

**GHADAR**

**The Immigrant Indian Outrage Against Canadian Injustices**

**1900 - 1918**

by

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**in conformity with the requirements for**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Ghadar, meaning mutiny in Punjabi, was a revolutionary movement which was carefully crafted by the Indian immigrants in Canada and the United States. Ghadar was dedicated to achieving India's independence from Britain by use of armed force. It was also fueled by the inequities and discriminatory treatment meted out to them in North America. Ghadar equated the oppression of the Indians under the British Raj in India to the ill-treatment of the Indian immigrants in Canada by governments and public attitudes. Though Ghadar expressed militant Indian nationalism in its activities in North America, it was a revolutionary movement with international dimensions. As an ethnic experience, it was a search for identity and a protest against the hostile environment in Canada.

Ghadar had original and significant Canadian aspects which make it a part of Canadian history. This study examines the historical background of South Asian settlement in North America; Canadian racist and discriminatory policies, laws and practices; the exclusion of the wives and children of the Indian immigrants; the rise of Ghadar as a reaction to Canadian injustices; the eruption of the Komagata Maru Affair of 1914 and the subsequent development and aftermath of Ghadar in Canada.

Existing Canadian literature on the South Asian experience in Canada is focused on how the host society viewed issues of race, immigration and labor. The thrust of this study is the Indian immigrants appreciation of their problems in the context of the host country environment. Existing literature deals largely with the

**Oriental** -the Chinese and the Japanese, to the exclusion of South Asians. The impact of the policies and laws specifically designed for and applied to the South Asians needs to be explored. The differentiation between the Oriental and the South Asians, though significant, is often overlooked in practice. This is an analysis long overdue of the South Asian experience in Canada, through the prism of Ghadar.



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I dedicate this study to my father, Inderjeet Singh Bhoi, whose vision, knowledge, encouragement and love made this study possible.

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## Chapter One

### Introduction

***What is our name? Mutiny. What is our work? Mutiny. Where will this mutiny break out? In India. When will it break out? In a few years. Why should it break out? Because the people can no longer bear the oppression and tyranny practiced under British rule and are ready to fight and die for freedom.<sup>1</sup>***

This quotation describes the manifesto of the Ghadar Movement (hereafter referred to as Ghadar). In the major native languages of India, including Hindi, Urdu and Punjabi, Ghadar means uprising, revolt, insurrection or rebellion. Hence Ghadar was an armed revolution. It became the most powerful terrorist organization during the period 1913 to 1917, dedicated to India's struggle for independence from Britain. Use of violence and terrorism was directed against the Raj and its massive apparatus - institutional, civil, administrative, police, military, economic and intelligence. Ghadar was akin in its purpose and methodology to the Mau Mau Rebellion in Kenya, the Algerian Revolt against the French, or any other revolutionary movement against colonial rule, except that Ghadar was the largest in size.<sup>2</sup> It was short lived and operated widely in North America. It was established and directed from outside of India against Great Britain - the mightiest imperial power of that era. Ghadar, though international in scope and operations, was born and nurtured in British Columbia, Canada with the support of its American counterparts in the Pacific States of Washington, Oregon and California. The movement was multi-faceted, generating a series of episodes in various countries

of which any single report or document provides only a selective view. It provided high drama on land and sea: the Ghadarites planned to send gunboats to India, attempted to raise an army, obtained solid funding and support from various sources, produced voluminous literature and launched worldwide propaganda. It was involved in several riveting court trials and in murders in Canada, the United States and in India. Ghadar flirted with Germany amidst the clouds of the First World War in Europe, much to the annoyance of Britain and the United States. When its activities violated neutrality laws of the United States, crackdown on Ghadar was swift and severe. Ghadar collapsed under the weight of British military might and its penetrative intelligence services, aided by those of Canada and the United States.

Ghadar was fueled by the inequities and discriminatory treatment meted out to the Indian immigrants who settled initially in British Columbia at the turn of the twentieth century. Canadian politicians, trade unions, media, public interest groups and governments of the day, both federal and provincial, joined hands to stop, and indeed, to reverse, Indian immigration to Canada. Indian immigrant outrage against oppressive treatment and discriminatory Canadian immigration and labor policies, laws and practices led to an open confrontation. This was evident during the Komagata Maru Affair of 1914, which broke out in Vancouver. Ghadar preached that the British oppression of the Indians in India and the Canadian ill treatment of the Indian immigrants in Canada was one continuous and co-joined phenomenon - conspiratorial in nature, oppressive in methodology and common in ultimate goals.

Thus Ghadar is as much a part of the Indian struggle for independence from Britain as it is a part of the Canadian past and of Canadian history.

Mark Juergensmeyer, a scholar and historian of Ghadar, succinctly states that historically, Ghadar can be looked at through four distinct yet interconnected perspectives.<sup>3</sup> First, it can be seen as a revolutionary movement which became "...notable because of its international dimensions, and the extensive dissemination of literature to develop local and international support."<sup>4</sup> Second, it could be described as an evolutionary Indian independence movement, manifesting militant nationalism in its operations in North America and subsequently throughout India, but more particularly in the politics of the Punjab. Third, Ghadar can be viewed in the context of international affairs, affecting interstate relations involving Britain, Canada, the United States, Germany, the Far East and other countries where Ghadar was active. Fourth, Ghadar can be seen as an important chapter in North American ethnic history which became "...a partial expression of their (the Indian immigrants') frustration as a new minority in the American community - a frustration with economic and social conditions and conflict over identity."<sup>5</sup>

Juergensmeyer emphasizes that Ghadar was a historical phenomenon that occurred in the United States. However, other historians, like Khushwant Singh and Satindra Singh, point out that Ghadar originated, developed and flourished in Canada, and then spilled over into the United States. There exists a cogent body of well documented evidence to demonstrate that Ghadar was primarily a Canadian event. The Indian immigrants in Canada protested against the discriminatory

Canadian immigration laws, policies and practices. Legislation to prevent their entry, like the high monetary qualifications and the "continuous journey regulation," was designed and implemented by the Canadian provincial and federal governments. The exploitation of the Indian immigrants in Canada was in a massive scale, perpetrated by the Canadian employers, including the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR). The Khalsa Diwan Society, the governing body of Sikh religious institutions, was the first representative organization of the Indian immigrants established in Vancouver. This organization served as the meeting place of the immigrants, where they ventilated their grievances and espoused their causes under the platform of Ghadar. The absolute bar on bringing their families to join them and the controversial debate that followed called the "Hindu Woman's Question," were exclusively Canadian happenings. The Komagata Maru Affair of 1914 took place in Canadian waters. Its implications were international and long lasting. Ghadar's involvement in retaliatory murders, arms smuggling and court battles occurred on Canadian territory. Injustices and unfair practices of the Canadian Government against the Indian immigrants, built up a reservoir of discontent, ill-will and hatred which erupted into Ghadar. Thus, the case for Ghadar, as a part of the Canadian history, is strong.

Ghadar as a political phenomenon can only be understood fully in the context of the political, economic and social situation in Canada at the turn of the century. Canadian statehood from 1850 to the period after the First World War was characterized by racism and conformity to the dominant Anglo-Saxon cultural

values that were hostile to ethnic diversity, particularly to immigrants of color who represented sharply divergent religions and traditions. The formulation of national Canadian policies, enactment of legislation and the enforcement of the laws were heavily weighted in favor of the dominant Anglo-Saxon culture. It was racist, discriminatory and intentionally manipulated against the immigrants, particularly in the fields of immigration and labor relations, by the politicians, the media and organized labor. At the intergovernmental levels, there was well coordinated collaboration involving Canada, the United States, Britain and the British India Government, to formulate and enforce the discriminatory policies of the Canadian Government.

Between 1850 and 1920, Canada went through processes of settlement, agricultural expansion and industrial development. Ready access to capital accelerated and diversified economic development. Trade in fur, fisheries and forestry gave way to national economic development triggered by the Industrial Revolution in Europe. Intensified economic expansion needed additional labor. The Orient and South Asia, along with some other European countries, provided cheap, readily available and docile skilled and semi-skilled labor. Transportation, trade, agricultural and infra-structural projects on a massive scale were developed to open up Canada to white settlement under Anglo-Saxon paramountcy. Immigration, thus was used as a tool to achieve this national objective of Canadian nation-building.

Immigrant labor was a direct and effective contributor to the Canadian nation building effort. Peter S. Li and B. Singh Bolaria in their work Racial Oppression in



Canada, give a Marxist interpretation regarding the exploitation of immigrant labor. They explain that to generate maximum surplus value, the capitalist state extracts profit from the working class by justifying racism as a mechanism to pay low wages to certain targeted segments of the population, including immigrant labor. Thus, racism serves the economic, political and social interests of the ruling class. Immigration is also "used by the ruling class to create a reserve army of labor which can be utilized according to their needs and interests."<sup>6</sup> Immigrants compete with the indigenous working class for jobs. This competition instigates antagonisms between the working class and non-white immigrants along ethnic and racial lines, thereby weakening the working class. The immigrant then becomes a victim of the racist state's manipulation. The state can thus oppose, restrict, close or select immigration at any time to suit its policies and prevailing public opinion and market conditions.

According to the Marxist interpretation, the adverse effects of the divided or split labor force are brought to bear on the immigrant worker. This split becomes wider and deeper. It becomes ethnicized and racialized. The ethnics are cheaper to employ than the local white labor. Since they enter the country on a temporary basis as guest workers, work permit holders, seasonal laborers or sojourners, they become hostages of the employers who keep them in line by constant threats of deportation by their employers and the state governments they can influence. They are thus vulnerable to manipulation by the employers. They are denied unemployment, disability, health and social benefits. The male laborers, being

single, are not a significant burden on the social services of the state. Thus, the immigrant workers suffer from the three-fold oppression of the state, the employer and the dominant indigenous work force.

During the period under study, it was fashionable to talk of assimilation or the Canadianization of the immigrants from economic, social and even religious platforms. Assimilation in the context of immigration became an intensely debated public issue. Broadly speaking, assimilation is a process whereby elements of the minority ethnic or racial sub-cultures are relinquished to and absorbed by the dominant ethnic group because the power of the dominant group is irresistible and unchallengeable. The smaller ethnic group "integrates" or "fits" into the larger ethnic group.<sup>7</sup> Howard Palmer points out in his article "Reluctant Hosts: Anglo-Canadian Views of Multiculturalism in the Twentieth Century," that assimilation encompassed three intertwined concepts.<sup>8</sup> The first concept was based on the preservation of Anglo-Saxon values and institutions, as exclusive or dominant factors, to which the immigrants would be compelled to conform (i.e. assimilation). The second concept related to the emergence of new immigrant groups with a distinctive identity founded on the biological and cultural mingling of Anglo-Saxon Canadians and immigrants (i.e. melting pot theory). The third concept aimed at the promotion of cultural pluralism in English speaking Canada under a distinctive identity (i.e. multiculturalism).

In Canada, the assimilationist theory was dominant during the initial decades of the twentieth century. It demanded conformity to Anglo-Saxon norms and at the

expense of the immigrants' ancestral cultural heritage. Enforcement of conformity was achieved through various means. Some examples include: the imposition of the head tax against the Chinese; possession of two hundred (\$200) as a precondition of landing with respect to Indians; requirement for Indians to comply with the impossible conditions like the continuous journey provisions; selective imposition of legal disabilities on unwelcome immigrants like the denial of rights of citizenship, prohibitions on voting, employment and residency. Literature of the time was based on the assumptions of Anglo-Saxon conformity. Palmer lists some of these works: J.S. Woodsworth's Strangers Within Our Gates, J.T.M. Anderson's The Education of the New Canadian, Ralph Connor's The Foreigner and Alfred Fitzpatrick's Handbook For New Canadians.<sup>9</sup> The National Conference of the Imperial Daughters of the Empire (IODE) passed a resolution in 1919 to make new Canadians "one hundred percent British in language, thought, feeling and impulse."<sup>10</sup>

Many Canadians believed that the non-white immigrants in Canada neither deserved to be assimilated, nor would they permit assimilation to occur. Mariana Valverde in her work entitled The Age of Light, Soap and Water: Moral Reform in Canada, 1885-1925, deals with this subject. She describes the moral and social purity movement in Canada which had clear racial and ethnic overtones. It favored whiteness and claimed to be founded on Christian spiritual values. The movement promoted skin-color consciousness and contributed towards the spread of racist fear about the "yellow peril," and about Anglo-Saxon's being overrun by ethnic

groups belonging to the so-called more fertile races. Valverde points out that:

Moral reformers had a significant impact on immigration policies, both directly lobbying for such innovations as the medical/moral inspection of all immigrants and indirectly creating a climate of opinion in which certain groups were perceived as morally undesirable.<sup>11</sup>

Racist ideas and strategies permeated public policies of this period. Sexual morality was regarded as a pivotal component of character from which national wealth and power flowed. The Anglo-Saxon whites were held out to be the monopolists of certain values or virtues - control of instinct, respect for authority and self control. Allegedly, the Orientals, the Blacks and the South Asians did not possess these attributes. They behaved like savages, unable to control their sexual desires and unlikely to lead orderly and civilized lives.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, in order to make these inferior ethnic groups conform to Anglo-Saxon morality, they had to be subjected to external, coercive regulatory controls. Rev. S.D. Chown, head of a Methodist Church opined:

The immigration question is the most vital one in Canada today, as it has to do with the purity of our national lifeblood...It is foolish to dribble away the vitality of our own country in a vain endeavor to assimilate the world's non-adjustable, profligate, and indolent social parasites...it is most vital to our nation's life that we should ever remember that quality is of greater value than quantity and that character lies at the basis of national stability and progress.<sup>13</sup>

Valverde concludes that Chown's reference to 'parasites' meant Asians, Blacks and Jews.

Many of the social purists believed that the mixing of the races, described as

miscegenation, resulted in deviant sexuality, national degradation, economic disaster and ethical demoralization.<sup>14</sup> A Methodist newspaper justified the exclusion of Indian immigrants in the Komagata Maru Affair on this basis. J.S. Woodsworth, in his work, listed the "negro and the East Indian" at the lowest rung of the human ladder. Racist accusations against them were endless and outlandish.<sup>15</sup> The social reformers were adamant about sanitizing immigrants' physicality, sexuality and spirituality to bring them in line with Anglo-Saxon normative values. It was into this Canadian environment that the Indian immigrants entered the scene and bore the brunt of its worst excesses.

It is useful at the outset to clarify certain terms used in this study and to explain important Sikh traditions since the Sikhs were the overwhelming group of Indian immigrants that entered Canada between 1900 and 1918. In the context of Ghadar, South Asians were primarily Indian subjects of the far flung British Empire. In the official Canadian documents, specifically the statistical reports and the records of the Immigration Department, they were referred to as "Hindoos" or "Hindus." However, over ninety per cent (90%) of the Indian immigrants to Canada and to the United States were Sikhs. Of these, ninety per cent (90%) of those who went to Canada, settled in British Columbia. Those that went to the United States settled in California.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, for the purposes of this paper, the term "South Asian" is synonymous with Indians emanating from the subcontinent of India. It includes Sikhs, Hindus and Muslims from various parts of India as well as those of Indian origin who had settled in the British overseas possessions, as traders,

retirees or indentured labor and subsequently immigrated to Canada. *Raj* means the British rule in India enforced by the Viceroy as the official representative of the British sovereign. He was vested with immensely wide powers of governance. The word "Punjabi," often spelled as "Punjabee" in official documents, refers to the people from the Punjab, a province in North India from where these immigrants hailed - Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs or even a smattering of Christians. The native language spoken by them is also called Punjabi or Punjabee.

Punjab means "the Land of the Five Rivers." It was, and is still regarded as the richest agricultural state of India. Punjab is also the spiritual and temporal home of the Sikhs - the renowned warriors known for their bravery, loyalty and militant traditions. *Sikh* literally means a disciple. *Gurudwara* is their place of worship where Sikhism is preached. The *Guru Granth Sahib* is their holy scripture which is recited with great devotion often to the accompaniment of music called *kirtan*. Charitable work is performed and community affairs discussed at the Gurudwara. By cooperative *seva* (effort), *langar* (communal food) is prepared daily and served free of charge to one and all - Sikhs and non-Sikhs alike. The Sikh spiritual heritage is established by the ten Gurus. *Guru* means the one who leads from darkness to light.

The first, Guru Nanak, was the founder of Sikhism. He expounded its philosophy. The last was Guru Gobind Singh who gave Sikhs their symbolic appearance and militancy. Guru Gobind Singh baptized the Sikhs and gave them the Five K's as symbols of Sikhism.<sup>17</sup> He preached peace, equality, freedom of

worship, tolerance of all other religions and respect for traditions, law and order. He advocated peaceful methods to end oppression. However, if oppression continued unabated, then and only then, as a matter of last resort, use of the sword (meaning armed struggle) was justified and permissible. This was the basis on which the Sikh struggle against the once mighty Moghul Emperors was conducted. This background explains why Sikhs have never capitulated to oppression or unjust subordination or abuse of power by a ruler. At their baptismal ceremony, called *Amrit Parchar*, Guru Gobind Singh invested the Sikh symbols with the force of spiritual law. It binds the conscience of every baptized Sikh who becomes known as *Singh* (lion). Khushwant Singh and Satindra Singh, in their book entitled Ghadar 1915: India's First Armed Revolution, state that the Sikhs are "...strong of body and extremely touchy on questions of personal honor."<sup>18</sup>

The Sikhs, as a result of their history, going back barely 550 years, are a fiercely militant people. They fought pitched battles and shattered the Moghul Empire, which had held India in bondage for nearly 400 years. Under Maharaja Ranjit Singh, the Sikhs established an empire, which extended from the Sind, in the South on the Arabian Sea, to Afghanistan in the North. The Sikhs were the last of the Indians to be conquered by the British in 1849. The Indian Mutiny of 1857 in East Bengal almost terminated British colonialism in India. However, the Sikh regiments came to the defense of the British and saved their crumbling Empire. Their loyalty was duly rewarded by the British: the able bodied Sikhs were recruited in large numbers into the British India Army. It was used by the British to maintain

British imperial control over India, in South Asia and throughout the British overseas possessions. The Sikh and Gurkha regiments of the Indian Army are legends to this day. After the collapse of the Indian Mutiny of 1857, any resistance to British rule was ruthlessly crushed:

The British shot and slashed their way back into full control and then wrought a blood thirsty vengeance on the mutineers, both proved and suspected. The Governor General, Clemency Canning, tried to restrain the excesses of retribution, but he could not subdue the anger of his men. Nobody knows how many Indians were hanged, run through, shot or disemboweled, how many villages were burned, how many temples desecrated, or how much was looted from innocent Indians. The punishment of those found guilty by court martial of rebellion was to be tied over the barrel of the canon and, to the beat of drums, blown to pieces. The Indian army was never again to rise in force against the British.<sup>19</sup>

The Mutiny of 1857 remained indelibly etched on the minds of the revolutionary Indian leaders, who called it the First Ghadar or the First War of Independence. They drew inspiration from this significant event in Indian history.

From 1857 to 1900, British annexation of India was complete. Many Sikh soldiers, after retirement from the British India Army, settled outside of India in places such as China, Malaya, Singapore and the Phillippines. Others, mostly peasantry from the Punjab, wanted to escape the economic hardships in India altogether. Political repression under British colonial rule drove freedom movements underground and often out of India to foreign lands where dissent was tolerated. The first batch of Indians from the Indian subcontinent entered Canada as



immigrants at the turn of the century. Their numbers increased dramatically in the ensuing years, but not without difficulties and struggles. This study records their settlement in Canada, their trials and tribulations, their hopes and frustrations in their journey of life in Canada from "coolies" to Canadian citizens.

This study highlights the Canadian aspects of Ghadar and views it as a part of Canadian history. Ghadar can also be described as an aspect of the South Asian experience in Canada. Much work has been done on Ghadar in India and the United States. Research on Ghadar in Canada in the Canadian context is rather sketchy. Events in Canada which led to the establishment of Ghadar in Canada and the United States during the period 1900 to the end of World War One in 1918 are examined. Certain specific issues are dealt with, including but not limited to: a brief historiography; the historical background of South Asian settlement in Canada and the United States, the two being inextricably linked; the intentional brutalization of the South Asians in Canada under Canada's immigration and employment policies, laws and practices; the exclusion of the wives and children of the domiciled Indians in Canada; the rise of Ghadar as a revolutionary struggle against Canadian injustices and its alliance with the nationalistic struggle against British colonial rule in India; the Komagata Maru Affair, as the immigrant response to Canadian oppression; and the failure and aftermath of Ghadar. The impact of Ghadar on Canadian and British policies on South Asian immigration is of special interest. Although Ghadar, in its violent phase of activity in North America, was a short lived phenomenon, which erupted between 1913 and 1917, its full story continues to

unfold to this day. This study, thus, is a modest attempt to unfold Ghadar's Canadian chapter.

1. Hindustan Ghadar, (San Francisco: November 1, 1913), p. 1. Emphasis added.
2. Donald L. Barnett and Karari Njama, Mau Mau From Within: An Analysis of Kenya's Peasant Revolt (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1967), p. 34
3. Mark Juergensmeyer, "Ghadar Sources: Research of Punjabi Revolutionaries in America," in Punjab Past and Present: Essays in Honor of Dr. Ganda Singh, eds. by Harbans Singh and Norman Barrier (Patiala: Punjab University, 1976), p. 302.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid., p. 303.
6. Peter S. Li and B. Singh Bolaria, Racial Oppression in Canada (Toronto: Garamond Press, 1985), p. 8.
7. Carl E. James, Seeing Ourselves: Exploring Race, Ethnicity and Culture (Toronto: TEP Publishing, 1995), p. 140.
8. Howard Palmer, "Reluctant Hosts: Anglo-Saxon Canadian Views of Multiculturalism in the Twentieth Century," in Immigration in Canada: Historical Perspectives, ed. By Gerald Tulchinsky (Toronto: Copp Clark Longman Ltd., 1994), p. 299.
9. Ibid., p. 304.
10. Ibid., p. 305.
11. Mariana Valverde, The Age of Light, Soap and Water: Moral Reform in English Canada, 1885-1925 (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1991), p. 32.
12. Ibid., p. 105.
13. Ibid., p. 106.
14. Ibid., p. 108.
15. Ibid., p. 110.
16. Khushwant Singh and Satindra Singh, Ghadar 1915: India's First Armed Revolution (New Delhi: R & K Publishing House, 1966), p. 1.
17. The Five K's, or Sikh religious symbols are: *Kirpan* (a sword worn by Sikhs representing freedom and indomitable spirit); *Kes* (uncut hair which represents a simple life, saintliness, wisdom and devotion to God); *Kara* (a steel bracelet worn on the wrist as

a sign of the eternity of God); *Kanga* (a wooden comb worn to represent a clean mind and body); and *Kacha* (short breeches representing hygienic living).

18. Singh and Singh, Ghadar 1915, p.2.

19. Brian Laping, End of Empire (New York: St. Martin's Press. 1985), p. 27-28.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Ghadar: A Historiography**

**There is a renewed interest in the Ghadar movement, in part due to the research materials recently uncovered and currently available. But the interest may also be credited to the movement itself, its high intentions and high adventures, and the endless fascination of the variety in its historical perspectives.<sup>1</sup>**

**Harish Puri, author of Ghadar Movement: Ideology, Organization and Strategy, highlights some of these new sources.<sup>2</sup> They include, the Ghadar Collection held at the Center for South Asia Studies, University of California, Berkeley; records of the United States National Archives and cassettes of the recorded interviews with the very few surviving Ghadarites, their associates or dependants like Bhagat Singh Bilga, Niranjana Singh Dhillon, Sohan Singh Josh and Chain Singh Chain; the National Indian Archives at the Nehru Museum and Library, New Delhi; records of the Sikh History Research Center, Khalsa College, Amritsar; material held at the official archives in Victoria, Ottawa and New Delhi; the records of the British Foreign and Colonial Offices in London, England; the collection held at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver; and the records of the Khalsa Diwan Society in Vancouver. Sohan Singh Josh, in his book Hindustan Ghadar Party: A Short History, complains bitterly that much of the source material on Ghadar is not available because "...a bulk of it has been destroyed," and from this allegation he concludes that the British had some "most heinous and shameful crimes" to hide.<sup>3</sup> Party records of Ghadar were destroyed in a fire at a farm house**

in Davis California.<sup>4</sup>

Puri's book is the most recent work on Ghadar - scholarly, balanced and comprehensive. He emphasizes the role of Ghadar in arousing political awakening amongst the largely illiterate and semi-illiterate Indian settlers in British Columbia and California. The powerful Ghadar propaganda and its activities also stirred up strong nationalistic sentiments amongst the rank and file of the immigrants. He discusses the problems of inter-relationship between the different groups of revolutionaries carrying out activities in places including California, British Columbia and Germany. Puri gives an excellent account of Anglo-Canadian espionage on Ghadar, developed and controlled by William Hopkinson - an Anglo-Indian. Puri's work is strong on Har Dayal - the ideological architect and the impassioned spokesman of the movement.

Khushwant Singh and Satindra Singh's work, Ghadar 1915: India's First Armed Revolution, is a concise, illustrated narrative of Ghadar - its rise and fall and the conclusions to be derived from this short lived phenomenon. The authors argue that Ghadar was a movement of the Pacific Coast, which emerged out of the struggles waged by the Khalsa Diwan leadership in British Columbia. The Gurudwaras served as storm centers of political activity, which was heavily influenced by "the radical counsel of Har Dayal."<sup>5</sup> Illiterate immigrants needed to deal with lawyers and government departments. Therefore they needed spokesmen who could speak English. People like Har Dayal filled the gap. The role of the revolutionaries was thus strengthened into "dual leadership," as Ghadar

representatives and as spokesmen for the masses. This invested them with solid authority from the grassroots up and assured them great respect.

After an objective analysis of the failures and achievements of Ghadar, Singh and Singh conclude that the movement did not achieve any spectacular results: "It did not succeed in driving the English out of India, nor did it do any serious damage to the British Raj."<sup>6</sup> They further state that Ghadar was the first purely secular movement which aimed to liberate India with the force of arms. Although it was predominately Sikh, Hindus and Muslims also joined in. It was a collective reaction against the exploitation, discrimination and ill-treatment of the Indians in Canada and the United States, which was linked to the suffering of their brethren in India under the Raj.

