests of the corrupt banis and put forward its own political program. We wanted to wean away the poor and the middle peasantry…... Our strong point was that we were against landlordism, and wanted their lands to be distributed among the landless and the poor peasantry.[48]

The *non-place* occupied by the peasantry in existing forms of representations, which had been "covered over" in colonial and nationalist discourse, made it possible for it to become a political subject. Here, we witness an important similarity between Ghadar Party activities and peasant revolts that allowed for their simultaneous incorporation into communist thought. Anti-colonial groups such as the Ghadar Party constructed a transnational, anti-colonial geography exceeding the limits of imperial sovereignty. As Enseng Ho has argued, this *excess* allowed anti-colonial groups to haunt the colonial imaginary, since their ability "for geographical mobility often meant crossing imperial and departmental jurisdictions" from where they appeared as "sophisticated as empire itself, and enough so to represent a potential threat".[49] The conflagration of peasant discontent into a political crisis also remained a concern for British officials, who recognized that the "trials and troubles of the Indian peasant are many and he who seeks to ease their lot may well succeed in not only gaining their confidence but also their blind and unthinking devotion".[50] Therefore, contrary to the "external" threat posed by Ghadar, the peasantry represented an

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of contemporary scholarship on the subject. See Mao Zedong, *Selected Works of Mao Tse Tung* (Oxford: Permagon Press, 2014)

[48] Sohan Josh, *My Tryst with Secularism* (Columbia: South Asia Books, 1991), p. 118.

[49]Enseng Ho, 'Empire through Diasporic Eyes: A View from the Other Boat *Comparative Studies of Society and History* 46:2 (2004), pp. 210-246.

[50] H. Williamson, *India and Communism* (Calcutta: Government of India Press, 1933), p. 153.

immanent excess, whose financial precarity often turned into political defiance, threatening the internal stability of the Empire.

Colonial anxiety over a fusion between these *global* and *local* symbols of interruption triggered simultaneously a transnational and national operation to contain the "threat" posed by such groups, with colonial officials vowing to "stamp" them out "like the plague".[51] Following from Agamben, I posit that such excessive figures were at the heart of colonial sovereignty, since their inclusion into the legitimate body politic could only be realized through the exclusionary gesture of sovereign violence.[52] Such an *inclusion through exclusion* was not only a response to a foreign intrusion or an external threat, but was also critical in structuring the internal life of the Empire, a fact borne by the flurry of "sedition" charges against the leading figures of the National movement inside India.[53] Thus, Josh's attempts to forge an identity between "global" groups such as the Ghadar party and "local" agrarian movements stemmed from each's *excessive* presence in imperial categorizations, with their lack of place endowing them with a disruptive potential in the present.

We see that groups such as the Ghadar party were not merely "cosmopolitan," a category unable to explain their political specificity beyond mundane theme of geographical mobility. Instead, we should view them as part of a *political project* in fidelity to the disruption of a historically specific Empire, which could align with other groups (internal or external) that posed a similar threat to imperial rule. British officials themselves placed these two threats together, condemning *Kirti* for simultaneously "advocating the organisation of workers and peasants" and "championing the cause and ideals of the Ghadar conspirators", in the worse combination of "internal" and "external" threats imagined by colonial authorities.[54] Therefore, rather than creating a socio-cultural homology as a basis for political identification, it was the ability of both the Ghadarites and the insurgent peasantry to interrupt colonial sovereignty that allowed their adequation in a shared political project, without posing a logical contradiction.

Loss, Volition and Sacrifice

Yet, the mere interruption of social processes does not allow us access to the historicity of communist thought, i.e. how a *specific* politics was imagined, practiced and sustained in a given historical situation. Instead, we run the risk of reading a particular political interruption in the colonial world as simply a *repetition* of similar insurrectionary moments elsewhere in modernity, whose consequences had already been deduced by European thinkers. We know from Deleuze, however, that no repetition is innocent of improvisation, even if the novelty appears to be part of

[51]David Petrie, *Communism in India* (Calcutta: Government of India Press, 1928), pp. 321.

[52] Agamben, Giorgio *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 2004).

[53] See Shruti Kapila, 'Once Again, Sedition is at the Heart of Defining the Nation', *The Wire,* 2nd of February, 2016 https://thewire.in/22763/once-again-sedition-is-at-the-heart-of-defining-the-nation/ accessed on 4th of March, 2016.

[54]H. Williamson, *India and Communism* (Calcutta: Government of India Press,1933), pp. 160.

a world constantly repeating itself.[55] A repetition of an idea in a novel setting is always also a movement of an internal loss, displacing its own coordinates to permit the emergence of unfamiliar elements, even if the lack of an adequate language corresponding to this novelty cloaks the new inside the vocabulary of the familiar. The peasantry signified a critical new element in Marxism's repetition in the non-European world which induced a deeper loss than merely a displacement of the proletariat as a political subject.

The classical Marxist conception of the proletariat was tied to a stagist view of history in which the proletariat represented the maturation and exhaustion of the capitalist mode of production, allowing it to embody an epoch-shifting potential to take humanity beyond the present. The absence of the proletariat as a principal political subject was also a loss of such certainty in the Big Other of History and its sociologically predictable laws, turning political action into a *creative* and *productive* process tied to the contingency of the historical conjuncture. Thus, rather than simply an exchange of positions between the proletariat and the peasantry within a shared conception of History, the erasure of scientific guarantees turned *volition* into a central aspect of political subjectivity in anti-colonial thought. I study volition through the trope of sacrifice which, apart from signalling a confrontation with History through its interruption, allows us to examine a precise practice through which anti-colonial thinkers, including Marxists, produced autonomous political ideas.

Let us take an example of the Ghadar party's elucidation of colonial rule. For the Ghadarites, participation in colonial institutions represented a process of financial and psychic self-enslavement for the colonized subjects. Consider the following lines from the first edition of *Ghadar di Goonj,* the official newspaper of the Ghadar Party.

> The world derisively accosts us: O Coolie, O Coolie. We have no fluttering flag of our own anywhere. We go fighting to wave the British flag over our heads. This is a very shameful thing for us. You became slaves to the English nation and disgraceful to the name of Hindustan.[56]

The emphasis on shame (as we shall discuss later) is immediately followed by a call to arms to arrest this subjection by inculcating a spirit of self-abnegation.

> Make the platoons aware, why are you sleeping, O swordsmen? Indians won battles in Burma, Egypt, China and Sudan, Shame on us we that we helped our enemy. This is what a wretched slave does…... Driving out the British tyrants, we have to

[55] See Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995).

[56] Quoted in Sohan Josh, *Hindustan Ghadar Party: A Short History* (New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1977), p. 172.

> brighten the name of India like bright torch. ….. If we remain alive we shall rule and if we die, the world will sing songs of praise for us.[57]

In a gesture common to various anti-colonial movements, the Ghadar Party called for an active *distancing* from the material and ideological coordinates of imperial rule. The lack of political institutions expressing the will of anti-colonial organizations compelled groups like the Ghadar Party to substitute the pursuit of material benefits with voluntary suffering in order to resist assimilation into the imperial project. In psychoanalytic terms, "sacrifice" was offered by anti-colonial militants not in the name of universally accepted institutions or a political community, but instead as an act that *brought into existence* a new political community.[58] In other words, since there was no institutional or sociological guarantee for the existence of ideals such as "liberty" or "nation", *sacrificing* in the name of such ideals became the alternative ground for their production by inscribing them on a suffering body. Thus, anti-colonial movements in India had to produce the grounds on which to premise their political ideals, with concepts attaining their sanctity not from a legal regime, but from sacrifices offered by anti-colonial militants in their name. It is for this reason that Josh elevated the element of self-abnegation central to Ghadarite subjectivity as the party's most essential and eternal contribution to communist politics in the region.

> The Ghadar armed struggle was not fought in vain. It left an indelible heritage of revolutionary spirit and courage in the country. It set a new precedent of selflessness, self-sacrifice and self-abnegation for the cause of freedom and took it to a new height...Their martyrdom taught us at every moment of our duty and obligation towards India's freedom.[59]

The appeal of the figure of the martyr in Josh's writings stem from his ability to become a productive symbol for a regulative idea. Writing in the *Kirti* magazine, the official organ of the communist movement of the Punjab, Josh depicted a martyr as the epitome of the revolutionary subject.

> The martyr is far higher than the standard of his time, and his views are far loftier than those of other people. The people who are tightly bound with the chains of conservative views cannot understand his lofty flights (of imagination) and independent views…then comes his turn for execution. Does he become upset on

[57] *Ghadar di Goonj,* 1 (1913), p.1 and Sohan Josh, *Hindustan Ghadar Party: A Short History* (New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1977), p. 191.

[58] See Dennis Keenan, *The Question of Sacrifice* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), pp. 33-45.

[59] Sohan Josh, *Hindustan Ghadar Party: A Short History* (New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1977), p. 271.

> hearing of his death? Does he begin to cry? Does he make entreaties to save himself? Never. He rejoices, merry-makes, leaps and jumps and sings smilingly.[60]

This description of a joyful martyr elevated confrontation with death as a more authentic mode of existence than mere attachment to life privileged in liberal humanism. But more importantly, it is the martyr's indifference to existing temporality that made his actions indiscernible to those attached to a defaulting present. One may argue that suffering and sacrifice became universal tropes for political claim-making in colonial Punjab as acts in excess of the present, interrupting its reproduction. In fact, Marx himself had to be placed within this tradition of conscious self-abnegation to make him legible in the region's politics. In a speech on Marx, which could have easily have extended to revolutionaries from the Ghadar Party, Josh describes Marx as one who "suffered" for humanity.

> He had been passing his life in securing bread for the poor people. The German Government offered to give him the higher posts several times but he refused to accept them and said that in order to provide happiness in the world it was necessary that some people should be in distress. Happiness cannot prevail over the world unless some persons become martyrs for the sufferings of the people.[61]

The transformation of Marx into a colonial, or better still, an anti-colonial militant undergoing voluntary suffering was part of the larger shift in communist practice in the colonial world, particularly on political subjectivity. Josh privileged the consciously suffering partisan as a bearer of revolutionary potentiality, rather than situating the latter in a sociologically deduced group, such as the industrial working class. In a classical anti-colonial gesture, Josh cloaks his departure from orthodox Marxism by invoking, if not incorporating, Marx into a new conception of revolutionary subjectivity. Yet, much like every border, the line separating orthodox from anti-colonial Marxism also co-joined them. As we have discussed, for Josh, what was at stake was not a rejection of Marxism as a "foreign idea" to be substituted by indigenous thought, but to use the particularity of the historical situation, and its attendant cultural and political repertoires, to produce a *new practice* of Marxism. The giant shadow of the Ghadar movement and the persistence of agrarian revolts produced a historically specific communist subjectivity that overcame the loss of historical certainty through volition and sacrifice. This new dialectic of Marxism developed in Punjab provides us with a window to re-open Marx's own oeuvre to examine repressed elements that resonate with this praxis, as we shall see in the next section.

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[60] Ibid., pp. 98-99.

[61] Copy of speech delivered by Sohan Singh Josh at Jallianwala Bagh, Amritsar, trans. Morid Hussain, *Meerut Conspiracy Case, Prosecution Exhibits*, pp. 37-38.

Encountering Two Geneologies of Shame

We have studied how communism arrived in colonial Punjab as a peculiar encounter between Marxism and Ghadarite anti-colonialism, resulting in a complex interplay between external imperatives and internal displacements. Yet, there perhaps appears to be a deeper subterranean connection between the political practice of the Ghadar Party and Marxism, despite their production in distinct spatial (and temporal) locales.[62] Once again, we look at Josh's attempts at fusing these disparate currents to unearth these connections.

For Josh, the history of communism in Punjab, and the history of the Ghadar Party, were an attempt to continue the work of a deeper undercurrent in Punjab's collective unconscious, the revolt of 1857. The uprising and its subsequent defeat aided in securing a special place for Punjab in colonial administration, while also served as an untapped source of accumulated rage against the Empire.

> According to British authorities themselves, the most important factor which tilted the balance in favour of British victory was the arrival in time of the Sikh regiments in Delhi...The Sikh chieftains, in their selfish interests, with their illiterate armies openly sided with the British rulers and stabbed the revolt in the back…. Even backward areas heard many rumours and stories current [sic] during those days. It gave a good jostling the high and the low [sic]. It aroused feelings of sympathy for the rebels and people were sorry they did not succeed.[63]

We see the double movement in which Punjab had been integrated into Empire through the loyalty of its military regiments and the ruling elite, yet tales of the revolt circulated in colonial Punjab as a heroic episode of resistance. This interplay between a revolutionary promise and a haunting betrayal retained 1857 as an unfinished experience in popular memory. Much like the British invocation of the event each time there were anti-British "disturbances" in order to justify excessive state violence[64], anti-colonial movements also had to engage with 1857 as a settling of scores from the past, as well as to retroactively save its heroic promise by situating it in existing anti-colonial struggles.

As discussed earlier, for a militant anti-colonial organization like Ghadar, belief in an onward march of progress was replaced by the humiliation of participating in a project of self-enslavement. Shame became the raw material for fueling political and ethical action by militants in the Punjab. Shame also served as the affective motif through which they mobilized the

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[62] My argument is partly informed by Bruno Bosteels' excellent discussion on the persistence of subterranean undercurrents in social formations, and their re-emergence through encounters in distinct historical moments. See Bruno Bosteels, *The Actuality of Communism* (London: Verso 2011).

[63]Sohan Josh, *Hindustan Ghadar Party: A Short History.* (New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1977), pp. 12-13.

[64] Mark, Condos, 'Licence to Kill: The Murderous Outrages Act and the rule of law in colonial India, 1867–1925', *Modern Asian Studies* 50 (2015), pp. 1 - 39.

revolutionary potentialities of past revolts, such as 1857, which had been obscured by Punjab's apparent loyalty to Empire. Ghadar leaders displaced existing codes of loyalty and honor towards the British state onto the register of anti-colonial shame. In the first edition of its newspaper, *Ghadar di Goonj,* published in 1914 and cited almost verbatim by Josh in his works on the Ghadar Party, the theme of humiliation is deployed to counter-pose the Punjab's alleged attachment to Empire.

> Are you not ashamed that in times of war you are ordered to the trenches and the British troops are kept in the rear in security? For all danger to your lives you get only nine rupees a month and out of this, you have to clothe and feed yourself and save from this for your family, whereas the British soldier gets three good square meals a day and is provided with the best of uniforms, besides getting forty five rupees a month and bonus, etc.[65]

In a classic example of counter-interpellation, these words were aimed at disrupting the process of recognition through which colonized Punjabis came to identify with Empire, by emphasizing the physical separation between Indian and white soldiers in the British military. It is this estrangement from dominant modes of identification induced by shame that opened up a separation from colonial ideology, denoting the disjointedness between colonial self-representation and its actual practices in Punjab. Josh stressed the centrality of Ghadar's contribution in the realm of ideology, by "reminding Indians" of the realities of colonial rule.

> The Ghadar heroes' everlasting contribution was that they raised the banner of Ghadar (revolt) against British slavery and reminded Indians that the motherland was still fettered in British chains and they had to be broken...And they reminded us that the war for independence started in 1857 and carried forward by them in 1914-1915 still remained unfinished and that it had to be concluded.[66]

By inducing a consciousness turned against itself, shame had the power to "remind" colonial subjects of an originary event in which revolt and subjection lay anchored in the same instance. For Josh, the "unfinished" work of Ghadar, that "had to be concluded," was continued by the communist movement in India, which "always sought and got inspiration from the 1857 revolt". Thus Ghadar's summoning of 1857 allowed it to become a vanishing mediator between military revolts against the British and the advent of mass anti-colonial politics in India, tying the two moments together in a history of continuing rebellion.

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[65] Quoted in Sohan Josh, *Hindustan Ghadar Party: A Short History* (New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1977), p. 191.

[66] Sohan Josh, *Hindustan Ghadar Party: A Short History* (New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1977), p. 271.

Should we view Marxism's relationship with Ghadar's history as simply an extension or negation of Marxist thought, or can it aid us in locating elements within Marx's *oeuvre* that allowed for such belated resonance in the non-European world? I argue that there were, perhaps, deeper undercurrents structuring Marx's writings that allowed aspects of his thought to be incorporated into an anti-colonial subjectivity premised on shame and suffering. In a beautiful but rather under-studied commentary on German patriotism in a letter to Ruge written in 1843, Marx highlights the revolutionary potential in *shame,* if directed at one's own participation in a farcical political project, in this case, German nationalism.

> The glorious robes of liberalism have fallen away and the most repulsive despotism stands revealed for all the world to see. This, too, is a revelation, albeit a negative one. It is a truth which at the very least teaches us to see the hollowness of our patriotism, the perverted nature of our state and to hide our faces in shame. I can see you smile and say: what good will that do? Revolutions are not made by shame. And my answer is that shame is a revolution in itself... Shame is a kind of anger turned in on itself. And if a whole nation were to feel ashamed it would be like a lion recoiling in order to spring.[67]

It is difficult to miss the resonance between the deployment of shame by Marx and by the Ghadarite revolutionaries, as if there was a secret knot that tied together the two political projects and permitted a mutual incorporation. Here, shame is deployed as an "anger turned on itself" in an act of self-accountability. "Shame is in itself a revolution" insofar as revolution demands a minimal separation, "a recoiling" from the laws of the world, only in order prepare for subjective interventions "to spring". Much like the Ghadar party, Marx emphasizes subjective transformation, rather than an expression of objective relations, as a necessary pre-condition for meaningful intervention. We are miles away from discussions of teleological laws of History pre-destined to move towards a revolutionary event, and are instead presented with a revolutionary subjectivity that is incongruous with fantasies of linear development.[68] The encounter between "Marxism" and the anti-colonial movement compels us to register the consequences of communist praxis in the colonial world within traditional Marxism, including making audible the silences

[67] Karl Marx, *Early Writings.* trans., Rodney Livingston and Gregor Benton (New York: Vintage 1975), pp. 199-200.

[68] In recent years, there has been an emphasis on recovering the political aspects (i.e. interventions) of marx, rather than simply viewing him as a scholar of political economy. In such analyzes, Marx is not seen as either a critic or an enthusiast for modernity, but rather a militant who was actively strategizing to overturn the status quo. It is this legacy of Marx that became relevant in the non-European world. See Alain Badiou, *Communist Hypothesis* (London: Verso Books, 2009), Harry Cleaver, 'Karl Marx: Economist or Revolutionary?' in *Marx, Schumpeter and Keynes: A Centenary Celebration of Dissent,* eds. Suzanne W. Helburn and David F. Bramhall (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe Inc., 1986), pp. 121-146, and Daniel Bensaid, *Marx for our Times: Adventures and Misadventures of a Critique* (London: Verso, 2002).

within the texts of Marx, a long-neglected task that is finally being undertaken in intellectual history.[69]

The Ghadar movement, and its appropriation by communists in Punjab, became one of the many sites of the encounter that turned Marxism into a theory of rupture from History, rather than simply an expression of its teleological movement. Josh's appropriation of Marxism not only overcame the internal impasse of the radical tradition in Punjab, but also aided in restoring to Marxism its own forgotten legacy, obscured by the positivism dominant in 19th Century Europe.

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[69] I have in mind Bruno Bosteels and Kevin Anderson's work. See Bruno Bosteels, *Marx and Freud in latin America: Politics,Psychoanalysis and Religion in Times of Terror* (London: Verso, 2011), and Kevin Anderson,*Marx at the Margins; On Nationalism, Ethnicity and Non-Western Societies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016).

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Article

THE MADNESS OF JODH SINGH: PATRIOTISM AND PARANOIA IN THE GHADAR ARCHIVES

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Abstract

This article centers on the experiences of Jodh Singh, a marginal figure in the history of the Ghadar movement, who exists as the sum of a few documents in official archives and the media record of the Hindu-German conspiracy trial of 1917–18 in which he served as witness. Based on a close reading of these materials, at the center of which is an official account of the insanity of Singh, I undertake an analysis of discourses of patriotism and paranoia in the archive. Making a case for viewing Singh as exemplifying the condition of subalternity, I describe how the juridical-legal-medical framework of the American state that condemns Singh is based on anxieties about madness, foreignness, and sexuality as threatening to the legitimacy of the state. I also argue that Jodh Singh's story offers the basis of a critique of the idea of the Ghadar Party as an exemplar of cosmopolitan values and solidarity, given that Ghadar discourse shares some assumptions with the state apparatus that has judged Singh as defective, guilty, and diseased. In undertaking such a reading, the article illustrates how the story of Jodh Singh troubles the distinction between patriotism and paranoia as it exists in the imagination of the state.

Keywords

Jodh Singh, patriotism, paranoia, sexuality, cosmopolitanism, foreignness, Hindu-German, madness, insanity, conspiracy

Introduction

Jodh Singh, prisoner of the US government, was insane. This was the unequivocal conclusion of the psychiatrists tasked with diagnosing him. Their diagnosis is included in the report of a commission appointed to evaluate Jodh Singh's physical and mental condition. Appointed on February 20, 1918, the Commission presented its report on March 12 of the same year.

Initially imprisoned at Alameda County Jail on November 27, 1917, Singh, according to the statement of the jail physician, was "apparently in the best of health and spirits" till February 14, 1918 ("Report" 1918, 13). On February 26, 1918, he was moved to a private sanatarium ("Report" 1918, 11). Medically, the report found Jodh Singh to be suffering from "prison

psychosis" and syphilis. Legally, as well, he was determined to be insane. The Commission, accordingly, recommended that he should be institutionalized in a hospital for the insane.

Jodh Singh was a sympathizer with the cause of the revolutionary Ghadar Party. The aim of the party, founded in 1913 and based in the San Francisco Bay Area, was to foment a revolutionary armed struggle in India to throw off the yoke of British colonial rule. Led by intellectual elites, the party drew membership and support from the Indian labour diaspora in North America. Thoroughly internationalist in outlook, with a self-image that located the movement in a cosmopolitan genealogy of revolution against injustice, Ghadar members and sympathizers were part of a global network of political intrigue. In 1917, Ram Chandra, then leader of the Ghadar Party, other party members, and German diplomatic officials were arrested for planning a military conspiracy against the British, in violation of US neutrality laws. The trial of the Indians, Germans, and Americans accused of the conspiracy lasted from November 1917 to April 1918. Twenty- nine conspirators, Indian and German, were found guilty at what came to be known as the Hindu-German Conspiracy Trial. On April 23, 1918, a day before the trial concluded, Ram Chandra was shot by Ram Singh, a co-defendant in the trial.

Arrested in Bangkok by the Siamese government for "High Treason in connection with Hindu Conspiracy" plots, Jodh Singh turned informer for the US government ("Report" 1918, 4). He was first imprisoned in Bangkok, then in Singapore for 10 months, where he was brutally tortured (Special Correspondent 1917, 1–2; Smedley 1922, 341–42). Accompanied by Secret Service agents, he was taken to Chicago to testify in a case related to the plot in October 2017 and then to San Francisco (Smedley 1922, 341–42). In the Chicago trial, Jodh Singh indicated that he had turned witness for the US for fear of being tortured by the Indian Police (Special Correspondent 1917, 2). Yet, later, during the trial in San Francisco, on December 5, 1917, he claimed that he had been used as a pawn by both the British and the Americans ("Bomb Plots" 1918, 7). Asking for his plea to be changed from "guilty" to "not guilty," Singh refused to testify, invoking in his plea America's legacy of justice and fairness by, among other arguments, comparing George Washington to a Mahatma or great soul ("Bomb Plots" 1918, 7; Smedley 1922, 342). Eventually placed in the Mendocino State Asylum in Talmadge in California, Jodh Singh was freed in 1921 thanks to the efforts of his father who had traveled to the US to find his son. "Mentally dead and physically ruined," he was taken back to India by his father (Smedley 1922, 342).