Sohan Singh Josh's book, Hindustan Ghadar Party: A Short History, in two volumes, is another major piece of scholarship on Ghadar. The author was a well known political agitator for India's emancipation from Britain, a committed Marxist and a spokesman for the downtrodden in India. He was the leader of the Punjab Kirti Party (The Worker's Party). He sacrificed much for the causes he espoused. He wrote copiously on many Indian historical events, including Ghadar, Marxism and The Communist Party of India. According to him, the history of Ghadar started with the Mutiny of 1857, which he calls the First Ghadar. He maintains that the first Ghadar generated four politically programmatic slogans, the implementation of which ultimately led to the collapse of the Raj in India. *Swadesh* urged Indians to produce and consume local material and products no matter however rudimentary,

to the exclusion of all others. Boycott of all British textiles, goods and services was designed to hit the British economy at its source. After all, the British capitalists made large profits from the captive Indian market. Attainment of *Swaraj* meant winning self-rule which alone would arouse the political consciousness and define the national identity of the oppressed masses. The need for a comprehensive national educational program was an imperative of *Swaraj*. Josh gives graphic accounts of the oppression of the Indians in Canada and the United States. This oppression was a direct result of a carefully crafted collaboration involving the Governments in London, New Delhi and Ottawa. He provides the most detailed accounts of the representations made by the Indian immigrants to the Government of Canada in Ottawa, the British Imperial Government in London and to the British India Government in New Delhi. All such efforts produced no results. He discusses in depth the debate that took place in British Columbia on the merits and demerits of Indian immigration to Canada. He examines the reasons for the ill-treatment of Indians in Canada with great particularity. However, his writing is heavily tainted by two factors which detract from the strength of his work. His concept of the interpretation of history is suspect. He states:

A historian worth his name must be on the side of the enslaved, the oppressed or the downtrodden. He must never be neutral. He must condemn the enslaver and the oppressor and stand up for the enslaved and the oppressed.<sup>7</sup>

This conceptual approach hinders an objective assessment of a given historical event. It is tantamount to an interpretation of history with predetermined judgmental



values. He further states:

Only the adoption of Marxian methodology can pave the way for writing scientific and inspiring history books on Indian peoples struggle for the liberation of their country, because without that methodology, the role of the masses, the real makers of history and classes, does not stand out clear and sharp.<sup>8</sup>

He does not fully explain the Marxian methodology. In any event, this approach is restrictive and selective. It is biased in favor of the masses even before a comprehensive analysis of historical events can commence. Many readers, including devoutly committed nationalists, may find certain parts of his work offensive and difficult to take seriously. Some parts of his work are patently vindictive, vitriolic and speculative in concept and subject matter. Nonetheless, this shortcoming should not be taken to mean that his work is not largely sound, comprehensive and revealing. The depth and scope of this work are indeed, impressive.

Tilak Raj Sareen's work, Indian Revolutionary Movement Abroad, 1905-1921, is a general work of Indian revolutionary movements, dealing with but not confined exclusively to Ghadar. Sareen provides the reader with a comparative analysis of the experiences of the Indian immigrant groups spread out in various British overseas possessions. He traces the formation of the Indian National Congress Party in 1885 which was committed to self-rule through non-violent, gradualistic and constitutional means. They were opposed by the extremist nationalists who believed in political agitation, boycotts and external support for the

achievement of their objectives. Sareen analyses in depth the relationship between the Indian nationalists and the revolutionaries on the one hand, and the Russian anarchists, the German nationalists and the Irish Sinn Finners, on the other. The Indian revolutionary movement in Canada and the United States enjoyed the support of a substantial part of the Irish populace in the United States. The editor of the Gaelic American, George Freeman, declared: "India's cause is also Ireland's cause, they must march along the same road, and on the same lines in ultimate victory."<sup>9</sup> Myron Phelps, a New York lawyer, formed very strong links with the Indian revolutionaries. He was the moving force behind the formation, in September 1907, of the Indo-American Association. Many American university professors wholeheartedly supported Ghadar's objectives if not its methodology. Sareen also gives a good account of the aims, objectives, organization, strategy, operational principles and external relationships of Ghadar.

Continuous Journey: A Social History of South Asians in Canada, by Norman Buchignani and Doreen M. Indra, is yet another well researched work. It discusses the activities of Ghadar in Canada in particular and shows how "...South Asians bore the full brunt of racial ideologies, social isolation, economic subordination and political disenfranchisement"<sup>10</sup> in Canada during the first decades of settlement. This work is also an excellent overview of the history of South Asians in Canada and covers the period from the early 1900s to the 1970s.

Arun Coomer Bose's work Indian Revolutionaries Abroad, 1905-1922: In the Background of International Developments, follows the work of Sareen. He studied

with Ghadar records in London, Berlin and Delhi to place Ghadar within the broad framework of international politics. Other works on Ghadar worthwhile mentioning include, Ghadar Heroes: A Forgotten Story of the Punjab Revolutionaries, 1914-1915 by Randhir Singh. This work is based on the author's interviews with a few Ghadar leaders and records the role of Sohan Singh Bakana, an illustrious Ghadar personality. Gurdev Singh Deol's work The Role of the Ghadar Party in the National Movement breaks no new ground. L.P. Mathur's book, Indian Freedom Movements: Revolutionaries in America, relies almost exclusively on government documents. The same can be said about Ghadar Revolution in America by A.B. Ganguly. Har Dayal: Hindu Revolutionary and Rationalist, by Emily C. Brown is a well known biography of Har Dayal. R.C. Majumdar's History of India's Independence Struggle attaches considerable importance to Ghadar as an important chapter in India's struggle for independence.

There are numerous other works on Ghadar in Gurmukhi, Urdu and Hindi, many of which have not yet been translated into English. Some are autobiographical like Sant Attar Singh's Jiwan Katha (Sant Attar Singh's Life Story) by Teja Singh. Baba Sohan Singh Bakana's Memoirs were written in the Central Jail in Lahore and smuggled out for publication. Other works are anecdotal and are based on interviews with Ghadarites or their associates. Ghadar Lahir (The Ghadar Wave) by Jagjit Singh Tamtarani was published in 1955. It contains scholarly analysis of Ghadar. Ghadar Parti Daa Itihas (History of the Ghadar Party) by G.S. Sainsara, is an example of work based on interviews. The latter compilation under

the aegis of the Desh Bhagat Yadgar Committee, Jallundar, is faulted as being somewhat speculative, written long after the fact and over-emphasizing the role of Ghadar as a political force in the politics of the Punjab. Many works, including those cited above, deal with Ghadar literature and poetry. Powerful, moving and full of imagery, the best known Ghadar poetry is contained in Ghadar-di-Goonj (Echo of Ghadar). It is recited on commemorative occasions in song and drama to this day at public functions, inside and outside of Gurudwaras.

'Mark Juergensmeyer has given an excellent account of Ghadar source material.<sup>11</sup> He points out that few party records remain, except for some used as evidence in the San Francisco Trials. Ghadar publications reflect Ghadar ideology and propaganda, churned out by the Ghadar press at Yuganthar Ashram in San Francisco, in the form of newspapers, posters, pamphlets, articles by its leaders and poetry in English, Hindi, Urdu and Gurmukhi. These publications were designed to arouse sympathy of the American people for Ghadar by drawing parallels between India's struggle for independence from the British and the American Revolution, which won independence for the United States after a prolonged struggle against Britain. Ghadar publications targeted the wider Indian community scattered throughout the world. Such propaganda material was smuggled into India and is preserved in government files in New Delhi and London.

There are valuable interview's with the Ghadarites or close members of their families. These were recorded years after the occurrence of events. They are personal interpretations of the events. Juergensmeyer suggests that many of them

are colored accounts emanating from a clouded memory and prejudiced by distortions of time.<sup>12</sup> Gurdev Singh Deol in the Punjab and Professor Herald Jackoby of the University of the Pacific in Stockton, California, have used such interviews to good effect. They are also available at Desh Bhagat Yadgar, Jallundar, Punjab, India and in the Ghadar Collection held at University of California at Berkeley.

There are some informative British, Canadian and American government records which are interesting. They reflect the British spin on Ghadar as viewed through the prism of the colonial power. There is no doubt that the British Government assessed Ghadar as a dangerous revolutionary threat to the Raj operating away from its immediate sphere of control. Two British investigators, F.C. Isemonger and J. Slattery filed a report on Ghadar known as the Isemonger and Slattery Report. It contained evidence gathered against the Ghadar defendants in the Lahore Conspiracy Trials of 1915; and of Ghadarite activities to incite rebellion in the British India Army. Likewise, the Sedition Committee Report of 1918 and the Government Order listing material banned from entering India are indicative of the British Government state of mind on Ghadar.

Ghadar succeeded in 1915 in engineering a mutiny in some of the Punjabi regiments of the British India Army stationed in Singapore. This was crushed. Its records provide an insight into Ghadar activities aimed at undermining the loyalty of the Sikh soldiers. Juergensmeyer states that "although Ghadar chapters were active outside of India and North America, virtually no research has explored this

dimension of nationalist adventure."<sup>13</sup> Hardly any historian, with the possible exception of Puri, has as yet tapped the German archives, nor the records of the British Foreign Office. Some historians have suggested that the complete record and evidentiary material of the San Francisco Trials needs an in-depth legal and historical scrutiny.

After a brief review of authorities on Ghadar, it can be concluded that ample room exists for further research on Ghadar in Canada: its origins, activities, consequences and its impact on official Canadian policies, practices and administrative procedures.

1. Juergensmeyer, "Ghadar Sources," p. 316.
2. Harish Puri, Ghadar Movement: Ideology, Organization and Strategy (Amritsar: Guru Nanak Dev University Press, 1993), preface.
3. Sohan Singh Josh, Hindustan Ghadar Party: A Short History, Volume 1 (New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1976), p.1-2.
4. Juergensmeyer, "Ghadar Sources," p. 303.
5. Puri, Ghadar Movement, p.5.
6. Singh and Singh, Ghadar 1915, p. 56.
7. Josh, Hindustan Ghadar Party, p. 3.
8. Ibid, p. 6.
9. Tilak Raj Sareen, Indian Revolutionary Movements Abroad, 1905-1921 (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers Ltd., 1979), p. 54.
10. Norman Buchignani and Doreen M. Indra, Continuous Journey: A Social History of South Asians in Canada (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1985), p. 67.
11. Juergensmeyer, "Ghadar Sources," p. 302-321.
12. Ibid., p. 304.
13. Ibid., p. 310.

## **Chapter Three**

### **The Search For a New Life in Canada**

**Harassed in our own land and with no support available abroad, we aliens have no land that we can call our own.<sup>1</sup>**

The above quotation is indicative of the frustration of the Indians in their homeland. The same feeling persisted after their arrival and settlement in Canada as immigrants. The frustration, helplessness, homelessness and loneliness added to their difficulties of adaptation to their new cultural, climatic and work environment. In order to understand the situation of the Indian immigrants in Canada, it is pertinent to ask why the Punjabi immigrants left there in the first place. This seemingly simple question has a very complex answer, involving political and economic reasons. Natural disasters and epidemics played their role as well. The ex-British army soldiers who had been exposed to foreign lands during their service abroad, found life in India unpalatable. They were eager to emigrate to the greener pastures of North America.

The bloody aftermath of the Mutiny of 1857 exposed the severity of British response and confirmed the British intention of ruling India with an iron hand. Freedom of speech, assembly, religion and movement fell under tight controls. Any element in the populace advocating independence from the Raj would be mercilessly suppressed. Freedom fighters or potential freedom fighters were thus driven underground. At the same time, in 1885, the Indian National Congress was founded to redress the grievances of the Indians by peaceful, democratic and



constitutional means. It was dominated by British educated middle class Indians. Their gradualistic approach was time consuming, ineffective and unsatisfactory. This situation "...further intensified disaffection, strengthened patriotic impulses and bred a spirit of revolt."<sup>2</sup> The British attitude towards their Indian subjects was arrogant, unsympathetic and exploitative. The British policies for administering India were unresponsive to their subjects' manifold and pressing needs. Representative institutions were not developed. Employment opportunities to higher levels of administration were not open to the Indians. The economic policies were designed to drain wealth out of India. Freedom of expression was suppressed by rigorous laws. Any violations were attended by the harshest of penalties. Religious differences were manipulated to spread intra-communal and intra-religious conflicts. Thus, the "divide and rule" strategy became "the openly declared policy of the Raj to keep India in perpetual bondage."<sup>3</sup>

When Punjab was annexed by the British in 1849, capitalism had already become the basis of the British economy. Punjab was productive and prosperous and its people hardworking and resourceful. Thus, British colonization of the area was quick and complete to bring it into the imperial market economy. The policy of accelerated but selective agricultural development was designed to raise productivity, primarily for export to Britain. This policy was used as a tool to control and exploit the small and middle level peasantry.

The British introduced new land settlement schemes, modified the existing systems of land holding and introduced new laws on taxation and the collection of

land revenue.<sup>4</sup> The judicial system for the administration of law and order was heavily weighted in favor of the colonial power and its agents and collaborators. Tax collection laws were unfair and unpopular but were nevertheless enforced harshly, whether the crop was good or bad in a particular year. There was no tax relief during periods of scarcity and famine. Fauja Singh states that such relief was regarded as weakening "the moral fibre of the cultivator."<sup>5</sup>

According to Khushwant Singh, the value of land in the Punjab rose from Rupees 10 per acre in 1870 to Rupees 100 per acre by the end of the century.<sup>6</sup> This rise in the price of land increased the credit worthiness of the peasant proprietor, thus facilitating ever rising levels of borrowing from the money lender, called the *bania*. The taxes imposed by the British were exorbitant and the amounts due were collected without let or hindrance. The land owner was forced to borrow money to pay the taxes. The indebtedness of the peasants rose to such high levels so quickly that they could not repay the loans. The end result was the forfeiture of their lands to the moneylender and large scale dispossession of the peasantry. The districts in and around Jallundar, Hoshiarpur, Amritsar, Lahore, Ludhiana and Ferozepur were badly hit. According to Fauja Singh, between 1870 and 1871, 1.2 million acres of land passed into the hands of the moneylenders for default of mortgage payments.<sup>7</sup> By 1891, the figure had jumped to 4 million acres. The Financial Commissioner of the Punjab noted that "...over large areas the peasantry was already ruined beyond redemption."<sup>8</sup>

Once the peasants had been evicted from their own lands, they became

agricultural laborers and tenants at will. Between 1872 to 1903, such laborers increased by 360 per cent.<sup>9</sup> The moneylender, or *bania*, was notorious for cheating the illiterate peasants. No matter how many and how high interest and principal payments were made to the *bania*, the indebtedness of the peasant on record kept on increasing progressively over and above the amount borrowed.<sup>10</sup> The *bania* manipulated accounts at will; he could not be called to accountability under the law because the peasant had neither the guidance nor the resources to fight his case. In addition, the *bania* enjoyed a high degree of protection, both legal and political. This situation moved Denzil Ibbertson, Lieutenant Governor of the Punjab to state that the rules and regulations had become "...a new engine of oppression" and the civil courts "stink in the nostrils of the peasantry."<sup>11</sup>

Large scale corruption at every level of the British administration in the rural areas deepened the oppression of the masses. The British did not favor the continuation of the existing indigenous industries or the promotion of new ones in the Punjab. The British policies made sure that local products faced fierce competition from goods manufactured in England and shipped out to India. This affected the textile, food and village industries the most. The artisans thus affected joined the exodus to the rural areas, adding to the mass of the landless, jobless and disaffected peasantry.

The British implemented unpopular legislation which aroused extensive unrest and protest in the Punjab. Such legislation, *inter alia*, included the Punjab Alienation Land Act of 1901 and the Colonization Bill of 1906. Taxation was

imposed on the allocation and use of water from the river canals for agricultural purposes. Protest against these measures was well organized, strident and spearheaded by some well known militants. Ajit Singh, the uncle of Punjab's legendary hero and freedom fighter Bhagat Singh, and Lala Lajput Rai, a political agitator, caused much discomfiture to the British by leading the protest. They urged people not to pay taxes, not to allow their grain to be exported, not to use government services and not to buy British produced goods. They demanded self-government, preached self-reliance and counseled boycott of everything British. Massive political propaganda was also targeted at the Sikh elements of the British Indian Army stationed in India. The British authorities panicked at this situation and had fears of the repetition of the Mutiny of 1857.<sup>12</sup> Ajit Singh and Lajput Rai were deported, but the unrest continued.

Natural disasters occurred with regularity in Punjab as in other parts of India. They spread desolation, starvation, death and destruction. During such times, food became scarce and prices rose sharply. However, the Government did not intervene to give relief to the people. Instead, whatever little food was available, was exported, even during the famine years, 1896 to 1900.<sup>13</sup> As if famines were not enough, between 1905 and 1907, serious droughts occurred which unleashed epidemics of malaria and plague. The Census Report of India of 1911 indicated that between the years 1901-1911, these epidemics killed 2 million people in the Punjab. It represented a net reduction of 2.2 per cent of the entire population of the Punjab.<sup>14</sup>

There was nothing in sight to alleviate the sufferings of the subjugated populace. Protest, anger, frustration and unrest increased the anxiety of the British Government. The happenings in Punjab and in the rest of India coincided with Japan's scoring a stunning victory over Russia in 1905. This event unleashed a spirit of militancy in India which developed a life of its own. Sareen asserts that the "success of Japan against Russia had demonstrated that an Asian nation could by organization and training, defeat one of the mightiest nations of Europe."<sup>15</sup> This new spirit was also fed by the powerful preaching of aggressive reformers like Swami Dayananda, Swami Vivekananda, the Rama Krishna Mission, the Arya Samaj, the Theosophical Society and the Servants of India Society. By their teachings, the Indians "...became conscious of their political rights and felt pride in their ancient heritage."<sup>16</sup> Bose articulates the same sentiments when he states: "This growing self confidence and pride as a nation became a messianic message of manliness, unity, service and sacrifice..."<sup>17</sup>

In order to meet the mounting wave of protest, the British Government took two decisive steps. First, the Raj passed further repressive laws to strengthen its imperial stranglehold over the rapidly growing ranks of the disaffected, the dispossessed and the disenfranchised. Examples of such repressive laws were the Prevention of Seditious Meetings Act, Explosive Substances Act, Newspapers (Incitement to Offences) Act, India Press Act and the Indian Criminal Law Amendment Act. Second, the British were terrified that if the Sikh regiments revolted, then British control over India would be damaged beyond repair.

Maintaining Sikh loyalty for the Raj became an article of faith in the British policy in India. Thus, intentional efforts were made to strengthen Sikh orthodoxy amongst the Sikh soldiers, with the blessing and cooperation of Sikh religious institutions like the Khalsa Diwan Society. This orthodoxy was equated to loyalty and the martial instincts of the Sikhs. "Any falling off from orthodoxy detracted from the fighting force of the Sikh soldiers."<sup>18</sup> Wearing all the symbols of Sikhism became a qualification of a Sikh for recruitment into the British India Army. Special facilities for the observance of Sikh prayers, rites and traditions were provided for them. Attendance at both morning and evening prayers was compulsory for the Sikh soldiers. The end result was that by the end of 1907, 20 per cent of all Indian troops were drawn from the Punjab and the Sikhs constituted 24 per cent of the total strength of the Indian Army.<sup>19</sup> Thus, the Sikhs were regarded as staunch loyalists of the Raj.

Quite apart from the landless peasants who emigrated overseas, the revolutionary elements, being the target of repressive legislation, were driven underground. Later they escaped to foreign countries to carry out their anti-British activities more openly. Thus, anti-British centers were established in London, Paris, Berlin, New York and Tokyo, by leaders like Shayamji Krishna Verma, Savarkar, Har Dayal and Baraktuallah.<sup>20</sup> These men were middle class British educated revolutionaries. Amongst their ranks were some Indian students who had gone overseas to pursue higher education in the United States. Bose asserts that since the Indians were exposed to democracy at work, respect for law and order and

observance of constitutionally guaranteed rights and freedoms of an individual, they naturally questioned their enslavement in India under the Raj."The efforts of the Indian revolutionaries to promote the cause of Indian independence from abroad occupies a unique place in the history of India's struggle for freedom".<sup>21</sup>

Amongst the most highly congested areas of the Punjab were Jallundar, Hoshiarpur, Lahore and Ludhiana. The Punjabis living in these areas had heard of employment opportunities abroad. Some of their relatives had already established themselves abroad. They had settled in such places as Malaya, Hong Kong, Thailand, Sumatra, Shanghai and Manila. Australia, East and Central Africa and the Caribbean were also attracting cheap immigrant labor under the indentured labor system. A large number of Punjabis were posted in the Far East with the British India Army. Upon retiring from the Army, they stayed behind in the Far East instead of returning to India. They began working as policemen, caretakers, watchmen, moneylenders and other mid-level service jobs. They also opened up small scale, self-owned businesses as shop keepers, mechanics, importers and exporters. These overseas Indians were better educated, more resilient, disciplined and exposed to other cultures by virtue of their service abroad in the British India Army.

These Punjabis in the Far East influenced their families to join them. They also advised them of the exciting possibilities that were opening up in North America. By 1904, Chinese steerage traffic had almost ceased after the Canadian Government raised the head tax on each Chinese immigrant to five hundred dollars (\$500). There was the urgent need to replace the Chinese workers. Hong Kong

agents of the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) preferred to recruit Punjabis for jobs in Canada. Settled in the Far East, these Sikhs were ever ready to immigrate to Canada. They had heard tales of a better life and golden opportunities for enrichment in Canada. They were tough, seasoned, disciplined, traveled and adaptable. They were loyal, hardworking and dependable. Those who returned home to India after retirement "missed the thrill and excitement of foreign lands and longed to seek new pastures. Their 'wanderlust' became an added inducement to emigration from India as economic difficulties at home forced them to look for alternatives."<sup>22</sup> The few Indians who had already settled in British Columbia sent out similar messages to their families in India.

Prospective immigrants sold their lands to cover the costs of their travel abroad; others borrowed money at high rates of interest; and yet others pledged family heirlooms like jewelry for this purpose. Rajani Kanta Das, author of Hindustani Workers on the Pacific Coast, confirms that the "economic prospects were so bright that some of them even sold their property and mortgaged their homesteads in order to raise money necessary for the passage."<sup>23</sup> The Punjabis who had made up their minds to emigrate were determined to leave India in search of a new life abroad, regardless of the consequences or the difficulties that they would encounter. Their attitude was expressed by the Punjabi phrase *vekhi jaau* (meaning "damn the consequences"). Puri characterizes this as the "devil may care" attitude.<sup>24</sup>

Oppression, poverty, unemployment, famines and epidemics drove countless



Punjabis to emigrate all over the world, including Canada. Stripped of the colonial aspects of the British rule, the condition of the Punjabis was similar to that of the Southern Italians, who emigrated to North America around the same time for practically the same reasons.<sup>25</sup> The Indians left their homeland out of desperation amidst visions of making money and settling abroad. Once their relocation to the new world had been completed, they were confronted by an inhospitable environment; discrimination in employment, housing, education and social services; extremes of climate, communication problems and struggle to adjust to their country of adoption. What the Indian immigrants believed to be an easy move to success and happiness, turned out to be a troublesome and lengthy transition. Sadly, both the British in India and the Canadian hosts, viewed the Indian immigrant through stereotypical and myopic eyes. J. Barclay Williams, a commentator for Canadian Magazine wrote in 1907 that: "It is a daily sight to see them wandering here, there and everywhere, half starved, half naked, boarding in wretched hovels, ordered here, excluded there and despised everywhere."<sup>26</sup>

1. Ghadar-di-Goonj (San Francisco: Ghadar Party Press, 1918), p. 1-2. This collection is a series of pamphlets containing revolutionary poetry and verse describing India's distressed conditions and the immediate need for freedom. This publication was circulated throughout North America and in other parts of the world where Indians resided. A second edition was published in 1931.

2. Sareen, Indian Revolutionary Movements, p. xiii.

3. Ibid., p. xii.

4. Fauja Singh, "The Effects of Land Transfer on Rural Economies During the Later Half of the Nineteenth Century," Punjab History Conference Proceedings (Patiala: Punjab University, 1979), p. 258.

5. Ibid.

6. Khushwant Singh, A History of the Sikhs. (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 151.

7. Fauja Singh, "The Effects of Land Transfer," p. 258.

8. C.J. O'Donnell, The Causes of Present Discontent in India (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1908), p. 94.

9. Sukhwant Singh, Agricultural Development in the Punjab, 1849-1946 Unpublished M.A. Dissertation. (Amritsar: G.N.D. University, 1979), p. 174.

10. Selections from a Note by Denzil Ibbertson in Norman Barrier, The Punjab Alienation of Land Bill 1900 (Duke University Press: Monograph No. 2, 1966), p.108.

11. Ibid.

12. Puri, Ghadar Movement, p. 19.

13. Inderjit Sharma, Punjab Famines and the British Policy in the Nineteenth Century, Punjab History Conference (Patiala: Punjab University, 1980), p. 180-185.

14. Puri, Ghadar Movement, p. 16.

15. Sareen, Indian Revolutionary Movements, p. xiv.

16. Ibid., p. xv.

17. Arun Coomer Bose, Indian Revolutionaries Abroad, 1905-1922: In the Background of International Developments (Patna: Bharati Bhawan, 1971), p. 21.
18. D. Petrie, Developments in Sikh Politics, 1901-1911 (Amritsar: Khalsa Diwan Society, n.d.), p. 11.
19. Norman Barrier, The Punjab Alienation, p. 60-61.
20. Bose, Indian Revolutionaries Abroad, p. xviii.
21. Ibid.
22. Puri, Ghadar Movement, p. 22.
23. Rajani Kanta Das, Hindustani Workers on the Pacific Coast (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1923), p. 7.
24. Puri, Ghadar Movement, p. 22.
25. Robert F. Harney, "The Commerce of Migration," in Pierre Anctil and Bruno Ramirez (eds) If One Were To Write A History: Selected Writings by Robert F. Harney (Toronto: Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 1977), p. 19-36.
26. J. Barclay Williams and Sant Nihal Singh, "Canada's New Immigrant," Canadian Magazine, March 1907, p. 385.