Representing what Ranajit Guha has called the "small voice of history," a source of historicity that is unrecognized by the implicit ideology of "statism" that marks disciplinary historiography, Jodh Singh exists as the sum of a few documents in official archives and special collections, media coverage of the trial, and scholarship on the Ghadar Party (1997b, 1). Through a close reading of a web of these documents and scholarly reflections, at the centre of which lies the report of the Commission appointed to inquire into his mental condition, I want to read the account of the madness of Jodh Singh as a statement about patriotism and paranoia.

A man broken by incarceration and violence, Jodh Singh also exists, in Guha's evocative phrase in another of his essays, as the "residuum of a dismembered past" (Guha 1997a, 37). Guha uses the term in the context of his analysis of an "untamed fragment" in the historical record, an

account of the death of Chandra, a subaltern woman from among the most abject of social groups in colonial Bengali society (Guha 1997a, 37). Chandra's death results from a paste administered to induce an abortion that winds up killing her; the document in question is the testimony of members of the family about the event as recorded by a village scribe. In the essay, Guha argues that Chandra's death is already claimed by "two kinds of politics," seeking to "appropriate the event…as a discursive site—on behalf of the state in one case and on behalf of the community in the other" (Guha 1997a, 40). Guha's reading, a "critical historiography" that is both deconstructive and recuperative, is motivated by a profoundly humanizing desire: to view Chandra's death from the vantage point of a family struggling to deal with a crisis (Guha 1997a, 36, 40).

In a similar vein, I seek to understand Jodh Singh's trials as an individual's attempt to deal with repeated experiences of dislocation and violence. I am particularly interested in how the record of his experiences indicts the system that has judged him insane, that is, the juridical-legal-medical framework of American society. I also wish to examine how the figure of Jodh Singh points to the glimmers of a critique of the self-image of the Ghadar Party as a revolutionary movement committed to egalitarian principles. In undertaking such a reading, I am not aiming to demonstrate the 'truth' about Jodh Singh's madness, but rather to show how the story of Jodh Singh troubles assumptions about patriotism and belonging that are central to a reason of state. I also hope to illustrate how the figure of Jodh Singh might call into question a certain totalizing account of the Ghadar Party as an exemplar of cosmopolitan values and solidarity.

In my reading of madness as the site of a set of relations between the reason (and authority) of the state and society, my debt to Foucault's work on madness, especially his seminal text, *The History of Madness*, should be obvious (Foucault 2006). I draw on Foucault in my arguments about madness as the Other of reason (particularly a reason of state), of the social and historical construction of madness, and of the discourse of madness producing the very 'truth' that it seeks to find. In his introduction to the text, Khalfa points out that Foucault divides the separation of madness and reason into three phases, each associated with a distinct mode of social control (2006, ix–x). In the modern phase, which begins as the eighteenth century fades, madness is seen "as factual or positive, an object of science, as a disease or series of diseases" (2006, ix–x). The mad, that is those that are marked by this objective condition, are, consequently, deemed as legitimate objects of control, treatment, and confinement by a medical reason that is yoked to or subsumed within a reason of state.

It is to this modern phase that the experience of Jodh Singh belongs. But the madness of Jodh Singh must also be examined while taking into account the fact of another kind of difference, that of a treasonous foreignness, which threatens the very integrity of the state. Singh is doubly threatening: first, as the embodiment of the Other of reason that is madness and, secondly, as the foreign Other whose existence threatens the normative order of political and social life. The danger of foreignness represented by Singh is compounded yet further by his diseased sexuality, marked as the latter is by the symptoms of syphilis. Though Foucault is valuable in shedding light on the general link between madness and diseased sexuality, he does not say much about the specific threat that someone like Jodh Singh poses as the bearer of a racial and colonial difference that is

also designated as sexually aberrant (Foucault 2006, 91). In seeking to understand what that threat might represent and what it may additionally illuminate about the juridical-legal-medical discourse on Singh, I draw on the work of Lowe and Shah who have critically examined the role of sexual and racial difference across various theaters and sites of colonial modernity (Lowe 2015; Shah 2011).

Patriotism and Paranoia in the Ghadar Archives

For its 'medical' diagnosis, the Commission found Jodh Singh to be suffering from three distinct ailments: "Prison Psychosis" with symptoms of paranoia, "Cerebro-Spinal Syphilis," and "Constitutional Psychopathic Inferior Individual" ("Report" 1918, 3). The last of these conditions, in turn, was "fertile soil for the development of the Psychosis upon a Neuro-Syphilitic basis" ("Report" 1918, 3). While the Commission expressed the view that symptoms of the psychosis could be managed, its 'legal' prognosis categorically described Singh as insane.

The report presents other traits, symptoms, and explanatory factors, which collapse medical and scientific diagnosis with social judgments and morality. Read a century later, the medical discourse reflects the prejudice of its age as much as it sheds light on possible causes for Singh's descent into insanity. Singh had in the last two years experienced nervousness, headaches, severe insomnia, and epileptic fits ("Report" 1918, 3). In terms of his personality, he was "secretly….Egotistical," "secretly revengeful," sarcastic, and "a Moody" individual" who was prone to contemplating suicide on occasion ("Report" 1918, 4–5). The 'Mental Examination' conducted on Jodh Singh highlighted his lack of hygiene, his destructiveness, an obsessive repetition of acts like washing his hands and the sink, the visual and auditory hallucinations that he experienced, his sense of persecution and paranoia, some weakness in memory, and his refusal to eat ("Report" 1918, 5–8). All these actions warranted that Singh be moved to a sanatarium in Oakland in California where he showed some improvement. His symptoms abated in intensity and he experienced "short periods when he [was] quite rational" ("Report" 1918, 7). Given the confirmation of insanity, the report absolved him of the possible charge of being a "Malingerer" or faking medical symptoms ("Report" 1918, 5–8).

In the narrative, the difference between Singh before and after the onset of his symptoms strikes one as stark. In his testimony at Chicago, for instance, Singh complained about not being allowed to bathe in Singapore. Incarcerated in a cell "full of vermin," Jodh Singh "testified that he had suffered great mental anguish because he was not permitted to bathe twice a day as his religion demanded (Special Correspondent 1917, 2). In contrast, in the report, Singh is described as "filthy in habits," urinating and defecating in his cell and then covering himself and walking in his waste ("Report" 1918, 6–7, 13).

The report presents us with a conundrum here. On the one hand, Singh's symptoms are consistent with a "syphilitic insanity," including delusions about persecution, thoughts of suicide, and violence, though Singh categorically denied having ever contracted syphilis when asked so for

the report of the Commission ("Report" 1918, 41; Stewart 1870, 409–10).[1] The account of Singh's symptoms is based on the statements provided by several individuals to the Commission. In a conversation with Mrs. M. Cowdrey, Matron of the Cowdrey Sanatarium, as recorded in her statement (which forms part of the report), Singh reported that "he felt queer for years" and had first experienced such feelings in 1912, suggesting that the symptoms of syphilis may have started manifesting themselves at this point ("Report" 1918, 18). Yet, on the other hand, the timing of the onset of insanity is curious, coming as it does right after Jodh Singh had possibly exhausted his value for the US government and had refused to be a witness for it. Through and after the duration of the trial in 1917, Jodh Singh was lucid, testifying as witness for the US government and clearly explaining the rationale for why he had first turned witness only to later retract his plea. All this transpired after Singh had already suffered torture during his imprisonment in Singapore. The report is silent about the fact that the "prison psychosis" suffered by Singh could have been a function of his current experience of incarceration at the hands of the government of the United States, as much as it could have resulted from his earlier spell in a prison in Singapore.

The document that designates Jodh Singh as insane speaks with both the objectivity of medical science and of the reason of the state. But the medical and legal diagnoses of Singh are inseparable from judgments that the report articulates about intrinsic moral character on grounds of nationality. Jodh Singh was deeemed to be suspicious "by personal make-up and nationality" ("Report" 1918, 4). According to the clinical psychologist, Mrs. Grace M. Hawkins, in her letter to one of the members of the Commission, Dr. Ball, Jodh Singh but naturally "talked peculiarly on account of his East Indian manner" ("Report" 1918, 28). In the inquiry into Jodh Singh's condition, cultural difference, too, is coded as lack of reason. The statement of G.C. Denham, the chief of Indian Police Intelligence in Bengal, who had travelled to San Francisco in relation to the Hindu-German conspiracy plots, shows how the incomprehension of the questioning authority was projected on to the answering subject as a lack or deficiency within the latter (Plowman 2013, 10; "Report" 1918, 15–16).

> He gave his evidence in the Chicago case...Seven men were executed and according to the record he said 'These men are my brothers' and so according to the interpretation, Jodh Singh caused the death of seven of his brothers. He didn't quite understand and he wanted to clear up the thing. They were not his brothers at all. Jodh Singh testified to the death of his seven brothers but it was just his way of speaking. They were not his brothers at all.

[1] The symptoms also seem to be consistent with one manifestation of neurosyphilis, namely General Paresis or what was termed General Paralysis of the Insane ("General Paresis" 2016; Hurn 1998, 6–7). Hurn, however, notes that the symptoms of GPI included "florid delusions of grandeur–in which the patient typically believed he owned everything around him–with a sordid physical decline" (Hurn 1998, 6–7). While the report amply details Jodh Singh's delusions, these do not qualify as delusions of grandeur. The term "General Paresis" is not used in the report itself.

Curiously, for someone who was based in India, Denham seemed unaware of the idiomatic use of the term 'brother' or *bhai*, as a kindred spirit or fellow traveller in a cause. Again, the silence is instructive. The obvious explanation that Jodh Singh might be stricken by guilt at having betrayed his compatriots did not appear to strike Denham though he did pick up on Singh's agony over the decision. "Then he [Jodh Singh] asked to come over to this country. He came over and stayed some time in Canada, all the while tossing up whether it was right or wrong to give the evidence" ("Report" 1918, 15). Denham's statement ends with a revealing generalization: "They," that is the Hindus or Indians, "believe that all the world is an allusion and intangible," an instance when the prior knowledge possessed by official authority is simply confirmed by invoking it as explanation for Jodh Singh's actions and responses ("Report" 1918, 15).

The conflation of medical and legal judgment and the bleeding of moral judgment into the same may be explained by the fact that Jodh Singh, as an Indian immigrant, did not arrive into North America as an entirely unknown entity. Rather, Singh entered a social-political matrix powerfully shaped by ideas about racial and colonial difference in which the perception and reception of foreigners was structured by the deep-rooted anxieties and fears of the native population about the loss of jobs and the imagined physical, and often sexual, threat posed by the outsiders. Studies of the history of "transient male migration to North America" show that these migrants were seen "as a pernicious threat to democratic politics, economic distributions, and social morality" (Shah 2011, 13). Indeed, the very word 'Hindu,' which was used to describe Jodh Singh's identity in the report, carried with it the weight of such assumptions. As Shah notes, the term was an "axiomatic racial category codified in the 1911 *Dictionary of Races* created and used by the U.S. Immigration Service" that drew attention to the territorial source, Hindustan, of the migrants (2011, 14). The term functioned as a neutral descriptor for Punjabi migrants regardless of their religion but was also a slur or "derisive slang" (2011, 14). Shah points out that the South Asians who arrived in North America in the late nineteenth century and earlier were viewed primarily as exotic but unthreatening objects of fascination. However, with the influx of over 9,000 migrants into Canada in the first decade of the twentieth century, many of who would then move to the American Northwest, that image changed drastically. As with earlier waves of Chinese and Japanese immigrant labourers, South Asians were described in the rhetoric of infestation and invasion, deemed an economic and moral danger, and pathologized as a predatory sexual threat to white women (2011, 14).[2] The turban worn by Sikh migrants became a highly visible symbol of cultural and civilizational difference. Viewed as dirty, barbaric, and incompatible with Western modes of dress, the turban functioned as a "a marker of the unsanitary and the disordered as well as the exotic alien," concatenating a range of associations about racialized Otherness (2011, 39).

The social, political, and economic structures that informed such reactions were themselves embedded in the broader logic and longer histories of liberal colonial governmentality, which, as Lowe has shown, was predicated on the control, regulation, and dominance of the bodies of the

[2] See Shah, pp. 19–30, for a description of the prejudices against South Asian migrants arriving in North America and the violence that they faced.

colonized (2015). Lowe argues that as Britain expanded its territorial possessions in the nineteenth century, colonial power began to operate in both 'negative' and 'positive' capacities (2015, 102). As negative force, colonial power could "seek, enslave, occupy, and destroy" as it had in colonial Hong Kong and elsewhere (2015, 102). However, colonial power also manifested itself in a "new mode of imperial sovereignty" that would "administer the life, health, labour, and mobility of colonial bodies" (2015, 102). Examining the logic of colonial governance and the Anglo-American political-economic order in China and Hong Kong in the wake of the Treaty of Nanjing that brought the first Opium War (1839–1842) to an end, Lowe describes how a vastly expanded set of regulatory and disciplinary powers over restive and potentially dangerous populations became not just compatible with but indeed central to a notion of liberal government (2015, 110). The state drew a distinction between its own "'legitimate' violence against the threat of 'illegitimate' violence from others it deemed criminals, dissenters, and disturbers of the 'peace'" (2015, 110). This distinction entailed the pathologization and criminalization of a disenfranchised diasporic Chinese population in Hong Kong, that would then migrate again to work as labour across the globe.

In demonstrating how colonialism operated as a productive force, Lowe provides us with a set of rich insights into the historical, political, and economic forces that would have shaped the journey of someone like Jodh Singh. Singh's entry and participation in the Ghadar movement was itself partly a product of these forces and partly an act of a resistance to them, born as it was of the colonial encounter between Britain and India. His arrest, interrogation, treatment in prison and in the sanatarium, on the other hand, can be seen as consistent with the assumptions of liberal colonial government detailed by Lowe above. These assumptions also underpinned the juridical-medical-legal framework which had locked Jodh Singh into its gaze; they were reinforced here by America's own founding history of violence, its legacies of prejudice against South Asians, and the role that the American state played as proxy for British colonial power in its treatment of Singh.

These foundational assumptions surface not just in the generalizations about nationality and race made in the report of the Commission, but also in the report's strained attempt to assess Jodh Singh as a singular, distinct individual. The report's struggles to pin down and fix Jodh Singh are instructive in at least two critically important respects. One, they help us grasp a particular sense in which we can see Jodh Singh as a subaltern figure, sharing the condition of the 'small' voices of history I have mentioned earlier. And two, these struggles show how colonial knowledge is bedeviled by guilt and uncertainty about its own assumptions about colonized subjects.

The report makes several assertions about Jodh Singh's passivity, stating that Singh's "extreme altruistic ideas" render him a "'dreamer'", used here in the sense of someone incapable of independent action ("Report" 1918, 4). Describing Singh as always "content…to assume an inferior position but wishing great things," the report avers that he is clearly not a leader but an eternal follower ("Report" 1918, 6). Yet the report struggles to make a comprehensive case for Singh's constitutional inabilities, for, despite his troubles and seemingly obvious defects, his qualifications and achievements are not explained away so easily. A speaker of five languages, Singh had also studied electrical engineering ("Report" 1918, 4). While he did not display any ideas of "Dominence" ("Report" 1918, 5), presumably meant to refer to significantly original thoughts,

he had shown "Initiative…as regards his own intellectual development" ("Report" 1918, 5). Under the category of 'Personality', the report states that Singh's "ideation processes are good" and considers his ability to express ideas "up to the time of his incarceration in the Alameda County Jail, and shortly thereafter" as very good ("Report" 1918, 5). The results of the 'Mental Examination', in contrast, detail Singh's "Abnormal Ideation" as reflected in his diary and interviews. If his personality, based on his remarks, is categorized as "possibly that of a homosexual type" ("Report" 1918, 5), Singh has also testified that "he liked them [women] very much" ("Report" 1918, 5). The report cannot find an external source of some of Singh's failures although it suggests that circumstance has played some role in bringing him to his current situation. Ultimately, though, it is Singh's failure to lead, think for himself, or to overcome his internal shortcomings that are found responsible by the report for his predicament. The same reasoning also informs the finding that Singh is a Constitutional Psychopathic Inferior Individual.

The category of Constitutional Psychopathic Inferior Individual is already a condemnation, predicated as it is in part on an ultimately opaque conception of nature or character that is taken as a basis for aberrant behavior. Yet, as a medical and scientific judgment, it has already claimed an objective status for itself. A study of the condition from the general time period lists "emotional irritability" as one of its symptoms, attributing it to "perverted emotions" (Orbison 1929, 78). Orbison describes it in the following manner:

> Constitutional Psychopathic Inferior personality (C. P. I) is an inherent constitutional condition which is the basis of personality, for the reason that it represents the sum of psychic elements of that individual. These elements are exhibited objectively in every case, in terms of pathological behavior, of that individual.
>
> It is not a disease and is therefore not curable. Being a constitutional fault it may be corrected, but only by such means and methods as are capable of supplying psychic stability by the engrafting of normal acquired character factors…(Orbison 1929, 78).

The language of intrinsic defect is emphasized elsewhere in this text as well. Constitutional psychopaths suffer from "inherent instability" (Orbison 1929, 79). Their "inherent perversion," as well as the fact that they do not necessarily lack intellectual competence, is precisely what makes them highly dangerous to society, more so than the "insane or feeble-minded" (Orbison 1929, 80). And it is, consequently, the duty of the state to respond to this threat much as it does to natural disasters or riots (Orbison 1929, 80–81).

There are, then, at least three discourses that have already prejudged Jodh Singh in one respect or another:the discourse of liberal colonial governmentality, the discourse of the racialized Other in early twentieth century America, and the medical discourse of inherent inferiority. To this we can add a fourth discourse, that of the sexually aberrant, given that Singh is confirmed as

suffering from syphilis and is also defined as a possible "homosexual type" ("Report" 1918, 5). Foucault points out that from the classical age, roughly the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, sexuality had been brought under the same rubric as madness in one vital respect:

> When the classical age locked up those who through sexually transmitted diseases, homosexuality, debauchery or prodigality had demonstrated a sexual freedom that previous ages might have condemned but had never dreamt of assimilating to insanity, it brought about a strange moral revolution, uncovering a common denominator of unreason among experiences that had long remained separate from each other. It banded together a whole group of blameworthy behaviour patterns, creating a halo of guilt around madness (Foucault 1990, 91).

As is the case with madness, sexuality then became a legitimate object of intervention, a zone to which the technologies of biopolitics could be applied to individual bodies and populations for purposes of domination as well as treatment and experimentation. Indeed, as Foucault argues, according to the science of sexuality that emerged by the nineteenth century in Western societies, "sexuality was defined as being 'by nature': a domain susceptible to pathological processes, and hence a calling for therapeutic or normalizing interventions," even as it was understood as an area of darkness that had to be parsed into legibility (1990, 68). And, as Shah (2011) and others have shown, if sexuality is viewed as a subversive force that must be brought under the control of political-bureaucratic order in the imagination of the modern state, the sexuality of the foreign body is even more subversive.

As condemned on not just one but several grounds, Singh may be considered as exemplifying the condition of subalternity, even if he is not an immediately recognizable or 'classic' subaltern figure like a peasant, tribal, or a member of a marginalized caste, or group lacking caste. As the subject and object of a knowledge, indistinguishable from an ignorance ordained by the American state that had already authorized a violence against him, Singh embodies the vulnerability and abjection that are the hallmarks of subalternity. In delineating the multiple genealogies of the Subaltern Studies movement, drawing as it does on Marxism, poststructuralism, and postcolonial theory, Prakash suggests that to speak of—or to even try and identify—an authentic subaltern consciousness or a set of defining characteristics of the idealized subaltern subject might be a profoundly misguided venture. "The subaltern," Prakash notes, "is a figure produced by historical discourses of domination" (1992, 8). While "the early phase of the *Subaltern Studies* was marked by a desire to retrieve the autonomous will and consciousness of the subaltern," the movement later abandoned "this desire to recover the subaltern's autonomy…because subalternity, by definition, signifies the impossibility of autonomy" (Prakash 1992, 9). Prakash goes on to articulate a set of relations between the state of subalternity and structures of power, arguing that to be subaltern, as it were, is to to be subject to hegemonic discourses, whether those of the nation-state, modernity, science and technology, or forms of instrumental reason (1992). I propose that by this yardstick and definition, we can meaningfully

see Jodh Singh as reflecting the condition of subalternity. In fact, as I will now argue, the discourse of revolution espoused by the Ghadar Party also operates as a hegemonic discourse with regard to him, locating Singh, as it does, in a relative condition of subalternity.

In the report of the Commission, the apparatus of the prison and sanatarium represent the state as the counterpoint to Jodh Singh who is accused of "High Treason" against it ("Report" 1918, 4). Here the discourse of the report stands in an ambivalent relationship to the discourse of the Ghadar Party. For the Ghadar Party, India and the US were natural allies, both sharing a history of anticolonial revolution. It is this belief, arguably, that prompted the members of the Ghadar Party to openly call for armed revolution in India and that possibly explains its silence on the question of racial discrimination within the United States.

When it comes to class, though, Ghadar discourse is messier and riven by contradictions. Juergensmeyer argues that class issues were significant in the initial phase of the movement, when meetings in Oregon 1912 and 1913 "were concerned with labour issues as well as nationalism" (1977, 9). However, as the movement took shape in San Francisco, it included in its fold students, intellectuals, and farmers from varied economic backgrounds, including landowners as well as labourers who did not own property (1977, 9–10). According to Juergensmeyer, these issues did not create any discord among Ghadar members (1977, 10). He sees the movement till 1918 as "exclusively nationalist, with a touch of utopian socialism" (1977, 10). In contrast Ramnath, in a more recent work on the radical legacies of the Ghadar movement, views it as animated by concerns broader than a narrow nationalism, drawing attention to the "members' own expansive universalist principles" (2011, 4). I want to suggest, however, that in one important respect, perceptions of class among the more privileged segments of the Ghadar movement occupy the same discursive field as the medical and psychiatric-legal authorities that constitute the Commission to assess Jodh Singh—the idea of the rank-and-file member of the movement as incapable of independent agency.

For the authors of the report, Jodh Singh, despite having had the opportunity to meet people of all classes and backgrounds in several countries had only acted upon the directions of others ("Report" 1918, 4–5). In a talk given at the University of California Berkeley in 1973, nearly three decades after the voluntary formal disbanding of the Ghadar Party following India's independence in 1947, Gobind Behari Lal, who, in his own words, "had some thing to do with the initiating of the GADAR EXPERIMENT," provides us with a sense of the movement's understanding of the relationship between its leaders and members (1973, 1, capitals in original). The 23-year old Lal, a student at the university, had called a meeting in 1913 to express support for an Indian Maharaja's initiative of establishing a parliament for the purpose of governance (1973, 2). Lal describes the Ghadar "experiment"itself in strong class terms:

> What kind of an experiment was THE GADAR? It was based upon a theory, which had to be tested by a test. Crudely stated the theory was even that the pre-learned Indians can be instructed politically, and become motivated by modern freedom. The idea of self-government, which is political freedom, can be transmitted from

> the learned to the unlearned common people, farmers, factory and other sorts of routine workers and so forth (1977, 3).