## Chapter Four

### White Canada Forever: Immigrant Restriction and Oppression

Then let us stand united all,  
And show our father's might,  
That won the home we call our own,  
For white man's land we fight.  
To Oriental grasp and greed,  
We'll surrender, no, never.  
Our watchword be "God save the King."  
White Canada for ever.<sup>1</sup>

The first documented Indians landed in Canada around 1900.<sup>2</sup> They came as sojourners without their wives and children. They intended to eventually return to India with money earned in Canada, to redeem their lost lands or to buy new ones. Between 1900 and 1904, Chinese labor in Canada was no longer readily available because of the imposition of the Chinese Head Tax.<sup>3</sup> In 1904, 258 "Hindus" were listed in the Census Report of British Columbia and by 1906 over 1500 Punjabi laborers worked in or near Vancouver.<sup>4</sup> The Report of the Royal Commission Appointed to Inquire into the Methods by Which Oriental Laborers Have Been Induced to Come to Canada of 1908, by William Lyon Mackenzie King, Minister of Labor (hereafter referred to as the Mackenzie King Report), found that in 1908 there were 5179 Indian immigrants in Canada (see Table 1).<sup>5</sup> These immigrants replaced the Chinese at a time when Canada was suffering from an economic slump during which even white Canadian workers lost their jobs. Many of the Indians who found employment were engaged in lumbering, railroad construction, land clearance and development, repair and maintenance, canneries,

**Table 1 - Indian Immigration into Canada, 1905-1908**

<b>YEAR</b>	<b>NUMBER</b>
1905	45
1906	387
1907	2124
1908	2623
<b>TOTAL:</b>	<b>5179</b>

Source: Mackenzie King Report, 1908, p.75.

building trades, dairy farming, fruit picking and general farming, They were favored because their demands were few. They worked long hours at low wages. They were not unionized. They displayed an enormous capacity to face hardship whether caused by climate or imposed by the lack of amenities, like running water, electricity or the absence of facilities like proper shelter or transportation. They lived in abandoned factories, condemned buildings, open farm lands and in congested tenements hardly fit for habitation:

Horde of freezing immigrants take possession of a wretched tenement condemned by health authorities. It was a combination of Libby Prison and the Black Hole of Calcutta, with a little touch of Dante's Inferno, and a free fight thrown in.<sup>6</sup>

Thus, they withstood any calamity hurled their way.

The Mackenzie King Report gave three main reasons for the increase in Indian immigration to British Columbia: exaggerated advertisements in India of the prospects offered in Canada; the aggressive recruitment by steamship companies as agents for the major Canadian and American employers (i.e. the CPR); and the successful efforts of Indians already settled in British Columbia to sponsor and bring into Canada their kinsmen and friends.<sup>7</sup> Between 1905-1908, many of the 5000 Indians who came to Canada, crossed over to the United States: seventy-five per cent (75%) of the Indians were Sikhs, with fifty per cent (50%) being retired British India Army officers.<sup>8</sup> Most of the CPR employees settled in and around Vancouver, including New Westminster, Fraser Mills, Duncan, Coombs and Ocean Falls.<sup>9</sup> Their first settlement was at Port Moody which eventually became known as

the East Indian Center. British Columbia provided an excellent area in which to settle. Its climate was mild, soil fertile and resources rich and varied. Fishing, lumbering and mining were the main industries offering excellent employment opportunities for the Indians. Friends, relatives or kinsmen of the Indians in Canada also lived in various parts of the United States, including California, Oregon, Washington and Nevada.<sup>10</sup> Some form of rudimentary communication was established between the two camps. Most of the Sikhs were well looked after by their sponsoring friends and by the Gurudwaras particularly in Vancouver and Victoria. They were provided with modest, temporary living accommodation and *langar* (communal food) in the open kitchen of the Gurudwaras. William Hopkinson, the Canadian Government agent, spy and an anti-Indian baiter, was an Anglo-Indian, born of a Sikh mother and an English father. He was born in Delhi in 1880 and grew up in Northern India. He had lived in the Punjab and spoke acceptable Hindi, Urdu and Punjabi. In 1903, he became an inspector in the Calcutta Police Force. In 1908, he moved to Vancouver where he was hired by the Canadian Government as an Immigration Inspector and Interpreter. He continued to work for the Indian Police as well. Even he admitted that the Sikhs were "generally well provided with funds," and that there "was not one Hindu...who ever became a public charge."<sup>11</sup>

The influx of Indians could not have occurred at a more inopportune time, or into a province more hostile to immigrants than British Columbia. This delicate situation was exacerbated by the growing rumors that 700 Sikhs were fleeing the

State of Washington following race riots there and were headed north for permanent settlement in British Columbia.<sup>12</sup> This coincided with the eruption of anti-oriental sentiments against the Chinese and the Japanese. The Province was in the throes of an economic recession, causing widespread unemployment and social degradation. Coming one right after the other in quick succession, these events only reinforced the fears of an Indian avalanche hitting Canada - the tide of the turbans!

The major cause of white hostility and prejudice towards Indian labor was the belief that cheap labor was being imported from India to weaken the bargaining power of the trade union movement in British Columbia. The Indian laborers worked longer, on low wages, without complaints and were very productive, loyal and non-unionized. They had also settled down well in hostile environment in jobs that white laborers did not wish to perform. The white unionists feared that this situation would bring down the wages of white laborers, lower their standards of living and create labor unrest, which would become uncontrollable particularly in recessionary times.<sup>13</sup> White workers resented the successes of the Sikhs, whose lives became organized around the Gurudwaras. They met there to worship; to discuss their problems; to exchange gossip and to gather information on availability of employment opportunities.

At first, the Indians in British Columbia worked in lumber mills, logging camps and on the railroads. They were also assigned the lowest menial jobs in factories and workshops. Their wages ranged from \$1 to \$1.25 a day, which was twenty-five



per cent less than the rates received by the white workers.<sup>14</sup> Later, some of them gradually discovered other openings in real estate, milling, farming and independent businesses as owners and not as workers. Mills owned by Indians themselves were located in Duncan, Ladysmith, Coombs and Vancouver. The mills in the United States and in British Columbia became the "training ground for many Hindustanees. They learned their work so thoroughly that in a few years some of them became very efficient in the lumber industry and earned recognition as such."<sup>15</sup> Indian-owned lumber mills were Tansor Lumber Company and the Mayo Lumber Company at Duncan; The Eastern Lumber Company at Ladysmith; The Virginia Lumber Company at Coombs and the Bharat Lumber Company at Vancouver.<sup>16</sup> They set up other enterprises as well like the Bombay Trading Company in 1910 with a capital of \$25,000; The Guru Nanak Banking and Trust Company in 1908 with \$50,000 in capital and the Guru Nanak Mining Company in 1909.<sup>17</sup> Other businesses started by the Indians were logging camps, a couple of grocery stores, firewood camps, several farms and lumber companies. The owners were working shareholders in the companies and they employed workers from all backgrounds - Chinese, Japanese, Eastern Europeans and Indians.<sup>18</sup>

The racial prejudice against the Sikhs had economic aspects but it was also rooted in their unusual appearance, resulting from their religious tradition of wearing turbans, keeping full beards and unshorn hair.<sup>19</sup> The media joined in the frenzy of racial attacks against the "Hindus". They were maligned in song and doggerel in highly inflammatory and insulting language. Newspaper headlines like

**"Hindus cover dead bodies with butter" and "Sikhs sever the heads with swords," exacerbated matters<sup>20</sup>**

The labor leaders and the media were joined by the politicians. Henry Hubert Stevens, MP for Vancouver was the most rabidly anti-Indian politician in British Columbia. He made the often quoted outrageous declaration that "the Hindus never did one solitary thing for humanity in the past 2000 years and will not probably do the next 2000 years."<sup>21</sup> As if the strident and concerted attacks against the Indians by the unions, the media and the politicians were not enough, the Governments of British Columbia and Canada joined in the fray. Their joint sentiments were well articulated by Mackenzie King when he stated:

That Canada should desire to restrict immigration from the Orient is regarded as natural, that Canada should remain a white man's country is believed to be not only desirable for economic and social reasons, but highly necessary on political and national grounds.<sup>22</sup>

Fearing the dreaded invasion of the yellow and the brown immigrants, from across the Pacific, one commentator neatly summed up the situation as follows:

British Columbia is one of the last frontiers of the white race against the yellow and the brown. It is a land where a hoary civilization meets a modern one, and where the swarming millions of ancient peoples, stung into restless life by modern events, are constantly impinging on an attractive land held by sparse thousands of whites. And here, the alarmed British Columbian, clamorous for Asiatic exclusion, feels that he is taking the long view...British Columbia is a community of half a million souls which stands in the sea gate of the northwest Pacific, and holds it for Saxon civilization.<sup>23</sup>

While the Indian immigrants confronted powerful and numerous detractors, they hardly had any friends or defenders. A lively public debate ensued during which the Sikhs attempted to answer the allegations made against the Indians settled in Canada.<sup>24</sup> Their main spokesman was Teja Singh, a respected priest, a spell-binding orator and an exceptional Punjabi poet. It was claimed that the Indians could not settle in Canada because of the severity of the climate. Actually, the severity of the climate was of little concern to the Punjabis as they were used to the coldest and hottest climates of the Punjab. Many of the Sikhs were ex-military personnel who had served in the British India Army in countries with extreme climatic conditions. With nutritious food, warm clothes and positive attitude, of which there was no lack, they could withstand any climatic conditions. The opponents of Indian immigration asserted that the Indians were unable to secure employment in recessionary times because they lacked the necessary skills. Their further immigration would intensify unemployment and create unbearable pressure on public services and facilities. This was an untenable position because banned from skilled jobs, they moved to and dominated the labor market which required muscle power, forbearance and determination in occupations like lumbering, logging, saw milling and other types of manual labor. In these fields the competition from the white workers was insignificant, as the latter shunned these jobs because wages were little, hours were long, work strenuous and union backing uncertain.

The employers preferred Sikh workers because they were loyal, hardworking, reliable and cheap to employ. The Hindu baiters asserted that the

presence of Indians created race friction and its attendant complications, which would grow out of hand. They were of the "turban class" and their strange appearance and peculiar habits and customs precluded them from becoming an integral part of the Canadian society at large. This criticism, was applicable with equal force and effect, to the Chinese and the Japanese immigrants, whose numbers were much greater. They were also allowed to bring their families while the Indians were banned from so doing. The Canadians condemned the traditional appearance of the Sikhs. The British, on the other hand, promoted Sikh orthodoxy in their turbaned and bearded appearance..

It was alleged the Indians were dirty, lousy and riddled with diseases. Ironically enough, these allegations were countered by white officials who were not supporters of the Sikhs. Henry H. Gladstone, a nephew of the ex-Prime Minister of Britain in an article in the Pacific Monthly, dated March 1907, stated that "...the Sikhs are scrupulously clean and I regard them as a very fine race of men."<sup>25</sup> Dr. H.S. Lawson, surgeon to the CPR steamships *Monteagle* and *Tartar* wrote:

It was my duty to make a thorough physical examination of each immigrant at Hong Kong and although at first I was strongly prejudice against them, I lost this prejudice after thousands of them had passed through my hands and I had compared them with white steerage passengers I had seen on the Atlantic. I refer in particular to the Sikhs and I am not exaggerating in the least when I say that they are one hundred percent cleaner in their habits and free from disease that the European steerage passengers I had come in contact with. The Sikhs impressed me as clean, manly, honest race. My more recent impression as a surgeon in mining camps among thousands of white men, where

immorality is rife, has increased my respect for the  
Sikhs.<sup>26</sup>

The Indians were accused of being charges on the public funds of Canada and British Columbia. This allegation too was totally unfounded. Even during seasonal unemployment, the Sikhs lived on their savings or by courtesy of their co-religionists at the Gurudwaras.<sup>27</sup> No other religious groups had such facilities just for the asking. Furthermore, the Canadian Government did not permit the wives and children of immigrants to join them in Canada because that was one way to keep the immigrant population from growing. The Indian immigrants were accused of corrupting the morals of the whites. However, since they did not have their wives with them, it was a reasonable assumption that some of them would consort with white women, mostly prostitutes. The patrons of prostitutes did not have to be Indian to spread disease.

It was alleged that the Indians in India had no rights; therefore the Indian immigrants should not be given any protection under the laws of Canada. This reasoning was as spurious as it was inaccurate. British constitutional law granted every British subject settled in any part of the British Empire equal rights under the law - to life, limb and property with due process of law. However, despite the fact that the Indians were British subjects, Canadian officials turned a blind eye to their constitutional rights and denied them landing. Under a legal twist, freedom to travel or reside in any part of the Empire was relegated to each Dominion. This was interpreted to mean that the Canadian Government had the legal right to allow the

Indian British subjects to land in Canada or to ban their entry. When the Sikhs pleaded that they had been loyal British subjects and had protected the British Crown in many wars, they were bluntly told that loyalty, by and of itself, was not a requirement for admission to Canada.<sup>28</sup>

The well orchestrated and ever increasing pressure from the trade unions, the media and the politicians, forced the Canadian and British Columbia Governments to act on a number of fronts, in order to satisfy their demands. Coordinated policies to contain Indian labor within Canada or to exclude prospective immigrants from entering Canada was worked out by the Governments in Victoria, Ottawa, London and New Delhi. It is recalled that the Mackenzie King Report, under a wide mandate, linked immigration control to labor problems. Attempts were made to relocate immigrants to places outside of Canada, like Fiji, Panama, Cuba and British Honduras. Legislation designed to halt the flow of Indian immigrants to Canada was being formulated.

Steps were also taken to stem the flow of Indian immigrants at its source. In 1908, Mackenzie King, went to London to hold meetings with Lord Eigin (British Secretary of State for the Colonies), John Morley (British Secretary of State for India) and Edwin Grey (British Foreign Secretary). Mackenzie King then held meetings with the representatives of the Raj in India. This visit led to the Government of India issuing a warning to prospective immigrants in the Punjab, that Canada no longer offered any employment opportunities. The shipping companies were ordered to stop offering travel facilities to the Punjabis. They were also

ordered to cease and desist from advertising about the availability of employment opportunities in Canada.<sup>29</sup>

Singh and Singh point out that the provisions of the India Emigration Act (XXI of 1883) were invoked.<sup>30</sup> This Act allowed Indians to emigrate only to those designated countries which had passed legislation to protect the interests of emigrants. Canada was not so listed because it had not enacted any immigrant protective legislation. As Canada was unwilling to host Indian immigrants, this Act was used to stop emigration of Indians from India to Canada. However, the Act did not apply to the Indians resident outside of India. They were free to proceed to Canada from overseas territories without being hindered by this particular Act. Their situation presented a challenge to the Canadian and British Governments. The Indians living in the Far East were British subjects. Their exclusion from a British Dominion, like Canada, would create complex legal and political problems.

These problems were now addressed by the concerned Governments in a concerted manner.<sup>31</sup> Agreement was reached on the following basic points. First, the British Columbian Government was entitled to exclude prospective Indian immigrants and to expel those already domiciled in the Province, if it wished to do so. Second, appropriate legislation would be drafted and promulgated in such a way that it would not reflect the appearance of any discrimination against the Indians. Third, the Government of Canada would pass complementary legislation by Orders-in-Council to reflect the terms of this understanding. Fourth, the British Government would not undermine the framework of this understanding by

questioning its validity or importance.

A number of other proposals exclusively designed to keep Indians out of Canada were canvassed, including the "continuous journey clause" and the \$200 requirement.<sup>32</sup> Eventually it was decided to make new rules and regulations applicable only to Indians "...requiring standards of physical fitness, financial and professional ability and the manner of travel..."<sup>33</sup> Josh refers to this as a "conspiracy" of the Canadian and Imperial Governments against the Indians, to rob them of their legal rights as subjects of the British Empire.<sup>34</sup>

These policy decisions were in full accord with the recommendations of the Mackenzie King Report - restriction, control and exclusion of Oriental labor, including Indians. Canada's wish to remain a "white man's country" was regarded as desirable and highly necessary for political and national reasons.<sup>35</sup> More specifically, the Indians, presumably from their country of origin in India and from other overseas territories, were targeted for absolute exclusion because: "Indians were unsuitable for settlement in Canada on account of their objectionable manners and customs so unlike those of the people of Canada."<sup>36</sup>

In a communication dated February 26, 1908, John Morely, gave the following reasons for limiting immigration of the Indians to Canada:

1) That the terms of close familiarity which competition with white labor brings about, do not make for British prestige; and it is by prestige alone that India is held, not by force; 2) that there is a socialist propaganda in Vancouver and the consequent danger of the East Indian being imbued with socialist doctrines; 3) labor rivalry is sure to result in occasional outbreaks of



feelings on the part of the whites and any dissatisfaction and unfair treatment of Indians in Vancouver, is certain to be exploited for the purpose of agitation in India; and 4) East Indian affairs are sometimes made use of by unscrupulous partisans to serve the cause of their political party.<sup>37</sup>

Another scheme to rid Canada of Indian immigrants was discussed by the Canadian authorities from July to October in 1908 - the deportation of all the resident Indians to countries outside Canada. This was designed to meet the anticipated recessionary-driven surge in the rapidly worsening unemployment situation in British Columbia. The British Colonial Office decided that British Honduras was the best choice for relocation of the Indians and recommended that representative of the Indian community in Canada should visit Honduras.<sup>38</sup> Accordingly, a delegation of four men was set up: Nagar Singh and Sham Singh, were designated as the Indian community representatives; J.B. Harkin, Supervisor of Immigration Department, Ottawa, was appointed to serve as the Canadian Governments representative; and William Hopkinson was appointed as the interpreter to the delegation. The delegation left Vancouver for Belize on October 15, 1908.

The Indian representatives reported to the general body meeting of the community held at the Vancouver Gurudwara on November 7, 1908. The Honduras scheme was rejected outright for the following reasons:

The climate of Honduras is not suitable. Monthly wages are much lower. Fresh water and milk are not available. Sea water is used for washing and bathing. Lots of mosquitoes, flies and many diseases. Labor is

contractual. Some Indians working as contractual laborers are living a miserable life. We were asked to accept a bribe of three thousand dollars to make a report in favor of settling in British Honduras.<sup>39</sup>

The British Government sought to reverse the rejection by the Sikhs through persuasion. It arranged for the Canadian Government to invite General Swayne (Governor of British Honduras) to visit Vancouver, to talk to the Sikh leadership and to persuade the Sikhs to relocate to Honduras. General Swayne had lived in India for several years and spoke Urdu and Punjabi.<sup>40</sup> According to Josh, General Swayne personally visited numerous Sikh households and "...he offered 20 dollars a month and a pension of ten dollars a month after ten years of service..."<sup>41</sup> Not a single Sikh was persuaded to go to Honduras for settlement.

General Swayne also held talks with Teja Singh, the erudite Sikh spokesman who took the position that the Sikhs were loyal, hardworking, successful and well settled in British Columbia. They were not afflicted with hunger, disability or unemployment of any significance. They had built temples costing tens of thousands of dollars, invested heavily in capital stock of several mining companies. Almost every Sikh had savings, some substantial and others at a level adequate to guarantee that not a single Sikh would go on the public dole. Teja Singh reminded General Swayne that the Sikh temples offered *langar* - free food for all, everyday, regardless of race, color, class or faith.<sup>42</sup> Every Sikh could expect, and in fact did receive, community support - moral, material, spiritual and emotional.

In response to Teja Singh's representations, General Swayne finally

admitted to the Vancouver World:

Teja Singh is right. The Sikhs are in good position. They don't want to leave British Columbia. In these circumstances if they are expelled forcibly from the country, there is a danger of 50, 000 Sikh soldiers going out of control in India, and in order to bring them under control, we shall have to send 2 lakh soldiers.<sup>43</sup>

By December 1908, the Government of Canada issued an official statement that Indians would not be sent to British Honduras by force. The British Honduras chapter was thus closed.

According to Lord Grey, the Canadian Prime Minister, Sir Wilfrid Laurier and his Government considered many forms of legislation to exclude Indians from entering Canada.<sup>44</sup> This legislative authority would be implemented ingeniously: the British agents in Hong Kong, Singapore, Shanghai and other ports would prohibit Indians from proceeding to Canada without a passport. Also, the number of passports issued to Indians would be strictly limited (the exact number to be fixed by agreement between the Governments of Canada and British India). This measure would also empower the Government of Canada to deport all Indians arriving in Canada without passports. Such an agreement, according to Morley, would mean "almost virtual exclusion of Hindus (Indians) in Canada."<sup>45</sup> Responding to Morley's observation, Mackenzie King replied "...that in my opinion that was what it amounted to, and that it was virtual exclusion that we should like to have."<sup>46</sup> The British in India had their hands full of political troubles and wanted no further headaches. They preferred to transfer such problems to other sympathetic

governments within the Empire. This device would enable Britain to easily disclaim responsibility for any ensuing troubles. It is not surprising, therefore, that the British India Government did not pass any new legislation restricting Indian emigration. Rather, the Government of Canada took such a step. This resulted in the enactment of new legislation which was so effective in its exclusionary power that it virtually halted all immigration from India: only fifteen Indians were allowed to enter Canada between 1910-11.<sup>47</sup>

By the end of 1907, the economic crisis in British Columbia had deepened. White workers began to establish anti-Asian Leagues across the Pacific Coast. They indulged in systematic and unrelenting attacks on Asian workers. The Canadian Government moved quickly to pass two Orders-in-Council, specifically designed to halt Indian immigration. The first was passed in 1907 and raised the sum of money required to be in the possession of an intending immigrant from twenty-five (\$25) to two hundred (\$200) - and astronomical amount in those days for any immigrants.<sup>48</sup>

The second Order-in-Council was passed on January 8, 1908, specifically intended to restrict Indian immigration to Canada. The Minister of the Interior was empowered to prohibit the landing of immigrants in Canada under the following provision:

Immigrants may be prohibited from landing or coming to Canada unless they came from the country of their birth, or citizenship, by continuous journey and on through tickets, purchased before leaving the country of their birth or citizenship.<sup>49</sup>

It was common knowledge that no shipping company operated vessels directly from India to Canada and that India had no ships of its own. It was also well known that any ships from India had to go through transshipment at Hong Kong, Shanghai or some other port in the Far East. The continuous journey clause was incorporated into substantive law by amending the Immigration Act of 1906. In 1910 a new Act was passed which finally incorporated the two Orders-in-Council as part of Canadian law, thus putting them beyond challenge in the courts of law.

Lord Grey, Governor General of Canada, in a letter dated November 11, 1907 to Lord Elgin, explained the Canadian position as follows:

In the absence of regulations made by the Government of India restricting the flow of Hindus to Canada, such a regulation is considered necessary by my Ministers in order to avert real suffering and distress and consequently would appear to be called for in the interest of humanity.<sup>50</sup>

By an exchange of letters on March 1, 1909, Lord Minto, Viceroy of India expressed his sentiments on this matter to Sir Wilfrid Laurier:

We hold the view that the continuous passage and the two hundred dollar regulations are likely to prove effective in putting a stop to immigration of Indian labor. We have published the conditions imposed by Canada widely...We raise no objections to the methods adopted by Canada, and we have not any intention to raising questions regarding them.<sup>51</sup>

Singh and Singh sarcastically observe that Lord Minto and Sir Wilfrid Laurier were in a self-congratulatory mood for devising such a clever and effective mechanism for strangulating the flow of Indian immigrants to Canada.<sup>52</sup> The effect of restrictive

legislation on Indian immigration resulted in a decrease in their numbers to 118 between 1909 and 1920 (see Table 2). Likewise, the number of Indians denied entry into Canada between 1906 and 1914 increased to 390 (see Table 3). Indians deported from Canada between 1908 and 1914 totaled 229 (see Table 4).

The rigidity with which the Orders-in-Council were applied was soon evident when the Monteagle docked at Vancouver in March 1908, carrying two hundred (200) passengers, mostly Sikhs. The eighteen (18) who had boarded at Hong Kong were denied landing because they did not come by direct passage from India and the one hundred and five (105) who had boarded at Calcutta, with stops en route in South Asian ports, were turned back because they had not come directly on a continuous passage.<sup>53</sup> In addition, the families of the immigrants already legally in Canada were victimized: the continuous journey and the two hundred (\$200) requirements were applied to each member of their respective families, including their wives and children. This made family reunions of Indian immigrants in Canada impossible. This was followed by a few cases where domiciled Indians in Canada tried to bring their wives and children to join them in Canada.

The Nippon Uesen Kaisha, a Japanese shipping company began to operate a direct route to Canada from India as a means of circumventing the legislation. In October 1913, its ship, the Panama Maru brought 39 Indians to Vancouver. Chief Justice Hunter upheld their right to enter Canada because they came on a "direct" journey. Within two weeks, the Canadian Government enacted yet another Order-in-Council forbidding the entry of "artisans and laborers, skilled or unskilled....at any

port of British Columbia."<sup>54</sup> This legislation was applied in such a way that it made it impossible for the Indians to be landed in Canada even by direct route.

**Table 2 - Indian Immigration to Canada, 1909-1920**

<b>YEAR</b>	<b>NUMBER</b>
1909	6
1910	10
1911	5
1912	3
1913	5
1914	88
1915	0
1916	1
1917	0
1918	0
1919	0
1920	0
<b>TOTAL:</b>	118

Source: The Canada Yearbook, 1920

After 1908, the Canadian Government introduced legislation to restrict and halt Indian immigration, the effect of which can be seen in the table above.



**Table 3 - Indian Immigrants Debarred from Entering Canada, 1906-1914**

<b>YEAR</b>	<b>NUMBER</b>
1906	18
1907	120
1908	218
1909	4
1910	6
1911	0
1912	2
1913	8
1914	14
<b>TOTAL:</b>	<b>390</b>

Source: Canada. Report of the Superintendent of Immigration, 1913-1914, p. 76.

(Note: This table does not include the passengers involved in the Komagata Maru Affair of 1914.)

**Table 4 - Indian Immigrants Deported from Canada, 1908-1914**

YEAR	NUMBER
1908-1909	24
1909-1910	1
1910-1911	1
1911-1912	2
1912-1913	1
1913-1914	0
<b>TOTAL:</b>	29

Source: Canada. Report of the Superintendent of Immigration, 1913-1914, p. 76.

(Note: This table does not include the passengers involved in the Komagata Maru Affair of 1914.)

1. The song "White Canada For Ever," is cited in Singh and Singh, Ghadar 1915, p. 2.

2. During Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee visit to Canada in 1887, she was escorted by a regiment of Sikh soldiers from India. These soldiers traveled across Canada, from Montreal to Vancouver. It is believed that these soldiers, upon return to India, told their fellow kinsmen of the great opportunities that lay in North America.