Lal goes on to claim that Har Dayal, the leader of the Ghadar Party at the time, was very successful in carrying out this experiment, significantly "changing nonpolitical Indian minds," and that the Ghadar experiment "perhaps prepared the way indirectly, for the Great Gandhi Experiment" that led to India's freedom (1977, 3). For Lal, the Indian masses lack political agency by virtue of being pre-political and are "pre-modern in their cultural experiences" (1977, 3). Jodh Singh did not belong to the peasant classes, but could fall into the category of "routine workers" that Lal describes (1977, 3). The report notes that Jodh Singh was educated in India from "a clerical and commercial standpoint," though later he attained some knowledge of electrical engineering ("Report" 1918, 3). Clearly, though, Jodh Singh was not part of either the intellectual vanguard or the political leadership of the Ghadar movement. For the authors of the report of the Commission, Jodh Singh lacked in agency because of individual failings of character, which constitutionally ruled out any political independence and intellectual autonomy on his part. For the intellectual leaders of the Ghadar movement, it was Jodh Singh's background that rendered him disadvantaged with regard to any kind of sophisticated political understanding. The difference, though, is that for the Ghadar leadership, Jodh Singh's consciousness was nevertheless capable of being politically charged to the extent of enabling participation in the movement toward the grand goal of securing Indian independence.

The report also strains to persuade us of the illegitimacy of Jodh Singh's nationalism. We can read the report here as betraying an anxiety about distinguishing Jodh Singh's nationalism and patriotism to the cause of Indian independence from its own service in the cause of patriotism to the United States. As with the question of Jodh Singh's abilities, the report attempts to resolve these contradictions and tensions through explanations founded on a predetermined knowledge that assumes the status of objective reason. According to the report, Jodh Singh has "innate 'crooked' tendencies" which he seeks to justify through the invocation of patriotism, or, "which he excuses to himself on the grounds of personal uplift (educationally) for the furtherance of his altruistic ideas for the national benefit—to him a justifiable means toward an idealistic end" ("Report" 1918, 4). Jodh Singh's lack of agency is described in the report as undermining the purpose of his actions; he is described as someone who has merely been carrying out orders without understanding their import.

Singh, for the authors of the report, dreams "dreams for his people" but these dreams are tinged with impotence, the sterile fantasies of someone who cannot act of his own accord ("Report" 1918, 5). C.E. Curdts, the physician at Alameda County Jail, presents to us a revealing account of one such fantasy. Singh insisted that his cell was the "center of India" and that four men had visited it. The ring leader among these was "trying to become the 'King of England' and another of these men was trying to become 'King of India'" ("Report" 1918, 13). In this fantasy, we can perhaps see the glimpses of a kind of reason in expressions of Singh's conflicted self; his being, for which his cell can serve as metaphor, has become the theater of a conflict between Britain and India for

political supremacy. But this oblique expression of nationalist sentiment, rendered in traces, already lacks legitimacy for on account of Jodh Singh's nationality, background, personality and madness.

Contrast this to what, from the perspective of the law and reason of the American state, are considered the legitimate nationalism and patriotism of Americans. Following the uncovering of the plot and the arrests of those accused in the conspiracy plot, J.W. Preston, US Attorney General, began an elaborate procedure of gathering evidence for the trial. There is a particular kind of document in his archives that is of interest for my purposes here. The archives feature a number of letters from concerned citizens writing in to the authorities and reporting on the suspicious activities of Germans, Hindus, and others.

Replying to a Mrs. James Tucker, the US Attorney thanks her for providing the address "of the young lady in Berkeley from whom we might obtain certain information about the Americanism of the President of the University" ("Correspondence to Mrs. James E. Tucker" 1917). A telegraph operator, John Hilliard, writes, with apparent worry, to Preston, in response to the news of Dr. A. Farid, an Egyptian, being arrested in connection with the conspiracy, to clarify the fact that he recently had a conversation with Farid but was unaware of the latter's link to "Hindu plotters" ("Correspondence to John W. Preston from John Hilliard" 1917). Mr. R. R. Lucas, who owns an auto supplies business of the same name, presents the following request to Preston: "Would I be intruding on your or your office by suggesting that you quietly have the past, present, and future conduct of one of our prominent German friends of Maricopa investigated?" (Correspondence to John W. Preston, U.S. District Attorney, San Francisco from R.R. Lucas 1917). A letter to Don Rathbun, a special agent of the Bureau of Investigation, from the US Attorney details a Mr. Palmer calling in about his Philippine neighbor, who has had "a dozen or so more very probably Germans" visiting his house ("Correspondence to Don S. Rathbun, Special Agent, Bureau of Investigation from U.S. Attorney, 3/28/1917" 1917). Preston also invokes the idea of patriotic duty that is expected of American citizens. In response to a query from R. A. McNally, the city editor at the Honolulu Star-Bulletin about a German official arrested in the plot, Preston states that duties preclude him from responding to McNally's questions in detail ("Correspondence to R.A. McNally, 1917"). Preston ends the letter by raising the specter of loyalty—"I assume from the tone of your letter that you are in sympathy with the prosecution of those who are conspiring to violate the laws of the United States"—that also sounds very much like a threat ("Correspondence to R.A. McNally, 1917").

These are some voices of 'suspicious' American citizens, the very trait attributed to Jodh Singh as a defect that is rooted in both his East Indian nationality and Hindu ethnicity and linked to his servility and sullenness. Along with fears of foreignness, the letters also enunciate a demand that Americans should prove their loyalty to the state by constantly performing and demonstrating their patriotism. Nationalist loyality is an especially dangerous commodity: its presence and existence has to be continually proved and asserted as an article of faith. Reframed as vigilance motivated by loyalty to America, suspicion and anxiety rooted in nationalist sentiment appear as entirely positive virtues in the letters that Americans write to the officials who are the

representatives and bearers of state reason. In Jodh Singh's cell, which, in one of his delusions, he described as the center of India, however, suspicion and anxiety are incontrovertible proof of paranoia. Decontextualized and delinked from the service of the state, the performance of nationalism is simply illegible, incoherent madness.

Conclusion

Was the Ghadar movement itself, too, a kind of madness? From the vantage point of the present, in which the surveillance capacities of the modern state have been amplified manifold, it seems remarkable that a movement like Ghadar could have even happened. If its aspirations seem unrealistic in a time when our political imaginations cannot grant a legitimate place to the utopian, consider that for a long time the members of the Ghadar Party were able to get away in the United States with openly calling for armed insurrection against the colonial British government. They also found support in Irish-American and other American groups, who shared their antipathy to the British and to colonialism. Perhaps, those who lived in that historical moment, inhabiting international networks of political solidarity committed to radical political change, would have seen our times as beset by a kind of madness.

Whatever it was—an expression of radical cosmopolitanism, an experiment, or a unique madness—the movement depended upon the labour, energy, and affective investment of countless individuals, some of whom gave their lives for the movement or, like Jodh Singh, were destroyed by it. Singh's account provides testimony of the cost of this commitment, the collateral damage masked by the narratives of the Ghadar Party either as treasonous conspiracy against colonial Britain and the US, an anticolonial nationalist project, or a radical socialist or communist project. In aiming to listen to Singh's voice, within and beyond the experience of madness, I have tried to employ empathy as a methodological imperative, to question the violence of not just the reason of the state, but also of the political aspiration of the Ghadar movement. It is not just the liberal state but also radical movements that purportedly aspire to the same ideals of equality and freedom that consume the Jodh Singhs of the world, with their lives being spoken for and assimilated in the service of the grand narrative of one or the other.

As a final thought, it is appropriately ironic that Jodh Singh should have been diagnosed by "alienists," a term used to describe the psychiatrists operating in a legal capacity ("Report" 1918, 3). For the term "alienist," an archaic word for "those who study the insane" and etymologically derived from the Latin for the "Other," carries with it the sense of the outsideness of the immigrant and of the estrangement of those exiled by history and circumstance. And inasmuch as alienation itself can be seen as an Other of solidarity, the tragedy of Jodh Singh can be read as a cry for solidarity—a solidarity that, in the ultimate analysis, he did not find either in the Ghadar Party or in American society.

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Article

WORKERS AND MILITANT LABOUR ACTIVISTS FROM PUNJAB IN BENGAL (1921-1934)

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Abstract

Sikh migrants joined post-war strike-waves, formed unions and turned left in the 1920s and early 1930s in and around Calcutta, in the South Bengal region under British rule. To them, an unofficial commemoration of Komagata Maru's voyage and the militancy associated with the Ghadar movement during First World War, became inseparable from contemporary resistance to the domination of colonial capital and British colonial state in India. They engaged with, worked upon and simultaneously moved beyond the boundaries of ethno-linguistic and religious identities as well as the social content of anti-colonial nationalism by focusing on a self-aware identity based on organised class action. This understanding was linked with the lived experiences of migration and imperial exploitation, the components of identity that had come to the forefront during the war. The diasporic identity of the Sikh migrant workers converged with the wider labour movement and was politically reshaped in the post-war context as livelihood issues took on the form of systematic protests in the city and beyond.

Keywords

Komagata Maru, Ghadar, Sikhs, Punjab, migrants, Bengal, labour, militancy, inter-war, communists, Gurdit Singh, Bengal Kirti Dal

Introduction

The Komagata Maru's arrival in 1914, the confrontation with colonial state power and the massacre of 21 Sikh passengers at Budge Budge, the repressive measures adopted by the colonial authorities on Punjabi migrants and the local Punjabi Sikh inhabitants, and the influence of Ghadar, prompted a handful of Sikh workers to participate in short-lived revolutionary actions in and around Calcutta during First World War. The minute and predominantly working-class Sikh migrants were chiefly visible in the neighbourhood of Bhabanipur and the Khidirpur dock area in Calcutta and Howrah, Calcutta's industrial urban twin. The activists who joined the underground lived, earned their livelihoods and developed a degree of social support and political network distributed across these geographies of local labour concentration. They were drawn from the ranks of cab-drivers, chauffeurs, janitors and tailors, all of derooted peasant background and some with military experience as former soldiers. Their transterritorial consciousness from below was

shaped by the migratory appeal of Ghadar as a movement of labour and popular revolt stretching from Burma to China to the Pacific. While moving back and forth from one region to another, they had become familiar with individuals, literature and ideas bearing programmes of a revolutionary overthrow of the colonial regime. Calcutta and Howrah became connected, through them, with the diasporic revolutionary movement brewing in the British port-cities, colonies of South East Asia and further East in China, Japan and North America. Though they were suppressed (IB 454/1916 (13/16))[1] the horizon of post-war political landscape in Calcutta and its surroundings was extended and altered by anti-colonial mass movements, labour activism and the emergence of the left. This was also the period when migrations from Punjab and the size of the Sikh labour-force increased. To the Sikh migrants who joined post-war strike-waves, formed unions and turned left in the 1920s and early 1930s, an unofficial commemoration of the Komagata Maru's voyage, and the militancy associated with the Ghadar movement,[2] became inseparable from contemporary resistance to the domination of colonial capital. They engaged with, worked upon and simultaneously moved beyond the boundaries of ethno-linguistic and religious identities and the social content of nationalism by focusing on a self-aware identity based on organised class action. This understanding was linked with the lived experiences of migration and imperial exploitation, the components of identity that had come to the forefront during the war. The diasporic identity of the Sikh migrant workers converged with the wider labour movement and was politically reshaped in the post-war context as livelihood issues took on the form of systematic protests in the city and beyond.

Post-War Upsurge

The Sikhs in Calcutta,[3] classified by colonial census-makers as the practitioners of one of the "minor" religions, worked mostly as sepoys and traders during the first decade of the twentieth century. A marked increase of the Sikh population was registered during this period. The majority had migrated to the city since 1901 (O'Malley 1913a, 20-26). In 1911, 980 Sikhs lived in Calcutta and its suburbs; they fell within the wider population of 1,743 Punjabi emigrants and included 171 Sikh women. Most Sikhs were adult men of a working age, between 20-35 years (O'Malley 1913b, 14, 28). Ten years later, the population of Sikhs rose to 1,485; while they continued to engage in business, the number of soldiers declined. Instead, many came to be employed as taxi cab-drivers. The drivers and owners of "mechanically driven vehicles" and their families lived in Calcutta and

[1] "IB" stands for Intelligence Branch of Bengal Police. These documents are from the West Bengal State Archives in Kolkata.

[2] For a pioneering and brilliant study of Ghadar against the backdrop of agrarian poverty and migration from Punjab, see Puri 1983. Also, Sood 2000; Deepak 2001, 61-85; Ramnath 2011. For an account of Komagata Maru's journey, see Johnston 1995. Also, Tatla 2007.

[3] For a survey of the Sikh diaspora in Calcutta, see Banerjee 2012.

Howrah; the Sikh chauffers were classified within them (Thompson 1922, 38-39).[4] With the introduction and increase in motor vehicles during the second decade of the century, the pattern of Sikh employment changed. Inside the Calcutta municipal area, the highest concentration of Sikhs was in Bhabanipur. They were also to be found, probably employed as sepoys, in Fort William and the *maidan*. The rest were scattered across Jorasanko and Kolutola in the north, Ballygunge and Tollygunge in the south and Garden Reach, the industrial suburb of Calcutta associated with shipping. Half of the male population was unable to read and write, illiteracy was very high among women and the population consisted mostly of working men between the age of 20 and 40 years (Thompson 1922, 10, 17, 28).

Labour upsurge of the late 1910s and the early 1920s found resonance among them; labour was incorporated by the ongoing Non-Cooperation and Khilafat Movements, the chief vehicles of popular anti-imperialism. The post-war mass upsurge was guided by the demands for India's self-government and the protection of the Ottoman Caliphate, the headquarters of Sunni Islam, from Anglo-French invasions. In this wider climate of Hindu-Muslim unity and populist militancy,[5] the echoes of the Ghadar tendency from the war years resurfaced and the protest-mentality of the post-war years showed signs of spreading in the colonial army. In 1921, Santa Singh of Ludhiana, sepoy and driver of 23rd Indian Mechanical Transport Company, was charged with spreading disaffection in the ranks. He had "used words in favour of the Khilafat Committee and Non Co-operation, and was found guilty and sentenced to suffer rigorous imprisonment for two years." He had complained of poor wages, urged other soldiers to resign, promised better-paid work with the Khilafat Committee and advocated wearing of "swadeshi or Gandhi cloth" in late October 1921. At his court-martial in late November 1921, one Havildar, 2 Lance Naiks and 2 Sepoys of the same company testified against him and he claimed in defence that they were his enemies, having harboured personal hostility towards him. He served time in the Alipur Central Jail, a familiar destination of political prisoners in the city. In 1923, "an officer reported that he seemed very discontented, and that he was met by several motor car drivers on his release." During the months that followed, he briefly went back to his village, returned and received a taxi-driver's license in Calcutta; he travelled briefly to Rangoon to stay with his brother, a milk-man and his movements were watched closely; finally, he again came back to Calcutta to take up the occupation of a private car driver, finding employment at 4 Russell Street (IB 454/1916 (13/1916)). Others had tried to organise risings within the army during the war. Influenced by the post-war anti-imperialist mass movements, Santa Singh had encouraged mass resignation from colonial service, an altered strategy to weaken the Empire. The transition from a recalcitrant sepoy-driver to a civilian transport worker, his journey from the army barracks to the Alipur Jail to Punjab and Rangoon and his return to Calcutta, the aim of sowing "sedition" in the ranks of the army at a time of

[4] *Maidan* was the open space at the centre of the city, adjoining the Europeanised Chowringhee and Dalhousie areas of imperial urban governance and commercial control.

[5] For details on the context and trajectory of the twin mass movements launched in India after the First World War under Gandhi's leadership, see Sarkar 1983, 165-227.

organised anti-colonial upheaval resonated similar patterns and movements from the immediate and distant past. The accumulated experiences of rebel soldiers of the preceding century, of Pathan and Sikh soldiers who had supplied British colonialism with military labour and been court-martialled for defying the imperium's authority or those who had left the army, had filtered down across the decades; they had directly and indirectly touched the route he had taken.

The Sikh presence in the service sector as drivers explains their participation in the post-war world of strikes and union-formation. The taxi-cab and the private cars plying in the streets had come to symbolise speedy transport and urban luxury. Those who drove these vehicles, in contrast, suffered from low pay and police repression. During the strike-wave of 1920-21, as protest mentality of industrial and service sector workers found an organised outlet in a climate of material hardship, the taxi and professional motor-car drivers went on short-lived strikes and displayed a tendency to step beyond the restraints imposed by the mostly middle-class labour leaders. 150 drivers employed by Indian Motor Taxi Cab Company went on strike during 12-14 December 1920. They demanded a rise in their commission from 11 percent to 15 percent, smaller deduction for empty miles when cabs ran without passengers and dismissal of oppressive supervisory staff. They alleged that the firm had not fulfilled its promise to raise their commission to 12 and a half percent; this was the term of settlement reached, leading to an end of the strike. This strike was followed, a month later, by a longer strike, involving 3000 taxi drivers and professional drivers of private cars in Calcutta during 12-26 January 1921; this was a direct result of protracted differences with the police over new regulations. The rules directly interfered with the livelihoods of the workers by prohibiting the practice of carrying attendant-companions and imposing medical checks on drivers which adversely affected those who were older. During September-October 1920, the association of taxi and private automobile drivers had objected to the new regulations being planned in writing to Police Commissioner of Calcutta. A situation of confrontation emerged whereby the workers tried to cling to the existing working conditions, opposing police interference through strategies of attrition while the police tried to change and control them and their working conditions. On 2 January, the association held a meeting at Town Hall. It was decided that a strike will begin on 26 January unless a fresh petition being sent to the Police Commissioner led to a favourable reply by 25 January. On the night of 11 January 1921, the mood of labour militancy suddenly escalated when Issur Singh, a taxi-driver was arrested and hauled to a police station for "continued disobedience of the traffic police officer" and refusal to show his license. Other drivers on the spot protested against his treatment and immediately went on strike. By 12 January, all taxi-drivers of the city had stopped work. Though this was "a breach of programme," the strike was endorsed by their association. On 16 January, a mass meeting of strikers at Wellesley Square under auspices of the association spoke on the negative implications of the new regulations, particularly medical tests on existing drivers, making it practically impossible for many to work. The strikers also successfully appealed to the drivers of private cars to join the action. In the face of widening protests, the Police Commissioner announced he had recommended the appointment of a committee of enquiry to look into the rules, will allow attendants unconditionally and accept the medical certificate of any doctor, depending on the committee's report. He also agreed to receive

a deputation of strikers in order to reach a negotiated settlement. On 18 January, the strikers re-assembled at Wellesley Square. As the leaders briefed them on the meeting with police authorities, they were frequently interrupted by shouts from strikers that they will not accept medical tests and will carry attendants who did not possess a license. They also demanded a withdrawal of the case against Issur Singh. On 20 January, the Commissioner agreed to drop medical examination of old drivers, if the committee of enquiry agreed and issued a communiqué announcing its formation. This conciliatory strategy was abruptly abandoned the next day when the government suspended all existing driving licenses of motor cars. The President of the association, along with the owners of automobiles, now began a negotiation with the Commissioner. The President agreed to drop the demand regarding Issur Singh's case on 22 January. On 24 January, the association and the owners accepted the Commissioners' proposals and the suspension order on driving licenses was lifted. The drivers returned to work on 25 January, having prematurely started and ended their strike. The results of industrial actions demonstrated uneven gain. While the stoppage of work directed against a specific concern in December 1920 by taxi-drivers secured higher earnings, the joint cease-work by taxi and private car drivers in January 1921 failed to overturn new police regulations.[6]

The life of a taxi-driver as a worker, mostly Sikhs from Punjab, was subject to continuous police interference. The police apparatus, acted as a managerial force on behalf of the colonial authorities and business enterprises, with the aim of replacing older drivers and vehicles as disposable labour and outdated means of service against a backdrop of rapid growth in productive forces which benefitted the owners rather than the workers; the aim was to control the work-force physically and impose curbs on used vehicles, the instruments of service-production which most drivers, as workers, did not own. Aging drivers and automobiles became the chief targets of police authorities. The police attempted to legitimise the measures of control in the name of road-safety and "standardisation" of taxi services. By 1918, the numbers of motor vehicles in Calcutta streets were over 5000, including motor-cycles. A "regrettable rise in fatal accidents" was also registered. In the course of the 1920s, the government plans to control and regulate the taxi-trade were implemented. The number of people injured and killed from collision with taxi-cabs kept rising between 1920-22 despite these restrictions, confirming that they were not aimed at saving lives but increasing the control of the government and entrepreneurs over the profitable transport sector and often recalcitrant drivers. By 1923, the rules had taken effect. In 1928, a huge increase in the trade was recorded and further regulations were imposed on cabs. These restrictions did not lead to immediate protests. The work-force, in the absence of a surge in labour resistance, was forced to adapt to the changes, and may have seen a rise in earnings. The police thought that there had been an increase in the number of licenses of all kinds due to a surge in motor traffic and higher income for drivers, as they were needed while sectoral expansion in their line of work was taking place.[7]

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[6] *Report of the Committee on Industrial Unrest in Bengal 1921.*

[7] *Annual Reports on the Police Administration of the Town of Calcutta and its Suburbs for the year 1918-1928.*

The Turn Leftwards

Work as a realm of intensified labour exploitation, made way for an affinity towards political radicalism. From the second half of the 1920s, an identifiable left tendency emerged among the Sikh workers living in the city and the suburbs. In November 1927, during the birth anniversary celebration of Guru Nanak, a *diwan* (religious congregation) was held at Bara Sikh Sangat in 172 Harrison Road. Gurdit Singh, the organiser of Komagata Maru expedition to Canada, who had shifted to Calcutta that year, delivered a "fiery speech" before 600 men and women, citing "indignities" inflicted on the Sikhs by the government. An "objectionable" Gurumukhi leaflet, printed at the Kavi Kuthia Press of Bhabanipur, was circulated. Signed by Teja Singh Sorabha and Inder Singh Hoshiarpuri, it stood for a theology of liberation: "The Guru was born to deliver the labourers from the oppressions of the rulers. The same oppressions are committed now as in those days…Be united. Listen to the commands of the Guru. Realise the ideal of the Guru. Unite as the labourers have done all over the world and throw off the yoke of slavery. Awake and arise. Break the fetters of slavery." The hand-bill urged the Sikhs to subscribe to *Kirti* (Worker), a labour journal published by communists in Punjab. They were also asked to join Bengal Kirti Dal located at 29, Russa Road, North, Bhabanipur. It was to be a local branch of the Kirti-Kisan Party of Punjab, a counterpart of Workers and Peasants Party of Bengal (WPP); both were open organisations of the illegal Communist Party of India (CPI). The police sensed a joint influence of "Ghadar revolutionaries" and "the Bolshevik flavour" behind this initiative. A Bengal Kirti Dal Committee was established in December 1927. A "Sikh Agent" reported on a private meeting of "Kirti Dal Committee" held on 3 December 1927, at 29 Russa Road, at the residence of Mahendra Singh, a bus owner and a member of the Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee, Bengal. Among the office bearers elected to the Executive Committee were Balwant Singh Granthi of the Ballygunge Gurudwara, Bhag Singh, a bus driver, Genda Singh, a bus driver of the Tramways Company, Gurdayal Singh Patiala, of 10 Justice Dwarka Nath Road, a medicine dealer, Mahendra Singh, a bus driver and owner and Sawadagar Singh of Kavi Kuthia Press. No programme of work was drawn up but President Teja Singh Sorabha (Safri) and Secretary Inder Singh Hoshiarpuri, a motor driver from 9 Alipur Road were working on it.