3. The Chinese Head Tax required each Chinese immigrant to have \$500 in his or her possession upon landing on Canadian soil.

4. Singh and Singh, Ghadar 1915, p.1.

5. William Lyon Mackenzie King, Deputy Minister of Labor. The Report of the Royal Commission Appointed to Inquire into the Methods by Which Oriental Laborers Have Been Induced to Come to Canada. Ottawa: King's Printer, 1908. (hereafter referred to as Mackenzie King Report).

6. Barclay and Singh, "Canada's New Immigrant," p. 385.

7. Mackenzie King Report, p. 76.

8. Ibid.

9. Hindustanee (Vancouver: February 1911), p. 3.

10. Ibid.

11. Puri, Ghadar Movement, p. 25.

12. Immigration Department File on the Komagata Maru, (RG 76, No. 879545):PAC, 1914 (hereafter referred to as Immigration Department File)

13. Sant Nihal Singh, "Indians in America," Modern Review, March 1908, p. 206.

14. Indicated in a letter from Dr. A.S. Munro to W.D. Scott, August 16, 1906, Immigration Department File, RG76, No, 536999, part 1. The William Lyon Mackenzie King also describes in detail how the wages of the Indian laborers decreased steadily, The Mackenzie King Report, p. 79-80.

15. Rajani Kanta Das, Hindustani Workers, p. 27.

16. Ibid.

17. Khalsa Diwan Society, Temple Ledger, 1908-1920 (Vancouver: K.D.S., 1914), p. 6 (hereafter referred to as Khalsa Diwan Records).

18. The Aryan (Vancouver: December 1911), p. 5.
19. Peter Ward, White Canada Forever: Popular Attitudes and Public Policy Toward Orientals in British Columbia (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1978), p. 14.
20. Kesar Singh, Canadian Sikhs and the Komagata Maru Massacre (Surrey: Hans Publishing, 1997), p. 18.
21. Josh, Hindustan Ghadar Party, p. 112.
22. Quoted in Ted Ferguson, A White Man's Country: An Exercise in Canadian Prejudice (Toronto: Doubleday Canada Ltd., 1975), p. ii.
23. Quoted in Ward, White Canada Forever, p. iv.
24. Teja Singh, Sant Attar Singh's Jiwan Katha (Vibhag, Punjab: Bhasha Printing, 1973), p. 64.
25. Pacific Monthly, (Vancouver: Vol 17, 1907).
26. Das, Hindustani Workers, p. 11.
27. Khalsa Diwan Records, p. 20.
28. The Aryan (Vancouver: January 1912), p. 3.
29. Singh and Singh, Ghadar 1915, p. 7.
30. Ibid.
31. Ibid, p. 8.
32. These regulations are discussed in detail later in this paper.
33. Singh and Singh, Ghadar 1915, p. 5-6.
34. Josh, Hindustan Ghadar Party, p. 113.
35. Sareen, Indian Revolutionary Movements, p. 65.
36. Mackenzie King Report, p.77.
37. Quoted in Puri, Ghadar Movement, p. 36-37.
38. Kesar Singh, Canadian Sikhs, p. 40.

39. Ibid., p. 41.

40. Teja Singh, Sant Attar Singh, p. 365.

41. Ibid.

42. It is part of the Sikh faith to provide food and shelter for all who care to visit any Gurudwara.

43. Two *lakhs* means 200,000 - the number of Sikhs recruited in and serving the British India Army. Josh, Hindustan Ghadar Party, p. 82.

44. Governor General's File on Komagata Maru (RG 7): PAC, 1914.

45. Ibid.

46. Ibid.

47. Ibid.

48. Ibid.

49. Ibid.

50. Quoted in I.M. Muthanna, People of India in North America (Banglore: Lotus Printers, 1982), p. 59.

51. Bose, Indian Revolutionaries Abroad, p. 46. Also quoted in Singh and Singh, Ghadar 1915, p. 8.

52. Singh and Singh, Ghadar 1915, p. 9.

53. Ibid, p.11.

54. Ibid., p. 12.

## **Chapter Five**

### **The Politics of Exclusion: The “Hindu Woman’s Question”**

**If you want to live a happy life then deport the Indians  
bag and baggage from Canada.<sup>1</sup>**

The Indian immigrants were confronted with many difficulties of settlement and adjustment to their new home of adoption. They withstood indignities, discrimination of every sort, physical violence, punishment from unjust laws and flawed legal process. However, none of these difficulties was more hurtful, dehumanizing and oppressive than the ban on their wives and families joining them in Canada, even for domiciled Indian immigrants. Das states that “...nothing has so much embittered them (Indian immigrants) as this policy of exclusion; for it is not only injustice to them, but also to their innocent wives and children.”<sup>2</sup> This sentiment was shared by educated men and women in India and the liberal elements in Britain and Canada. The struggle of the Indians against the prohibition on family reunion and the ensuing public debate was referred to as the “Hindu Woman’s Question.” This debate was highly charged, intense and prolonged. It raged on every platform - parliament, the media, the vernacular press, religious organizations, women’s groups, trade unions, Sikh temples and academic circles. This issue confronting the Canadian society at large was taken so seriously that a correspondent wrote to The Victoria Daily Colonist of February 20, 1912:

**... the question of admitting Hindu women is one of the  
gravest which has confronted the Province for some  
time and I hope that the Government will not take a step  
which will be a matter of regret possibly for all time.<sup>3</sup>**

Likewise, Mr. Burrell, the Federal Minister of Agriculture, addressing the Canadian Club in Toronto, is reported in the Victoria Daily Colonist of March 4, 1912, as having said:

The question of Hindu women immigration is not only a great question with us in British Columbia; it is the dominant question of the whole empire. It is a question of the ultimate dominance between the Far East and the West, of the final supremacy of the yellow or the white.<sup>4</sup>

The Aryan, a monthly newspaper established by and for the Indian immigrant community, reported the cases of domiciled Indians whose wives and children were arbitrarily denied admission into Canada by the Canadian immigration officers. The first case concerned Hira Singh. He came to Vancouver in 1906 and worked hard for three years in the lumber industry. In 1910 he visited India and returned to Canada, with his wife and daughter. He was allowed to enter Canada on the basis of his Vancouver domiciliary status. His wife and daughter were, however, denied landing because as "Hindus," they had not come directly from India on a continuous journey. Thus, Mrs. Hira Singh and her daughter were served with deportation orders. She was released on cash bond of \$1000 pending the hearing of the application for a writ of *habeas corpus*.<sup>5</sup>

Bhag Singh was a trooper in the British India Cavalry. Upon retirement, he settled in Hankow, China as a policeman. Leaving his wife behind, he came to Vancouver in 1905. He was one of the founders of the first Sikh Temple in Vancouver. He was also appointed the secretary of the Sikh Trust Company. In

1910, he visited India with the intention of bringing his wife with him to Canada. The steamship company refused to sell a ticket to his wife on the ground that she could not comply with the Order-in-Council requiring Indian immigrants to come to Canada on a continuous journey. Bhag Singh was free to come to Canada but not his wife. Balwant Singh's case was similar. He was a soldier in the 25<sup>th</sup> Regiment in India. When he came to Vancouver, he became the priest of the first Sikh Temple in Vancouver. He went back to India to bring his wife and two daughters. He was also free to return to Canada but not his wife and children. Both Bhag Singh and Balwant Singh had considerable property in Vancouver. They retained A.M. Harper as their Legal Counsel. In 1912 he applied to the Supreme Court of British Columbia for a writ of *habeas corpus* on behalf of their wives and children. He maintained that the arrests were illegal because the Order-in-Council on which the deportation orders were based, was invalid as being *ultra vires*. This meant that the action of detention was beyond the scope or authority of the Order-in-Council. Furthermore, he argued that it was a long established rule of law that if a husband was domiciled in Canada, his wife, no matter wherever she resided, automatically acquired the domicile of the husband under Canadian Law. Finally, he asserted that the Order-in-Council allowing admission to Indian immigrants who came by direct passage was inapplicable to the commercial classes of Indians to which the cases under litigation belonged. This legislation was aimed at the exclusion of the laboring classes alone. The application was not heard by the Supreme Court because the women and children were released from custody and allowed to remain in Canada



**"as an act of grace, without establishing a precedent."<sup>6</sup> This was followed by the case of Hakim Singh, which was disposed of in a similar manner.**

**Considerable agitation was generated by certain sections of the press, women's organizations and church leaders for allowing the wives and children of domiciled Indians to stay in Canada. In addition, the Indian residents of Vancouver, under the aegis of the United India League sent a deputation to Ottawa on December 11, 1911.<sup>7</sup> It was comprised of Teja Singh, the Sikh scholar, priest and a fiery orator; Dr. Sundar Singh, a highly qualified and respected Sikh leader; Raja Singh, a social activist and Rev. L.W. Hall, a Methodist Minister, sympathetic to the Sikh cause.**

**In its preambular part, the petition expressed complete loyalty to the British Crown and complained that the Hindu immigrants were not given equality of treatment in Canada. This was contrary to the declarations of Queen Victoria and succeeding monarchs who had made India an integral part of the British Empire and had promised equality within the Empire to all its subjects. The petition emphasized the heroic loyalty of the Sikh soldiers in the British India Army in defense of the British Imperial Crown. In its operative part, the petition stated the grievances of the Indian immigrants and sought remedial action.<sup>8</sup> It asked for the repeal of the regulations prohibiting the entry of wives and children into Canada:**

**The compulsory separation of families is punitive and in itself penal, and can only lawfully be applied to criminals by any civilized nation. It is contrary to every human instinct and jeopardizes the existence of the family life, which is the very foundation of the British**

Empire as a whole...there are no good political, economic or racial reasons why this regulation should not be abolished...There is not a mother in Canada looking into the eyes of a child, who would not sanction its repeal...<sup>9</sup>

The petition also asked for the repeal of the continuous journey regulation because it was a device "to strip loyal British subjects of their inherent right to travel or reside in any part of the Empire."<sup>10</sup> It emphasized that the Indian immigrants had to show possession of two hundred (\$200) upon arrival in Canada. In contrast, the other immigrants from the Orient, specifically the Japanese, paid only fifty dollars. They argued that this should be replaced by a standardized monetary qualification for all immigrants. This deputation to Ottawa was a total failure because it fell on deaf ears. Frederick Charles Blair was appointed to investigate the immigration of Indian women into Canada and submitted his report to the Federal Government. The Victoria Daily Colonist of Feb. 12, 1912 reported his fundamental conclusion as follows: "...the report is adverse to opening the door to the Hindu people, and states that the admission of the wives of men now in Canada will be a step in the direction of re-opening the whole issue..."<sup>11</sup> Simply put, the official position was that the admission of the Indian women was unacceptable and undesirable because it would promote further migration from India. Exclusion of Indian women as spouses, mothers and single women continued well into the 1920s.

For comparative purposes, it is interesting to note that although the Chinese and the Japanese immigrants were attacked likewise, they did not suffer from the same handicaps as were imposed on the Indians, particularly when dealing with

female immigration. The anti-immigrant lobby, led by Henry Hubert Stevens, vilified every aspect of Chinese civilization and traditional life. Such attacks were well supported by certain women's groups, church and civic leaders and the legislators in British Columbia. The attacks against the Chinese were persistent and violent. It was charged that wealthy Chinese merchants practiced concubinage, a system of secondary wives, akin to polygamy.<sup>12</sup> It was alleged that they also practiced "*mui Tsa*" - the employment of a domestic worker under special status within the family. Such a worker constituted a part of the bride price. She received food, shelter and clothing, but no wages. However, the family was obligated to find her a husband. Once married, she was free to leave. Female infanticide in China was common and binding the feet of young girls was an acceptable practice at one time. The Chinese observed elaborate rituals and ancestral worship at marriages, births, deaths, anniversaries and other festive occasions. The Chinese way of life was intertwined with secret societies, like the White Lotus and the Triads. The Chinese were accused of loose morals and un-Christian, inhumane, and uncivilized living. They were charged with white slavery, prostitution, gambling, drug addiction, and all other forms of vice and criminal activities.<sup>13</sup> Yet, unlike the Indian, the Chinese businessmen could freely bring their wives and children to Canada.

The Japanese were also the target of racial hostility. The 1907 race riots in Vancouver caused the Canadian Government to take a moderate stand towards Japanese immigration. A Gentleman's Agreement was signed in 1908 between the Governments of Japan and Canada, restricting the number of Japanese immigrants

who could enter Canada with their wives and children. Most of them were unmarried, initially. However, they arranged with the help of relatives in Japan or through matchmakers in Canada to marry "picture brides."<sup>14</sup> The groom looked at the girls' picture which was followed by the signature of documents at the Japanese Consulate in Vancouver. No marriage ceremony as such took place, but the signed agreement constituted a binding marriage. It entitled the Japanese men to bring their brides to Canada. Under this agreement, 600 Japanese women arrived in 1908 alone.<sup>15</sup> This mode of immigration was terminated in 1929. The preferential treatment given to the wives of the Chinese and the Japanese who were aliens, not members of the British Empire and with no record of service to or sacrifice for the Imperial Crown, fueled this controversy to new dimensions.

The major argument against the admission of Indians, their wives and children into Canada was that they were unassimilable. Mackenzie King in the House of Commons Sessional Paper 360 (7-8) of 1908, stated as follows:

It was clearly recognized in regard to emigration from India to Canada that the native of India is not a person suited to this country, that accustomed as many of them are to the conditions of tropical climate, and possessing manners and customs so unlike our people, their inability to readily adapt themselves to surroundings entirely different could not do other than entail an amount of privation and suffering which renders a discontinuance of such immigration most desirable in the interests of the Indians themselves.<sup>16</sup>

Similar sentiment was echoed in the Report of the Special Committee prepared by E.D. McLaren and GEO. C. Pidgeon, for the Ministerial Association of Vancouver.

It was adopted in December 1911. The thrust of the report revolved around the following basic premise:

They are segregated in our towns and our cities, they preserve their national characteristics, in many cases their living conditions which we believe to be unhealthy physically and morally, and they form everywhere "a community within a community"...There can never be a homogenous Canadian people if these people in considerable numbers continue to be admitted.<sup>17</sup>

Indians were described as "...an unassimilable clot in our civilization," and it was claimed that "a foreign mass undigested will be fatal to our national life."<sup>18</sup>

Elizabeth Ross Grace, from Saskatchewan, wrote an article in the Westminster Hall Magazine, which was published in Vancouver, for the March 1913 issue, in which she criticized the assimilationist argument. She wondered why the argument of unassimilability was applied only to the Orientals and Indians and not to the Galicians, the Syrians, the Russian Jews, the Southern Italians, the Dukhobors, who were also clannish, tradition-bound and practiced lifestyles at variance with Anglo-Saxon normative values. Defending Indian fellow subjects of the Empire, she stated:

Five or even ten years is a brief time in which to test the "unassimilability" of any race. That the Hindu has not yet become assimilated is no proof that he cannot or will not. I have seen scores of Sikhs who were rapidly adapting themselves to the new conditions, and who were eager to get into the life of the new world.<sup>19</sup>

Others commented that the Canadianization of the Indian immigrants had taken root. The process of acculturation to Canadian life was in full swing. No one,

including the assimilationists could have had the farsightedness to conceive of multiculturalism that would one day accommodate diversity of cultures under one country, one flag, one nation, one nationality. The Law Union of Ontario in its report published in 1981 had an interesting comment on why assimilation was stymied:

It was the law itself which ensured that the Asians would not be "absorbed" or "assimilated"...legislation prohibited Asians from taking any occupations, voting in elections, from traveling to certain areas of the country, as well as requiring Asians to carry identification cards.<sup>20</sup>

It was feared that were the wives and children allowed into Canada, the all-male Indian transients or sojourners would be tempted to become permanent residents. They would then spawn the establishment of permanent colony of Indians in Canada. The Special Committee established by the Ministerial Association in Vancouver stated in its report that "to allow them to settle...in Canada would mean the transplanting of a little section of India into the heart of Canada, which would retain its distinct individuality."<sup>21</sup> Permanent settlement of Indian men in Canada with their wives and spouses would further encourage large scale emigration from India and other parts of Asia. Thus Frank Andrews, a correspondent to The Victoria Daily Colonist argued in its issue of February 10, 1912:

...let the wives in, and in a few years no one could tell the results. Either Japan or China, if emigration was unrestricted, would flood the country (and would lead to) a gigantic problem such as the United States has to face in their Southern States.<sup>22</sup>

Similarly another speaker, Major C.B. Simonds, an ex-British Army officer, in the

same newspaper dated February 20, 1912, asserted that:

...the admittance of the wives of Hindus into this Province must be prohibited at any price...if British Columbia allows Hindu women to come, their presence will create a sociological problem which will be well nigh impossible of solution. If they are allowed in, the immigration of them will be impossible to control or stop. I question if any government would be able to solve the problem.<sup>23</sup>

Stevens published a booklet entitled The Oriental Problem: 1912 in which he discussed the demerits of Oriental and Indian immigration to Canada and the immediate need to restrict it. He even advocated the deportation of the Indian immigrants already domiciled in Canada. In particular, he implacably opposed the admission of the wives and children of the domiciled immigrants. Stevens asserted that if Indian women were allowed entry into Canada, the Government of Canada would have to accept women of all other different races, thus swelling the ranks of divergent and undesirable types of immigrants. Referring to the Indians, he stated that "with a nucleus of 20,000 they would soon grow to such numbers as to constitute a permanent menace to the country."<sup>24</sup> Stevens was obsessed by the idea that the Indian immigrants had secret plans to colonize Canada:

The Hindu has in recent years become possessed of a notion that he is destined to rule the Empire: that his civilization is so much older than ours, that if he can once secure recognition as a British subject, with full rights of citizenship throughout the Empire, he will by weight of numbers be able to become the predominating influence in Imperial Affairs. We are not prepared to discuss "Home Rule For India," but we are prepared to take this stand, that we will never consent to any policy which will make it possible for the Hindu to

become a factor in Imperial affairs, except to a limited extent, and that to be confined entirely to India. Consequently, in connection with Australia and New Zealand, we take the position that as far as Canada is concerned, it shall remain white, and our doors shall be closed to the Hindu, as well as to other Orientals.<sup>25</sup>

The Ministerial Association stated in similar fashion that "the admission of the wives of those already here is a part of an extensive colonization scheme, elaborately planned and carefully provided for."<sup>26</sup> The same body expressed the opinion that if the Indian immigrants were granted permanent residency and were enfranchised, they would by joint concerted action support only those political parties which espoused their causes. This would lead to the Indian control of the mainstream political parties. Once the control of political parties fell into the hands of the Indians, they would consolidate and expand further their colonization of Canada. The white race would thus face political suicide. Mrs. Andrews of the National Council of Women argued:

That the admission of their wives would mean a Hindu colony in British Columbia. The danger that this province, unless measures were taken to prevent it, would become the home, not of British people but of Orientals...<sup>27</sup>

In rebuttal, Indian spokesmen stated that the fears of colonization were farfetched, unrealizable and alarmist. They were mischievously and maliciously designed to stir up white agitation against the entry into Canada of Indian women and their children. Furthermore, the numbers of Indians and Orientals in Canada were so minuscule that it was inconceivable to suggest that they possessed the



capacity of colonial control over Canada. After all, Canada was a nation of immigrants from all parts of the globe. They had established their individualized settlements in the various Provinces that were distinct, ethnocentric, family oriented and self-sustaining within the Canadian mosaic. Examples were the ethnic neighborhoods of the Italians in Toronto, the Jews in Montreal and the Ukrainians on the Prairies. Representatives for the Indian immigrant community, like Teja Singh and Dr. Sundar Singh, supported by people like Rev. Hall of the Presbyterian Church of Vancouver, addressed various public meetings. They pointed out that the alarmist fears of a so-called Indian plot to colonize Canada constituted baseless allegations designed to create a sense of fear and insecurity in the minds of the immigrants. It would force them to remain transient, cause them not to bring their wives and children to Canada and discourage them from settling permanently in Canada. The immigrants would not wish to expose their families to racist indignities, humiliation and even physical violence in the streets of Vancouver. Labeled with a transient status, they remained aliens subject to discretionary and arbitrary deportation. This fear alone would heighten their sense of insecurity and force them to keep their wives and children at home in India, away from the immigrant-hostile environment in Canada.<sup>28</sup> As if to reinforce this point, the Report of the Ministerial Association falsely claimed that there was no general desire among the rank and file of the immigrants to bring over their wives; that only a small percentage expressed such a desire and that the agitation in favor of the Indian wives was plotted by some malcontents for ulterior motives.

Steven's supporters feared that an enlarged immigrant population, which would inevitably flow from the admission of Indian women into Canada, would pose an incalculably grave threat to Anglo-Saxon white supremacy and that "the policy of white Canada is absolutely necessary, and it must be maintained now or never."<sup>29</sup> In furtherance of the above policy, Prime Minister Borden declared bluntly that "our Government has decided that Sikhs cannot become Canadians, cannot bring their wives and families into Canada and cannot come with their wives except under certain almost impossible conditions."<sup>30</sup> It is inconceivable how a minuscule percentage of the population could challenge white supremacy. This Indian minority was disenfranchised, unrepresented in the Government, lacked access to power, privilege, social services and benefits of protection under the law. Its empowerment to ascendancy based on the entry of their families into Canada was inconceivable.

The eugenicists gave birth to biological politics. In Canada, such politics were directed against the immigrants, particularly the Asiatics, the Jews and the Blacks. The eugenicists believed that intellectual abilities were transmitted over time and that intelligence as a scientific concept was genetically inheritable. They asserted that foreigners were inherently inferior to the white Anglo-Saxon race. Believing this to be scientifically provable, they used it as a valid justification for their exclusion from Canada.<sup>31</sup> They insisted through spokesman like C.K. Clarke and Clarence Hincks, that native and immigrant populations must be tested thoroughly to determine their potential for feeble-mindedness and mental defectiveness. They claimed these were inheritable diseases afflicting the lesser

racess. They tried to establish a direct correlation between immigration on the one hand and insanity and criminality on the other.<sup>32</sup>

In Clarke's view, Canada had become a dumping ground for the riffraff of the world. W. G. Smith, in his work entitled A Study of the Canadian Immigration, provided an inflammatory account of the alleged dangers of immigration to the Anglo-Saxon strength, purity, traditions and values. The feminist movement of the day, when addressing immigrant issues, latched onto Smith's arguments. In the zeal for reform and purity, it charged that the immigrants were largely responsible for the spread of sexually transmitted diseases, tuberculosis, alcoholism, prostitution, feeble-mindedness, mental defectiveness, labor unrest, and the erosion of traditional Anglo-Saxon values. These were called the "public health and hereditary concerns."<sup>33</sup> Charlotte Witton, Director of the Canadian Council of Child Welfare, blamed Britain for dumping its surplus labor on the Dominions. She claimed that before the First World War, unregulated immigration to Canada was responsible for the spread of feeble-mindedness and postwar economic conditions in Canada. She charged that the immigrants were spreading with "cancerous tenacity" and were responsible for "filth, disease, criminality, immorality and vice."<sup>34</sup>

The technically flawed, scientifically unproven and politically distorted arguments of the eugenicists were never effectively rebutted by the representatives of the Indian immigrants. Nor were they aired extensively in the media, except in distorted, politicized terms to lash immigrant groups, including the Indians. It was largely a matter of concern to the policy makers, the academics, biologists and

certain members of the public health services. In pushing the eugenic arguments, their hidden agenda was to stem the tide of immigrants to Canada.

Some well placed civic leaders like Alderman Fullerton of the City Council of Vancouver charged Indians with disloyalty to the Province and to the Federal Crown. He supported City bylaws barring Indians from doing city work and placing them as aliens in the contract regulations of the city. He proclaimed that the Indian immigrants came to British Columbia as transient workers, saved money, sent it home and showed no commitment or loyalty to Canada. Given these conditions they should be punished by not being allowed to bring in their families and children into Canada.<sup>35</sup> In a letter to the editor of The Aryan of August 1911, one "A.H." took strong issue with Alderman Fullerton's accusations and dismissed them as false. He said that the Indian immigrants had invested 2.5 million dollars in real estate in the Province. Teja Singh and Dr. Sundar Singh pointed out that the Sikhs had built temples. They had also incorporated companies and were actively involved in trade and commerce, education and charitable causes. Thus, their loyalty and commitment to Canada were beyond question. Family reunification was their crying need. Family life would lend them stability, comfort, and the incentive to become full citizens of Canada.<sup>36</sup>

Some arguments against the admission of Indian women concerned law and order, fertility, sexuality, and alternative lifestyles. Some feared that the admission into Canada of the families of the Indians would eventually flood Canada and create gigantic racial problems like those existing in the Southern States of the United

States. This would exacerbate racial violence and challenge law and order in Canada. The supporters of Stevens also feared that if family reunification were permitted in Canada, the end result would be the proliferation of ethnic communities. The Victoria Daily Colonist, of March 4, 1912, editorialized as follows: "If they were permitted to come in limited numbers they would set up communities distinct from white communities."<sup>37</sup> Such a development would create family lifestyles alternative to the Anglo-Saxon model. Each colored ethnic community would take root in white Canada. Each would be distinguished by bizarre language, dress, culture, religion, and social systems alien to Canada. Just as the Anglo-Saxon women were the reproducers of the Canadian nation, colored women would become the creators of ethnic communities. This was seen as a threat to the entire process of nation-building in Canada.

It was alleged that Indian men and women in Canada would introduce and propagate practices and traditions morally repugnant to Christian civilization. Proponents of this view asserted that Indian life revolved around polygamy - a notion abhorrent to Christians. Its tolerance in Canada would create horrendous social and legal problems. According to Major C.B. Simonds, an ex-British army officer:

The question will arise, are the wives and families to come here under the Indian social laws...as they exercised among various sects, or are they to come under our system?...Polygamy is a part of the sociological conditions of the Hindu, so the question comes up as to whether all or only one or two wives of each person is to be admitted...with the advent of family

life among the Indians here how are the laws to be administered among them? Are they to have native leaders and the joint magistrate system, or will the matter be left in the hands of the police? These are all questions to be considered before Hindu women are to be allowed to come to British Columbia.<sup>38</sup>

Stevens claimed that the Indian was of a different "race, standard and morals and ...in fact, in every way is different from us. We cannot and will not assimilate."<sup>39</sup>

Mr. Burrell, Minister of Agriculture, accused Indian immigrants of criminality when he said that "the Indians form the one class of immigrants which cause trouble as British subjects; they alone are seditious and are in touch with other desperate characters living in the United States."<sup>40</sup> He was, of course, referring to Ghadar, which had already been founded. Hindus were described by Stevens as inherent liars, deceivers and a distrustful race.<sup>41</sup> He further charged that by consorting with white women, mostly prostitutes, in the absence of their wives, they spread sexually transmitted diseases. He conveniently forgot that the Indian males were not the only persons who sought the company of prostitutes.