The overwhelmingly working-class composition of Bengal Kirti Dal attracted government attention from its inception. The police hoped the group will be ineffective. A letter from 14 Elysium Row by S. S. H. Mills, Deputy Commissioner, Special Branch of Calcutta Police, to Cleary, Personal Assistant to Director, Intellingence Bureau, Home Department, New Delhi with copy to DIG, CID, Special Branch, Punjab, Lahore and F.P. McKinty, Intelligence Branch, Bengal Police forwarded the report of the Sikh agent and observed: "My own impression is that this Dal will come to an untimely end, unless it is supported with funds from outside. I am… in close touch with its activities. Teja Singh Safri, is, of course, well known, and I am endeavouring to ascertain the antecedents of Inder Singh Hoshiarpuri."

In April, a worried letter from CID, Lahore reached Cogwill of IB in Calcutta:

> Information has been received that Calcutta is being made a centre of the Kirti Group, that the Bengal Kirti Dal is in close touch with Bengal revolutionaries on one side and with the Kirti group in the Punjab on the other side, and that messsages are being exchanged between Calcutta and Amritsar through special messengers. It is further reported that the organizers of the Kirti Movement are trying to set up a regular system of communication between Calcutta and the Punjab, as they are afraid of their correspondence being censored by Government if sent by post.… I am desired to pass on the above for your information and any action you may deem necessary in the matter. The Intelligence Bureau, Simla, is also being informed.

Soon, the CID was accused of trying to crush the nascent Kirti Dal through infiltration, harassment and persecution. Genda Singh, employed by the European owned Calcutta Tramways Company, was threatened with dismissal unless he refused to resign from his post as President of Kirti Dal. Consequently, Genda Singh had to give up his employment rather than submit to the pressure. Tight police control and surveillance on Sikh dissenters meant closing in on political activists through indirect routes of victimisation and removal when legal means of prosecution were not at the disposal of the colonial authorities.

By early August, the connections between Bengal Kirti Dal and Workers and Peasants Party of Bengal were being keenly followed. Sohan Singh Josh, a Ghadar revolutionary-turned-early communist leader from Amritsar wrote to Muzaffar Ahmad, one of the early communist leaders from Bengal and India, requesting him to write for *Kirti* which Muzaffar read regularly. Josh wanted Muzaffar to write an article "giving your views" on All India Workers and Peasants Party's constitution in the making or "some other article" by 15 August: "You should do it positively as the articles of all the comrades are being published in the columns of the "Kirti" save and except that of yours." He acknowledged receiving *Ganabani*, the mouthpiece of Bengal WPP edited by Muzaffar and asked him to underline important sections in red, possibly for the purposes of translation and discussion. He promised to do the same when sending *Kirti*. The police instantly surmised: "It is pretty clear from this that the "Kirti Dal" of Amritsar is getting in closer touch with the Workers' and Peasants' Party in Bengal." Meanwhile, gathering information on and stereotyping of leftist opponents continued. The Punjab police sent its views on Kirti Dal as a grouping of "Sikh extremists" from Amritsar. Sohan Singh Josh was described as "weak and ineffective" while Baba Bhag Singh Canadian, a Ghadar veteran, was projected as "a drunkard and a womaniser." The surveillance report from Punjab thought the organisation was without prospects and could only become influential in the future if it became actively involved in agrarian issues, particularly the question of landownership.

In 1928, Bengal Kirti Dal's office was shifted to Gurdit Singh's house at No 27/2 Ashutosh Mukharji Road in Bhabanipur from its previous location at 35/17 Padmapukur Road. Later that year, Sohan Singh Josh visited Gurdit Singh and other members of Kirti Dal. He had arrived in

Calcutta and headed for the Bengal WPP office; local communist activists, including prominent figures such as Abdul Halim and Dharani Goswami escorted him. A Special Branch officer reported on 5 September 1928, regarding the watch over the Bengal WPP office at 2/1 European Asylum Lane, Calcutta:

> This morning at about 8 A.M a Punjabi aged about 30/35 years, tall, having moustaches and beard, fair complexion, strong build wearing long coat (Achkan) pyjama, nagra shoes and a pagri, came to the above place with a small bedding and a handbag in a 2nd class phaeton. This Punjabi was searching for Muzaffar Ahmed of 2/1, European Asylum Lane, of "Ganavani" office, and his name was ascertained to be Sohan Singh. He was coming from the Punjab. The watchers were instructed to keep an eye over him.

The next day Assistant Sub-Inspector Brojendra Kumar Roy Chowdhury of Special Branch reported on "Suspect Sohan Singh who stopped at 2/1 European Asylum Lane," following him to various addresses of Sikh left activists in the city till he left, late in the evening by Punjab Mail, having been escorted to Howrah Station by Halim and two Punjabi activists (IB 185/1928 (87/1928)).

That "suspects" mingling as "comrades" were a source of anxiety. Their transregional, transcontinental and internationalist connections were apparent when Special Branch noted that 100 copies of "India and the next war" by Agnes Smedley were in possession of Muzaffar Ahmad of Bengal WPP: "they were probably brought here during the last visit of Sohan Singh Josh of the Amritsar Kirti Dal." By October, "several visits" had been "exchanged" between Dharani Goswami of Bengal WPP and Prithi Singh of the Bengal Kirti Dal, the focus being the latter organisation's activities. Dharani had apparently advised the inclusion of Bengali members, with the aim of popularising the Dal at the local level. The Executive Committee of the Dal, according to the police was thereby "re-constructed" with Mohini Mohan Haldar as President, Genda Singh as Vice President, Tincori Banerji as Secretary, Inder Singh Hoshiarpuri and Prithi Singh as Assistant Secretaries and Balwant Singh Granthi as Treasurer (IB 185/1928 (87/1928)). Prithi Singh was later identified as a former apprentice in French Motor Car Company at Bhabanipur who had arrived in Calcutta at the end of 1926. He had read up to Middle English Standard, studied Civil Engineering, had served in Mesopotamia for 3 years during the war and returned after Armistice (IB 111/28 (191/28)). The Bengali office-bearers were expected to help enlist Bengali members. Mohini Mohan Haldar was reported to be a Homeopathic practitioner residing at 275 Kalighat Road and a member of the South Calcutta Congress Committee. Tincori, a clerk of the Bengal Nagpur Railway's office at Garden Reach was the assistant secretary of the Bengal Nagpur Railway labour union and lived at 6/1 Kali Lane. Both were acquaintances of Prithi Singh who had encouraged them to join the Dal. Balwant Singh was suspected of making arrangements "to preach communistic and revolutionary principles among the rank and file of Sikhs" by bringing out a fortnightly newspaper called "Lal Jhanda" (Red Flag), the print-organ of Bengal Kirti Dal in

Gurumukhi script and guided by the principles of the Dal's headquarters in Amritsar (IB 185/1928 (87/1928)).

Combined Actions

Gurdit Singh had become active in labour and community meetings soon after his arrival in the city. His memoirs on Komagata Maru's voyage was translated and printed from Calcutta (IB 111/28 (191/28)). He also started civil proceedings against the government regarding the ship's journey and treatment of the passengers during 1914. His activities, along with the wider political developments in which Sikh workers and migrants engaged, came to be watched each week by police agents. On 8 January 1928, "intemperate speeches" were made by Pandit Murali Dhar of Kanpur and Gurdit Singh, at a Sikh diwan held in Ballygunge Gurudwara. Murali Dhar stated that in 1925 he had "declared himself free and would make India free at any cost," being a resident of a part of the country where the mutiny of 1857 had broken out. If the Sikh soldiers had not fought against the mutineers, the "red-faced men" would not have been able to rule India. The speaker appealed to the Sikhs to join in the cause of freedom, as "death was preferable to a life of shame." He ended his speech with a reference to imperialist incursions into China, appealing to all Indians not to assist the British in any way against the Chinese people. Gurdit Singh endorsed his views. He thought the Sikhs had committed a great sin by helping the English to suppress the mutiny. At a private meeting of 20 Sikh bus and taxi owners held at Gurdit Singh's Bhabanipur residence on 10 February, it was decided to form a Sikh motor syndicate to check "the alleged zulum of the Police." A Khalsa Motor Syndicate emerged with Gurdit Singh as President of the owner's association. On 11 March, at a meeting in Ballygunge Gurudwara with the aim of popularising the syndicate, "Gurdit Singh, as usual, seized the opportunity of hurling invective at the police, whom he criticised as "demons let loose" and "parasites sucking the life-blood of the people." The police, he alleged, went about in Calcutta sending up the poor Sikh drivers on petty charges, and allowing the more wealthy who were able to pay bribes to go scot-free."[8] He was arrested on 16 March to answer a charge of delivering a seditious speech at Mirzapur Park on 3 March. He was granted bail and ultimately acquitted by the Chief Presidency Magistrate.[9] He issued a pamphlet in Gurumukhi drawing attention to his continued persecution by the state "to hamper him in the civil suit, in connection with the "Komagata Maru" case, which he has first instituted in the High Court." The response, in his support, was immediate. On 22 April, at a diwan held at Ballygunge Gurudwara, and attended by 350 men and 200 women, a speaker proposed, that in the event of a future war, Sikhs should refrain from assisting the Government and remain passive, having been subjected to

[8] IB File numbers suppressed at the time of consultation. Contains "Reports on the Political Situation and Labour Unrest in Bengal" from 1928 to 1932.

[9]IB File numbers suppressed at the time of consultation. Contains "Reports on the Political Situation and Labour Unrest in Bengal" from 1928 to 1932. *Annual Report on the Police Administration of the Town of Calcutta and its Suburbs for the year 1928.*

many indignities after having helped in the last war. Gurdit Singh agreed and "regretted that Sikhs, whose heads were dedicated to the service of the Gurus, should serve in the army for a pittance of Rs.15 a month and should slaughter human beings. What was worse still, they joined the C. I. D. and carried to the ears of the authorities stories against their own countrymen." He sarcastically declared that British soldiers deserved no rewards, for they served their king, but Indian soldiers reserved awards for killing their compatriots in the interest of the British Raj. He concluded that he could be "sent to jail for saying these things, but he was not afraid as they were already confined in a bigger jail." These views matched some of the radical analyses on empire, colonial governance and the repressive state apparatus stemming from the left, and worried the authorities. The police encouraged Raghubir Singh, projected as a moderate and a loyalist, to successfully expel Gurdit Singh from a position of influence in the owners' association. Since the association was composed of owners, the police could easily outmaneuver Gurdit Singh. This was evident from a report on a Bus Syndicate meeting held on 20 July on the roof of its Bhabanipur office at 79 Padmapukur Road. Raghubir Singh expressed satisfaction over Police Commissioner's sympathetic attitude to their deputation. The meeting requested owners to make the drivers obey the orders of the traffic police. The police happily noted that the syndicate had "cooperated with the police in dealing with taxi and bus traffic in the neighbourhood of Chowringhee, and the results so far have been very satisfactory."

Other speakers in Gurdit Singh's milieu, representing the Sikh community from below, joined and championed the communist-led left movement in Punjab, locally represented by Bengal Kirti Dal. Gurdit Singh endorsed and participated in these efforts. At a diwan held at Ballygunge Gurudwara on 15 January 1928 in the presence of about 500 Sikhs, Mahtab Singh and Mangal Singh exhorted the Sikhs to be ready to sacrifice their lives in the cause of their religion and country. The latter's appeal also held up Soviet Russia as an example to follow. On 1 July, at a diwan held in Bakulbagan Gurudwara and presided over by Balwant Singh Granthi, around 260 persons, 60 of whom were women, gathered. "The object of the diwan was to advocate the necessity for joining the Kirti Dal. Speeches were made by Bhag Singh, Assistant Secretary of the Dal, and Prithi Singh, a member. The speeches were anti-Government in tone, but there was nothing unusual or alarming about them." Prithi Singh also printed and circulated a Bengal Kirti Dal membership application form in Gurumukhi from Kavi Press, Bhabanipur.[10] Soon, plans were afoot to bring about an "amalgamation" of the Bengal Kirti Dal with its regional counterpart, Workers and Peasants Party of Bengal. This was evident on the eve of a proposed All-India Conference of the different regional groups led by Communist Party members. By late 1928, the police were well aware that the Bengal communists, with the help of Kirti activists, were planning to host an All-India WPP meeting alongside the annual Congress session to be held in December at Calcutta (IB 185/1928 (87/1928)).

[10] IB File numbers suppressed at the time of consultation. Contains "Reports on the Political Situation and Labour Unrest in Bengal" from 1928 to 1932.

Muzaffar Ahmad, who had travelled to Bombay and been unable to meet Sohan Singh Josh when the latter visited Calcutta during early September, wrote to Josh on 5 November 1928: "I draw your attention to the fact that Sikhs in Calcutta form a Bengal Branch of the Punjab Party. This is really ludicrous. I held a Conference with some of them and what I understand is that the workers themselves are not unwilling… I will make the Bengal Kirti Dal at least a branch of the Bengal Party…Also print a notice in the Punjabi addressing the Punjabi workers, Sikhs, Hindus and Mussalmans in Calcutta and near about." He wanted the Kirti members to deal with two specific points in the notice: what Kirti Dal stood for and the relationship between different regional parties organised by the left. Muzaffar suggested that the notice should put forward the position that all the regional parties led by communists were working with the same principles and programme and will unite as one through the coming conference. Planning of the event led to joint activities. On 11 November, a public meeting of Sikhs was held in Calcutta under the aegis of the Bengal WPP. The aim was to publicise the Party's programme among the workers, particularly Sikh migrants and obtain their assistance during the forthcoming All-India Workers and Peasants Party Conference. Philip Spratt, sent to India by Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB), to help communists in India spoke first and explained the programme of the party, advising labour organisations to join ranks. Other speeches focused on the oppressions of the colonial state as well as Indian money-lenders, zamindars and capitalists. At the end of the month, Spratt, Muzaffar Ahmad and Executive Committee members of Bengal WPP made further practical plans to work closely with Kirti members in view of the coming merger in December and chose Sohan Singh Josh as the conference president. The police thought Josh had been instrumental in convincing Bengal Kirti Dal members to work with Gurdit Singh when he briefly visited the city. Josh believed this cooperation will strengthen the group (Roy 1998, 51-53). A meeting of the reception committee of All-India WPP Conference was held at European Asylum Lane on 28 November where P. Dinda presided in the presence of Muzaffar Ahmad, Abdul Halim, Philip Spratt, Dharani Goswami, Nirod Chakraborty, Balwant Singh and Genda Singh. The discussion touched on the number of delegates who will be coming, the method of voting and other details.

This was followed, a month later, by the hosting of what was described by the police as "the first conference of its kind in India." Among prominent representatives from Bengal to United Provinces to Bombay were noted the presence of activists from Punjab, including Ferozuddin Mansoor, Sohan Singh Josh, Mangal Singh and Gurdit Singh. B.F. Bradley and Philip Spratt of CPGB, active respectively in Bengal and Bombay and Jack Ryan, a communist from Australia, representing the Pan-Pacific Trade Union Congress attended the conference, emphasising its internationalist orientation. Sohan Singh Josh allegedly delivered an "objectionable" presidential address at Albert Hall, College Street, a hub of the anti-colonial public sphere in the city, where 300 left delegates had congregated. He "began by referring to the "Komagata Maru" incident at Budge Budge, on which occasion, he said, Punjabis had been brutally murdered. He then attacked the Congress policy and said that they must demand complete independence." He envisaged a "coming war" between the communists and the British Empire; once direct combat against British capitalism began, mass strikes and sabotage were to be adopted as methods, and all means of

communication destroyed so that the British government faced the combined attack from two sides by Soviet Union and the communists from India. In anticipation of such a day, he advocated launching a campaign to discourage potential recruits from joining the colonial army, turning to the imperial practice of enlistment drives in Punjab and in keeping with similar views long circulated by anti-colonial Punjabi circles. The militant mood at the conference was observed along with a march across the city at the conclusion of the event to publicise left activism; the procession responded to anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist slogans, demanded a workers' government, and carried 40 red flags (IB 210/1927 (23/1927)). The conference, held alongside the annual session of Indian National Congress (INC), also had another purpose. The left activists, trade-unionists and workers "invaded" the Congress conference tent and demanded the adoption of "complete independence" as the declared goal of Indian nationalism; under gathering pressure from below, the Congress leaders agreed to consider and adopted this as policy in the following annual session at Lahore (Chatttopadhyay 2011, 180).

The colonial state was already prepared to strike at the militant labour and communist movement. Speeches were being recorded in detail, and perhaps embellished to suit the imperial strategy of uprooting the left opposition from the political landscape. Hansen, Deputy Commissioner of Calcutta Police felt a "distinct advance" in proceeding against the communists and leftists could be made on the basis of views expressed at All-India WPP conference. After communist and militant labour leaders were arrested in March 1929 and stood trial at Meerut, a "legal defence fund" was established in Calcutta to raise money for those on trial and campaign against the arrests; the initiative involved activists from a Sikh background. In his letter to the Central Defence Committee of Meerut prisoners in Delhi, Abdur Rezzaq Khan, Secretary of Meerut Trial Defence Committee in Bengal wrote that the fund-raising body formed in May contained Balwant Singh of Bengal Kirti Dal. The correspondence between Punjabi and Bengali communists continued, indicating a relationship of shared concern and personal warmth in the face of repression. In April 1929, Halim wrote to Ferozuddin Mansoor enquiring on the state of the communist party in Punjab, stressed on a need for renewed campaign among workers and peasants following the Meerut arrests, reported his ill-health and expressed his "heartfelt" love to be conveyed to Baba Bhag Singh Canadian. Ferozuddin replied that the fight had to go on and Bhag Singh Canadian was keeping well.

Though Gurdit Singh briefly turned left before moving to a position of permanent affiliation with the Congress, the handful of activists who had joined Bengal Kirti Dal, remained within the communist fold. Inder Singh Hoshiarpur, Genda Singh, Balwant Singh, Ajit Singh and Prithi Singh were regarded by the colonial authorities as "Sikh members" of the Communist Party of India, active among the diaspora living in Calcutta and Budge Budge, especially transport workers from Punjab (IB 210/1927 (23/1927); IB 210/27 (41/27)). In late April 1930 an enquiry was made by Special Branch, Calcutta Police regarding a letter written by Prithi Singh from 118 Manoharpukur Road, Bhabanipur to Hari Singh, a carpenter engaged at Lilooah railway workshop in Howrah. Prithi Singh had wanted Hari to print "ABC of Communism" in Gurumukhi, promised to send Rs.100/- for this purpose and declared that the translated manuscript covered 4 exercise

books. Confidential enquiries at Lilooah workshops yielded nothing. Hari Singh could not be traced (IB 185/28 (87/28). During the early 1930s, Abdul Halim was in "close touch" with the local communists from a Sikh background. In 1933, the government thought he was making plans with his Sikh comrades to import Russian oil cheaply via Budge Budge and utilise the profit for spreading communist propaganda in India. Since oil-products imported into Calcutta passed through the oil depot at Budge Budge, surveillance was mounted on the possible arrival of Soviet ships carrying petroleum and propaganda, and Sikhs with communist convictions connected with the transport of oil in South Bengal. However, the British official requested to keep watch revealed the paradox of capitalism-in-crisis and the submerged yet ever-present inter-imperialist competition; he felt such a development was to be welcomed as Russian oil could only drive the depression-era high prices of petroleum downwards. He labeled "current" prices as "scandalously high" as the market was controlled by American corporate monopolies like Standard Oil (IB 111/28 (191/28)). Halim was also suspected of using Harnam Singh, a communist from a Sikh background as a courier of confidential communist correspondence; in a letter to Muzaffar, Halim had mentioned sending some letters through him (IB 210/1927 (23/1927)). In the early 1930s, Mangal Singh, who had been dismissed from Tata Steel Works at Jamshedpur was in touch with several activists in Calcutta, including Abdul Halim, the Bengali communist leader Somnath Lahiri, and Santa Singh, described as a communist based in Calcutta. He also maintained contact with Munsha Singh Dukhi, a revolutionary poet with a Ghadar past who had established the radical Kavi Kuthia press at Bhabanipur. Viewed as "an experienced and influential labour agitator" in the language of state, Mangal Singh worked with Manik Homi, a Parsi worker and Phanindra Nath Dutta, an unemployed youth from a bhadralok background who had studied engineering at the nationalist technical school at Jadavpur in Calcutta. The latter corresponded with Halim on action. His brother, Nagendra Chandra Dutta, a political prisoner had died in jail during the late 1910s. Phani wrote to Halim in 1934 that he and "Comrade" Mangal Singh were organising unemployed workers and about a thousand had gathered at a meeting in Jamshedpur where the causes and remedy of unemployment had been explained in leftist terms (IB 210/27 (41/27)). Though Muzaffar Ahmad spent the first half of the 1930s in prison, the police thought he had been keen to organise Sikh janitors and recruit them to the communist party (IB 168/22 (1935-51)). The cordial relationship between communist organisers and Sikh labour activists survived into the 1940s. Sardar Kehr Singh, a Ghadar veteran from Canada, member of Executive Committee of Bus Drivers' Union and volunteer at a Congress meeting in 1945, defended communists against the accusation that the former had cut microphone wires to sabotage a Congress mass meeting. He stressed on the unity of all anti-colonial forces as the "need of the hour" and regarded "baseless accusations against individuals and parties" as undesirable.[11]

The communist activists from a Punjabi Sikh background in Bengal during the inter-war period continued to represent a militancy inherited from their struggles as migrant workers. Saroj Mukherjee, a communist leader from Bengal recalled Genda Singh as an active organiser of CPI-

[11] See: *What happened at the Deshapriya Park meeting and thereafter?* 1945. Calcutta: CPI pamphlet.

led Transport Workers Union in the early 1930s. In 1934, Genda Singh was arrested for delivering a speech against the state at a communist rally in the *maidan*. He was speaking at a time-honoured protest spot in Calcutta, the space in front of the Ochterlony Monument, a colonial landmark later renamed Shahid Minar (Martyr's Column). Sentenced to rigorous imprisonment on the charge of sedition, he and other communists were stripped of their status as political prisoners and treated like ordinary convicts inside the jail premises. He had appealed to the crowd to uproot the British Raj and throw the regime into the sea (Mukhopadhyay 1993, 61, 78).

Conclusion: The Long Memory

In the inter-war period, the expatriate militancy of the war-time Ghadar Movement and the symbolically defiant references to Komagata Maru surfaced in labour rallies and speeches of left and militant labour activists. They appeared as sources of inspiration and as traumatic memory incorporated within the repeated drives for fresh mobilisation against colonial capital and resistance to imperialist state authority. They also conveyed an explicit vision of an alternative society after decolonisation, one that was no longer bound by the rule of private property and profit.

Genda Singh had cited, perhaps unconsciously, the motif of the ocean, associated with Komagata Maru and other ships of Ghadar "sedition," (Chattopadhyay 2016, 203-222) carrying migrant workers across long stretches of water. He had inverted the water-bound experience of Sikh migrant workers and consigned the Empire to the sea. A direct reference to the experiences aboard Komagata Maru could be found in the lectures of Gurdit Singh. Though leaving behind his early communist association in the city, he had joined a socialist labour current present within and subordinate to the Congress nationalist platform. Gurdit Singh continued to recall the ship's journey in public meetings. In June 1932, he revisited Budge Budge as the President-Elect of a district labour conference; he was welcomed on behalf of the local population. A chorus of little girls started the proceedings with a song dedicated to labour. Ideological differences surfaced when the sole communist speaker Abdul Momin criticised Gandhi and the Congress leadership for compromising with capitalists. Some tried to object while he was speaking but Gurdit Singh allowed him to continue. Others echoed the wider contours of the communist position. Sudhin Paramanik who addressed the meeting in Bengali as chairman of the conference reception committee, spoke of the hardships endured by Gurdit Singh and his struggles on behalf of labour, welcoming him on behalf of the people of Budge Budge. He spoke on the oppressive labour relations practiced by different oil and petrol concerns at Budge Budge. Referring especially to the misbehavior and exploitation of Burma Shell Company at Budge Budge and Golmuri, he requested the conference to adopt a policy to combat the management. Speaking of a "rotten society" and its "tyrannical administration," he pronounced: "Time had…come for the capitalists to be careful as to how they behave with their labourers." Condemning capitalism and imperialism he declared

that their conjoined hold will be overthrown, that capital was not the master of the working-class, and that the Meerut Trial showed how afraid the capitalists were of workers.

Gurdit Singh was overwhelmed by a sense of déjà-vu while addressing the assembled crowd of 4000 men and women: "he was glad to address the Budge Budge people in their own place, he loved Budge Budge as he was intimately connected with the place… described how he and the rest of the crew of the Komagata Maru were treated by the Canadian as well as the English Government." He recalled his direct experience of contesting, within legal bounds, colonial racism and the discriminatory navigation and immigration laws applied against people of dark skin, and being persecuted by the state. He consciously linked and situated this past within a personal and wider frame of social resistance from below; he stated he was a born peasant who had spent his life among workers and planned to spend what remained of it in the same way. While opposing capitalism and empire-building, he praised Soviet Union as a workers' state, envisaged India as a country ruled by workers in the future and advocated unity of labour, free of factional differences, so that workers could become "invincible." The speech, delivered in Urdu, was translated into Bengali by Jalaluddin Hashmi, a Congress trade-unionist, for the benefit of those who could not scale the language barrier. The latter went on to add that the task of the workers' movement was to defy those in power (IB 497/1927 (168/1927)). Not merely as an individual, unique "episodic" memory, Gurdit Singh was sharing his experience on the ship with others as memory-knowledge, rooted in a rejection of the colonial labour regime. Activists and workers from different ethno-linguistic-religious and political backgrounds, as listeners, absorbed this as transmitted experience, to be claimed and shared (IB 185/28 (87/28); IB 497/27(168/27)).[12] For them, the past was unfolding in the present, urging action and individual memory was taking on the form of class memory.

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[12] Memory-formation of individuals is explored by E. Tulving 1972. An analysis of workers' memory of past struggles in the North Indian context can be found in Joshi 2003, 11, 236. For an understanding of the social dimensions of memory, see Fentress and Wickham 1992. For discussions on memory and action, see Assmann and Shortt 2012.

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Article

OF SUBALTERNS AND SAMMI TREES: ECHOES OF GHADAR IN THE PUNJABI LITERARY MOVEMENT

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Abstract

This paper explores how the Ghadar legacy is interpreted by the Punjabi literary movement in Punjab, Pakistan. Putting Ghadar poetry into conversation with the work of these contemporary activists sheds light on unexplored facets of both. It unveils how these writers and thespians invoke Ghadar to subvert the narrow discourse of "Punjabiyat" and ethno-nationalist identity, and allows us to appreciate the politics of language that underpinned Ghadar di Goonj. The intertwining of these histories of literary dissent raises key questions for debates around radical literature and progressive writing in South Asia, by highlighting the role of vernaculars in reading subaltern consciousness and native traditions of revolt.

Keywords

Ghadar, Punjabi movement, Punjabi, language politics

Introduction

The air is cold but the sun shines bright onto the mud courtyard. The surrounding walls are neatly scrubbed, mud and thatch, enclosing a group of around 50 women, young and old, with their eyes trained onto a lean man clad in blue, and a vivacious young girl in pink. Some among the audience whisper fervently into each other's ears, discussing the tale unfolding, others seem a bit confused, if not bored, with their fidgety, frollicky children giving them a hard time concentrating on the dialogue: "He is a Ghadri, he is fighting a war against the English. We have to throw the English out. We want to bring the rule of the poor, remove the hold of the ruling classes, bring back the relations between people, what they make and what they eat."[1] (Syed 2004, 10)

A contemporary Punjabi play, *Sammi di Vaar* is being performed in a small village in Chakwal by the Sangat troupe, the small but active group of intellectuals and artists who constitute a Marxist stream within the Punjabi movement. The director, Huma Safdar, addresses the audience before the performance, introducing them to the play which presents a creative re-telling of an important chapter in Punjab's history of revolt, weaving in the narrative of subaltern groups,

[1] The translation of Sammi di vaar into English was completed by myself and Virinder Kalra.

fisher (wo)men and faqirs with the larger history of anti-colonial resistance embodied by the Ghadar movement in South Asia.

Safdar is in her late fifties. Silvery wisps of hair frame her face, her green eyes dancing as she talks about Ghadar with her audience, who are perhaps only hearing the word for the first time. Politicised by the women's movement in the 1980s, she has dedicated herself to Punjabi street theatre for the past twenty years. On a recent trip to East Punjab where her students staged a Punjabi production on Baba Farid's life[2], she described Punjabi as "the language of love, activism and art … untouched by the elite"(Indian Express 2015). She has also recently completed a Potohari translation of Dada Ameer Haider's autobiography, an Indian communist who connected with the Ghadar Party in New York in 1920, and began distributing copies of *Ghadar di Goonj* at different sea ports across the world. His birthplace, a small village in Rawalpindi, is only an hour's drive from Chakwal.

Huma Safdar remains one of the leading members of Sangat. At the core of their praxis lies a theoretical approach which a) links language essentially with class, and b) critiques the cultural politics of the organized Left in Pakistan for their use of an elite language (Urdu), and for ignoring local traditions of dissent. The group engages folk forms and subaltern history as tools for commenting on contemporary politics. They believe that only a rooted revolutionary subject can connect with the oppressed classes of Punjab. In the Sangat's imagination, the Ghadar movement provides a template for this revolutionary subjectivity.

This paper explores the interpretation of the Ghadar legacy in contemporary West Punjab. Invoking its transnational history and universalist politics allows these activists to subvert the narrow discourse of "Punjabiyat" and avoid being reduced to an ethno-linguistic and nationalist movement in a country where Punjab remains the dominant region. An analysis of the language and symbolism in Ghadri poetry reveals how Ghadar's cultural politics connect with the Punjabi movement through an understanding of Punjabi as a working class language, a vessel for channeling pre-colonial traditions of resistance. This also allows an appreciation of the anti-colonial politics of language which underpinned Ghadri poetry, an aspect which has remained unexplored.

Once viewed in that framework, an interesting exploration of the language politics of these texts becomes possible, one which links colonialism, class and radical cultural politics in a new and refreshing interpretation of the poetry of Ghadar and of the Marxist Punjabi movement.

Ghadar di Goonj: a poetics of vernacular rebellion

The Ghadar Party was a transnational organization founded by poor Punjabi immigrants settled in the Americas in the early 20th century. As many commentators have maintained, the party organ, *Ghadar,* was integral to the anti-colonial praxis of the movement. Ramnath has shown

[2] Fariduddin Ganjshakar was a 13th century Punjabi poet. His poetry has also been included in the Granth Sahib, the Sikh scripture.

how the paper connected diaspora members across Hong Kong, Shanghai, Tokyo, Yokohama, Manila, Rangoon, Panama City, Seattle, and Vancouver. Kamran highlights how: "The concept and memory of Ghadar was so powerfully ingrained and deeply associated with [the] newly formed Hindi Association of the Pacific Coast and, perhaps, because of its widely distributed organ Ghadar, the party itself was, later, named as the Hindustan Ghadar Party" (Ahmad 2013).

Thousands of copies were published and circulated in the diaspora and abroad, and the paper was banned promptly by the authorities. Although initially in Urdu, *Ghadar* soon began to be published in Punjabi, in both the Shahmukhi and Gurmukhi scripts. While intellectuals within the movement such as Lala Hardayal contributed prose (written in Urdu and then translated into Punjabi by Kartar Singh), it is the sheer volume of poetry, predominantly in Punjabi, which has become an icon of Ghadar's cultural legacy.

These poems were later compiled and published as an anthology titled *Ghadar di Goonj*. They were not produced by ideologues or intellectuals, and were the work of ordinary party workers: the laboring men and landless peasants who re-enacted in moving verse their experience of oppression, their "coolie" subjectivity, their hope in the victory of India's downtrodden over the colonial masters.

The poetry draws generously on the language of tradition. Kalra points out how in the poetry, religious identities are almost always evoked to be condemned, calling on the reader to overcome communal differences to unite against the oppressor (Kalra forthcoming). For example, one poet writes how "we do not need pandits or kazis for we do not want our ship to sink/ the time for prayers and contemplation is past, it is time to raise the sword" (Tatla 2013, 63). Another poet states:

> The Guru established the Panth for selfless service, He fought a marvellous battle
> To remove tyranny from India, battles on many fronts
> For this Hind, millions sacrificed their lives, it is we who have forgotten the cause
> The Tenth Guru sacrificed his whole family, along with Nabbi and Ganni Shah for the cause (Kesar 1995, 94).

Hence, while the language of tradition does appear in the poetry, it is reworked and appropriated by the Ghadri poets to narrate a history of revolt.

This kind of re-interpretation of spiritual and regional heroes also defines the literary method of Najm Hosain Syed, who has been described as the "fountainhead" (Ayers 2009, 69) of the Punjabi movement in Pakistan by Alyssa Ayers. Syed began writing in the 1960s, and has published over thirty books of poetry and drama in Punjabi. His play *Takht Lahore* is based around the life of Dullah Bhatti, who was allegedly hanged by the Emperor Akbar for rebelling against the Mughal state. Interestingly, Dullah Bhatti never appears as a character in the play. He is instead employed as a symbol of rebellion, and while all the revolutionary action in the play takes place in his name, it is carried out by nameless factory workers and subalterns. Second, there is a deliberate obscuring of geography in the play. The word "Punjab" is not uttered once, so Dullah's rebellion hardly

appears as a chauvinistic assertion of Punjabi power against Mughal hegemony. It is framed explicitly as a challenge to "kingship itself" and the "regime of property and wealth" (Syed 1972,154).

To reiterate, *Takht Lahore* commemorates Dullah Bhatti's rebellion for its radical political character, not for its celebration of a Punjabi ethnic pride. This echoes Ghadar's method, where references to Punjab, historical Sikhism and local spirituality are not used to affirm a religious, ethnic or regional identity. Instead, they constitute "a form of political articulation," that connected deeply with pre-colonial histories of resistance: (Kalra forthcoming)

> Just citing the wonderful, the wonderful guru, have not we actually forgotten the political know-how?
> He had vowed to destroy injustice and tyranny, and gave his own life for the cause!
> In the cause, young sons he sacrificed, have you forgotten guru's command?
> Read again his indicts, the glorious deeds, and the commands of our great guru
> And come to the battlefield, let us dedicate life and drink the nectar of Ghadar –the rebellion! (Kesar 1995, 98)

Despite the clearly subversive use of tradition in *Ghadar di Goonj*, Tatla reads it as a "Sikh manifesto," citing references to the likes of Guru Gobind Singh, Hari Singh Nalwa and Tegh Bahadur as invocations of what he terms the heroic Sikh tradition of the 18th century (Tatla 2013, 61). In a similar vein, Parmbir Gill has pointed out the Ghadris' use of religious symbols for inviting the Punjabi masses to rebellion, concluding that an essentially Sikh consciousness informed the poetry (Gill 2013, 23-41). These reductive readings are produced by, and help reproduce the marginalization of Ghadar in both nationalist and Leftist narratives. They reflect an inability to grasp what Ramnath terms the "jagged edges" of Ghadar and its legacy. Evading neat categorization, the "eclectic ideological synthesis" (Ramnath 2015, 28) presented in *Ghadar di Goonj* refuses to be reduced to a "Sikh manifesto." Its revolutionary poets happily drew from "a variety of sources, combining them without concern for the constraints of any existing orthodoxy," (Ramnath 2015, 28) selecting and adapting tactical and ideological content into a dynamic, yet consistent form throughout the course of their struggle (Ramnath 2015, 28). While orthodox Marxist analysis has been wont to dismiss Ghadar's political orientation as "untheorised hodgepodge," (Ramnath 2015, 28) a close reading of its poetry reveals a powerful compounding of socialism and anti-imperialism with pre-colonial histories of peasant rebellion. The poetry represents a unique moment in Punjab's intellectual history, a mode for radical thinking that critically informed traditions of literary dissent in colonial South Asia.

A similar fate has met the radical texts produced by the Punjabi movement. Despite the clear challenge to state and authority articulated in Syed's *Takht Lahore*, the play has been read as an articulation of a newfound "Punjabiyat," embodied by an image of a masculine, valourised Punjab which is "valiant and unfazed by authority" (Ayers 2009, 76). The Punjabi movement has

been interpreted solely within the frame of ethno-nationalism, described as having risen out of the "shadowy political movements for regional autonomy" (Shackle 1970, 266) that characterized national politics in Pakistan in the 1960s. While the work of intellectuals within the Punjabi movement echoes *Ghadar di Goonj* through its soldering of folk narration with socialist emancipation, the intervention posed by these texts has never been placed in dialogue with the Progressive Writers' Movement, an organization that championed Marxist-inspired writing in Urdu and has remained the subject of much commentary on modern Left-wing movements in South Asia.[3] Emancipating the Punjabi literature produced by Ghadar historically and the Punjabi movement today from the shackled view of "Sikh consciousness" and "Punjabiyat" exposes an alternative genealogy of literary dissent in the region which connects subaltern history, vernacular expression and local culture with contemporary class struggle. It also allows us to analyse *Ghadar di Goonj* as a discursive site for radical language politics in the colonial period.

Imperial linguistics: language, colonialism, class and power

The marginalization of the poetry of Ghadar and the Punjabi movement in literature on radical literature and cultural politics in South Asia stems from the colonial restructuring of the relationship between language and society. As Cohn demonstrates, colonial knowledge about languages institutionalised the so-called distinction between "classical" and "vulgar" tongues (1996). For example, the Persian department was the most prestigious at Fort William College, as Persian, Sanskrit and Arabic were considered comparable to the classical European languages of Greek and Latin, worthy of scholarly study (Cohn 1996, 24-25) On the other hand, commonly spoken languages were understood as "fallen, broken, or corrupt versions of some pure, authentic, coherent, logically formed prior language…" (Cohn 1996, 33). Despite the contempt for the spoken languages of India, the instrumentalities of rule dictated that the regime train its officers in certain vernaculars, the prime example being Hindustani. This was developed especially as a "language of command" (Cohn 1996, 33) to marshal the "lowly servant and sepoy" (Cohn 1996, 33). Due to this practical utility associated with Hindustani, later known as Urdu, it was taught widely to British officers, increasingly replacing Persian at the lower levels of administration after 1837 (Cohn 1996, 33). Thus, Persian along with Arabic and Sanskrit retained its scholarly and literary status (Rahman 2011) as a "classical tongue," meanwhile Urdu became the language of colonial government.

Thus, high culture and statecraft became the sole preserve of the "classical tongues" and "languages of administration," by implication placing vernaculars like Punjabi at the lowest rung of this linguistic scheme. These functions also endowed the classical and administrative languages with a public and universal nature which was denied to vernaculars. Kaviraj highlights the dual

[3] See for example, Ali, Asdar, Kamran. 2017. *Surkh Salam: Communist politics and class activism in Pakistan 1947-1972.* Karachi: Oxford University Press and Ahmed, Talat. 2009. *Literature and politics in the age of nationalism: The Progressive Writers' Movement in South Asia 1932-56*. New Delhi: Routledge.

nature of these languages, which were public to insiders and closed, esoteric for those who lacked the requisite skills, i.e. spoke and understood only languages like Punjabi, Pashto or Sindhi (2005). For him, the political implication of this was "that while elite discourse could range across the entire subcontinent, the discourse of the subaltern groups necessarily remained trapped in the closed boundaries of their vernacular dialects" (Kaviraj, 319). While Kaviraj here is indicating the geographical limits of subaltern discourse, subaltern languages also came to be subjected to ideological confines. In other words, while elite discourse in the nationalist languages of Urdu and Hindi, or the official language of English could address questions of politics, culture and identity that ranged across the entire sub-continent, vernacular expression was necessarily "localized" in its ideological purview. It was deemed capable of articulating only a very particular, regional subjectivity, grounded in local, provincial politics, incapable of a universalist orientation. That is why Ghadri poetry, composed overwhelmingly in Punjabi, is read as a "Sikh manifesto" rather than an anti-colonial literature of resistance, and why plays like *Takht Lahore* are analysed from the lens of "Punjabiyat," despite Syed's clear use of "Marxist-inspired literary methodologies" (Kalra and Butt 2013).

In this way, colonial linguistic policy created the conditions that marginalized cultural production in the vernacular.

Language and the nation: postcolonial continuities

Colonial policy around language also caused Urdu to become a desirable commodity in North India on account of the prospects of government employment it brought (Rahman 2011). The colonial state's need for Indian scribes and functionaries educated in the language of administration led by the mid-19th century to the creation of what Hamza Alavi has termed the "salariat," a class of urban-based professionals, sections of which would later play an important role in the Pakistan movement (Alavi 1988, 68). Their distinct identity as the "governing class" which also served the interests of the "economically dominant classes" through their "direct grip over the colonial state apparatus" (Alavi 1988, 68) was cemented through the cultural bond of Urdu, the language they spoke, wrote and worked in, and also came to enjoy in literature, music and theatre.[4] Language, culture and economic status thus came together in the social reproduction and self-identity of this group.

The emergence of Urdu as a prestige symbol also impacted its status vis a vis other languages, reflecting the power of the salariat in relation to other groups in society (Saqib 2004). In colonial Punjab, "upper classes and educated people spoke Hindustani," while Punjabi was the language of the "peasantry and lower classes in town only" (Rahman 2011, 216). In this context,

[4] For an account of the shift from the vernacular language to Urdu in 19th century Indian theatre, an important cultural site through which the emergent middle class reproduced itself, see Hansen, Kathryn, "Languages on Stage: Linguistic Pluralism and Community Formation in the Nineteenth Century Parsi Theatre," *Modern Asian Studies* 37, No.2 (2003): 381-405.

the overwhelming domination of Punjabi in the poetry of *Ghadar di Goonj* reveals the complex relationship forged between language and class under colonialism. Punjabi lay outside the colonial state and its education system, which explained the profound suspicion with which the colonial mind viewed it, as evinced by the following quote from a British officer writing about Udham Singh: "…sentiments which are typical of a half educated Ghadar Revolutionary, in which words aspire to the Ghadar poetical compositions in which truth is subordinate to the flow of language" (Quoted in Ramnath 2015, 32). Read against the grain, the accusation that this "half educated" poetry subordinates truth to its "flow of language" betrays a fear of Ghadar's poetic power, a power which rested on its working class language that could connect immediately and intimately with the masses and was outside the knowledge controlled and created by the elite.

After the fruition of the Hindi-Urdu controversy,[5] Hindi and Urdu increasingly came to dominate as the languages of Indian and Muslim nationalism in North India, going on to take their places as the national languages of the nascent nations, India and Pakistan. The Indian National Congress and the Muslim League took centre-stage, and with all the might of the state, got to work erasing alternative histories of anti-coloniality.

The marginalization of regional languages went hand in hand with this project. By sidelining the role of regional culture in building national identity, the postcolonial states simultaneously silenced the politics and ideology contained in vernacular expression. One such victim was Ghadar. Ghadar's subversion and critique of bourgeois nationalism was expunged from the national consciousness. The scope of its poetics, articulated almost entirely in Punjabi, was "trapped within the confines of its vernacular dialect," reduced to an emblem of "Sikh consciousness" despite its universalist political orientation. The *goonj*, or echo of Ghadar became an inaudible whimper.

However, its surviving reverberations would be picked up in 1960s Pakistan, with the birth of a literary movement that combined rebel peasant consciousness and radical language politics in a historical tradition of resistance that stretched back from the Mazdoor Kissan Party to Ghadar, and all the way to the pre-colonial institutions of radical Sufism in Punjab.

The Punjabi Literary Movement

The origins of Punjabi language activism in Pakistan can be traced back to 1947. In the early years, prominent members of the Punjabi elite began campaigning publicly for its recognition as a language of the state. In 1951, Hameed Nizami, editor of the Urdu daily, *Nawa-i-Waqt,* penned an article in favor of Punjabi's adoption as the medium of instruction, while Hafeez Jalandhari, prominent Urdu poet, wrote poems in Punjabi and recited them with much gusto at rallies for the

[5] The Hindi-Urdu controversy developed in the late 19th century in North India over the need to distinguish between "Hindi" and "Urdu" as two distinct languages belonging to two distinct communities, Hindu and Muslim. Historically the distinction between "Hindustani," "Hindi" and "Urdu" was not emphasized. For more detail see King, Stephen. 1995. *One language, two scripts: The Hindi movement in 19th century North India.* Oxford: Oxford University Press

rights of the mother tongue.[6] This particular strand of Punjabi language politics lived a short life, as the Punjabi elite soon abandoned its fears of being sidelined by their Urdu-speaking compatriots, and wholeheartedly embraced the project of Pakistani statehood. In fact, Hameed Nizami's newspaper would emerge as the most vociferous critic of organisations like the Punjabi Majlis and Punjabi Writers' Guild in the 1950s. *Nawa-i-Waqt* ran a media campaign that branded Punjabi writers as anti-patriotic "traitors," accusing them of plotting to replace the Shahmukhi script with Gurmukhi, the script associated with the Sikhs (Rahman 1996). Both organisations were banned by the repressive military regime of Ayub Khan, in 1959 and 1963 respectively (Rahman 1996).