Anglo-Saxon supremacists believed that Indian women possessed potent sexuality and a high capacity for fertility. Using these weapons, over a period of time, they would demographically overwhelm the Anglo-Saxon race. Their progeny would likewise not assimilate but dominate. In reference to supposedly unlimited fertility of Indian women, one is reminded of Col. Grogan, a white supremacist in Kenya, who fought to keep Kenya white. He called Asiatics "Asia-ticks" and said that they bred like locusts.<sup>42</sup> Canadian Anglo-Saxon attitudes approximated this

attitude. Ena Dua, a sociologist sums it up nicely: "Thus the threat that Indian women posed was located in their gender as well as their race."<sup>43</sup>

The immigrants from India were a part of the British Empire and were British subjects. Time and again the British Imperial Government made solemn declarations that all British subjects had equal rights. Queen Victoria's Proclamation of 1858, ten years prior to the British North American Act of 1867, stated:

We hold ourselves bound to the natives of our Indian Territories by the same obligations of duty which bind us to all our subjects, and these obligations, by the blessing of Almighty God, we shall faithfully and conscientiously fulfil. And it is our further will, so far as they may be our subjects, of whatever race or creed, be fully and impartially admitted to offices in our service, the duties of which they may be qualified by their education, ability and integrity, duly to discharge.<sup>44</sup>

Barring Indians from entering Canada and denying landing to the wives and children of the Indian immigrants already settled in Canada was in violation of the constitutional rights of British subjects. Stevens tirelessly argued that being British subjects was not any criteria for admission into Canada. Nor were the loyalty and sacrifices of the Indian soldiery on the battlefields around the world in defense of the British Crown, material and pertinent. Stevens drew distinction between British citizens and British subjects. He regarded the Indians as British subjects only. They were not entitled to the rights of British citizenship like the right to vote, the right to protection under the law and the right to due process. Stevens warned that nobody should dare "...to interfere in our inalienable right to state the qualification of our immigrants...we in Canada have the right to say who shall and who shall not settle

here..."<sup>45</sup> He further stated that if Indians were British citizens, "so is the North American Indian, the Bushman of Australia, the Hottentot of South Africa, the Natives of New Guinea, the Aborigines of New Zealand..."<sup>46</sup> The British Government remained silent. However, W.W. Baer in a detailed article in The Victoria Daily Colonist, as reported in September 1911 edition of The Aryan, took issue with the position of Stevens. He argued that the Indian immigrants could not be treated as aliens; their citizenship arose by virtue of being subjects of the British Empire which protected them constitutionally within the Empire. They were entitled to a fair deal under the law. The position of the Native Indian, Bushman, Hottentot and Aborigines was hypothetical: none would immigrate; no claim had been made by them. More in sorrow than in anger, Baer said:

We permit the Japanese who comes to our country to acquire property, naturalize, vote and have a voice in our affairs, transacting such business as his acumen dictates. We also permit him to bring with him or send to Japan for his wife and as many of his offspring, male or female, as he desires to move to this country...<sup>47</sup>

With respect to the Chinese, he observed:

We permit any reasonable number of Chinese - men or women - to come to Canada and enter our ports on payment of a head tax of \$500. After they are here they possess all of the privileges of our civilization and may naturalize as easily as the immigrant from anywhere. A Chinaman may come here, acquire property, send home and bring one, two, three or four of his wives with him and live in polygamous relations with all of these, and we do not raise any protest...<sup>48</sup>

Turning to the Indian immigrant, he stated:



The Hindu is a monogamist by tradition and practice, as faithfully so as the Anglo-Saxon. Yet he is not permitted to bring his wife to this country, and no female child of his may come near enough to smile into his eyes.<sup>49</sup>

Robert Clarke, a supporter of the Indian family reunion, said that the Indian is a Britisher and from that standpoint alone he should be regarded quite differently from the Chinese and the Japanese.<sup>50</sup>

The Indian immigrant was also charged with being injurious to the economic interests of Canada in general and of British Columbia in particular. The trade unions, with the support of the mainstream media, attacked the Indian immigrant labor on many fronts. The common accusations against them were that they took away the jobs from the whites; lowered wages; brought down the standard of living of the whites; weakened the power of the trade union movement; supplied cheap labor and, by accepting abject terms and conditions of employment from large scale employers, they destabilized the labor market. The allegation that they were charges to the public funds of the Province and of Canada was proven false. It was no fault of theirs that the Indian laborers worked longer, on low wages, without complaints and were very productive, loyal, non-unionized, settled well even in hostile environment in jobs that white laborers did not wish to perform. For these reasons, they were much sought after by the employers. This scenario was seen as perfect for the creation of labor unrest, which would become uncontrollable, particularly in recessionary times. Were the wives of the Indians permitted to enter Canada, they would also compete for white jobs and render the situation far worse

than before. There were 50, 000 Japanese and Chinese with their wives and children who were in the labor market and competed for white jobs.<sup>51</sup> This was ten times the numbers of the Indian immigrants. It was conveniently forgotten that the Indians worked in menial, low paying, back-breaking jobs, which the whites had rejected.

Much has been said about the married Indian immigrants. However, it must be pointed out that there were many Indian males who were not married. These men faced difficulties similar to those of the married domiciled male Indians without their wives. Single Indian women were likewise prohibited from entering Canada. Thus, for the unmarried, choice of a spouse did not exist. Das points out that these male immigrants faced three alternatives. First, these men could marry Black women. This option was not often practical:

...there is a strong prejudice among them against associating with the Negroes in America. This is partly due to their feeling of race superiority and partly to the fact that the Negroes are socially ostracized by the Americans themselves and they would not like to be a party to the racial problem.<sup>52</sup>

The second alternative was to marry Mexican women. Das states that there were several marriages between Mexican women and Indian men. However, "Mexican women are to be found only in Southern California, and are not, therefore, available to the majority of the Hindustanees in the North."<sup>53</sup> The third and final alternative was to marry Canadian or American women. This was not always feasible as "there exists a strong prejudice among the Americans and the Canadians against such

marriages. Moreover, the cultural differences stand in the way of such marriages being happy and successful.”<sup>54</sup>

In summing up, certain observations on Indian women stand out. The debate over whether they should be admitted into Canada was linked to their gender and their race. For Canadian society, their racialized gender made them either undesirable or dangerous, or both. The notion of Canada as a “white man’s country” was intended to marginalize immigrants from non-European countries. They were disabled from playing a meaningful role in the Anglo-Saxon nation state, except as laborers. It is true that the white European immigrants from Eastern Europe, Southern Italy, Portugal and Greece faced enormous difficulties in settling in Canada. They were, nevertheless, white and shared a common Christian faith and culture. They were more acceptable than the Indians, the Orientals and the Blacks. The latter could not be knit into the fabric of Canada as an Anglo-Saxon nation. The Indian immigrant, on account of his/her race or culture was regarded as unassimilable. The Indian woman was seen as undesirable and dangerous in several roles. As a spouse, she would give solidity to the family and help to sink roots in Canada. As a mother, she was the potential “creator of ethnic communities.” As a possessor of potent sexuality, she would help accelerate population growth of the community that might outgrow and outpace the Anglo-Saxon white population. As a potential worker in the labor market, she would increase competition for jobs. As a housewife, she would develop alternative family lifestyles that would challenge Christian values and mores. As a single woman, if

allowed to enter Canada, she would accelerate further immigration flows into Canada. Collectively, as she helped spawn ethnic enclaves distinct from white communities, she would undermine the racial make-up of Canada on which Canadian nation-building was founded. Indian women were regarded as the bearers of culture and as maintainers and enforcers of social and cultural mores. Thus, Indian women were seen as more threatening to Anglo-Saxon mores than the already domiciled Indian men.

It is evident that general fear was the basis of propaganda against the Indian immigrants. The supporters of Indian women, who favored their entry into Canada, did so for several reasons. The principal reason was the fear of sexual relations between Indian men and Anglo-Saxon women. This would result in miscegenation and the dilution of Anglo-Saxon whiteness and culture. Anglo-Saxon groups constructed Indian women as barriers to Indian male sexuality. Thus, the presence of Indian women in Canada would hinder or minimize chances of sexual relations or interracial marriages between white women and Indian men. The Anglo-Saxons believed in maintaining a social and moral order that was based on patriarchal and heterosexual familial structures. Therefore, the admission of Indian women, as spouses of domiciled South Asian males, would promote the Christian notion of the family. As Mrs. Gordon pointed out in The Victoria Daily Colonist of February 10, 1912, "a man to be seen at his best must be surrounded by his wife and family."<sup>55</sup>

Some farsighted Canadians realized that barring the families of domiciled Indian men from entering Canada would exacerbate unrest in Canada as well as

in India. The Imperial Crown would be threatened in India if Sikh regiments in the British India Army protested against the ill-treatment of their compatriots in Canada. Yet others, particularly Church men and women, advocated the cause of Indians and their spouses on grounds of Christian morality, humanity, fairness and the civilizing mission of Christianity. The legal minded supporters wanted to uphold the rights of British citizens. This would also promote harmony within the Empire - a prerequisite to unity of the Empire when faced with war with competing colonial powers. Those who adopted the practical approach did not find that the role of Anglo-Saxon women as "mother's of the race" to be incompatible with the role of Indian women as "creators of ethnic communities."<sup>58</sup> The two had existed side by side within the Empire, and this compatible trend was bound to continue in the indeterminate future in Canada as well.

Denial of admission to the spouses and children of the domiciled Indian immigrants and the denial of admission to single Indian women as independent applicants, resulted in grave injustices and hardships. This intensely controversial and comprehensive public debate did nothing to ameliorate the condition or the status of the Indian domiciled males or their spouses. Neither did it do anything for single Indian women. For all of them, the age of reason and enlightenment, the promise of plenty and prosperity, of security and stability, remained an unfulfilled dream.

1. Josh, Hindustan Ghadar Party, p. 93.
2. Das, Hindustani Workers, p. 109.
3. The Victoria Daily Colonist, February 20, 1912.
4. The Victoria Daily Colonist, March 4, 1912.
5. The Aryan, August 1911.
6. Ibid.
7. Kesar Singh, Canadian Sikhs, p. 66-68.
8. Josh, Hindustan Ghadar Party, p. 97.
9. The Aryan, December 1911.
10. Josh, Hindustan Ghadar, p. 97.
11. The Victoria Daily Colonist, February 12, 1912.
12. Vijay Agnew, Resisting Discrimination: Women From Asia, Africa and the Caribbean and the Women's Movement in Canada (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), p. 32.
13. Sonia A. Riddoch, Our Cultural Heritage (Toronto: Clark, Irwin & Co. Ltd., 1979), p. 287.
14. Vijay Agnew, Resisting Discrimination, p. 34.
15. Ibid.
16. Cited in Li and Bolaria, Racial Oppression, p. 146.
17. Westminister Hall Magazine, January 1912, p. 26.
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid., March 1913, p. 11.
20. Li and Bolaria, Racial Oppression, p. 147.
21. Westminister Hall Magazine, January 1912, p. 27.

22. The Victoria Daily Colonist, February 10, 1912.
23. The Victoria Daily Colonist, February 20, 1912.
24. Henry Hubert Stevens, The Oriental Problem - The Hindu (Vancouver: Terminal City Press, 1912), p. 12.
25. Ibid.
26. Westminister Hall Magazine, January 1912, p. 27.
27. The Victoria Daily Colonist, January 23, 1912.
28. Li and Bolaria, Racial Oppression, p. 155.
29. Ward, p. iv.
30. Westminister Hall Magazine, January 1912, p. 27.
31. Agnus McLaren, Our Own master Race: Eugenics in Canada, 1885-1945 (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 46-67.
32. Ibid., p. 59.
33. Ibid., p. 64.
34. Ibid.
35. The Aryan, August 1911.
36. Ibid.
37. The Victoria Daily Colonist, March 4, 1912.
38. The Victoria Daily Colonist, February 9, 1912.
39. Stevens, The Oriental Problem, p. 11.
40. Josh, Hindustan Ghadar Party, p. 101.
41. Stevens, The Oriental Problem, p. 12.
42. Reference given by Mr. Inderjeet Singh Bhoi, former Deputy Permanent Secretary, External Affairs, Republic of Kenya, 1960-74.

43. Ena Dua. The "Hindu Woman's Question:" Canadian Nation-Building and the Social Construction of Gender for South Asian Canadian Women. Working Paper (Kingston: Queen's University, 1997), p. 17.

44. The Hindustanee, April 1914.

45. Stevens, The Oriental Problem, p. 10.

46. Ibid.

47. The Aryan, September 1911.

48. Ibid.

49. Ibid.

50. Josh, Hindustan Ghadar Party, p. 109.

51. Ibid.

52. Das, Hindustani Workers, p. 109-110.

53. Ibid., p. 110.

54. Ibid.

55. The Victoria Daily Colonist, February 10, 1912.

56. Mariana Valverde coined the term "mother's of the race," in reference to Anglo-Saxon women in the early part of this century. Ena Dua has countered this with the term "creators of ethnic communities" when dealing with South Asian women.



## **Chapter Six**

### **Indian Immigrant Response: The Birth of Ghadar**

**Come on! Join us, let us go to fight  
the battle of our freedom; why waste time,  
the final order is given, let us go!<sup>1</sup>**

Oppression, racial discrimination and the insensitivity to the plight of the Indian immigrants in Canada bred Ghadar. Buchignani and Doreen state that:

**...virtually all previous nationalist movements were either reformist or religiously based; Ghadar was neither, and though its membership was chiefly Sikh, it was not a Sikh religious organization.<sup>2</sup>**

They also point out that the political awakening of the Indian immigrants was inextricably linked to the ever worsening immigration battle. The prohibition on the entry of the Indians into Canada was "...etched in stone and had become unchallengeable. The courts and the judicial system could offer no redress."<sup>3</sup> Therefore, the attitudes of those involved had hardened. There was no room for compromise or reconciliation. Faced with this situation, the Indians from Canada and the United States met in Stockton, California in 1913 and set up an organization called the Hindustanee Workers of the Pacific Coast. It was representative of the various Indian groups, including students, workers and businessmen, drawn from the rank and file of Sikhs, Hindus and Muslims. Sohan Singh Bakana was elected president and Har Dayal its secretary. Har Dayal is generally acknowledged as the brains behind Ghadar. He linked support for Ghadar to backing for India's fight for independence from Britain by revolutionary means.

Funds were raised from the Indians sympathetic to Ghadar in order to buy a printing press and rent offices in San Francisco. The head office was set up there, rather than in Vancouver or Victoria, because American policies and laws were more liberal. The American laws permitted more freedom of expression, association, movement and religion, to organizations like Ghadar. Unlike Canada, the United States had won independence from Britain and had no restrictive political or constitutional ties with Britain. In addition, there was considerable fascination and sympathy in the United States for the cause of Indian independence.

The Indians were up in arms against oppressive and humiliating treatment. They vented their grievances at public meetings. Their indignation found expression in the Indian, English and vernacular press. The Swadesh Sevak was a monthly Gurmukhi newspaper published in Vancouver, edited by Guruditt Kumar. He arrived in Victoria in October 1907. Its May 1910 edition dealt with the meeting of Indian immigrants held in Vancouver on April 24, 1910:

The law creates an unfair distinction between the European and the Indian subjects of the British Government. Indians are subjected to additional disgrace in that even the Japanese are admitted more readily than they are. Only Indians who have come direct from the Indian ports are admitted. There is no direct route from India to Canada. The above rule operates to prevent immigration altogether... Even the members of the families of Indians owning land in Canada have to show 200 dollars worth on landing. The present law is a restriction on the liberty of the subject.<sup>4</sup>

The cumulative effect of the ill-treatment, rioting and oppressive legislation sensitized the Indians to their inferior status in Canada. Their insecurity and

rejection, though hurtful, nevertheless united them into a cohesive force. It fostered a sense of political awakening and defined their national identity - a feat not achieved even in India. Their suffering was now converted into a positive force of aggressive demands for rights and organized protest against injustice. Puri asserts that:

The political awakening among the Indians in Canada and the United States rose with different types of activities revolving around three main factors: resentment and hostility against the white community for its prejudice and oppression; the development of an ethnic identity, and nationalism directed against British colonialism in India. These three factors were interrelated and reinforced one another.<sup>5</sup>

This newly forged political consciousness manifested itself in community activity centered largely around the Gurudwaras. The first Gurudwara had been established at Port Moody in 1907. Its management committee was named the *Khalsa Diwan Society*. The Gurudwara on Ross Street, Vancouver was completed in 1909. The one in Victoria opened its doors in 1912. Other smaller ones were built wherever there were small concentrations of Indians. The Khalsa Diwan Society vowed to conduct evangelical work in *Gurumath Parchar*, which means preaching of Sikh doctrines. Its basic purpose was to promote the purity of Sikh religious norms. Educational and charitable activities were not ignored (see Table 5). Hindus and Muslims developed parallel organizations to protect their interests. These inter-communal organizations interacted systematically to fight for immigrant causes and to organize resistance against racial attacks by whites.<sup>6</sup> The United India League

**Table 5 - Contributions Made Through the Vancouver Khalsa Diwan Society, 1908-1920**

<b>CAUSE</b>	<b>AMOUNT</b>
Sufferers of Massacres	\$4330
Families of Political Prisoners	\$2100
Sufferers from Political Activities	\$30,000
Congress Swaraj Fund	\$3333
Religious and Educational Causes	\$148,000
The Komagata Maru Case	\$50,000
Immigration Cases	\$30,000
Deportation Cases	\$12,000
Indian Vernacular Press in Canada	\$15,000
<b>TOTAL:</b>	<b>\$295,463</b>

Source: Khalsa Diwan Society. Temple Ledger, 1908-1920. Ross Street Gurudwara, Vancouver, (Punjabi)

was established in Vancouver by a Gujarati named Hussain Rahim and a Hindu named Atma Ram from the Punjab. They liaised with similar organizations across the border like the Hindustanee Association of the Pacific Coast.<sup>7</sup> Meetings were also held in different forums addressed by Ghadar advocates. They shuttled between Vancouver and San Francisco, preaching unity and a reasoned response to attacks against them directed by the anti-immigrant lobby.<sup>8</sup> Thus, the resistance to discrimination had widened from the Sikhs alone to the other communities like the Hindus and the Muslims. Some rational Christian quarters like Rev. Hall and Principal Mackay, editor of the Westminster Hall Magazine espoused the cause of equality of treatment. Certain academics also advocated equality and fairness. Some of them were Americans who had visited India on different occasions, like J.T. Sunderland, Rev. John Hayne Holmes, J.G. Phelps Stokes, Roger Baldwin of the American Civil Liberties Union, Socialist leader Norman Thomas and Oswald Garrison Villard.<sup>9</sup>

Ghadar grew stronger by the day. Its united voice was finding powerful utterance in newspapers in Gurumukhi, Urdu and English. The Indian agitators cleverly linked their oppression in Canada as a continuation of the British imperial oppression of the Indians in India: the two forms of exploitation were seen as two sides of the same coin. The Canadian immigration laws were under challenge in every possible way - in courts of law, by public petitions, through delegations to Ottawa, London, Delhi and through newspapers. Legitimate grievances were vented at public meetings as well as through gatherings for worship in the Gurudwaras,

temples and mosques. Contact was established with movements in India and elsewhere. This was, in fact, Ghadar in action.

Har Dayal was the chief architect, the propagandist and inspiration of Ghadar. He "can be credited with organizing the Indians on the West Coast and stirring them to nationalist action in what came to be known as the Ghadar movement."<sup>10</sup> He was regarded by the British as the most dangerous of the Indian agitators in North America. After the formal establishment of Ghadar in November of 1913, Har Dayal, in his capacity as Secretary of Ghadar, became one of its principal spokespersons in North America. He also assumed the role of the chief editor of Ghadar's publications, including the newspaper initially called the Hindustan Ghadar and subsequently renamed simply Ghadar. Since he was a central figure in Ghadar, it is important to discuss his background, work and strategy for Ghadar.

Har Dayal arrived in the United States in 1910.<sup>11</sup> He had lived in Europe but was rather disillusioned with the social situation there. He became a guest lecturer at academic institutions like Stanford University and Berkeley. He taught Hindu philosophy, Indian religions and Sanskrit culture. His intellectual attainments were impressive: he was a good orator and well grounded in Hindu philosophy and culture. In his publication Ghulami Ka Zeher (The Poison of Slavery) he argued that British colonialism had undermined the moral order of India, degraded Hindu tradition and converted Indian culture into a decadent body of beliefs.<sup>12</sup> In his speeches, he repeated these allegations but became more secular in the sense that

he admitted that not only Hindu culture, but the Indian culture, in its widest sense, had been undermined by the Raj. This was an effort to include Sikhs, Hindus and Muslims into the scope of the wider Indian culture. The Isemonger and Slattery Report quote Har Dayal as saying the following:

The more I think the more I realize that half measures are of no use. They blind the people to the mighty issues that are at stake. We must lay the axe at the root of the tree. The people can never understand the figment of loyalty to the sovereign and hostility to his Viceroy. This is a European conception which cannot be assimilated by us. No, when I write I shall dip my pen in my heart's blood and write about what I feel and think. 'Constitutional-Government,' 'Colonial-Self-Government,' 'autonomy,' etc., are terms borrowed from the western political phraseology which convey no meaning to our people. Place a clear issue before the people: 'such is your state; this is the cause; remove the cause.' Depend upon it, plain speaking carries conviction to the heart, while sophistry only perplexes honest men. This is one of the reasons why (the Indian National) Congress has failed to appeal to so many people.<sup>13</sup>

Later he charged that both British colonialism and the Indian Maharajas and Rajas, together with the landlords, were equally responsible for "injecting the poison of slavery in the minds of the honest, hardworking peasants and laborers."<sup>14</sup>

Ghadar lacked a structured ideology. At best, it was comprised of a rather loose framework of ideas drawn from all over, which prevailed among Indian revolutionaries of that time. In his youth, Har Dayal was influenced by the Hindu Reform Movement called the Arya Samaj<sup>15</sup>. He then fell under the spell of extreme Hindu nationalists like Sarvakar and Madame Cama. He flirted with Marxism,

studied Italian history and the works of Mezzini, Garibaldi and Cavour. He admired George Washington and Abraham Lincoln as great revolutionaries of all times. He was an avid reader of literature on the American War of Independence which gave America a strong democracy, liberty and equality. He wanted to pattern India's struggle for independence from Britain along the lines of the American struggle, in which Ghadar would play a significant role. While in California, he held himself out to be a proud anarchist, having graduated from the Bakunin Institute of California which he described as "the first monastery of anarchism."<sup>16</sup>

Thus, Har Dayal's intellectual and inspirational background was as varied as it was checkered. Hence, the charge was often laid against him that he was inconsistent and contradictory and incapable of being ideologically coherent and cogent. His response was: "I am too erratic and explosive to be institutionalized."<sup>17</sup> Lajput Rai, a veteran Indian freedom fighter, described Har Dayal as "more impulsive than consistent in his thought and action...quite an uncertain item," and he coined the term "Har Dayalism". Rai stated that a prominent feature of Har Dayal's character "was the lack of any positive and constructive program."<sup>18</sup>

Har Dayal's academic credentials and organizational genius must be acknowledged. Through tireless efforts, he exposed the deplorable conditions of the Indian laborers in British Columbia. He toured the areas where Indians lived, delivered rousing lectures and lambasted impediments and restrictions imposed on the immigrants. Effectively, skillfully, systematically, patiently, he channeled immigrant discontent over the harshness of the laws and the callousness of the



governments of the day into support for Ghadar. He became the single, strident voice for his people, both in Canada and the United States. He won immense support and popularity for representing his countrymen to the Canadian and American authorities with confidence, resourcefulness and dedication. An example of his oratorical skills can be seen in the following speech delivered by Har Dayal on June 2, 1913 in Astoria, in the presence of such Ghadar leaders as, Sohan Singh Bakana, Hussain Rahim and Kanshi Ram:

You have come to America and seen with your own eyes the prosperity of this country. What is the cause of this prosperity? Why? Nothing more than this, that America is ruled by its own people. In India, on the other hand, people have no voice in the administration of the country. The British are mindful only of their own personal interests. As an agricultural country, India is infinitely richer than any other country in the world and yet we see famine ravaging our country. The reason for this is that wheat is grown in India merely to be exported to England by the Government. From the official statistics of the last sixteen years, it is seen that two crores of people have died from hunger alone in India. Again, during the last decade, eighty lakhs of people have succumbed to plague. Governments have been totally unaffected by this enormous loss of life. During the last century, war has accounted for the loss of only five lakhs of human beings throughout the world. Since the British occupation of India, famines have followed one another in quick succession and plague has come to stay. In other countries the man of education is honored and respected, whereas in India he is despised and degraded. Desist, therefore, from your pretty religious dissensions and turn your thoughts towards the salvation of your country. What you earn, earn for your country. What work you do, do it for your country. English education is a farce. Collect money and get the youth of India educated in America in order that they may become equipped to serve their country.