As Tariq Rahman has identified, vernacular expression occupied a subversive space in Pakistan's early days, and most intellectuals populating the ranks of the Punjabi writers were Left-leaning and progressive (Rahman 1996). Prominent amongst them were Shafqat Tanveer Mirza, who asserted that "in order to de-class oneself, one must first de-class one's language" (Saqib 2004, 347). Others included Najm Hosein Syed, Maqsood Saqib and Ishaque Muhammad. Muhammad was the chairman of the Mazdoor Kissan Party (Workers and Peasants Party), a Maoist organization focused on peasant politics which emerged in 1968 when the National Awami Party (NAP) split along Sino-Soviet lines (Ahmed 2010). His figure brought together literature and politics, inspiring a distinct tradition within Left-wing cultural politics in Pakistan.

Ishaque Muhammad's main literary works include two plays written in Punjabi, *Quqnus* and *Mussali*.[7] *Quqnus,* like Syed's *Takht Lahore,* is based on the historical figure of Dullah Bhatti. The play makes heavy use of folk songs and Punjabi poetry by the likes of Bulleh Shah, Shah Hussain and Waris Shah, grounding an invitation to revolutionary struggle in the historical, cultural and linguistic context of the Punjab. This "instrumental" use of Punjabi as a "mobilisational tool" (Butt and Kalra 2013) was an important aspect of the MKP's Maoist inspired line which sought that its "philosophy, strategy and tactics may be communicated to people… in a simplified and easy to understand manner" (Muhammad 1978, 306). The MKP's founding was undoubtedly influenced by the rising prominence of Maoist ideas internationally. However, Kamran Asdar Ali points out that it also represented the fruition of a critical strand within Pakistani communism in its early years, articulated most forcefully by Eric Cyprian, an old Communist Party of India (CPI) member who later came to associate with the MKP (2013). Cyprian criticised the nascent Communist Party of Pakistan (CPP) for its urban emphasis, advocating instead for organising the landless peasants and migrants in West Punjab (Ali, 490). The CPP on the other hand, based its strategy on a class analysis of Pakistan which categorised the country as a capitalist one where socialism was the next step, and hence, concentrated on the urban,

[6] Personal interviews with Maqsood Saqib and Mushtaq Soofi, conducted circa May 2016.

[7] See Muhammad, Ishaque. 2008. *Ishaque Muhammad De Dramay.* Lahore: Saanjh Publications.

industrial working class. The CPP thus focused largely on trade union activity in the urban centres.[8]

This difference of opinion also arose from a conflict between Punjab's communist tradition and that of the migrant leadership of the CPP, who had travelled to Pakistan from the United and Central Provinces when the party was divided along communal lines in 1947. This "Punjabi communism," for want of a better word, was heavily shaped by the ideology and practice of the Kirti Kissan Party, which was at the forefront of Punjabi anti-colonial resistance in the 1930s (Ramnath 2011), and subscribed to a similar emphasis on the countryside and on agrarian agitation against the Raj and its collaborators.

Thus, the MKP developed both a mobilisational and an ideological interest in Punjabi. Very little Urdu was spoken and understood in the countryside, which necessitated an instrumental shift to Punjabi for the party's cadre which was mostly urban. Second, Punjabi was also being understood as a doorway into the cultural world of the peasant, which was critical to building a rooted struggle that resonated with people's traditions and beliefs. Muhammad wrote in the preface to his play *Mussali*:

> As part of living in a village and interacting with musallis… Firstly, I thought that they were always speaking in a free poetic form, but when needed they could play with words to maintain the flow. Waves of words flowed whatever the topic, ranging from the plough to love affairs. Secondly, the range of this language surprised me, these people who had been kept away from pathshalas, madrassas and schools, and for whom words were kept out of reach. They had a full command of their own language. Sitting in their school I became convinced about the importance of Punjabi (Muhammad 2008, 13).

Najm Hosein Syed and Maqsood Saqib were his close associates, and began their own journeys towards radical language politics in the same period. Syed wrote and composed revolutionary anthems in Punjabi which were recited at MKP's rallies' in Punjab's villages, while Saqib was closely involved with editing the party's Punjabi magazine, *Ruth Lekha*. After wrenching control of around 140 hectares of land in a peasant struggle in Hashtnagar, the MKP gradually went into decline, particularly following the death of Ishaque Muhammad in 1986.

While political organization in the countryside has suffered, as members of the Sangat, Syed and Saqib have been critical in keeping the radical cultural practice linking language, peasant consciousness and political dissent alive. Their "Marxist-inspired literary methodologies" (Butt and Kalra 2013) seek to consciously incorporate marginalized histories like that of Ghadar, whose poetry, in their analysis, presents the most pristine synthesis of language, culture and revolutionary politics.

[8] See Malik, "Narrowing Politics: The Labour Movement in Lahore 1947-74," Unpublished doctoral thesis, SOAS (2013).

Sangat: radical cultural practice in contemporary Punjab

The poetry of Guru Nanak and Bhai Gurdas is sung and read in the weekly Punjabi poetry meeting held at Najm Hosein Syed's house, as well as in public performances by the Sangat troupe. *Vaars* and *shloks* which emphasize political resistance dominate the repertoire of the Sangat group, for instance, the following verses of Guru Nanak were sung at a performance in Malka Hans, near Sahiwal, on a performing tour undertaken by the group:

> If you want to play love,
> Then come to my street with your head held on your palm,
> Once you set foot on this path
> Then sacrifice your head, do not turn your back.[9]

This approach resonates with the Ghadri poetry discussed in the previous section, which re-interprets the Sikh past as a history of speaking truth to power, a reversal of the loyalist narrative of Punjabi history. A play titled *Ik Raat Ravi Di*, penned by Najm Hosein Syed and directed by Huma Safdar,[10] similarly delves into the armed rebellion of Ahmed Khan Kharral in 1857. While dominant historiography on the subject identifies Punjab as a major collaborator in the 1857 uprising, Syed's play makes a nuanced distinction along the lines of class, positing that while the Punjabi elite threw in their lot with the British, the subaltern classes resisted British authority and maintained a militant anti-colonial outlook.[11]The Punjabi movement evokes Ghadar and its legacy to challenge colonial historiography, as well as the nationalist narrative sanctioned by the Pakistani state. As Jalal points out, regional histories were suppressed (Jalal 1995) in favor of forging a national identity premised solely on Islam and Urdu. Through her analysis of Pakistani textbooks, she reveals how the distinct responses of the Baloch, Sindhi and Pashtun to colonialism were written out of nationalist history, to privilege a narrative that placed Muslim League, Urdu and Islam at the centre (Jalal 1995). While Punjab has dominated the state apparatus, with a preponderance of Punjabis in the armed forces and the bureaucracy, Punjab's regional history, language, culture and anti-colonial memory have not met with the same fate. The Punjabi movement's engagement with the legacy of Ghadar and revolutionary Sikhism thus has a twofold function. One, subverting Pakistani nationalism's surgical removal of the region's non-Muslim past, and two, a rejection of the chauvinistic "Punjabiyat" that has become the foundation-stone of the Pakistani state. Plays like *Ik Raat Ravi Di* and *Chippan tohn pehlaan* exhume histories of

[9] My translation.

[10] This play was performed at several venues including Punjab University in Lahore, in collaboration with Lok Rehas, circa 2006.

[11] A similar argument is made in a documentary directed by Huma Safdar titled "Come let's mend the torn cloth," which showcases folk songs and oral ballads around Kharral's confrontation with Lord Berkeley.

rebellion that unsettle Punjab as the politically conservative ethnic hegemon, critiquing its contemporary position as the oppressor of Sindh, Balochistan, Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa and the Siraiki south from within.

Chippan tohn pehlaan is a play based on Bhagat Singh's life that was staged by Lok Rehas[12] between 2010-11 and was directed by Huma Safdar. The performance began with a mime performed to a poem by Guru Nanak that emphasized the plight of the ordinary man, contrasting his life of hard labor with the accumulation of wealth. This play was performed extensively in Lahore, and in Sahiwal, Gujranwala and Kasur. Most provocatively, it was staged as a street play at Shadman Chowk on 23rd March 2012, the square where Bhagat Singh was hanged by the colonial state on the very same date in 1931.

Bhagat Singh was a member of the Hindustan Socialist Republican Association (HSRA), and was in many ways directly influenced by Ghadar. As a student in Lahore, Bhagat Singh came into contact with many Ghadris, whose fiery lectures at the Bradlaugh Hall were recalled vividly by many of his comrades.[13] He was hanged in Lahore in 1931 for assassinating John Saunders. He also shared his jail sentence with Baba Sohan Singh Bhakna, a key Ghadri figure, who was extremely old and feeble at that point but still joined Bhagat Singh and his comrades in their hunger strike, despite Singh's attempts to convince him otherwise. Bhagat Singh had modelled himself consciously on Kartar Singh Sarabha, a leading member of the Ghadar Party who was executed by the Crown in 1915 for instigating an anti-colonial rebellion. Sangat's street performance at Shadman Chowk, the site of his execution, thus re-enacted Ghadar's brand of guerilla tactics against the state in the postcolonial setting.

A great deal of controversy has come to surround Shadman Chowk in recent years, after some civil society members petitioned the state to rename it "Bhagat Singh Chowk" to honor the young anti-colonial nationalist. The state agreed, but promptly reversed its decision following protests from orthodox Islamic groups, who deemed the naming of a square in an "Islamic" country after a "Sikh" highly condemnable. Every year, civil society activists from different groups including the Punjabi movement, especially Lok Rehas, gather at the square to light candles and sing *ghoris*[14] to remember Bhagat Singh's sacrifice. The play was performed at one of these gatherings, and its fusion of Guru Nanak's work with that of a modern Marxist revolutionary like Bhagat Singh represents an important interpretive move by the Punjabi movement, one which links pre-colonial and colonial traditions of resistance into a local lineage of rebellion that threatens the state-sanctioned brand of Muslim nationalism.

In addition to theatre and weekly reading circles, writing, translating and publishing radical texts in Punjabi has also been integral to Sangat's attempt at articulating a transhistorical

[12] Lok Rehas is now a registered non-governmental organization, but it began in the 1980s as a street theatre troupe dedicated to performing only in Punjabi. Among other plays, it has also performed Syed's *Takht Lahore*, which was discussed above.

[13] A talk by Chris Mouffat at the Commemorating Ghadar conference at the Lahore University of Management Sciences, 2015. I am grateful to him for sharing the outline with me.

[14] Folk songs which depict Bhagat Singh in the idiom of the bridegroom. His martyrdom is usually the key theme.

revolutionary subjectivity in Punjab. Ghadar and its legacy have figured prominently in these efforts. Maqsood Saqib published Baba Sohan Singh Bhakna's autobiography in the Shahmukhi script as a special edition of their monthly magazine, *Puncham*. This was also read together in a dedicated study circle in 2011. Further, in 2016, Huma Safdar published a Potohari translation of Dada Amir Haider's memoirs. As mentioned before, Haider was an Indian revolutionary who met with Ghadar Party members in New York in 1920 and became heavily involved with the circulation of *Ghadar di Goonj* globally. After the partition, Haider lived out his life in Rawalpindi, going to jail at least twice, for his defense of firebrand labour leader Hassan Nasir, and then for his political activities in the frontier province with MKP leader Afzal Bangash.

While the memoirs were penned in English, Huma's translation into not just Punjabi, but into the Potohari dialect of the northern Punjab that Dada Amir Haider belonged to demonstrates a very particular sensibility towards Punjab's revolutionary history. By translating from the language of imperialism to the vernacular, Safdar has attempted to return the history and intellectual lessons of Ghadar to the source of its radical potential, to the ordinary people and their culture of resistance where this anti-colonial movement found its roots. While the history of colonial language policy is the backdrop for Safdar's translation into Potohari, the contemporary linguistic context of Pakistan is also critical to understanding the radical cultural potential of this kind of language politics. The intimate link between class and language has continued to strengthen in postcolonial Pakistan. As Mansoor and Zaidi point out, Urdu remains a prestige symbol among the middle and lower middle classes in Pakistan, while Punjabi is seen as a marker of low socio-economic status (2005). Sindhi is used at the lower levels of administration only in a few parts of Sindh, while Urdu and English dominate in the armed forces, bureaucracy and judiciary alike in all other provinces of Pakistan (Ibid, 274-275). Despite the predominance of Punjabi speakers in the country, literacy in Punjabi is well below literacy in Urdu, to which employment is still tied inextricably (Rahman 2002). Translating the lessons of rebellion into the marginalized languages thus becomes a powerful way to reclaim the origins of a people's movement like Ghadar, and re-invent its legacy for emancipatory politics in the contemporary period.

Ghadar in Syed's Sammi di vaar

Sangat's re-enactment of the politics of Ghadar shows a unique linkage between language, culture, region and history to establish a genealogy of revolution drawing on local roots and vernacular ideology. *Sammi di vaar*, performed by the troupe between 2011 and 2015, perhaps warrants the most attention on account of its complex engagement with the memory and history of Ghadar. The play has been performed across Pakistani Punjab, in streets and in theatres, for audiences ranging from college students to peasants.

The year 1920 represented a pivotal moment in the history of the Ghadar movement. As Ramnath points out, contradictions within the original coalition which founded the movement

were emerging, and the emphasis was shifting from the "blowhard intellectuals" to the "salt of the earth soldier-farmer-poets who were off to get things done" (Ramnath 2015, 43). In other words, Ghadar was developing a mass-based, popular orientation, which later on in the 1920s gives birth to the Kirti Kissan Party. The Kirti communists brazenly defied M.N. Roy's disciplining efforts in favor of a more "home grown" Punjabi communism, emphasizing a more vernacular approach which blended Sikh egalitarianism with a universalist socialism. This is the year Syed chooses to set *Sammi di Vaar* in.

The play opens with a wiry, emaciated old faqir, sitting in front of a fire which he tends to day and night. A young girl, by the name of Munni enters, and the rest of the play is simply a dialogue between the two characters, who are united through their connection to Dhuni. Dhuni had been Faqir's lover and the girl's grand-aunt.

The climax in the play occurs when Munni forces Faqir to recount the last time he saw Dhuni, who has now been missing for five years. In a dramatic narration, Faqir relays how Dhuni brought a Ghadri to his hut one day, telling him that he will stay the night and leave early next morning. In the night, as Dhuni, Faqir and the Ghadri sit around Faqir's flames, the small hut is raided by the police. They have been tipped off about the Ghadri's presence, and despite Dhuni's attempt to conceal him inside the hut, they drag him out and arrest him. At this point, Dhuni first tries to convince the police that they have the wrong man, offering up Faqir as the wanted revolutionary they are after. Seeing that they are not fooled, Dhuni throws herself between the Ghadri and the police. She puts up a great fight, but is ultimately handcuffed and thrown onto a horse alongside the Ghadri, who is revealed to be her lover. The police gallops off with the two prisoners, who are never heard from again.

And all this while, Faqir sits there, transfixed. His fear and inertia in the face of crisis, in the moment of decision when his comrade and lover needed him is what gnaws at him, day in, day out. It defines the nostalgia and loss embodied by his character.

The play, in structure and thematic emphasis, is very close to other historical dramas written by Syed. His purpose, in this depiction of Ghadar, is twofold. One, highlighting an alternative history of Punjab's political past which reveals an underlying continuity in the traditions of rebellion, to which he self-consciously joins his own work. Two, he aims to deconstruct the historiographical centrality accorded to a masculine "hero" or leader figure in not just folk, but also nationalist and Left-wing narratives. In *Sammi di vaar,* ordinary characters embody the rebel consciousness that drives revolution. In a nutshell, commemorating Ghadar for Syed has to involve a foray into its humble, subaltern origins, represented in *Sammi di vaar* through the nondescript setting of a small, quiet village in 1920s Punjab, with a minimalist structure resting on only two characters.

Ghadar and the roots of resistance in Sammi di vaar

The exchange between Faqir and Munni artfully weaves the everyday with deeper reflections

on politics, society and culture. The two characters are tucked away cozily in a small hamlet shaded by trees, away from the main village. However, under the veneer of mundanity hides a thoughtful critique of colonial capital and state power:

> Munni: Nani Dhuni, told me that we are not only fisher people but also boat's people, *mallah*, ferrying across the river. Ferry men spend the night on the river, while the women tend to the fire in the forests, rubbing the tree twigs together, just like you do. In those days, that tree was called *Sammi*. Out of the *Sammi* the sun was born. *Sammi* became the flame which lit up the city, its forts and mansions. The union of fire and water, the *mallah* and *mallahni*, the ferry people. The hookah, the shisha of the *mallah* might not have water but was always alight.
>
> When the railways came, the ferries were no longer needed and the banks of the rivers were abandoned. The boat and fisher people moved to the settlements. Men started labouring and women sat at the *tandoors* (ovens).
>
> Faqir: And the *faqirs* gave up showing the way of life giving breath and became slaves, and acquired the fire. Aaah, Dhuni, you never told me, the truth of this labour that I had made into mine, that became my bondage (Syed 2004, 12).

Ensconced in this oral history of the fishing castes is an indictment of colonialism in India. The British Indian railways were among the most intrusive and brutally transformative interventions by the colonial state. They served key imperial interests, providing speedy transportation for troops and their food supplies, plus raw material and British commodities. In addition to their practical use, the railways as colonial infrastructure also had symbolic power, representing by their spread and reach the penetration of the state and its control of Indian Territory. Railways were also the physical embodiment of the white man's civilizing mission, the emblem of modernity, the promise of progress being held out to the traditional, uncivilized Indian. And what of those who were brutalized by this colonial modernity, their voices silenced and footsteps erased?

The untold and unheard story of the ferry men narrated here highlights the "others" of colonial development. Their plight is also left out of the nationalist discourse, which focused mostly on the urban middle classes. As Bhattacharya has shown in his work on pastoralist communities in colonial Punjab, British laws which entrenched private land ownership increasingly excluded customary modes of land use, in which roaming pastoral groups enjoyed social ties with settled communities that entitled them to certain rights over the land (Bhattacharya 1998). However, with the Land Alienation Act and canal colonization, a contradiction developed between pastoralists and settled agriculturalists, leading ultimately to the stigmatization and criminalization of the former (Bhattacharya 1998). Similarly, Guha and Gadgil show that colonial forestry laws played an identical role in undermining traditional rights to the forest enjoyed by hill

tribes (1995). The "ferry men" described in *Sammi di Vaar* saw a similar destruction of their livelihood. As the faqir laments, they went from being the guardians of fire and breath, the source of "life giving breath," and became "slaves."

The impoverished workers who boarded ships to Canada and America from Punjab, the coolies who swelled the ranks of the Ghadar Party also emerged from this process, as colonial transformations in agriculture and land use converted large sections of the Indian population into landless labour. The Ghadri in the play narrates a similar story. He appears as the product of this process of exploitation.

Syed's 'absent' Ghadri: a case for subaltern agency

> …I am from Beas, the British laws mortgaged our land and in debt we became hungry and with some friends we went to Malaysia, then to America. We worked hard there and faced a lot of difficulties, but also came to realise how our country has been exploited by the English. We are a group of Ghadris that decided the time was right to return, so we came undercover, but many of us got caught, these nobles/ zamindars spy for the English after all, the Police are also after me… (Syed 2004, 20).

The Ghadri in Syed's play is not listed in the dramatis personae. He appears instead as a memory, when the Faqir recalls the day Dhuni left the village. The "Ghadri" appears as just that, and is not identified by his name, which brings into sharp relief Syed's framing of Ghadar's quintessential political subject. Further, his profile and lack of a name also suggests that he is not amongst the leaders or intellectuals of the Ghadar Party, whose names would go down in history and who bear a hierarchical relationship to the ordinary foot-soldiers in re-tellings of Ghadar's history. The Ghadar movement appears in perhaps its most unassuming form, a young man, alone, unidentified, on the run. He ties into the plot through his intimate relationship with Dhuni, and it is around her, not him, that the dialogue in the play revolves.

Syed artfully connects the small, quiet village with the internationalist Ghadar movement through the love between Dhuni and the Ghadri. He attempts to show how intimately Ghadri sentiment and ideology permeated the lives of ordinary Punjabis, and how passionately they responded to the demands of the movement:

> Munni: *(quoting Dhuni)* I said to him, my Uncle was also a rebel, 60 years ago. Dhuni, said that Neeli bar and all along the Raavi is full of rebellious spirit, all of Dinpura supported Baba Ahmad Khan, except for these nobles. They gave horses to the English, got Ahmad Khan killed in secrecy… (Syed 2004, 20).

The emphasis on "all of the Neeli bar" and "Raavi" being Ghadri highlights the deep roots that Ghadar struck and its connection with subaltern agency. And these lines are relayed to us by

Dhuni, who, even more than the Ghadri, is the one to embody the spirit of rebellion. Her name is derived from the word for "smoke," which rises from the home and the hearth, the centre of life in the village. Smoke itself is ephemeral, immaterial, yet it rises above, can travel great distances, and engulfs the population. "Dhuni," who is like smoke, is the collective consciousness, containing within it silenced histories and forgotten traditions, as well as the ability to conjure them into a new, political reality. This readiness for rebellion is emblematized by Dhuni's choice to leave the Faqir, her childhood lover, for the Ghadri. The young girl in the play, Munni, calls her "Nani" (grandmother), signaling an intimate relationship between them. Munni, whose mannerisms and physical appearances bear similarity to Dhuni, is like a reincarnation of Dhuni, the living, breathing, contemporary manifestation of a life force that animates the politics, tradition and history of the people.[15] The continuity connecting Dhuni and Munni is symbolized by the Sammi tree, a plant indigenous to Punjab, fabled to be the source of life-giving fire produced by rubbing together its branches by the first women (not men!).

The Ghadri, through his connection with Dhuni, represents the powerful resonance that Ghadar had with vernacular traditions of resistance. It became a monumental transformative force because of the deep roots it struck in the subaltern consciousness. The play, in its interpretation of Ghadar, re-affirms the humility of its origins, instructing contemporary projects of emancipation in the need to reverse their top-down approach to the theory and practice of revolution.[16] For Syed, understanding and learning from Ghadar cannot be done by ignoring its relationship to genealogies of dissent ingrained in the popular imagination, and it cannot be viewed through the lens of its leaders and upper-class intellectuals.

This is a recurring pattern in Syed's work. As mentioned before, Syed's play *Ik raat Ravi di* dramatizes Kharal's resistance. However, in the play, Kharal's *mirasi* appears as the most radical subject, the unsung low caste hero of an anti-colonial uprising. Kharal only has a few lines in the play, and the action pivots around the *mirasi*, who wryly remarks how Kharal would be remembered in folk songs and ballads to come, while he himself would be erased from history. Similarly, in Syed's *Takht Lahore*, Dullah Bhatti is not amongst the cast of characters. His work is instead carried out by nameless factory workers of "unknown origins, unknown parentage," (Syed 1972, 64) and the dissident poet of Lahore, Madhu Lal Hussain. Similarly, in *Sammi di vaar*, the Ghadri's appearance is brief, and we only hear from him directly once. The ideology and practice he represents is instead actualized by Dhuni and Munni, two bold and brave women, unlikely heroes for masculinist retellings of Punjab's anti-colonial history. Through these female protagonists, Syed deconstructs the hierarchical notion of leadership to understand the Ghadar

[15] This kind of a female figure, inspired by the goddess "Kali," or the mythological figure of "Kaal" makes a recurring appearance in many of Syed's plays and poems. Kaal is also the word for time, and the havoc-wreaking, bloodthirsty female that appears in ballads like *Dulleh di vaar* and *Nadir Shah di vaar* is frequently interpreted by Syed as the essence of revolutionary consciousness, which is essentially female and has been repressed through the ages.