Prepare now to sacrifice yourselves for your country. You will find few people who make such demands as I do and few who will work as I do. You must collect funds whereby we can have books published, which will implant in the minds of all Indians an undying hatred of the British.<sup>19</sup>

Har Dayal advocated active hostility towards Britain: the boycott of British goods and services, its educational facilities, commercial ventures and its political system in India. He believed in collaboration with enemies of Britain, especially Germany. He advocated causing disaffection among the soldiers of the British India Army in order to weaken British control of India. He wanted to promote the study of Indian culture and philosophy in the higher echelons of academia in the United States and Canada. He helped establish scholarship programs in the Pacific States for Indian students to study in Canada and the United States. In collaboration with Bhai Jawala Singh, a wealthy farmer, he instituted Guru Gobind Scholarships.<sup>20</sup> William Hopkinson dreaded Har Dayal as a potent revolutionary. He tried hard to influence the United States Immigration Department to deport him from the United States, as a subversive, anarchist and a seditionist with terrorist credentials and agenda.<sup>21</sup>

Har Dayal's co-revolutionaries originated from many parts of India, from varying political, economic, cultural and religious backgrounds. However, they were all united on one fundamental objective - the overthrow of the Raj by force of arms. They included, among many others, Taraknath Das, Teja Singh, Harnam Singh, Sohan Singh Bakana, Gobind Biharilal, Pandu Rang Khankhoje, Darisi Chenchiah

and Jatindra Nath Lehi. Buchignani and Indra correctly point out that:

Ghadar unleashed political ideas, discussion and debate and gave focus and coherence to the plight of the exploited and discriminated immigrants. No sooner had the first issue of Ghadar rolled off the press than revolutionaries were reciting revolutionary poetry from Ghadar at Sikh congregations in Vancouver temples.<sup>22</sup>

Har Dayal's revolutionary philosophy centered around three main points. First, the British rule had ruined Indians and resulted in misery and degradation for its people. In support of this, Har Dayal enumerated fourteen points, characteristic of the Raj.<sup>23</sup> He vowed to overthrow it by force of arms. These fourteen points were published in every issue of Ghadar. Second, the British used law as an instrument of oppression against the Indian masses. Civil liberties were curtailed. Freedom of speech, association and movement was suppressed. Religious differences were manipulated to perpetuate British stranglehold over India. He summed it up neatly when he said: "...we call it British vampire not British empire."<sup>24</sup> Third, the British rule in India was held together by the British India Army whose loyalty had been bought. Ghadar had to undermine this loyalty and cause revolt with the army. Such an event would start nationwide rebellion to overthrow the British. In doing so, he joined the cause of other revolutionary movements in Ireland, Russia, China and Egypt. The tenth Sikh Guru, Gobind Singh had preached that when all else failed against the tyrant, it was righteous to take to the sword as a matter of last resort. Ghadar took this to heart. The headmast of the Ghadar carried the following Sikh postulate:

If you seek to engage in the game of love,  
Step into my street with your head on your palm.<sup>25</sup>

In other words, for the love of your country, be prepared to offer the supreme sacrifice of your life.

Ghadar rejected all forms of discrimination based on caste and faith. Untouchability was condemned in absolute terms. Religion was a matter of personal faith which one was free to pursue without making it an issue that could disrupt the unity of Ghadar. Secularism and freedom promoted economic, social and technological progress of the nation. Canada and the United States were clear examples of this reality. Ghadar wanted to achieve similar successes after wresting independence from the British. Josh criticized Ghadar for not taking a clear position on the Maharajas, Rajas and Princes who were the stooges of the British, oppressors of their subjects and collaborators of Britain. They were interested only in preserving their status and authority while leading thoroughly corrupt and decadent lives.<sup>26</sup> It is to be noted that Har Dayal did not criticize the Maharajas in absolute and continuous terms because he wanted their support for Ghadar.

Har Dayal exhorted Indians in India not to pay any taxes to the British because they did not receive any benefits in return. He charged that the money collected in India was exported to England to enrich the English and feed their Industrial Revolution. The Ghadarites campaigned for Indians in India to refuse enlistment in the British India Army. They would be used, Ghadar argued, as cannon fodder in a European war that was looming on the horizon. Ghadar was

designed to have an international character, hence its branch offices were established in countries like Malaya, Shanghai, Indonesia, the Phillippines, Hong Kong, and Singapore. Although the head office was in San Francisco, important suboffices were opened in Vancouver and Victoria. The primary objective of Ghadar was the ouster of Raj from India. Equally important was the establishment of an independent, democratic, secular state patterned after the American constitutional government. Hindu-Muslim-Sikh unity was stressed as fundamental to the success of Ghadar.<sup>27</sup>

The Raj implicated Har Dayal in the attempted bombing of the Viceroy Lord Harding in New Delhi. However, he was never formally charged because his utterances in this matter were merely an inspiration to subversive activity. On December 23, 1908, the capital of British India was being ceremoniously transferred from Calcutta to the old Mogul center in Delhi. When the Viceregal procession was about to enter Delhi, a bomb was thrown at it, which missed the Viceroy but struck the elephant.<sup>28</sup> When Har Dayal learned of this attack at Berkeley, he turned the incident into a gala celebration, complete with dancing, singing and repeated recitation of *Bande Matram* (the Indian national anthem). Har Dayal was the principal speaker - at his eloquent best quoting freely from powerful patriotic poetry. This celebration moved the British authorities to fast action against Ghadar in collaboration with Canadian officials. Hopkinson was sent on a temporary assignment to check on Har Dayal's alleged seditious activity in the United States and reported to his superiors that Har Dayal was the most dangerous of all the

Indian agitators in the United States. With the force of the British and Canadian Governments behind him, Hopkinson pressed the United States immigration officials to deport Har Dayal on the grounds that he was a threat to law and order, was a self-confessed anarchist and was working with the Germans in violation of American neutrality laws.<sup>29</sup> Charges were laid against Har Dayal but he fled the United States to avoid trial and almost certain conviction. Subsequently, Hopkinson made many clandestine trips from Canada to the United States to spy on the remaining Ghadar party activists.

There were organizations other than Ghadar committed to a similar ideology. The Hindu National Association was established by Khankhoje, a veteran on the West coast.<sup>30</sup> He was the protege of Tilak, the famed Indian freedom fighter, and was encouraged to get military training outside of India. He attended Tamil Pais, a military academy. He hoped to go to the West Point Military Academy but was frustrated because it was limited to American citizens only. He was also refused citizenship. This ended his quest for high military qualifications. With a diploma from a military academy, he founded the India Independence League in California whose membership rose to five-hundred.<sup>31</sup> Eventually he became associated with the illegal entry of Indians into the United States from Mexico and Canada. Khankhoje turned his focus from revolutionary activities to the immediate problems caused by immigration barriers in Canada and the United States. He constantly reminded Indians that the Chinese and Japanese Governments fought for their oppressed nationals in Canada and the United States. In contrast the British

Government abandoned her Indian subjects and sided with the Canadian and American Governments to oppress them.

Predating the formation of Ghadar, Indian revolutionaries had an active propaganda center in Berlin. A war in Europe was regarded as imminent in which Germany would be a pivotal player. This made Berlin a significant revolutionary center in Europe.<sup>32</sup> In the Spring of 1914, Har Dayal, while in Berlin, as a fugitive from justice in the United States, claimed Ghadar had thousands of active members ready for military training to overthrow the Raj by revolution. On his recommendation, the Berlin India Committee obtained a promise of support for Ghadar from the German Government. The Germans regarded British Imperialism as an obstacle to German ambitions and interests abroad. In the estimation of the German Government, Ghadar could be used as a potential dagger in the heart of British Imperialism. On the other hand, Ghadar regarded Germany as a reliable source for arms and training. The proverbial stand of "an enemy of my enemy is my friend," became the guiding principle of Ghadar in dealing with Germany. Emmaline Smillie sums up Har Dayal and his message as follows:

He was imbued with passionate Anglo-phobia and was determined to instill his own spirit into as many of his countrymen in America as possible. In several cities of the United States, he and his colleagues organized associations sworn to destroy British rule in India. They established a newspaper called the Ghadar and printed it in Hindustani. They poured out their poems and prose articles for free distribution in America and even tried to forward them to India. In their violent anti-British zeal they preached murder and revolt. They urged their countrymen to take up the cause and return to India to

expel the English by any and every means.<sup>33</sup>

The first edition of Ghadar, a monthly newspaper, came out in November 1913. Its contents were sensational, nationalistic and patriotically arousing. For example, the November 15, 1913 edition advertised in bold letters:

Wanted:	Enthusiastic and heroic soldiers for organizing Ghadar in Hindustan.
Renumeration:	Death
Reward:	Martyrdom
Pension:	Freedom
Field of Work:	Hindustan <sup>34</sup>

Sarvarkar's book, Indian War of Independence of 1857, was used as a focal point of Ghadar propaganda. Excerpts from this book were serialized in Urdu and Gurmukhi editions of Ghadar. Articles and poems from Ghadar became very popular and were reprinted in booklet form and read to congregations in places of worship, political meetings, social gatherings, universities and literary clubs. Emily Brown's biography of Har Dayal, asserts that the Germans assisted the Ghadarites in disseminating their propaganda and literature in the far flung corners of the world wherever Indians resided. There is convincing and credible evidence to support this assertion: it came out during the Lahore and Singapore Conspiracy Trials.

Dealing with Ghadar propaganda, four of the best known works by Ghadar were: Ghadar di Goonj (Echoes of Mutiny), Illan-I-Jang (Declaration of War), Naya Zamana (The New Age) and The Balance Sheet of British Rule in India.

Two translated poems from Ghadar di Goonj radiate their stirring emotional appeal:



No Pundits or Mullahs do we need  
No prayers or litanies we need recite  
These will only scuttle our boat  
Draw the sword; 'tis time to fight.<sup>35</sup>

The second describes the effect of Ghadar propaganda on its supporters: their conversion from docile British subjects into fanatical patriots:

Through a sprinkle on the withered hearts,  
The Ghadar fired a new life into the dead.  
The pen has done the work of a cannon,  
Shaken the foundation of the tyrannist government.<sup>36</sup>

Other examples of works published by Ghadar in the same vein included: Zulam! Gore Shahi Zulam (Tyranny, White Racial Tyranny), which highlighted the forcible deportation of Bhagwan Singh from Canada; Nawen Zamane De Nawen Adarsh (New Ideals of the New Era), was a criticism of the pacific politics of the Indian National Congress; Zalam Coolie Pukaran Sanoon (Tyrant Calls Us Coolies), dealt with the exploitation and ill treatment of Indians under the Raj; Zalam Farangi Lai Gaye Desh Lutt Ke (The English Have Looted Our Country) and Angrezi Raj Vich Praja de Duhk Kahani (The Story of the Peoples Suffering Under the British Rule), were anecdotal works based on evidence of victims gathered from government reports, books and journals. In this regard, Singh and Singh aptly observe that:

Within a few months, the Ghadar Party had the unanimous support of the entire Indian immigrant community of the Pacific Coast and had changed the Sikhs from loyal British subjects to ardent revolutionaries.<sup>37</sup>

Ghadar literature in vernacular in particular was directed to Indian laborers and farmers settled abroad. They looked for straightforward explanations to

seemingly complex problems and received them in people's vocabulary in Ghadar. This was in accord with the Marxist observation: "A beginner who has learnt a new language always translates it back into his mother tongue."<sup>38</sup> This maxim was shrewdly used by writers and poets in their stirring poetical renditions, particularly in Urdu and Gurmukhi. Powerful poetry came out of the pens of Bhagwan Singh, Harnam Singh Tundilat and Munsha Singh Dukhi. Their poems were collected and printed in a booklet form under the title Ghadar-di-Goonj. Puri states that this work "...became a major source not only of fervent emotional appeal but also of development of a new framework of consciousness for these people."<sup>39</sup>

The themes addressed by this poetry were the elements in the daily lives and thinking of the Indian immigrants. Bitter awareness of their humiliation and backwardness for which they were bullied and ridiculed and called "coolies and filthy ragheads" was brought home to them. They were reminded that they were forced to leave their mother country because of white oppression, the *bania*'s greed and the tax man's grab - a combination of which spelled ruin for them and their families. They conspired to steal their lands, their honor and their livelihood. The past oppression was linked to their present suffering in North America as a continuing phenomenon. British political dominance and economic exploitation was equated with the drainage of India's wealth to feed and enrich the English economy. Rhetorically, the poets asked why the electric bulbs were alight in England, while their kinsmen lay deserted in the dark; why the world was enjoying happiness and prosperity while the Indians were steeped in backwardness, decadence, shame and

embarrassment. A simple man could easily relate to such experiences. Some poems labeled Britain and her allies as oppressors and urged that Britain must be chased out of India by force of arms. This ouster alone would restore to the Indians their dignity, self-respect, equality and prosperity. The following are typical examples of Ghadar poetry:

In famines our children die of starvation  
And the English live off our income  
We grow wheat to eat, but've to make do with barley  
The revenue collectors do not leave behind a piece.

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In India a *Kaudi* is not available if you search  
And England has grown enormously wealthy  
The dogs of the *Feringhee* eat to their fill  
And human beings of India die of starvation.<sup>40</sup>

Ghadar literature was inflammatory. One couplet stated that if the Indians were treated like animals in their own country, how could they be expected to be accorded respect in foreign lands? The Indians had been stripped naked of everything they possessed including *izzat* (self respect). Drawing the sword in accordance with Guru Gobind Singh's teaching was now the only solution. Bhagwan Singh preached "Deputations are of no avail; take in your hand the sword and the shield."<sup>41</sup> He explained that world history has no account of any people who won freedom and independence without armed struggle. Bhagwan Singh used Guru Gobind Singh's teachings to emphasize the point that Sikhs were obligated, as a matter of last resort, to fight against tyranny by force of arms in defense of their honor, religion and culture. Reference to tradition became a significant source of

symbolic and normative justification for an armed confrontation with the British. The names of Sikh heroes like Banda Bahadur, Deep Singh, Mehtab Singh, Hari Singh and Phula Singh were used to stir the emotions of the Indian immigrants and to arouse political consciousness in their minds. Martyrdom and mythology were significant features in their poetry. This aroused militancy and strengthened loyalty to Ghadar causes. The poets never tired of glorifying sacrifices made by the Sikh Gurus, particularly Guru Gobind Singh who sacrificed his four sons and himself in battles against Mogul tyranny. Reference was made to the Mutiny of 1857 during which the Sikhs supported the British. They were now urged to remove the stigma of collaboration with Britain by following the teachings of Guru Gobind Singh:

The whole world taunts us  
Liberate the country soon, O'Singhs  
Lest you mistake again as in 'Fifty Seven  
Truly remember the occasion O'Singhs  
Get up, let's wash off the stigma of treachery  
If you remember the Guru's words O'Singhs  
Joining with the Marathas and the Bengalis  
And to the happiness of Hindus and Musalmans  
O'Singhs.<sup>42</sup>

Other representative examples of poetry designed to convert the Indian immigrants into Ghadar adherents are the following:

Though Hindus, Mussulmans and Sikhs we be,  
Sons of Bharat are we still  
Put aside your arguments for another day  
Call of the hour is to kill.<sup>43</sup>

---

While we were all sunk in stupor  
The foreigners took over our government

In pointless disputes we got involved  
Like quarrelsome whores our time we spent.

Though born we were in one land  
By caste we become high and low  
These foolish factions we did create  
And seed of discord ourselves did sow.

Some worship the cow; others, swine abhor,  
The white man eats them at every place;  
Forget you are Hindu, forget you are Mussulman,  
Pledge yourselves to your land and race.<sup>44</sup>

Despite the severity of British repressive measures, the Ghadarites influence reached deep into the innermost recesses of the Punjab. Singh and Singh state that "no village in the Punjab was beyond the reach and influence of the Ghadarites, who were bold, fearless and defiant."<sup>45</sup> The lasting effect of Ghadar poetry has been such that it is recited and lustily sung at Sikh Gurudwaras, public meetings and political rallies to this day.

While Ghadar gained new ground day by day, the authorities in Victoria, Ottawa, London and Delhi were not sitting idle. Through collaborative effort, these Governments stepped up their surveillance and intelligence activities. Their chief espionage agent in charge of intelligence operations in Canada was William Hopkinson. He was made available to Canada by the British authorities. He compiled a dossier on the Ghadarites, Sikhs and any discontented Indian immigrant. Hopkinson was rabidly anti-Indian and highly intelligent in his work. He was successful in building a network of intelligence agents from within the immigrant community recruiting Indian loyalists like Bela Singh, Arjun Singh, Babu

Singh, Gunja Ram, Kirpal Singh and Harnam Singh.<sup>46</sup> Hopkinson infiltrated the highest cadres of Ghadar. He kept the authorities duly informed of Ghadar activities, supporters and sources of funding. A detailed account of Hopkinson's operations can be found in the Isemonger and Slattery Report.<sup>47</sup> It details Ghadar efforts to smuggle arms from Canada and the United States into India. Ghadar plans to temper with the loyalty of Sikh soldiers in the British India Army were fully exposed. Ghadar connections with other revolutionary groups around the world were duly traced. Ghadar's relationship with Germany was established and analyzed. The anarchist activities of Har Dayal were highlighted. The British effort to influence American policy against the Ghadarites and Indian revolutionaries resident in the United States and Canada, were in this report.

While the Ghadarites had fired the imagination of the Indians in North America, the voyage of the Komagata Maru and its aftermath, provided Ghadar with an outlet for its revolutionary fervor and pent-up rage. The exploitative Raj in India and the oppression of the Indians in Canada and the United States became the focal points of Ghadar's revolution.

1. Cited from Ghadar-di-Goonj by Emily Brown, "Students, Sikhs and Swamis: Punjabis in the United States, 1899-1914," in Punjab Past and Present: Essays in Honor of Dr. Ganda Singh, eds. by Harbans Singh and Norman Barrier (Patiala: Punjab University), p. 333.

2. Buchignani and Indra, Continuous Journey, p. 52.

3. Ibid, p. 52-53.

4. Swadesh Sevak (April 24, 1910), p. 1.

5. Puri, Ghadar Movement, p. 43.

6. Singh and Singh, Ghadar 1915, p. 14. Also see Isemonger and Slattery Report, in Bhai Nahar Singh and Kirpal Singh (eds.) Struggle For Free Hindustan: Ghadar Movement (New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers, 1986), p. 21-22 (hereafter referred to as the Isemonger and Slattery Report). This book was designed to collect in one volume all the scattered documents relating to Ghadar. This volume covers the period 1905 to 1916.

7. Singh and Singh, Ghadar 1915, p. 14-19. They discuss in detail many of the short lived Indian organizations formed in the first decade of Indian settlement in Canada.

8. Jogesh C. Misrow, East Indian Immigration on the Pacific Coast (California: Stanford University Press, 1915), p. 4.

9. Anil Ganguly, Ghadar Revolution in America (Delhi: Jindal Printers, 1980), p. 7-8.

10. Brown, "Students, Sikhs and Swamis," p. 329.

11. Ibid., p. 327.

12. Puri, Ghadar Movement, p. 125.

13. Isemonger and Slattery Report, p. 13.

14. Ibid.

15. The Arya Samaj was a reformist movement founded by Swami Dayananda in 1875. It began an active campaign to unify India around the belief in God and complete faith in the Vedas (the oldest Hindu scriptures). This movement made a direct appeal to the masses and argued that the Vedas taught monotheism, morality and not the worship of images or caste discrimination. It also rejected Western learning as a basis for reforming society. The Arya Samaj was important in revitalizing the Hindu community in

India and fought for education reforms at every level. For further information, see Thomas Hopkins. The Hindu Religious Tradition. California: Wadsworth Publishing Co., 1971, p. 135.

16. Sareen, Indian Revolutionary Movements, p. 71.

17. Darisi Chenchiah states in his recollections of his days with Har Dayal that "it was a peculiar characteristic of Har Dayal to change his ideas rapidly and act upon them. Darisi Chenchiah, The Ghadar Party, 1913-1918: An Authentic Report, Part 1 (Jallundar: King's Press, 1935), p. 12.

18. Ibid.

19. Isemonger and Slattery Report, p. 28-29.

20. Ibid.

21. Immigration Department File (RG76, No. 879545), PAC: 1914.

22. Buchignani & Indra, Continuous Journey, p. 52-53.

23. Har Dayal, *A Balance Sheet of British Rule in India* (San Francisco: Hindustan Ghadar Party Collection, Berkeley, 1915.) Also included in the first issue of the *Hindustan Ghadar* (San Francisco: November 1913). The following fourteen points were listed by Har Dayal:

- "i) The English take away fifty crore rupees to England every year.
- ii) As a result, Indians have become so poor.
- iii) The average per capita daily income is only 5 paise.
- iv) Land tax is above 65 per cent.
- v) The expenditure on the 24 crore peoples is only 7.75 crores; on health care 2 crores; but on military 29 crores are spent.
- vi) Recurrence of famines is increasing under English rule and during the last one decade, 20 million men, women and children died of hunger (1904-1914).
- vii) 8 lakh people died of plague during the last 16 years and the death rate has risen from 24 to 34 per thousand during 30 years.
- viii) Schemes are executed to promote discord and ruin native states and to extend this sphere of influence of the English rule.
- viii) The Englishmen are never punished for killing Indian men and dishonoring women.
- x) Christian missionaries are helped with the money realized from Hindus and Muslims.
- xi) Efforts are made to foment discord between Hindus and Muslims.
- xii) Indian arts and industries are ruined for the benefit of the English.
- xiii) Using India's money and lives of Indians, aggressions are committed on



Afghanistan, Burma, Egypt, Persia and China.

xiv) The Indian population numbers 7 crores in Native States and 24 crores in British India. There are however only 79614 officers and soldiers and 38948 volunteers who are Englishmen."

24. Puri, Ghadar Movement, p. 124.

25. Ghadar (San Francisco: November 1913). This postulate is also found in the writings of Guru Gobind Singh. Translated by Jaswindar Bhoi.

26. Josh, Hindustan Ghadar Party, p. 175-176.

27. Jagjit Singh, Ghadar Party Lehri (Amritsar: Tarn Taran, 1955), p. 60.

28. Sir Michael O'Dwyer, India As I Knew It, 1885-1925 (London: Constable Publishing, 1926), p. 190.

29. Isemonger and Slattery Report, p. ii.

30. Puri, Ghadar Movement, p. 135.

31. Jagit Singh, Ghadar Party, p. 65.

32. Singh and Singh, Ghadar 1915, p. 48.

33. Emmaline Smillie, "An Historical Survey of Indian Migration Within the Empire," in Canadian Historical Review 4 (1): 1923, p. 233.

34. Ghadar, (San Francisco: November 15, 1913).

35. Ghadar di Goonj, (San Francisco: Ghadar Party Press, 1918).

36. Ibid.

37. Singh and Singh, Ghadar 1915, p. 21.

38. Puri, Ghadar Movement, p. 135.

39. Ibid.

40. Ghadar-di-Goonj, p. 5-17. "Kaudi" means seashell and refers to the smallest monetary denomination in any currency. "Feringhee" is the derogatory term to describe "the white colonizer."

41. Ibid., p. 5.

42. Ibid., p. 19.
43. Ibid., p. 23.
44. Ibid., p. 17.
45. Singh and Singh, Ghadar 1915, p. 38.
46. Sohan Singh Bakana, Jeevan Sangram: An Autobiography (Patiala: Youth Center Publication, 1967), p. 35.
47. Isemonger and Slattery Report, p. 4.

## **Chapter Seven**

### **The Komagata Maru Affair: The Indian Challenge to Oppression**

**For sixty days in 1914, a shipload of would be Indian immigrants was held just off shore by an angry province determined to stay white. The passengers fought off police, struggled in the courts, gave up when menaced by the navy, but left behind a legacy of death.<sup>1</sup>**

This incident in Canadian history is referred to as the Komagata Maru Affair. It was a calculated challenge to the oppressive Canadian immigration laws in their application to the Indians. At the outset, it is important to identify certain key players in the Komagata Maru Affair. On the official side, the Canadian position was built around the sentiment expressed by Sir Richard McBride, Premier of British Columbia, when he stated: "To admit orientals in large numbers would mean in the end the extinction of the white peoples and we have always in mind the necessity of keeping this a white man's country."<sup>2</sup> This theme was aggressively carried out by the anti-immigrant lobby led by the Conservative Party notables like Henry Hubert Stevens, C. E. Tisdall and Dr. Maguire, Members of British Columbia's Provincial Legislature and Mr. Baxter, the Mayor of Vancouver. This group provided powerful backing to Malcolm R.J. Reid, the Dominion Immigration Agent and Inspector stationed in Vancouver. He reported to W.D. Scott, the Superintendent of Immigration in Ottawa. Reid recruited additional staff, conversant with the background of the Indians. They were assigned to deal specifically with the cases of the Indian immigrants. There is plenty of evidence to suggest that Reid took direct counsel of Stevens and was heavily influenced by his views.

Reid's closest and most trusted officer was William Hopkinson, who was designated as the Official Agent and Interpreter for all the Governments involved. In intelligence matters, Hopkinson reported to the Minister of the Interior in Ottawa. He also reported to Mr. J.A. Wallinger, Agent of the British India Government in London. He had access to criminal intelligence material from India that was kept secret from his Canadian superiors. He drew a handsome salary of \$125 per month from the Canadian Government; a stipend of £60 and expenses of £60 from the India Office and a retainer of \$25 per month from the American Immigration Service.<sup>3</sup> Hopkinson kept suspected Indian Ghadarites and seditionists under surveillance, tracked their movements and carefully recorded their activities. He was ably assisted by his Indian informants, the best known being Bela Singh. In his multiple roles, the parties he represented curiously saw not even a semblance of conflict of interest.

Gurdit Singh, the charterer of the Komagata Maru, was a well-to-do Sikh resident in the Malay States. He was a successful contractor and an entrepreneur. While on a business trip to Hong Kong, he met with several Indians settled in Hong Kong, Singapore and the Malay States, who were keen to emigrate to Canada.<sup>4</sup> The idea of chartering a ship for this purpose was planted in his mind and he "...recognized the possibilities of making money by such an enterprise."<sup>5</sup> He saw it as an act of patriotism which, successful or not, would win him recognition among nationalists in India.<sup>6</sup> Eventually with the assistance of a German named Bune, he hired a Japanese-owned steamer, the Komagata Maru.

Gurdit Singh chartered the Komagata Maru with the explicit purpose of conveying to Canada new Indian immigrants picked up from Oriental ports like Shanghai, Hong Kong and Singapore. In the ship's log, Gurdit Singh wrote:

The reason which led me to this work is that when I came to Hong Kong in January of 1914, I could not bear the trouble of those who were in the Gurudwara waiting to go to Vancouver. They were waiting there for years ...How tyrannical and hard was this on our brothers!.. This affected my mind and I resolved to take them to Vancouver under any circumstance.<sup>7</sup>

Gurdit Singh took over the Komagata Maru on March 25, 1914. It was basically a coal carrying cargo ship but it was refitted as a cargo-cum-passenger vessel. The lower deck was cleaned, the latrines were fixed and the deck was furnished with over five hundred (500) benches which could be used as beds. Some three hundred (300) emigrants were picked up from Manila, Hong Kong, Shanghai, Moji and Yokohama; others had been brought over from Calcutta to Hong Kong.

Since the ship was refitted, it needed clearance from the Government of Hong Kong, before it set out to sea. While the ship was held up at the Hong Kong Harbor, F. W. May, the Governor of Hong Kong, detected trouble. On March 30, 1914, on instructions from London, Governor May cabled the Canadian Government in Ottawa:

150 Indian Sikhs have chartered steamer from here to British Columbia, are not on through ticket from India. Am advised that local emigration clauses do not apply to other than Chinese emigration. Please telegraph whether in the circumstances they will be permitted to land in Canada.<sup>8</sup>

When no reply was received after three days, a second urgent message was sent, but to no avail - there was still no word from Canada. In the meantime, Gurdit Singh consulted a firm of Hong Kong Lawyers Messrs. Wilkinson & Grist, to find out if there were any legal impediments to their landing in Vancouver. The letter of legal opinion from the law firm, dated March 24, 1914, stated the following:

Referring to your interview with us this afternoon when you enquired whether there were any restrictions upon Indians who wish to travel to Vancouver so far as this Colony was concerned, we have to advise you that in our opinion there are no restrictions upon the emigration by Indians from the Colony unless they are under contract of service...Provided however that the passengers are not under contract of service there are no provisions which they need comply with, since they cannot under any circumstances come within the definition of assisted emigrants unless they are Chinese.

We are therefore of opinion that provided their tickets are properly obtained from a passage broker, any Indians can leave the Colony for any destination unless they are bound under contract of service.<sup>9</sup>

At about the same time, Gurdit Singh accidentally met Hong Kong's Colonial Secretary Claude Severn in downtown Hong Kong. They had known each other when the Colonial Secretary was a district magistrate in Selangor State fifteen years earlier. They exchanged pleasantries. Gurdit Singh met him again on April 4, 1914 in his office. They conversed in Malay, which Gurdit Singh spoke better than English. Severn told Gurdit Singh that his charter was free to leave Hong Kong but that did not mean permission to land in Canada.<sup>10</sup> With still no word from Canada, the Komagata Maru set sail from Hong Kong on April 4, 1914. The

negative reply from the Canadian Government came three days after the ship set sail.

The Komagata Maru's voyage was closely followed by the British Columbian authorities. On April 18, 1914, Mr. Mulvey, Under Secretary of State of India, reported to the Deputy Minister of the Interior of Canada that the Komagata Maru had left Shanghai with "237 discontented Indians."<sup>11</sup> On May 3, 1914, Mr. Green, the British Ambassador to Tokyo, sent word to Canada that the Komagata Maru contained over three hundred passengers, who were almost all Indians. Hopkinson's intelligence reports alleged that the Komagata Maru carried as its passengers terrorists, subversives and seditionists from India. The Canadian authorities questioned other ships coming into the harbours of Victoria and Vancouver about the Komagata Maru. Finally, on May 21, 1914, in the late evening, the long awaited ship sailed towards Vancouver harbour. It was quarantined for failure to obtain a bill of health in Japan. Eyewitness accounts and media reports indicated that this was a technical ploy to deny berthing to Komagata Maru.<sup>12</sup>

The Times of London of May 23, 1914, described the arrival of the Komagata Maru as "the 2<sup>nd</sup> Oriental Invasion of Canada."<sup>13</sup> Its correspondent in Vancouver proclaimed: "Asia is knocking, and knocking persistently, at the door of Western America."<sup>14</sup> The Times of London of June 4, 1914, stated that the "East is east, and West is west, and though we may hesitate to accept as inevitable the corollary that never the twain shall meet, it would be fatal to deny the immediate difference between them."<sup>15</sup> Lord Hardinge, Viceroy of India, totally disowned any interest in

the Komagata Maru affair. His attitude is summed up in his own words in a speech to his Council of Ministers on September 8, 1914: "The development of this incident was watched by the Government of India with the closest attention; but as the question at issue was of a purely legal character, there was no occasion for intervention."<sup>16</sup>

Correspondents of local newspapers went on board and interviewed many passengers. The Vancouver Daily News Advertiser of May 23, 1914 reported: "They all seemed in good health and were certainly clean, well set up and handsome men. Some of the old men in particular were magnificent specimens of humanity."<sup>17</sup> The Victoria Times of May 23, 1914 reported:

The majority of the men had served in the British Army, and they are a tall handsome lot. They seem superior to the class of Hindus which have already come to this province. They stand very erect and move with an alert action. All their suits are well pressed, and their turbans spotlessly clean. Most of them know a little English and some of them converse in it remarkably well.<sup>18</sup>

The Komagata Maru was kept docked for two months in the Vancouver harbour, while immigration officials decided if the three hundred and seventy-six (376) passengers, mainly Sikhs from India would be given permission to enter Canada. It was asserted, on behalf of the passengers, that as British subjects, they had the legal right to enter Canada, a British Dominion. Since the Sikhs in the British India Army had served with high sacrifice and distinction throughout the British Empire during its darkest hours, the British agents promised them work and unhindered access to any country where the British flag flew. This proved not to be true.



However, in contrast, other British subjects like the Australians, the South Africans, and the New Zealanders, who had taken up residence in British overseas territories within the Empire faced no such immigration impediments. This was seen as outright discrimination in favour of the white subjects of the British Empire.

The actions taken by the Canadian Immigration authorities were seen by the Indian immigrants as examples of utter human cruelty and open racism against innocent victims in distressed circumstances. The passengers were trapped in a battle between the Canadian authorities and Gurdit Singh in regards to how much, when and how food and medical supplies could be sent to the passengers aboard the ship. Contrived delays, technical difficulties and deliberate obstructions intensified the misery, suffering and destitution of the passengers on board the ship. This sorry state of affairs lingered for a period of over two months. The Immigration officials knew that Gurdit Singh owed a balance of \$15,000 for the charter. If this sum was not settled by June 15, 1914, the ship would be returnable to Hong Kong under heavy penalties for breach of the charter party.<sup>19</sup> Every effort was made by the Canadian authorities to induce a breach of the charter so that the passengers could be returned to Hong Kong unlanded. One trick was to cause interminable delays in the medical examination of each passenger. What should have taken hours was stretched into weeks, without regard to the misery of the passengers. Hopkinson wrote to the provincial authorities on May 26, 1914:

As a matter of fact, I understand the sum of \$15,000.00 is now due and if that is not forthcoming by that date the boat will be returned. This is one reason, why we

are proceeding somewhat slowly with the medical examination, and is a further reason why I strongly object to Gurdit Singh coming ashore, as so long as he is aboard ship he cannot negotiate with local Hindus to raise money; nor can he do business with the Banks.<sup>20</sup>

The Canadian authorities refused to let Gurdit Singh come ashore. Delivery of food and provisions to the ship was suspended indefinitely, unless advance payment was made. An embargo was placed on the medical supplies as well. Concerns about sanitation were ignored even when passengers complained bitterly that flies, rats and vermin were pestering them.<sup>21</sup> One of the passengers, landed because of previous Canadian domicile, died in the hospital from consumption.<sup>22</sup> Of the three hundred and seventy-six (376) passengers on board the Komagata Maru, ninety were rejected on medical grounds; and four returning immigrants were allowed to land. All other passengers were served with deportation orders, subject to review by the Boards of Enquiry.<sup>23</sup> The sole purpose of this exercise was merely to gain time until the ship could be returned to Hong Kong, with its cargo of rejected immigrants.

Mr. R. Bird, a Vancouver lawyer was retained by the Sikhs, as counsel. He represented the passengers aboard the Komagata Maru in judicial proceedings commenced on their behalf.<sup>24</sup> The passengers were not allowed to have personal contact with Mr. Bird. He was not allowed to board the ship, nor was he allowed to see the charterer, Gurdit Singh.<sup>25</sup> He could only communicate by mail. This ploy denied the victims proper, timely and effective legal representation.

On May 31, 1914, the Indians from various parts of British Columbia

gathered at Dominion Hall at Vancouver, under the joint auspices of the Khalsa Diwan Society and the United India League. They quickly raised \$22,000 to tide over the legal problems of the charter contract and to pay for the legal defense of the passengers. They became known as the Shore Committee. Speeches were delivered by Hussain Rahim, the lawyer Mr. Edward Bird and a socialist, Mr. Fitzgerald. These were prominently reported by Hopkinson to his superiors. In a letter dated June 22, 1914 to W.D. Scott, Superintendent of Immigration in Ottawa, Hopkinson described the meeting as follows:

Hindus held mass meeting at Dominion Hall. Bird, Counsel on behalf of the Hindus, addressed the audience composed of about four hundred Hindus and one hundred twenty-five white socialists. He protested against the treatment of those on board the Komagata Maru and stated that the Government were procrastinating and were delaying to force the people to return to India; the Government were afraid to allow a test case to go before the Courts as the Chief Justice had declared the Act invalid. Followed by a rabid socialist named Fitzgerald who advised the Hindus to return to India and raise the flag of revolution, thus becoming masters in their own country when they could command interest here. Two other socialists were to have addressed the meeting but they did not appear. Rahim is responsible for the introduction of the Socialist Party as he is secretary of a Socialist party here. Bird himself is a Socialist. Other Hindu speakers also addressed the meeting which terminated in the following protest to be sent to Secretary of State, India and Premier Borden. Begins:

"Whereas the Hindustanee passengers on board of the Komagata Maru are unlawfully prevented by the Immigration authorities from consulting with their legal advisors and from procuring provisions and water from their Hindu friends, making their lot on board, a lot to

which cattle would not be subjected, and whereas such brutal and unlawful treatment be tolerated in India, we urge the Dominion authorities under the principle - do unto others as they would do unto you - see that the Hindus are saved from the high-handed actions of immigrations officials. We further protest that the action of the immigration officers in Vancouver is as unlawful as anarchists and one so provoking that the Hindus shall never forget or forgive the powers that be if they do not remedy the League and the Khalsa Diwan Society."

Rajah Singh, Sohan Lal and Balwant Singh advised Hindus to return to India and raise revolution reiterating statement of Socialist Fitzgerald. Will forward you verbatim report of Bird's speech. Mayor Baxter has announced his intention calling a mass meeting of citizens Monday or Tuesday to discuss Hindu situation and urge rejection. Will report results to you.<sup>26</sup>

Turning to the legal struggle, Gurdit Singh maintained that the passengers, as British subjects, had the legal right to enter Canada since it was a British Dominion. After much discussion with Mr. Bird, as Counsel for the passengers, and Reid, as the official representative, it was agreed to proceed to a test case before the Court of Appeal in British Columbia. Munshi Singh, a passenger on the ship, a native of India and a British subject, was chosen for this purpose. He was denied permission to land. In the formal proceedings before a Board of Inquiry, he was ordered to be deported. Munshi Singh then applied to a Judge for a writ of *habeas corpus* to test the legality of his detention pending deportation.<sup>27</sup> This, too, was refused. Munshi Singh finally appealed to the Court of Appeal where Chief Justice J.A. MacDonald heard the case. Munshi Singh's Counsel put forth the following arguments. First, the Immigration Act, in so far as it excluded British subjects from

entry into Canada, was unconstitutional because such authority vested in the Imperial Parliament in London. Second, the Orders-in-Council, made pursuant to the Act, prescribing monetary, continuous journey and occupational qualifications, were invalid as being *ultra vires*. Third, the Orders-in-Council operationalized discrimination on the basis of race. Since the Asiatic race was singled-out, and this test was not applied to other races, there was an unjust discrimination, not authorized by the Act. Fourth, a British subject born in one part of the Empire is a native citizen of every other part. Fifth, that the case of each and every passenger on board the Komagata Maru should be adjudicated individually rather than as a group. Sixth, the Order-in-Council did not apply to the appellant because he was a farmer and not a laborer. The above arguments were rejected *in toto*. The Court decided that under the British North American Act (1867), "...the Parliament of Canada is clothed with sovereign power in matters relating to immigration into any part of the Dominion...."<sup>28</sup> Chief Justice J.A. MacDonald, further stated:

The Immigration Act is not unconstitutional, and the Order-in-Council.....is not *ultra vires*, and as the Board was legally seized of the subject of the inquiry, I think the court cannot review a decision upon a question which the Board was authorized to decide...."<sup>29</sup>

The Chief Justice, in dismissing the Appeal in its totality concluded:

The result is that in my opinion the British North America Act vested in the Parliament of Canada sovereign power over immigration in Canada; that that power includes the right to exclude British subjects not even excepting those born in the United Kingdom; that each of the Orders-in-Council in question here was authorized by the Immigration Act; that each one of

them would bar the appellant; that the Board of Inquiry acted within its jurisdiction and in accordance with the provisions of the Act; further the onus to prove that he was not a laborer vested on the Appellant. He had not discharged this burden.<sup>30</sup>

Having lost his case in the courts of law, Gurdit Singh continued his protracted negotiations with the provincial authorities through intermediaries. The owners of the Komagata Maru, finally proposed to Prime Minister Sir Robert Borden, that if the vessel were provided with provisions by the Canadian Government at a cost of \$40,000, the vessel would be permitted to proceed to Hong Kong.<sup>31</sup> This proposal was accepted provided that it was implemented promptly. To make sure that this occurred, the provisions were placed at a point outside the three mile territorial limit. This was to ensure that the ship would begin its journey back to the Orient from international waters. Since Canadian sovereignty did not extend beyond Canada's territorial waters, legal action under Canadian laws could not be commenced by any of the passengers.

Instructions were issued for the Komagata Maru to leave the harbour immediately. The passengers sent a telegram to the Canadian Governor General making a final plea to remain in Canada for the purpose of farming.<sup>32</sup> They assured the Governor General that they were all farmers, and their countrymen on shore could obtain money to buy farm land for them to work on.<sup>33</sup> They made their appeal as fellow British subjects, and reminded the Governor General that the Komagata Maru had been detained in Hong Kong for a week while the Governor of Hong Kong wired the Governor General of Canada for instructions. It was the failure of the

Canadian authorities to reply that was responsible for their proceeding to Canada in the first place. Had they been told while in Hong Kong that they were absolutely barred entry into Canada, in all likelihood they would not have made the journey. This appeal, as expected, was rejected.

Armed with guns and other ammunition, the British Columbian officials, accompanied by anti-immigrant citizens, headed for the Komagata Maru. Their intention was to force the ship and its passengers to leave the Canadian territorial waters. The passengers, in response, gathered at the side of the ship and hurled firebricks, pieces of machinery, hatchets, coal, and iron bars at the tug, the Sea Lion which was used by the local police.<sup>34</sup> It was soon decided that the Royal Navy should intervene. The services of the S.S. Rainbow were commissioned. In all, two hundred armed men were called to duty. With guns exposed, the S.S. Rainbow entered the harbour on 21 July, 1914 and dropped anchor two hundred yards from the Komagata Maru.<sup>35</sup> Thousands of spectators gathered on the waterfront or perched atop buildings to watch the humiliating departure of the Komagata Maru. After being subjected to deliberate delays and calculated humiliation, the Sikhs on board the Komagata Maru were denied entry into Canada. They were eventually forced to return to India, but not without violent incidents that focused international attention on the plight of the Indian immigrants in Canada.

The Komagata Maru Affair highlighted the fact that Canada's immigration laws, policies and practices were enacted specifically to bar the entry of Indians into Canada. They were in fact racist, discriminatory and political acts in intent,

operation and effort. Gurdit Singh took it upon himself to break down these barriers - with or without backing from Indians, whether resident in or outside of Canada. Not all of the passengers on board the Komagata Maru came to Canada specifically to force their way into Canada. Nor were they all subversives and terrorists. It was unfair to brand the passengers as seditious merely because they desired to emigrate to Canada. The rough treatment meted out to the passengers of the Komagata Maru was unnecessary. It was not defensible even on the ground that it was intended to create a precedent against the mass immigration of Indians or their ilk to Canada. Immigration officials did have the discretionary powers to waive the application of certain regulations in appropriate cases. This discretion was used to benefit immigrants from European countries, but not from Asia and specifically not from India.

The Indian immigrants viewed the Komagata Maru Affair as yet another device to prejudice their legal and political rights. It raised protest, violence and public outcry. It united the Indians as nothing had prior to this incident. Sikhs, Hindus and Muslims spoke with a strident, unified voice, backed up by firm conviction and organised effort to fight the anti-Indian immigrant restrictions. The Ghadarites seized on this issue and made it their cause, India's cause and an international cause against British colonial domination, Canadian oppression and white supremacist policies. The Ghadarites also converted this situation of agitation into a fight for India's independence, to be waged from outside India through military confrontations with the British colonial power on every conceivable front.



In short, the struggle for a just and fair treatment of Indian immigrants triggered a chain reaction. Discriminatory policies and practices gave rise to oppressive legislation to control, restrict and ban Indian immigration to Canada. This led to a well concerted protest which fed on Ghadar propaganda. The Komagata Maru Affair unleashed Ghadar rage and propagandistic fury to frenzied heights.

10. 1. Gurdit Singh, Voyage of the Komagata Maru, (Calcutta: Arya Works, 1929), p.
2. Quoted in The Times (London: May 23, 1914).
3. Immigration Department File No. 808722 (1), RG76, PAC: 1914.
4. Isemonger and Slattery Report, p. 54.
5. Ibid.
6. Hugh Johnston, The Voyage of the Komagata Maru: The Sikh Challenge to Canada's Color Bar (Calcutta: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 25.
7. Gurdit Singh, Voyage, p. 20.
8. Quoted in Johnston, The Voyage, p. 28.
9. Letter from Messrs. Wilkinson & Grist to Gurdit Singh dated March 24, 1914, in Immigration Department File No. 879545, RG76, PAC: 1914. Also see H.H. Stevens, Special Collection - The Komagata Maru Affair (Vancouver: Vancouver City Archives), p. 412 (hereafter referred to as the Stevens Papers).
10. Severn's memo enclosed in Governor May's dispatch to the Colonial Secretary, April 8, 1914, a copy of which was sent to the Governor General of Canada, Governor General's File (RG7, G21, No. 332 B), PAC:1914.
11. Gurdit Singh, Voyage, p. 33.
12. Ibid., 34.
13. The Times (London: May 23, 1914)
14. Ibid.
15. The Times (London: June 4, 1914)
16. Gazette (India: September 19, 1914) as cited in Singh and Singh, Ghadar 1915, p. 25-26.
17. The Vancouver Daily News Advertiser (Vancouver: May 24, 1914)
18. The Victoria Times (Victoria: May 23, 1914)
19. Immigration Department File (RG76, No. 879545) PAC:1914.

20. Cited in Gurdit Singh, Voyage, p. 26.
21. Sohan Singh Josh, The Tragedy of the Komagata Maru, (Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1975),p. 67.
22. Ibid., 68.
23. Ibid.
24. Johnston, The Voyage of the Komagata Maru, p. 34.
25. Ibid, 40.
26. Letter from Hopkinson to Scott dated June 2, 1914 in Immigration File No. 879545, RG76, PAC: 1914. Also see Stevens Papers, p. 235-236.
27. Judgement of the Honorable Chief Justice J. A. MacDonald, dated July 6, 1914, in the matter of Munshi Singh, in Stevens Papers, p. 445, 450.
28. Ibid., p. 445.
29. Ibid., p. 449.
30. Ibid., p. 450.
31. Cited in Josh, The Tragedy, p. 71.
32. Ibid.
33. Ibid., p.73.
34. The "Sea Lion" was another steamship that was asked to escort police on to the Komagata Maru.
35. Johnston, The Voyage of the Komagata Maru, p. 47.

## **Chapter Eight**

### **The Trail of Ghadar: Bloodshed, Reprisal and Collapse**

While the Komagata Maru was still anchored in port and the judicial proceedings respecting the right of the passengers to land in Canada were in progress, Ghadar commenced its free fall. Some Ghadarites in Vancouver were busy purchasing arms, including automatic pistols and bomb making materials.<sup>1</sup> On July 17, 1914, Balwant Singh, Bhag Singh, Harnam Singh and Mewa Singh quietly crossed the Canadian-American border and met with Har Dayal's trusted lieutenant Taraknath Das at a place called Sumas. They purchased revolvers and ammunition with the object of smuggling them on board the Komagata Maru. Mewa Singh was arrested on his return to Canada with two automatic pistols and five hundred rounds of ammunition. The others were arrested at Sumas by the American authorities. Bhag Singh and Balwant Singh were allowed to return to Canada, but Harnam Singh was deported.<sup>2</sup>

The British Intelligence, in which Hopkinson played a dominant role, had compiled a secret document called The Ghadar Directory, printed by the British Government Printer in Lahore. Its revised edition of 1916 included the names, addresses and detailed biographical sketches of Ghadarites and all others known or believed to be "connected with kindred revolutionary movements in America and elsewhere abroad."<sup>3</sup> C.R. Cleveland, Director of Criminal Intelligence, Delhi, stated in the Introduction to this Directory:

In the early months of 1914 evidence accumulated

showing that Har Dayal and his associates had successfully amalgamated the scattered seditious enterprises of previous years to one big concern which may be conveniently termed the Ghadar Movement, the avowed object of which was to force the British to relinquish India. The ramifications of the conspiracy were very wide, but the central control and guidance remained with Har Dayal and his lieutenants in America....<sup>4</sup>

Sohan Singh Bakana was an ardent Ghadarite. He was involved in the purchasing and smuggling of arms for Ghadar. He left North America for India to foment and participate in the planned revolution of the masses against the Raj. He met the Komagata Maru at Yokohama upon its return voyage, with two hundred automatic pistols and two thousand rounds of ammunition for transportation to India.<sup>5</sup> This scheme was also foiled. He was eventually arrested in India in October 1914 and subsequently tried in the Lahore Conspiracy Case. He was sentenced to death but his sentence was commuted to life imprisonment. While in jail he wrote his memoirs in Gurmukhi which were smuggled out and published.<sup>6</sup>

Kartar Singh Saraba was an active Ghadarite connected mostly with the publication of the newspaper itself. He arrived in the United States in February 1913 and enrolled at the University of California at Berkeley. He was credited with having brought three important Indian associations under Ghadar's umbrella, namely the Pacific Coast Hindu Association, the Hindustanee Students Association and the Khalsa Diwan Society. When he returned to India to fight the revolutionary war, he found disinterestedness and lack of support for Ghadar in rural Punjab. Unable to contact other Ghadar soldiers and desperately in need of funds, he

participated in Ghadar dacoities. It was also alleged that he operated an arms conduit through which arms from external sources were conveyed to the Ghadarites from Bengal to Punjab. He was charged with bomb making and tampering with the loyalty of the British India Army troops by preaching sedition and treason to them. At the Lahore Conspiracy Trial of 1915 he was sentenced to death and hanged.<sup>7</sup>

Taraknath Das left India in 1906 and spent some time in Japan. He proceeded to North America and enrolled at the University of California at Berkeley. He became the editor of the Free Hindustan and was closely associated with every anti-British agitation in Canada and the United States. He made impressive contributions to the formulation, coordination and execution of Ghadar policy.<sup>8</sup> There were many other illustrious Ghadarites who dedicated their lives to the cause of Ghadar and paid heavy penalties but whose names do not appear anywhere.

The departure of Komagata Maru almost coincided with the outbreak of World War One. Operations for smuggling arms and imparting military training to the revolutionaries in Thailand were not successful. The distribution of anti-British, pro-German Ghadarite propaganda in India was a greater success. Most of the leading Ghadarites had already returned to India or were on their way, via the Komagata Maru and other ships to trigger the revolution against the Raj. Sohan Singh Bakana and Kartar Singh Saraba were on the Komagata Maru and Jawala Singh, with a party of sixty (60) Ghadarites, was already in India.<sup>9</sup> Due to the absence of Ghadar veterans from North America, Ghadar experienced a leadership vacuum. In February 1916, the reins of power fell by default into the hands of

Chandrakant Chakravarty. Bickering among Ghadar's rank and file broke out. Ghadar was now actually leaderless, implicated in arms smuggling and demonstrably in collaboration with Germany. It was under surveillance by the British, the American and the Canadian intelligence services. It is no wonder that Ghadar began to crumble.