[16] For Syed's stinging critique of Left-wing parties and organisational politics in Pakistan, see *Haar de phull,* a play in which *bhaands*, traditional comedians crash a rally organised by a workers' party and lead a hilarious expose of the leadership's shortfalls.

movement, presenting a transhistorical theory of local rebellion grounded in the Punjabi context which views Ghadri radicalism as a product of subaltern consciousness and mass initiative. Thus, Ghadar for the contemporary Punjabi movement in Pakistan becomes a vehicle for subverting both a chauvinistic "Punjabiyat" and the reductive view of Ghadar as an identitarian "Sikh movement."

Conclusion

Thus, viewing *Ghadar di Goonj* and the Marxist Punjabi movement as parts of a shared trajectory of revolutionary writing in Punjabi expands the interpretive possibilities we attach to both. Ghadri poetry, when seen as a "form of political articulation" (Kalra forthcoming) rather than a crude mobilizational tool that pandered to religious identities, can begin to be placed in a comparative frame with the anti-colonial literature and art it shared a time period with. Discussions about the surge of nationalist literature in the 19th and 20th centuries in India, described by scholars as heralding the emergence of new "publics" where anti-colonialism, reform, resistance and tradition were debated have almost entirely focused on writing in Urdu, Hindi and English. These languages emerged as the sanctioned bearers of intellectual discourse in colonial society, regardless of which side of the ideological spectrum we are looking at (Kamran 2011). The poetry of Ghadar and that of the Punjabi movement has never been placed in conversation with these many "publics," barring us from appreciating these works as a part of histories of literary dissent in South Asia. Similarly, the poetry and theatre produced by groups such as Sangat and Lok Rehas can no longer be reduced to representations of "Punjabiyat," or of any form of ethno-nationalist identity.

Further, an analysis of the colonial context in which orientalist knowledge and administrative imperative combined to hierarchize, order and objectify languages produced a politics of language that was shaped by and in turn shaped the contradictions of class in society.

This linguistic politics was reflected clearly in the poetic praxis of Ghadar. Punjabi became the language of *Ghadar di Goonj* precisely because of this colonial linguistic context. This aspect has dominated in the Marxist Punjabi movement's engagement with Ghadar. Writing in Punjabi highlighted the class base of Ghadri support, distinguishing their struggle against the British from its elite counterpart that relied heavily on Urdu/ Hindi and English for articulating nationalist dissent. Thus, for the Sangat and the Punjabi movement, the radicalism of Ghadar's poetic form owes a great deal to its language, the language of the unlettered working class, that has always remained outside the avenues of power.

Putting Ghadar and the Punjabi movement in conversation through their literature and poetry thus proves fruitful in illuminating both. This is an aspect of Ghadari poetry which has remained unexplored, in part because language and politics in South Asia has invariably been viewed through the lens of nationalism, a theoretical link which this paper also attempts to unsettle. Language, once yoked with class, also opens the Punjabi movement up to radical interpretation.

We can begin to read the Punjabi movement's texts as a quest for a rooted revolutionary subject by tapping into local traditions of dissent. These activists consciously link their language and cultural politics to a regional political tradition which unites the Ghadri rebels, Kirti Kissan Party, Bhagat Singh as well as pre-modern revolutionaries like Dullah Bhatti and Guru Nanak Dev. Ghadar and other local histories of rebellion become vehicles for engaging in cultural debates within the contemporary Left, shedding light on the ways in which the memory of Ghadar lives on amongst activist circles in Pakistani Punjab.

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Article

LEARNING FROM AND TRANSLATING PEASANT STRUGGLES AS ANTICOLONIAL PRAXIS: THE GHADAR PARTY IN PUNJAB

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Abstract

The Ghadar Party introduced a radical anticolonial praxis to Punjab, British India, in the early 1910s. Much of the literature on the Ghadar Party situates the birth of the movement among Punjabi peasants along the Pacific coast of North America who returned to their homeland intent on waging an anticolonial mutiny. One strand of argumentation locates the failure of the Ghadar Party in a problem of incompatibility between their migrant political consciousness and the conditions and experiences of their co-patriots in Punjab. I use Antonio Gramsci's concept of "translation," a semi-metaphorical means to describe political practices that transform existing political struggles, to demonstrate how the Ghadar Party's work of political education was not unidirectional, but rather consisted of learning from peasant experiences and histories of struggle, as well as transforming extant forms of peasant resistance – such as, banditry – for building a radical anticolonial movement. Translation is an anticolonial practice that works on subaltern experiences and struggles. The Ghadar Party's praxis of translating subaltern struggles into anticolonialism is demonstrative of how movements learn from and transform existing movements.

Keywords

The Ghadar Party; Punjab; anticolonialism; peasantry; translation; hegemony; Gramsci; Fanon; social movement learning.

When Britain entered the war in the summer of 1914, Kartar Singh, an eighteen year old militant with the Ghadar Party branch in San Francisco, along with other members, immediately made preparations to return to Punjab to raise a rebellion. One estimate was that about 8,000 *ghadaris* from across North America, East Asia, and other locations returned to Punjab over the next two years to wage an anticolonial insurrection (Ramnath 2011). When they arrived in Punjab they were divided into *jathas* or small bands, with many organizing series of *dacoities* (armed robberies) as a means of financing their anticolonial rebellion. Kartar Singh, who led one *jatha*, reprimanded Dilip Singh for suggesting to rob a relative just because he had disagreements with him. Kartar emphasized that their mission was not to engage in personal revenge, but rather was to overthrow British colonialism. Kehar Singh, another returned emigrant, suggested robbing a

rich man's house in his village, Sahnewal, in Ludhiana district. Once there, the band had someone watching the police station while others went inside the house of their target. They didn't find much loot in the house. When one *dacoit* was about to sexually abuse a female inhabitant, Kartar's second-in-command threatened to shoot the *dacoit* if he continued. The next target for a *dacoit* was a few days later at Mansurian village in the same district. There they targeted a Hindu moneylender. Kartar and Dilip remained on guard outside, while the other *dacoits* took the loot inside. While some villagers started gathering out of curiosity outside the house, Kartar explained to the villagers that they shouldn't worry as they were collecting money to attack the British. When the *dacoits* opened one of the safes, the deeds and debt logs were burned, a common practice among peasants to protest against exploitative debt relations. Boxes of gold and silver ornaments and coins were taken. When a retired high ranking officer of the British India Army from the neigbouring village arrived, he led an attack by firing on the *dacoits*. The *ghadari* militants responded by throwing inkbombs, leaving a cloud of smoke and a path for their getaway (Isemonger and Slattery 1919, 98-100). Kartar would also have an important role in convincing troops in the Ferozepur cantonment to join the Ghadar Party in a mutiny. However, the British foiled the Ghadar Party plans at an anticolonial rebellion through massive repression enabled by the Defence of India Act of 1915. This included the arrest of Kartar Singh and other *ghadari* colleagues. Karta was sentenced to death, was hanged in Central Jail of Lahore on November of 1915 (Puri 1993), and is remembered for going to the gallows with his head held high.

While Kartar Singh's and his colleagues' exploits in banditry may seem like a rather insignificant aspect in the history of the Ghadar Party – after all, *dacoity* is an under-examined aspect of their activities in academic and popular literature – it uncovers integral aspects of their political praxis. Namely, it shows the messy character of anticolonialism: militants did not all agree on the priorities of rebellion, and personal vendettas and interests mixed with the grander goal of ending the British empire. Anticolonialism was something that was learnt, and its specific character emerged through practice, dialogue, and contestation. The above narrative also points to how anticolonialism emerged through the process of transforming or translating peasant struggles, in this case by building upon contests with moneylenders.

The Ghadar Party

The Ghadar Party is situated within the second phase of anticolonialism in the Indian subcontinent. The first wave of anticolonial organizing began with the mutiny of 1857. The second included mobilizations against the partition of Bengal and in Punjab protests in 1907 over water rates and paternalistic colonial state regulations. While the latter protests had some articulations of anticolonialism, it was with the formation of the Ghadar Party in 1913 that Punjab was introduced to a more systematic and radical anticolonial praxis. The literature on the Ghadar Party situates the birth of the movement among Punjabi peasants and Indian intellectuals along the Pacific coast of North America (Puri 1993; Bains 1962; Ramnath 2011; Josh 1977). What follows

in that narrative is how after politicization in North America, Punjabi peasants returned to their homeland intent on waging an anticolonial mutiny among the peasantry, landless labourers, and native soldiers. Harish Puri (1993) locates the failure of the Ghadar Party in the impossibility of interpreting their migrant political consciousness to provide meaning to the social conditions of their co-patriots in Punjab. Further, he argues that their lack of organization skills led to their demise. This paper argues that the Ghadar Party did not encounter limits in bridging their anticolonial politics from North America to Punjab. Rather, they were quite successful in "translating" extant forms of socio-political struggles into radical anticolonialism. I also examine whether the appearance of a lack of coherent organizing was a belief in spontaneity and an under-mediated notion of rebellion. What is often ignored in the literature on the Ghadar Party is how they developed upon extant forms of peasant resistance, as well as the sentiments of alienation and desires of the subaltern classes. In this essay, I examine how the Ghadar Party learned from peasant banditry for building an anticolonial popular collective will.

Migration from Punjab to United States and Canada began at the turn of the twentieth century due to an agrarian crisis. Most migrants were peasants from the eastern districts of Jullundur and Hoshiarpur and some were from the canal colonies in western Punjab. The majority of the migrants were Sikh, followed by Muslims and Hindus. Half were ex-soldiers who had served in the British Indian Army (Puri 1993). Most of these Punjabi migrants settled close to the Pacific coast. Those around Vancouver Island and Victoria worked in railway construction, saw mills, and fruit farms. Some settled as far as Calgary and Edmonton working in coal mines. In the USA, migrants worked as labourers or tenant farmers in the Sacramento Valley, California, others in lumber mills in Oregon and Washington state (Puri 1993). There were also Indian students in universities in California.

The Punjabi labourers and Indian students that would form the Ghadar Party in 1913 developed their political consciousness through their shared experiences of white supremacy and class exploitation in North America. The Ghadar Party developed a radical critique of colonialism and imperialism which went further than that of Indian liberal nationalists. They experienced class and racialization in the workplace through differentiated wages with threats of deportation, special immigration regulations for Asians, and anti-Asian riots. This context was an opportunity to understand class exploitation and racialization as being structured by imperialism. They also saw their oppression in North America as being connected to British colonialism in India. Rather than making claims for extending liberal rights to the South Asian community in the United States and Canada, they made calls for ending empire.

They had published a newspaper out of their San Francisco office called *Ghadar* and a regular collection of poetry titled *Ghadar-di-Ghanj* (*Echoes of Mutiny*). Their network expanded to include branches in Vancouver, Portland, Panama, Berlin, Mexico City, Moscow, London, Paris, Buenos Aires, Cape Town, Lahore, Singapore, and Tokyo. With the beginning of the Great War, they called upon their members to return to Punjab to start a mutiny among the soldiers of the

British Indian Army. This call for an anticolonial insurrection among Indian *sepoy*[1] "echoed" another anticolonial moment – that of the 1857 mutiny (Elam 2014). The Ghadar Party had a major set-back when the planned uprising in the winter of 1914-1915 was repressed and many *ghadaris* sent to jail or killed by the colonial state in Punjab.

Several scholars have attributed the failure of the Ghadar Party to develop a successful mass struggle against the British Empire on questions of ideology and organization. Harish Puri[2] (1993) has argued that the *ghadaris* who returned to Punjab in 1914 and 1915 failed to develop a mass movement among peasants, soldiers, and labourers because there was a separation between the consciousness of the returned migrants and the native population, which the former were unable to bridge through the dissemination of political ideology. Similar assessments are made in colonial intelligence reports that argue that the Punjabis in North America had become disconnected with the realities in Punjab (Isemonger and Slattery 1919). There were real differences in the experiences between the recently returned Punjabis and their co-patriots in Punjab, however, this was a separation that could be overcome. The assumption in Puri's analysis is that ideas cannot be translated across space and experience. The Ghadar Party's analysis of empire was precisely an acknowledgement of the ways in which political unity could be produced through anti-imperialism because of the translatability of particular experiences of exploitation and oppression across empire.

Another commonly attributed reason for the failure of the Ghadar Party was to questions of organization: that the leadership lacked political organizing skills (Puri 1993, 148) and had "poor coordination" (Sarkar 1990, 147). There existed two sets of groups within the party: a small group of Indian university students (mostly Hindu Bengalis) and a large number of Punjabi labourers. The students assisted the core leadership at the headquarters in San Francisco on developing their propaganda and the party organ, *Ghadar*. The Punjabi labourers were spread across the Pacific coast and did the grunt work of developing branches, spreading propaganda, and collecting funds. The collaboration between the Bengali students and Punjabi labourers created an uneasy alliance, with internal disputes and divisions arising from class and ethnic prejudices as well as political differences. The Bengali students' idea of anticolonial revolution consisted of secret organization, military training, terrorism, and collaborating with Bengali revolutionary movements (Puri 1993). In contrast, the Punjabi labourers were more concerned with developing a mass movement through political education (Puri 1993, 154). With the arrival of World War I in the summer of 1914, most of the Bengali students were interested in organizing through the Berlin-based Indian Independence Committee, thus leaving most of the Ghadar organizing to the Punjabi labourers. The various branches across USA, Canada, East Asia, Latin America, and Africa had an autonomous relationship with respect to the headquarters in San Francisco. A branch could consist

1 A *sepoy* was the title used for a native soldier in the British Indian Army.

2 Whereas my engagement with the literature on the Ghadar Party focuses on a critique of Harish Puri's text, this is only because his laudable text is an often cited work on the party as well as its focus overlaps with the central concerns of my essay, that is questions of organization, spontaneity, and ideology.

of a small group or band, sometimes Punjabi labourers at a common workplace like a specific mill and farm. In some cases branches were initiated through the political education of party workers who travelled across the North American Pacific coast. In other cases, Punjabi labourers in the diaspora who had come across the newspaper *Ghadar,* were persuaded by its cause, formed a branch that operated autonomously from the headquarters, while being inspired by the directives that came through the party organ (Puri 1993). Puri criticizes the Ghadar Party leadership for not developing a coherent and centralized organizational structure. Puri describes the Ghadar Party as a "spontaneous and pre-organized movement," a quality that he associates due to the majority of the membership being peasants and this being typical of peasant rebellions (Puri 1993, 168). I agree that there was a non-hierarchical party organization, a lack of coordination, and an emphasis on spontaneous activity. Yet, this wasn't because of a lack of organizational skills nor a tendency among the peasantry towards spontaneity.

The theoretical and conceptual framework of Antonio Gramsci is very appropriate for an analysis of the Ghadar Party. While Gramsci, the Italian communist militant and intellectual, has been considered by Perry Anderson to belong to the universe of "Western Marxism" and could be considered as being irrelevant to non-Western contexts, the specific dynamics within Italian history provides a useful comparison that makes Gramsci's analysis worthy of translating for studying colonial and post-colonial societies (Kiernan 1995; Hall 1996). During the nineteenth and early twentieth century, Italy was at the (semi-)periphery of capitalism.[3] Italy had a majority peasant population embedded in an agricultural economy with comparatively lower productive capacity. Southern Italy existed in a semi-colonial relationship with northern Italy. This was a reflection of southern agriculture in a dependant relationship with northern industry and racial ideologies of southern inferiority were in operation (Green 2013). The deployment of Gramsci for the purpose of studying colonial India was previously advanced by the subaltern studies collective (Chatterjee 1986; Guha 1997). The subaltern studies collective brought an important contribution in critiquing colonial and liberal nationalist historiography by emphasizing the actions of subaltern classes. However, the subaltern studies collective would come to cast Gramsci conceptual universe in terms of discursive aspects of ideology, and under-emphasize the historicity of material relations. I develop upon the recent philological turn in Gramscian studies that places importance on Gramsci's "absolute historicism" (Thomas 2009; see also Santucci 2010; Ives 2004a; Ives 2004b).

Gramsci is relevant to this study especially in how his inquiry into the unification of Italy provides insights for analyzing how various social and political forces attempted to produce a national-popular collective will. This essay would not be the first attempt at translating Gramsci for the study of the Ghadar Party; Harish Puri (1993) brought Gramscian concepts to work in his own analysis of the party. While Puri makes use of Gramsci to examine the role of spontaneity and organization, and traditional and organic intellectuals, these are usually treated as dichotomies,

[3] Italy held a peripheral and weak position within Europe. It was the site of foreign occupation by Austria-Hungary and required military assistance from France for its liberation. However, the peripheral nature of Italy should not be overstated either: Italy was nonetheless a colonial power, with a presence in Libya, Tunisia, and Eritrea.

whereas Gramsci saw them in a dialectical and dynamic relationship to one another. The next section examines Gramsci's concepts of translation, the popular collective will, spontaneity, and organization.

Gramsci on Translation

Gramsci's concept of "translation"[4] provides a framework for uncovering the transformation of socio-political struggles in a hegemonic moment. Gramsci used the Italian word *tradurre*, which means linguistic "translation," but also "to express," "to interpret," "to transfer," "to summon." *Tradurre*'s etymological root is the Latin *tradere*, which means to "hand over," and is shared with "traitor" and "tradition" (Ives 2004a). This etymology unveils how translation entails a dialectical relationship between change and continuity, revolution and restoration, that is to say how meaning is transformed while maintaining elements from an earlier moment (Ives 2004a, 101).

Gramsci believed in the possibility of translation across time and space, but this was never a simple process of transposition from the source to the target language. Gramsci used the concept *tradurre* for teasing out what could be learned from the experience of the Russian Revolution in Italy. He recognized that a process of selective betrayal and faithfulness was required in transferring the experience of the Russian Revolution into the geography of Italy, especially given differences in state-society relations and the organization of rule. Gramsci wrote about how in Tsarist Russia "the state was everything," such that a strategy of a "war of maneuvre" made sense (Gramsci 1971, 238). Whereas in Western Europe and in Italy, Gramsci saw a greater role for the "war of position" given how there was a more developed relationship between state and civil society.

Translating revolution across time-space was open to producing something of a passive character, that is to say being a transformation from above rather than below. This was Gramsci's conclusion in examining how the French Revolution was taken up by the movement for Italian unification (*Risorgimiento*) in the mid-nineteenth century. Gramsci discussed how one Giuseppe Ferrari "was incapable of 'translating' what was French into something Italian, and hence his very "acuteness" became an element of confusion, stimulated new sects and little schools, but did not impinge on the real movement" (Gramsci 1971, 65). The passive quality of the Italian *Risorgimiento* was the consequence of mis-translating ideas developed in an international order characterized by uneven development (Morton 2007, 68–69). Ideas of the modernization of rule born in an advanced capitalist country became disfigured when mechanically translated to the peripheries of capital. For Gramsci, the idea of passive revolution denoted a condition where modernization of rule occurred without an organic basis, that is they came from an external influence or imposed from above at a moment when the necessary objective and subjective conditions were not fertile.

4 Translation here is used in the double sense of literary translation and a metaphor of socio-political practice.

Translation for Gramsci entailed a process of transformation or revolution of the target language. Party organic intellectuals are involved in the process of "active translation", transforming language, producing a new language from the existing one, and producing a new political subject from the material of social life (Ives 2004a). Said differently, translation as a political project is not just a process about introducing from outside ideas and forms of social relations, but was a process of organizing and bringing coherency to the spontaneous activities of subaltern classes.

Spontaneous action arises out of the lives of subaltern classes and their understanding of exploitation and domination. In a reference to a revolt by small farmers, Gramsci described how a flour tax severely affected their capacity for subsistence and led them to kill and beat tax collectors. He described these actions as spontaneous, that is the movement was without organization and conscious leadership (Gramsci 1992, 1:Q1§43). Elsewhere, Gramsci discusses spontaneity in a more complex relationship with conscious leadership. Gramsci states that pure spontaneity does not exist. In so-called spontaneous movements "there exist multiple elements of 'conscious leadership' but no one of them is predominant or transcends the levels of a given social stratum's 'popular science' - its common sense" (Gramsci 1971, 196). In discussing the Turin workers movement, Gramsci says that "elements of 'spontaneity' were not neglected and even less despised" (Gramsci 1971, 198). Gramsci continues by explaining the elements of spontaneity: "it [the workers struggle] applied itself to real men, formed in specific historical relations, with specific feelings, outlooks, fragmentary conceptions of the world." Spontaneity combined with conscious leadership provides an organic relationship with the everyday reality of dominated classes: "This unity between 'spontaneity' and 'conscious leadership' or 'discipline' is precisely the real political action of the subaltern classes, in so far as this is mass politics and not merely an adventure by groups claiming to represent the masses" (Gramsci 1971, 198).

The appeal to spontaneity made by Gramsci is expressed well by Fanon who saw there existing "a time-lag, or a difference of rhythm" (Fanon 2001, 85) between leaders of liberal nationalist movements and subaltern classes. In addition, we can find within spontaneity a form of political action that expressed the experience of alienation and the desires of subaltern groups. Fanon gives the example of how the question of subsistence can take central importance to subaltern classes but is ignored by liberal nationalists:

> The people, on the other hand [in contrast to the native liberal intellectual], take their stand from the start on the broad and inclusive positions of bread and the land: how can we obtain the land, and bread to eat? And this obstinate point of view of the masses, which may seem shrunken and limited, is in the end the most worthwhile and the most efficient mode of procedure (Fanon 2001, 50).

Fanon outlines how the "geography of hunger" (Fanon 2001, 96) is another marker of the "Manichean world" (Fanon 2001, 41) of colonialism and imperialism. Spaces are defined between the colonizer and colonized, between the stuffed and starved. However, as James Scott points out

hunger and exploitation do not necessarily translate into outright rebellion. And when working communities do resist, it may consist of "everyday forms of resistance," such as theft, banditry, or murder. In moments of subsistence insecurity, the target of resistance is a strategic calculation and in relation to subaltern consciousness of the geography of hunger – whether the perception of the source of hunger is due to the merchant, the state, or empire. Yet, there is always the possibility of re-configuring the target and content of political struggles. Scott's work provides evidence of everyday forms of peasant resistance in colonial Burma and Vietnam being translated into anticolonialism under different types of organizing – peasant, communist, and millenarian (Scott 1976).

A central inquiry for Gramsci, as well as Fanon, was how to develop a national-popular collective will among a fragmented and dominated population. The development of this unity required "translating" the common sense and the spontaneous movements of the subaltern classes to develop a collective will (Lo Piparo 2010). Gramsci envisioned a national-popular being developed as a hegemonic project through a process of unification. Yet, this was not meant to dissolve heterogeneity that is entailed in the fragmented and spontaneous feelings, thoughts, actions, and desires of the subaltern groups. Rather, the party worked to uncover difference due to exploitation and oppression and bring coherence to the social formation through mutual transformation.

The Ghadar Party attempted to develop a popular collective will by translating the fragmented feelings of alienation, desires, and struggles among the subaltern classes. I examine here how the Ghadar Party translated peasant struggles against money-lenders for developing an anticolonial popular collective will.

The Echo of Banditry

Ghadar was both party name and action. A British dictionary of Urdu from late nineteenth century defined it as: "perfidy, faithlessness, ingratitude; fraud, villainy; mutiny, rebellion, sedition, riot, disturbance, confusion, tumult, noise, bustle" (Platts 1884, 769). These connotations of *ghadar* as a negative and irrational form of political action was a reflection of imperial views of anticolonial resistance. The Ghadar Party's use of the term *ghadar* reflected a range of political actions including *sepoy* mutiny, riot, rebellion, and banditry, and acknowledged its translatability across time and space.

The Ghadar Party referenced the way in which their call for *ghadar* "echoed" the anticolonial mutiny of 1857 in the title of a poetry collection: *Ghadar-di-Gunj* or "Echo of Mutiny." *Gunj* can be translated from Urdu as "echo," "resonance," or "roar." Its origin is in the Sanskrit root word *gunjan*, meaning "vibration" or figuratively "an intense and continuous resonance." Echoing of mutiny was a means of establishing their organizing within a lineage of popular anticolonial rebellions that was highlighted by 1857. The Ghadar Party placed the tactic of *ghadar* at the center of their political organizing. That is, they saw the necessity of armed struggle and

developing a front among the native *sepoy* and peasantry. Just as with an audible echo, the Ghadar Party's invocation of *ghadar* consisted in a shift in time and space from the roar of 1857. The term *gunj* finds resonance with Gramsci's "translation," in the sense both terms evoke the importance of learning from past struggles yet transforming modes of resistance to adapt to new contexts. *Ghadar-di-gunj* can also reference the ways in which the Ghadar Party developed upon the practice of peasant banditry to transform it into an anticolonial practice.

When Great Britain declared war on Germany on August 4th, 1914, the Ghadar Party took this as an opportunity to transform their general call for anticolonial mutiny to making concrete this political action. Prior to this moment, Germans were regarded as sympathizers of national liberation of India, as they had a common enemy – England. Now, on the date that Great Britain entered into war, the Ghadar Party issued their own declaration of war through their party organ in an article titled *The Bugle of War*, where Indians were called to support Germany in the war effort (Isemonger and Slattery 1919, 17). The Ghadar Party mobilized their branches along the Pacific Coast through their party organ and in meetings to get masses of Punjabi labourers to return to their native Punjab to ignite an insurrection. The first goal upon their return was to raise funds through *dacoity* and to bring peasants, labourers, and *sepoy* into their fold.

The Ghadar Party's use of *dacoity* was more than just a convenient means for raising funds. *Dacoity* was one of the ways for peasants, landlords, and agrarian labourers to struggle against the influence of rural money-lenders, dominated by the Hindu *bania*[5] caste. The Ghadar Party developed on this mode of resistance to give it an anticolonial and anti-imperialist character. The potential relationship between banditry and anticolonialism can be teased out from the moment of February and March 1915, which witnessed both an attempted anticolonial mutiny by the Ghadar Party in central Punjab, and grain riots and banditry in southwestern Punjab.

In February of 1915, food prices and tensions were rising across the whole of the Punjab. These antagonisms developed into grain riots and *dacoity* in the southwest of the province from February to March of that year. Muslim *zamindars* (large landowners), tenant farmers, and landless labouring castes responded to the extreme high price of food by rioting against Hindu *bania*, who had taken advantage of the relative scarcity (Sohan et al. 1915; O'Dwyer 1925; Gandre 1986). This was the product of a war economy that prioritized the export of grain for feeding troops on the western front. On the one hand, Muslim *zamindars* from so-called *martial castes* benefited from military postings and land grants. But on the other hand, the war economy showed how *bania* controlled the subsistence of agrarian classes. Rioting by agrarian Muslims was a tactic to take relative control over subsistence and land against Hindu *bania*.

In the midst of those events, on the 19th of February, police raided a home in Gawal Mandi, Lahore, suspected by the government of being occupied by "Sikh revolutionaries." One pamphlet that was found at the house read:

5 As a way of shorthand I refer to the Hindu money-lending castes as *bania*, which was the dominant money-lending caste in Punjab. Yet, there were a range of castes that worked in this profession depending on the region. For example, in southwestern Punjab, the *aroras* were the dominant Hindu money-lending caste.

> Dear Indians:
>
> Just think a little, you and your country's state, what is happening to them. This country, which of all countries was considered the greatest, today is being destroyed under the feet of foreigners. Which country is the most fruitful in the world? This country's children today are dying of starvation. What is the reason for this? Why are you in this state? Does your grain in your country become less? Certainly not. Much more grain is being produced now than used to be produced, but this is all going to foreign lands. The grain produced in your country you are not allowed to eat (quoted in Punjab Government 1915, 193).

The pamphlet was the work of the Ghadar Party. It is unknown if this pamphlet, which was originally written months prior to the food price hike, was strategically reprinted given the contemporary circumstances. Yet, we know the Ghadar Party was unconnected to the grain riots in the southwest of the province because this region was not a zone of Ghadar organizing and the grain riots did not espouse explicit anticolonial politics.[6]

Nonetheless, there are at least two ways in which the grain riots of 1915 and the Ghadar Party are similar. First, they were both distinct responses to colonialism and imperialism. The grain riots were a critique of the restriction of food entitlement, which that was the outcome of imperialism and colonialism. As seen in the pamphlet above, the Ghadar Party made those connections between the imperial question and the right to subsistence. To this effect, the Ghadar Party worked to conspire against the colonial state and allied forces. In contrast, the grain riots of southwestern Punjab targeted Hindu *bania*. The targeting of *bania* rather than the colonial state might have been because it was a strategic choice for immediately and partially resolving the contradictions of colonial society. Second, *ghadaris* drew upon the repertoire of peasant forms of resistance, such as *dacoity*, that were used in the grain riots of 1915.

Social banditry was an extant form of class action by agrarian social forces in Punjab. *Dacoity* was a frequent strategy used by agrarian landlords, landless labourers, and peasants in their struggle against *bania* for control over agricultural surplus production. *Bania* were not just money-lenders for agrarian classes, but often dealt in commercial activity, particularly as merchants of agricultural production. Neeladri Bhattacharya explains that "the object of the merchant-moneylender was not to earn interest as such, but to control prices of purchase and sale, and ensure regular channels for the supply and disposal of commodities. Since rural traders could not always determine the price at which they sold their stocks to wholesalers in mandis, they attempted to exercise their control at the points of supply in the village" (Bhattacharya 1985, 307). After harvest,

6 Preparations were made by Ghadar militants to visit Rajput soldiers in the Multan Cantonment, located in the southwestern Punjab during the winter of 1914-1915 (Isemonger and Slattery 1919). But it is unconfirmed if this plan was ever carried out.

the *bania* came around to take the produce against the zamindar's debt. The control that *banias* held over agricultural production was such that increases in food prices benefited them, not producers. At times of high food prices *dacoity* and petty theft increased, and frequently was directed against the *bania*.

During years of famine there was a considerable increase in crime – *dacoity*, robbery, criminal trespass, house-breaking, and theft – as a strategy for subsistence. Famines brought greater distrust upon the *bania*. In the famines of 1868-70, grain-merchants stored grain, mixed wheat with lower-grade grains, and raised food prices (Punjab Central famine relief committee 1870, 9). The export of grain continued despite a food shortage. In the Hissar district, it was reported that exports in grain exceeded imports, with three-fourths of the population requiring food relief (Punjab Central famine relief committee 1870, 27). During the famines of 1877, grain riots occurred in eastern Punjab, mainly in Delhi, Amballah, Gurgaon, Karnal, and Rohtak districts (Commission 1878, I–2/35). Traders in Delhi speculated on grain prices, which drove prices up but also resulted in grain riots. Instances of *dacoity* increased during the famine. In many cases *zamindars* sold grain to the *bania* out of obligation. *Zamindars*, being hard pressed for food, formed *dacoits* to prevent the export of grain from villages to Delhi (Commission 1878, 5). Grain riots occurred in Rohtak district where *dacoits* broke into and looted 37 grain shops (Commission 1878, ix). The colonial administration frequently organized food-for-work programs during famines as a means of getting labour for public works. Authorities claimed that engaging the starving masses in such labour programs could prevent them from resorting to crime for survival (Commission 1878, I–2/19). Mike Davis termed famines as "redistributive class struggles" (Davis 2001, 20). Famines don't just create victims, they make it easier to transfer property between classes. Whereas greater privileges were accumulated by the *bania* in times of hunger, peasants and landlords made efforts to sabotage *bania* holdings through theft, looting, banditry, and rioting.

The Ghadar Party translated *dacoity* into a broader political practise by giving it articulations of anti-imperialism. This was accomplished by linking questions of food insecurity to the British Empire's presence in India. Since the 1870s, cash crops like wheat and cotton were growing with increasing intensity in Punjab for export. Punjab was opened up for providing cheap food for the heart of the empire through the construction of irrigation networks, canal colonies, roads, market towns, railway system, and an export port in Karachi. The industrial revolution in Western Europe was on the backs of agricultural labourers in the colonies providing factory workers in Western Europe with cheap food (Patnaik 2011). The vagaries of the emerging international grain market would be a determining factor in the local price of wheat. The higher demands for a secure food supply to feed troops and citizens in England during World War I placed a greater burden on working communities in the colonies and was driving an increase in prices. The Ghadar Party articulated these dynamics in their literature in terms of the British Raj being a "drain" on India that lead to deprivation and hunger among the population. In various speeches, Ghadar activist Lala Har Dayal would expound on how the British Empire's drain on India's surplus production was leading to famine and destitution. He called the British Empire

instead the "British Vampire" (quoted in Isemonger and Slattery 1919, 14). The analysis of the Ghadar Party on the question of food developed from the theories of Indian liberal nationalist Dadabhai Naoroji, specifically his "drain theory" (Naoroji 1901). Whereas Naoriji advanced the "drain theory" to support liberal nationalist politics of reforming colonial rule, the Ghadar Party found in this theory reasons for calling for the end of empire. *Dacoity* as re-constituted would be used for addressing both the immediate and root aspects of food insecurity.

The Ghadar Party made frequent calls for *dacoity* in their publications: "Commit dacoities in some places" (quoted in Waraich and Singh 2008, 292), "We should commit dacoity on the Government and awake the whole of the Punjab" (quoted in Waraich and Singh 2008, 292), "Plunder the treasuries" (quoted in Waraich and Singh 2008, 298), "Loot the plunders" (quoted in Tatla 2013, 8). Dacoity was seen as a way to raise funds for their revolutionary organizing, which included acquiring resources for manufacturing bombs and arms. The *ghadaris* distinguished their activities from "social *dacoity*" or survival-oriented forms of *dacoity*. The Ghadar Party translated "social dacoity" into "political dacoity" for the purpose of revolutionary praxis. Elsewhere, the Ghadaris criticized the colonizers for calling them *dacoits*, instead of revolutionaries; the real *dacoits* were the British (Ghadar Party 1919).

Ghadari militancy appeared to the colonial state as unorganized and spontaneous in character, rather than being decentralized and organizing spontaneous initiative. With the homecoming of *ghadiris* in the fall of 1914, party members were divided into bands of sixteen with a leader in charge but decisions being made collectively. Nawab Khan, a *ghadari* militant, explained: "Each of us was to be in charge of a detachment of the emigrants whom we were to keep concealed in different places, ready, when the occasion arose, to unite together and carry out our campaigns. The reason for our thus distributing our force was to ensure safety for the remainder in case [the] Government succeeded in capturing one leader and his party" (quoted in Isemonger and Slattery 1919, 67). Government intelligence reports commented that there existed next to little organization: "The various gangs wandered about from village to village to meet other returned emigrants, organise gatherings and look for likely places in which to commit *dacoities*" (Isemonger and Slattery 1919, 68). Further, they write that "they had broken up into small parties and wandered at random among the villages near their homes, preaching sedition when they found any one to listen and looking for favourable places for *dacoities*" (Isemonger and Slattery 1919, 70).

The principal target for *dacoity* mentioned in Ghadar texts is the colonial state. Specifically, targets listed included cantonments, police armouries, and district treasuries where agrarian tax revenue was deposited. Whereas plans and attempts were made at looting magazines at cantonments and a district treasury, when these were met with failure the focus shifted on raiding homes and shops of *bania* (Waraich and Singh 2008, 298–299; Isemonger and Slattery 1919). Returning to the common target of peasant banditry was described by the Ghadar Party as "political *dacoity*." This shift away from looting the colonial state reflected the practical difficulties of confronting its violent apparatuses. However, it was also a means for the party to include attacks on those native social forces that profited from imperialism at their expense – namely, the rural

moneylender. Balwant Singh's gang made an attack on 21st of January at Sheikhupur village in Kapurthala State, looting six Hindu shops. On January 24th, the same gang robbed Hindu shopkeepers at the village of Alawalpur in Jullundur District (Isemonger and Slattery 1919). The gang led by Icchar Singh, a religious leader at a *gudwara* who held anti-British sentiment after the Rikabganj Gurdwara agitations,[7] organized meetings at his *gudwara*. They organized a *dacoity* in Jhaner in the Maler Kotla State, where they attacked the home of money-lenders. The *dacoits* told the villagers not to be alarmed since they needed the money to fight the colonial state. A *dacoity* was organized on a moneylender in Chabba, a village near Amritsar, on January 4th of 1915. The *ghadari* militant who suggested the target actually owned money to this money-lender, and had suggested killing the old man, but the leader of the gang said they were not in the business of killing but only wanted money. The safe of the moneylender was opened by a locksmith working with the *ghadaris*. The gold and silver was taken and the debt bonds were burned.

The Ghadar Party's translation of *dacoity* into anticolonialism was not simply a process of transforming banditry into an anticolonial practise. Rather, in the process of political organizing, the meaning of anticolonialism took new form and content. *Ghadari* militants engagement with peasants expanded the targets of anticolonial praxis to include native social forces that supported and benefited from imperialism and colonialism. This contrasts the claims made by colonial officials that the Ghadar Party was out of touch with the peasantry. The colonial administration claimed that villagers, rather than being swayed by the revolutionaries, made attempts to stop the *dacoits*. They recount cases where unarmed villagers either captured or scared away the *dacoits*, this is despite the latter having guns, bombs, and swords (Isemonger and Slattery 1919, 108). British intelligence made claims that the acts of banditry actually alienated the peasantry as several cases show how they attacked the bandits. One British intelligence officer wrote: "These *dacoities*, on the Bengal model, had been recommended by the Ghadar for the collection of funds; but the authors of the scheme failed to consider the mentality of the Punjab peasant. The outrages committed, far from terrorising, only made him [the peasant] more keen to stamp out the perpetrators of them" (Isemonger and Slattery 1919, 103). It is true that accounts show that peasants and village officials like the *zaildar* (revenue agent over several villages) made efforts to attack the *dacoits*. However, what is left unmentioned in the colonists' analysis is that peasants and landless labour were never the bandits' target. Ghadar militants and peasants developed in dialogue the necessity of zeroing in on the common enemy of the peasant: the village money-lender. Peasant attacks on *bania,* however, took on the grammar of anticolonialism. The Ghadar Party's political organizing resulted in a transformation in the language of peasant resistance. In addition, peasant struggles transformed the language of the Ghadar Party.

7 The Rikabganj Gurdwara agitations began in 1913 among the Sikh community against the British Raj's demolition of a wall in a Sikh shrine in Delhi.

Organized Spontaneity

Bands belonging to the Ghadar Party approached – and as the British would say, "contaminated" – *sepoy* and cavalry of the British Indian Army at cantonments across the Punjab and beyond in Meerut, Canwpore, Allahabad, Benares, Fyzabad, Lucknow, in the United Provinces, as well as those stationed in East Asia at Singapore, Burma, and Hong Kong with the message of *ghadar*. February 21st, 1915, was set by the party leadership as the beginning date for a mutiny to take place. Rather than a coordinated mutiny across the British Empire, it was hoped that initiating mutinies at the cantonment in Mian Mir (Lahore) and Ferozpore would generalize *ghadar* across the empire. 1857 was taken as a model for how rebellion could become "viral." In the end, an informant conspired against these plans and the uprising was interrupted before it could take off. A large number of *ghadaris* were arrested and put to trial through the Defence of India Act of 1915 in what would become known as the First Lahore Conspiracy Case.[8]

Members of the Ghadar Party believed that once an audacious act like the raiding of the magazine of a cantonment and attacks on European regiments had begun in one district, rebellion would spread. Ghadar Party publications warned people to be attentive to the beginning of a rebellion and then join in, "Look out for the time when the rising will take place and you will slay the enemy" (*Ghadar* quoted in Ker 1917, 125). The belief in spontaneity can also be noticed in an anonymous pamphlet attributed to Har Dayal by colonial intelligence, published on the 23rd December 1913, the one-year anniversary of the "Delhi Bomb," the bomb is considered as a harbinger or "political sermon" for revolution.[9] The bomb is described as bringing political consciousness, particularly to the native soldiers:

> The roar of the bomb represents the voice of the united nations. Who does not understand this? The Madrassi and the Bengal, the Punjabi and the Pathan, the educated and the uneducated - all understand the meaning of the bomb. How are we to convey the message of freedom to the Sikhs, the Gurkhas, and the Pathan in the Indian Army? These people are, in the first place, uneducated, and, secondly, they are confined in cantonments where it is difficult to approach them. [...] The [Delhi] bomb demonstrated to the Sikhs, Pathans, Gurkhas, Rajas, and Maharajas [*sepoy* standing on guard during the Viceroy's procession] in three seconds that the British kingdom in India was about to come to an end. The bomb in question was a national warning, by beat of drum, to the brave men of India to gird up their loins and come into the field of battle. [...] The existence of the bomb proves that oppression prevails in the country. In short, the use of the bomb and the pistol is

8 For detailed description on the averted insurrection, see (Puri 1993; Ramnath 2011).

9 The Delhi Bomb of 1912 was an unsuccessful attempt on the life of the Viceroy of India, Lord Hardinge. It was organized by underground anticolonial revolutionaries in Bengal and Punjab, and with the leadership of the Bengali anticolonial radical, Rash Behari Bose. Bose led the Punjab operations of the Ghadar Party in January of 1915.

> [*sic*.] the most effective weapon of the political sermon. [...] The bomb is the messenger of mutiny, and the fear of mutiny is the weapon for correcting the Government, while a general mutiny will be the means of its annihilation (Quoted in Ker 1917, 130–131).

This perspective was influenced by the anarchist strategy of "propaganda of the deed," that anti-state actions like theft, rioting, bombing, general strikes, assassinations, or mutinies, would be a form of propaganda or mediation for escalating the struggle into a mass insurrection and what Mikhail Bakunin called "organized spontaneity" (Bakunin 1870, 183). The Delhi Bomb of 1912 followed the trends in global anarchism of assassinating heads of state from the late nineteenth to the First World War.

The idea of *ghadar* is comparable with how George Sorel (2008) conceptualized the general strike as myth.[10] Sorel argued that class consciousness would emerge spontaneously in the moment of a direct action by producing a cleavage in society. Gramsci described the Sorelian general strike as "a creation of concrete phantasy which acts on a dispersed and shattered people to arouse and organise its collective will" (Gramsci 1971, 126). Sorel's focus was upon the spontaneous energies of the masses that could be ignited through a general strike.

The Ghadar Party's political strategy held that initiating acts of *ghadar* would produce a collective political consciousness and the political subject of the *ghadari*. The Ghadar Party believed that a *ghadar* would bring about, to use a Sorelian concept, a "cleavage" in society, that it would awaken subaltern consciousness, and initiate autonomous politics. While organization for the Ghadar Party involved a process of translating the spontaneous energies of the subaltern, there was also a tendency towards adventurism, an over-reliance on the under-mediated spontaneity of the subaltern classes to carry the movement forward.

While Gramsci saw it as necessary to work through the spontaneous energies of subaltern groups, he was also critical of some calls for its mobilization, as that of George Sorel on the general strike. Gramsci's critique of the Sorelian myth of the general strike was developed through his reflections about developing a national-popular collective will that were informed by the Bolshevik Revolution, which had a determining role in renewing the form and content of radical movements in Italy, India, and across the planet. It led people to re-think the role of the political party and how to develop a mass movement. It convinced Gramsci to argue that direct action of a spontaneous character could not bring about new social relations and a new state. Sorel's general strike was a negative force; it was indifferent to an organizational capacity for creative construction of a new society. Gramsci argued that Sorel considered the general strike as the highest form of political action, while leaving untheorized the capacity of mediation, the political party, or translation in producing a collective will.

10 Maia Ramnath (2011) has previously compared the Ghadar Party's idea of mutiny to the syndicalist General Strike. Ramnath argues that the Ghadar Party had been influenced by ideas of syndicalism through their Pacific Coast connections with the International Workers of the World.

The Ghadar Party similarly went through a period of reflection in the post-war period as party members regrouped after the repression of 1915 and members were released from prison. While the Ghadar Party combined elements of spontaneity and organization, the emphasis was an under-mediated notion of rebellion, where organizational form was not as important. By reflecting on the reasons for their failures and translating the experience of the Russian Revolution, *ghadaris* began placing more emphasis on political education for building a mass movement. The Ghadar Party was to be re-born on various political fronts, such as the Kirti Kisan Party in the late 1920s. Now the historical point of reference was 1917, not 1857; Moscow, not Delhi; the united front, not mutiny.

Conclusion

The praxis of Gramsci, Fanon, and the Ghadar Party points to how translation is not only a political practice, but is also an educational process of learning from existing struggles while also transforming them. The Ghadar Party's practice pointed to the integral role of translation in an anticolonial hegemonic project. This was a process of giving coherence to the fragmented character of subaltern desires, thoughts, memories, political struggles, and experiences of alienation. Yet, the intellectual history of anticolonialism in Punjab traced a "crooked line," with long detours into peasant knowledge (Chatterjee 1986, vii). In the Ghadar Party's re-configuration of peasant struggles against money-lenders, they arrived at a radical anticolonial perspective through borrowings from the liberal nationalist economic thought of Dadabhai Naoroji, Bengali anarcho-terrorists practices like banditry, and the syndicalism of the International Workers of the World. Others have emphasized their re-configuration of Sikh thought and history (Tatla 2013). This diverse set of philosophies, tactics, and modes of organizing were translated into the radical anticolonialism that was the Ghadar Party. While many scholars have noted the eclectic character of the Ghadar Party (see for example, Ramnath 2011; Puri 1993), what has been largely sidelined in this set of literature is the essential ingredient of subaltern experience in the intellectual history of anticolonial politics. Ato Sekyi-Otu characterized such an anticolonial praxis from the writings of Fanon as the "dialectic of experience" (Sekyi-Otu 1997). For Fanon, the crooked line of anticolonial thought develops from experience, with re-adjustments and transformations in consciousness, from the knowledge of "immediacy" (Fanon quoted in Sekyi-Otu 1997, 47) or what Gramsci described as "common sense" being superseded in the process of struggle and experience. Such a framing gives a different means of understanding the open character of the Ghadar Party's anticolonial politics: it is experience that is the principal material for translation along with a diverse set of political thought that produced *ghadari* militancy. That the Ghadar Party learnt from peasant experience in their political education work demonstrates their organic relationship with the oppressed and exploited of Punjabi society.

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