The German diplomatic and consular representatives in Washington, San Francisco, Shanghai and Bangkok, were instructed by the German foreign office to help Ghadar revolutionaries. Such assistance was in the form of arms, training, money and the dissemination of Ghadar propaganda. Fritz von Papen, the German military attache in Washington, was the contact between the German Government, on the one hand, and the American and Canadian Ghadarites on the other.<sup>10</sup> Chandrakant Chakarvarty, as the new Ghadar leader, of a truncated movement, proved to be inept, corrupt and unreliable. Accountability for the German funds was not forthcoming. The German arms intended for the Indian revolutionaries were intercepted. Key Ghadarites already were under arrest. Under such circumstances, Ghadar activities came to a grinding halt. Henceforth, the Germans "...were in command and the Ghadarmen were treated as enthusiastic errand boys to be financed, advised and ordered about."<sup>11</sup>

On April 6, 1917, seventeen Ghadarites and eighteen German consular staff were charged with violating the neutrality of the United States. They were duly tried in San Francisco. This is referred to as the San Francisco Conspiracy Trial or the Hindu-German Conspiracy Trial of 1917. On the last day of the trial, Ram Singh,

one of the accused, shot Chandrakant Chakarvarty dead on November 12, 1917. Almost instantaneously the Court Marshall killed Ram Singh in retaliation. Thus ended Ghadar's connection with Germany and "...compromised the character of the Ghadar movement in the United States."<sup>12</sup>

Puri suggests that the German connection in Ghadar affairs is highly exaggerated.<sup>13</sup> German support was confined to three projects alone. First, the shipping of arms to destinations in India; second, the development of a military training base in Thailand where Indians could train for armed intervention in India; and third, the printing and dissemination of anti-British and pro-German propaganda material among the British India Army soldiers stationed outside India. It has been alleged by some historians that the German intention was not to help Ghadar, but to use it as a conduit for sending money and arms into India, through the state of Bengal for stirring up revolution in all parts of India against the Raj.<sup>14</sup> Such revolution was expected to erupt in the Punjab and then spread to the rest of India. Ghadar propaganda material was distributed worldwide with German help. It was air-dropped to Indian soldiers fighting German forces on the Western Front. It was printed in many Indian languages and dialects. It urged Indian soldiers to rise against the British. Instead of fighting for them, the soldiers were called upon to take revenge against the British to restore India's dignity, self esteem and sovereignty.<sup>15</sup>

On the Komagata Maru's return journey, Gurdit Singh was informed at Yokohama, Japan, that landing would be refused at Hong Kong. Requests for



provisions were also repeatedly denied as was docking at Singapore. Broken in spirit, suffering from acute shortages of fuel, food and fresh water, the passengers of the Komagata Maru finally arrived at Budge Budge Harbor, India, on September 28, 1914, some fourteen miles from Calcutta.<sup>16</sup> The British India Government was ready to deal with the returnees. By September 5, 1914, the Government had passed legislation called the Ingress Ordinance. It empowered the Government to restrict the liberty of anyone entering India after the above date. The returnees were ordered to board trains at Calcutta which would take them to their villages in the Punjab. The Sikhs protested, as many of them wished to stay on in Calcutta. Their return to their villages was unattractive because they had no land, no jobs and no money there. Others like Gurdit Singh had some unfinished work to do in connection with the charter of the Komagata Maru. None of these representations was accepted or acted upon. The authorities were in no mood to listen to the returnees. The Sikh passengers made a final plea that they be allowed to deposit the *Guru Granth Sahib* (the holy book of the Sikhs) at the Gurudwara at Hoogly in Calcutta. No reply was given and the Sikhs assumed that the authorities had no objection. They left the ship in a procession, carrying a copy of the holy book and the Sikh flag at the head of the procession. The heavily armed police and the military were present in full force. The procession was formally stopped at a railway crossing. Confusion broke out and the police opened fire, whereupon the passengers of the Komagata Maru dispersed all over. Twenty-six persons were shot dead, of which twenty were Sikhs. Thirty-five in the crowd were seriously

injured. Many were detained, tried, convicted and jailed or forcibly returned to their villages under armed guard.<sup>17</sup> Only two English officers died in this confrontation which Indian historians refer as the Budge Budge Massacre. This incident unleashed strong anti-British reaction particularly in the Punjab and in British Columbia. General O'Dwyer, Lieutenant Governor of the Punjab, as expected, blamed this incident on the Sikh passengers of the Komagata Maru. He stated:

The incident showed the defiant and highly explosive temper of the returning Sikhs. It was distorted by unscrupulous agitators in the Punjab and the Ghadar agents abroad into a gratuitous attack by an oppressive government on unoffending Sikhs. In this form it was presented to the thousands of Sikhs now on their way back from America and the Far East and thus it gave a powerful stimulus to Ghadar propaganda already working among them.<sup>18</sup>

Ghadar failed in its stated objective of igniting an armed uprising of the masses. There are numerous reasons for this failure. At the planning level, the movement was short of money, military leadership, arms, training, intelligence, coordination and every other conceivable requirement for an armed intervention. The British intelligence had advance, detailed knowledge of Ghadarite plans and their shortcomings. It laid traps for the Ghadarites into which they fell hook, line and sinker. Revolts by minuscule sectors of the British India Army stationed in Lahore (West Punjab), Singapore and Malaya, were foiled as quickly as they arose. Hundreds were arrested, summarily tried and executed or imprisoned.

The revolutionaries at the command level lacked military training, intelligence, arms, coordination and communication necessary to sustain an armed

rebellion. The Ghadarites openly contacted soldiers in and outside of India without observing any codes of secrecy. They were an open game for easy picking by the British counter-intelligence. Not lacking money, resources, personnel and leadership, the British espionage network did a highly successful job. Ghadar was spread too far out in too many countries without any effective system of safe communication. Ghadar was rather strident in its propaganda which spilled out its military plans in advance of the commencement of operations. Organizationally it was weak; on security, it was grossly negligent. For instance one British mole, by the name of Kirpal Singh, "...found his way into the inner circle (of Ghadar) in less than a week of his admission into it..."<sup>19</sup> Collaboration with German sources to smuggle arms to India by land and sea was stopped dead in its tracks by the British military and intelligence forces. The Germans as the main providers of arms, money and training, were deceived by the corrupt Ghadarites like Chakravarty. Their support stopped as fast as it had started.

This situation created tension and unbridgeable differences between the Germans and the Ghadarites. It divided an already shattered Ghadar Party. Subsequently, the German attempt to assume control of Ghadar dealt a mortal blow to the movement's effectiveness, credibility and support. When the Ghadarites went to India in large numbers from Canada between 1914 and 1915 to fight a revolutionary war of liberation in India, they assumed that the colonized masses of India were ripe for revolution. The Ghadarites were convinced that their terrorist activities would ignite an armed rebellion. To their bitter disappointment, this did not

materialize. Absence of spontaneous participation by the masses was fatal to Ghadar. Though concerned about World War One, the vast majority of Indians were loyal to the Raj and content with their lives.

The Indian National Congress was also sympathetic to the British cause respecting the war. Even Gandhi had volunteered for medical service. Radicals like Tilak did not wish the Indians to exploit the situation to the detriment of the British. Punjab sent its brave, bold and fearless sons to join the allied armies in Europe and the Middle East. The Khalsa Diwan Society of the Punjab, the only significant Sikh party in Northern India at that time, declared its loyalty to the British Crown. Priests of several important Sikh shrines condemned Ghadarites as renegades. They were treated as common bandits and the villagers helped the police hunt them down. In order to acquire funds and arms, the Ghadarites resorted to robberies, raiding and hitting Government treasuries, arsenals, derailing trains and blowing up bridges. The perpetrators were easily apprehended, tried, convicted and imprisoned or sent to the gallows with indecent haste. The outbreak of World War One led to legislation in India to suppress the propaganda of subversive organizations. All attention was now riveted on Europe and the other theaters of war. Ghadar and its activities were put on the back burner. In short, what had started with a bang, ended with a whimper.

The Komagata Maru had hardly docked at Budge Budge than "...a series of spectacular events rocked the South Asian community in British Columbia."<sup>20</sup> The Ghadarites in British Columbia hated Hopkinson and his informants Bela Singh,

Harnam Singh and Arjun Singh. On August 31, 1914, Harnam Singh was murdered. On September 3, 1914, Arjun Singh was gunned down. Both murders occurred under mysterious circumstances, but were widely attributed to the Ghadarites operating from within the Gurudwara in Vancouver. Bela Singh was incensed at the death of his two collaborators. Arjun's Singh's body was cremated on September 5, 1914 in accordance with Sikh rites, followed by a memorial service at the Gurudwara that evening. Bela Singh, clandestinely armed and fuming with rage, attended the memorial service to avenge the death of his friends, Harnam Singh and Arjun Singh. While the service was in progress, he shot dead Bhag Singh and Battan Singh, both leading members of the Sikh community. Seven others were shot and seriously injured, including Sohan Lal, Labh Singh, Dalip Singh and Uttam Singh. The Sikh community was thoroughly enraged. The murders and injuries inflicted by gun shots were bad enough. However, the spillage of blood in the holy precincts of the Gurudwara was an act of ultimate sacrilege. The Sikhs would never forget or forgive such heinous acts.

Bela Singh's trial commenced on October 21, 1914. He claimed self-defense. Hopkinson publicly declared ahead of the trial that he would give evidence in support of Bela Singh. He claimed to have been personally present at the crime scene. Indeed, Bela Singh was acquitted on November 29, 1914. Even before his acquittal, the Sikhs widely believed that the trial was a charade orchestrated by Hopkinson in collaboration with Canadian authorities and groups opposed to the Indian immigrants. Therefore, a small group of volunteers met secretly to plan

Hopkinson's assassination. They were prepared to face any consequences. The assassination of Hopkinson was viewed by them as a sacred act done out of religious duty. Any punishment attendant on the proposed assassination, including death, was regarded as a rare privilege. By a draw, Mewa Singh, a priest, was chosen to carry out the deed. Hopkinson was gunned down in the corridors of the Vancouver Court House on October 21, 1914. Mewa Singh was tried, convicted and hanged on January 11, 1915.<sup>21</sup>

Prior to his execution, Mewa Singh made a full confession. By quoting from Sikh scriptures, he justified the killing on grounds of overriding morality:

My religion does not teach me to bear enmity with anybody, no matter what class, creed or order he belongs to, nor had I any enmity with Hopkinson. I made friendship with him through his best Hindu friend to find out the truth of what I heard. On finding out the fact, I - being a staunch Sikh - could no longer bear to see the wrong done both to my innocent countrymen and the Dominion of Canada. That is what led me to take Hopkinson's life and sacrifice my own life in order to lay bare the oppression exercised upon my innocent people through his influence in the eyes of the whole world. And I, performing the duty of a true Sikh and remembering the name of God, will proceed towards the scaffold with the same amount of pleasure as the hungry babe does towards its mother. I shall gladly put the rope around my neck thinking it to be a rosary of God's name. I am quite sure that God will take me into His blissful arms because I have not done this deed for my personal interest but to the benefit of both my people and the Canadian government.<sup>22</sup>

Mewa Singh was sanctified in the Vancouver Gurudwara as a martyr, who had paid with his life for the religious principles he believed in. Annual memorial services,

even to this day, are held in British Columbia's Gurudwaras. Poetry in his honor is recited and the achievements of Ghadar memorialized.

Following the forced departure of the Komagata Maru, "...a trail of retaliatory violence followed..."<sup>23</sup> The murders of Arjun Singh, Harnam Singh, Bhag Singh, Battan Singh and Hopkinson have already been dealt with. They were all assassinated in Canada. The following murders and attempted murders should also be mentioned briefly. On March 16, 1915, Pratap Singh, another associate of Bela Singh, was killed by Jagat Singh, who was tried and sentenced to death. On April 13, 1915, three associates of Bela Singh were injured when the house in which they were sleeping was dynamited. Again no arrests were made. On April 16, 1915, Bela Singh's associates beat up Lachhman Singh. The attackers were tried and sentenced to terms of imprisonment. On October 3, 1915, Mit Singh Pandori, priest of the Abbotsford Gurudwara, was attacked by Bela Singh's gang. Its members were sentenced to four years imprisonment. Bela Singh eventually returned to his village in the Punjab. He continued to help the officials of the Raj in intelligence matters. Almost twenty years later in May 1934, he was executed by the revolutionary Babbar Akalis, a political party in the Punjab. The Punjab police were unable to trace Bela Singh's executioners.<sup>24</sup>

Thus the achievements of Ghadar were regrettably overshadowed by bloodshed, reprisal and collapse in the principal theaters of Ghadar activity in India, Canada and the United States.

1. Isemonger and Slattery Report, p. 57.

2. Ibid.

3. British India Government, The Ghadar Directory: Including Notes on Persons Connected with Kindred Revolutionary Movements in America and Elsewhere Abroad (Lahore, Punjab: Superintendent Government Publishing, 1916), p. 1 (hereafter referred to as The Ghadar Directory).

4. Ibid.

5. Johnston, The Voyage, p. 92.

6. The Ghadar Directory, p. 140-141.

7. Ibid., p. 80.

8. Ibid., 40.

9. Jagit Singh, Ghadar Party, p. 71.

11. Singh and Singh, Ghadar 1915, p. 48.

11. Puri, Ghadar Movement, p. 105.

12. Ibid., p. 104.

13. Ibid., p. 105.

14. M.N. Roy, Memoirs (Bombay: Allied Publishers, 1954), p. 3.

15. Puri, Ghadar Movement, p. 111.

16. Singh and Singh, Ghadar 1915, p. 55.

17. Buchignani & Indra, Continuous Journey, p. 60.

18. O'Dwyer, India As I Knew It, p. 194.

19. Singh and Singh, Ghadar 1915, p. 55-56.

20. Puri, Ghadar Movement, p. 104.

21. Singh and Singh, Ghadar 1915, p. 29-30.



22. Buchignani and Indra, Continuous Journey, p. 63. Also quoted in Singh and Singh, Ghadar 1915, p. 30-31.

23. Singh and Singh, Ghadar 1915, p. 29-30.

24. Ibid.

## **Chapter 9**

### **Ghadar as the Indian Immigrant Outrage**

**Ghadar unleashed political ideas, discussion and debate and gave focus and coherence to the plight of the exploited and discriminated immigrants.<sup>1</sup>**

**Ghadar failed in its objective to secure India's independence from British colonial domination by the use of force through a revolutionary uprising of the Indian masses. However, this failure cannot deny the fundamental achievements and international significance of Ghadar. It aroused the political consciousness, sense of national identity, esteem and pride, of the Indians overseas, particularly those in Canada. Before Ghadar, Indians in British Columbia were basically peasants, or retired Army soldiers with limited education. Their loyalties were regional and largely based on kinship systems traceable back to their villages. Ghadar taught its followers to demand their legitimate rights, secure their place with pride in Canadian and American societies and to fight united against oppression. Thus, Ghadar highlighted Canada's discriminatory laws, widespread racism and the denial of basic civil rights to the colored immigrants. Ghadar was an excellent school for political agitation, propaganda and secular thinking. Ghadar successfully linked the oppression of the Indians in India to the ill-treatment of the Indians in Canada and the United States, as a single event or a continuing phenomenon. This earned Ghadar widespread global support. It internationalized the fact of India's exploitation by Britain and made a powerful case in important quarters for Indian independence. Ghadar had forged fraternal affinities with Irish, German and other**

revolutionaries. Its international character was reflected in the opening of its branches throughout the world where Indians resided. Ghadar's propaganda, both in English and in the vernacular languages, attracted many supporters for its cause. It educated the North American populace on India's struggle for independence against the injustices of the Raj. Many Americans openly expressed sympathy for India, equating its struggle to the American War of Independence. Had American neutrality during World War One not been violated by German backing for Ghadar, it would probably have won the official support of the United States for its activities dedicated to India's independence. Under Ghadar, Sikhs, Hindus and Muslims were united to fight for their rights which eventually enabled them to gain Canadian citizenship and to exercise the legal rights flowing from this status. Buchignani and Indra aptly sum it up:

Time and tribulation had winnowed their numbers but had produced a community with a strong commitment to life in Canada. Those who remained were sojourners no longer. Their goals, resources and, indeed, many of their life experiences were inextricably tied up with Canada. In the midst of hostility, rejection and discrimination, they had found a place of their own, carving household, job and community out of a very hard stone. By 1920, they were to begin to lay the final part of this foundation - family life.<sup>2</sup>

To recapitulate, Ghadar exposed the racially discriminatory and grossly inequitable basis of Canadian immigration policies and laws. The Indian immigrants in Canada faced racism and discrimination in their daily lives, on all fronts, including political, economic and social. They were restricted from performing certain jobs in

various industries while they were fully qualified for such jobs. They were hired at much lower wages although their performance and productivity were equal to or better than that of the white Canadian workers. They were assigned menial jobs in the factory or the workshop.<sup>3</sup> They had no mechanism for redressing their work related grievances. In the event of accidents at work, they were denied compensation. When leasing land, they were charged higher rates of rent and subjected to harsher terms and conditions than those applicable to the white Canadians. They had rather limited access to credit.

Politically, their applications to become citizens were constantly denied for no justifiable reasons. Immigration officers did not exercise their discretionary powers in favor of Indians, even in the most deserving cases. Their cases were dealt with in a stricter fashion compared to the cases of other immigrants. They were often illegally detained and put to unnecessary trouble by Canadian immigration officers. On the instructions of the immigration officers, the steamship companies denied them travel tickets. Prospective immigrants to Canada were often detained at the ports in the Far East on trumped-up charges simply to deny them admission into Canada.

Socially, the Indian immigrants concentrated in British Columbia, faced humiliation when visiting theaters, movie houses, restaurants and hotels. They could not visit these places in their traditional native dress but had to wear western clothing. They could only sit in areas specially designated for them in the inferior parts of the establishments. They could only reside in living quarters located in the

poorer sections of urban centers of British Columbia. Upward mobility was very difficult. They were placed outside the mainstream of education, the labor market and the trade union movement. Services and facilities in such areas as transportation, housing, welfare, old age security and worker's compensation were not available to them.

The Komagata Maru Affair exposed dramatically, the hypocrisy and inequality inherent in the Canadian laws and policies. Although, even more oppressive immigration laws were proclaimed into force soon after the Komagata Maru Affair, eventually the Canadian Government realized the damage done to its credibility and its reputation. The direct consequence was that several decades later, Canadian immigration policies moved from control, restriction and exclusion to a more equitable and rational basis of admission based on the point system. The ill treatment of the Indians, the Komagata Maru Affair and the related events are chapters in Canadian history of which Canada cannot be proud. However, much has been done in the recent past to atone for and repair the damage caused by the inequity of its earlier immigration laws.

Ghadar was conceived and nurtured on Canadian soil. Although it operated more freely in the United States, its Canadian counterpart was no less important. The Komagata Maru Affair was a Canadian experience. The Ghadar struggle unfolded in Canada as witnessed by the trials and murders of those involved in Ghadarite activity in Canada. The trials, conviction and sentences in the aftermath of the Komagata Maru, occurred under Canadian law. Three observations can be

made. First, the revolt was neither a popular uprising nor a mutiny of the disaffected soldiery. It was a revolt of the brave influenced by the life of independent peoples abroad. Second, the Ghadar movement did not achieve any spectacular results in terminating the Raj by driving the British out of India nor did it do any serious damage to the Raj. Third, it was the first purely secular movement which aimed to liberate India with force of arms. Although it was predominately Sikh, Hindus and Muslims joined it in a common cause.<sup>4</sup> However, Ghadar stood for organized protest, revolutionary change, effective propaganda, building national identity and giving self-respect and esteem to the Indian immigrants.

Although this study is limited in its scope to the period 1900 to 1918, it is legitimate to ask what heritage Ghadar left behind for the Canadian Sikhs and what identity it forged for the Sikh community in Canada. The immediate effect of Ghadar was to build up, strengthen and develop a sense of Indian nationalist consciousness, a collective grievance against their ill-treatment and a defined identity as a discriminated group within the Canadian society. Unity was forged from disparate elements of the Indian immigrants and with one voice, under radical leadership, the Indians fought inequities and demanded equality of rights. This struggle was continued for several decades on several fronts, which resulted by 1947 in the repeal of the continuous journey provision, modification of monetary qualifications for Indians, the repeal of the legislation barring the wives and children of the domiciled Indians from entering Canada. The equitable exercise of the right of sponsorship by prospective immigrants, on a basis of equality, was still decades

away.

By the 1930s and 1940s, domiciled Indians in Canada became increasingly concerned with their enfranchisement.<sup>5</sup> The struggle of the Indian immigrants in Canada for the right to vote, on a basis of equality with the other Canadians, went back to the original Ghadar demands of 1913. These were forcefully expressed in the vernacular press, namely The Aryan, The Hindustanee and Ghadar. It was not until 1947, when India acquired its independence from Britain, the Indians were qualified to acquire Canadian citizenship. They were enfranchised and were free to buy property in areas that were once restricted to them. They now had access to proper housing, public facilities and jobs in the civil service. Such changes brought about security and cohesiveness in the ranks of the Indians, which enabled Indian culture and religions to flourish in Canada. Religious teaching, vernacular language training, promotion of ethnic literature, music, drama and theater were undertaken freely. The Indian immigrants contributed to the Canadian mosaic, which officially became known as Multiculturalism.

After nearly a century of the first arrival of Indians to Canada, new Indian immigrants still continue to come. Schisms have developed between the old and the new, the traditionalists and the modernists, the reformists and the doctrinaire elements of the Indian community in Canada. The Sikh community is deeply divided over the interpretation of religious doctrines, the funding and control of Gurudwaras and implications arising from the recent events in India, specifically the 1984 Operation Bluestar.<sup>6</sup> Such differences have resulted in internecine fights, court

trials, murders, violence in the holy precincts of Gurudwaras, police intervention and disillusionment within the Sikh community, particularly in British Columbia.

The succeeding generations of the Sikh pioneers, born and bred in Canada, are confused and disappointed at the turn of events. While the traditionalists enforce orthodoxy, Canadian Sikh youth strive to balance their Indian heritage with western ideals. However difficult this synthesis, Canadian Sikhs and their descendants continue to prosper and flourish as an increasingly important ethnic community in Canada in parity with other ethnic communities. The legacy of their ancestors' struggles and the spirit of Ghadar have been and will continue to be the solidifying factors for the enhancement of the Canadian Sikh identity within the Canadian mosaic. The same holds true for the Canadian Hindus and Muslims, for their experiences were one and the same. They have all enriched the Canadian culture, the political and justice systems and participated actively and substantially in the Canadian nation-building effort. Through a mixture of the East and the West, the Canadians of Indian origin are totally at home in both of the environs. This augers well for their future in Canada as Canadian citizens.



1. Buchignani and Indra, Continuous Journey, p. 52-53.

2. Ibid., p. 67.

3. Mackenzie King Report, p. 79-80.

4. Singh and Singh make these concluding observations with respect to the demise of Ghadar.

5. Buchignani and Indra, Continuous Journey, p. 104.

6. Operation Bluestar was an armed attack in 1984 on the Golden Temple in Amritsar, India, by the Indian Army against Sikh extremists, led by Bhindrawale. He was fighting for a separate Sikh state called Khalistan and took refuge in the Golden Temple, with heavily armed supporters and stocks of weapons. He believed that the sanctity of the holiest Sikh shrine was inviolable and that it was immune to military attack. He also wanted the Sikh shrine to be symbolically connected with the separatist movement and to show that since the movement emanated from their *sanctum sanctorum* of Sikhism, it had religious blessing. The Indian Army attacked the Golden temple, crushed Bhindrawale and his men and in this process many innocent victims were killed. Some of the most important historic Sikh relics were destroyed and the Golden Temple itself suffered considerable damage. This situation outraged the Sikh communities settled throughout the world. Eventually, Prime Minister Indra Gandhi, who had ordered the implementation of Operation Bluestar, was assassinated by two of her Sikh body guards. This was followed by massive rioting and the wholesale massacre of Sikhs throughout India. It created deep divisions and tensions between the Sikhs and the Hindus, which to this day, are being mended. The consequence of this event are felt even today, in the intra-communal relationships amongst the Indian immigrants in Canada. For further information, see Mark Tully and Satish Jacob. Amritsar: Mrs. Gandhi's Last Battle. London: Jonathan Cape, 1985.

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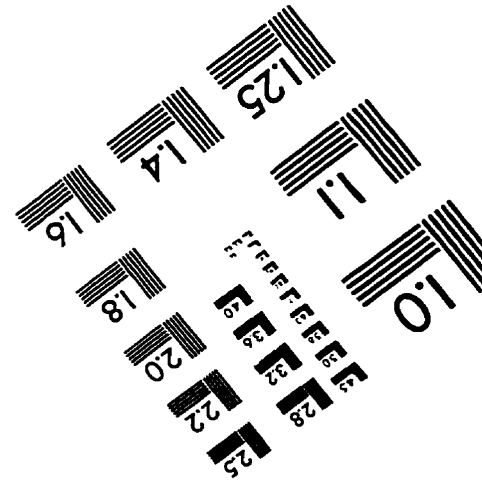
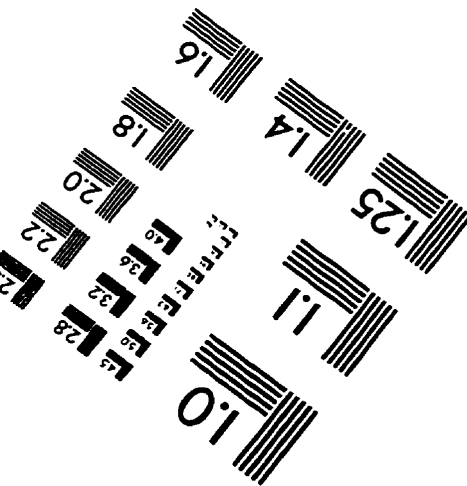
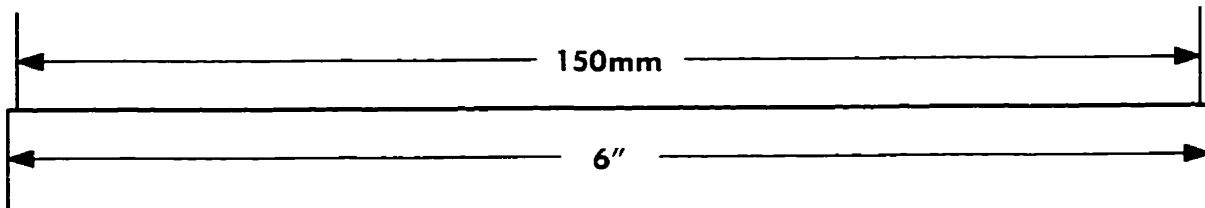
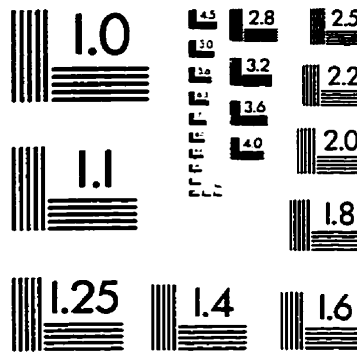
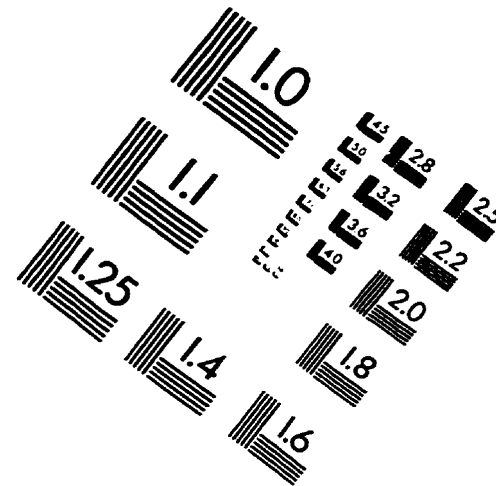
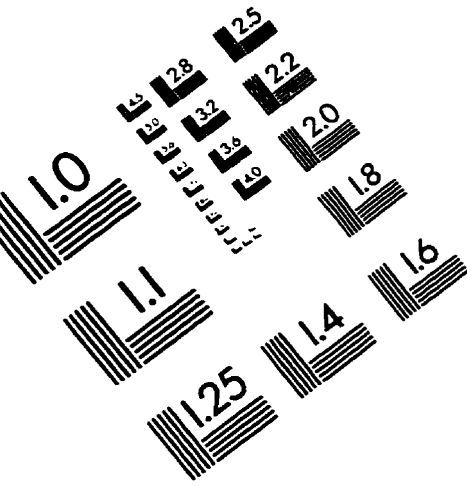
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