

Jill C Bender, *The 1857 Indian Uprising and the British Empire*, (Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 2017) pp. 205.

The Uprising of 1857 in India offers multiple renderings. Its imperial version as a mutiny is no longer sustainable in the historical research even in the heartland of the British Empire i.e. England. Since the 150th anniversary of the Uprising observed in 2007, historiography has moved from imperial renderings to the 'margins'. In fact, scope for unfolding the intricate layer of the Uprising has broadened. The present work situates the Uprising within an imperial context and traces its ramifications across the four different colonial sites of Ireland, New Zealand, Jamaica and Southern Africa.

The Uprising had wider reverberations across the British Empire. Sir George Grey, the Governor of Cape Colony, South Africa felt alarmed with the news on August 6, 1857 as 'the rebellion posed a great dangers' to the British Empire. It 'struck terror' from Ireland to New Zealand. In England, the Uprising was recognized as 'an imperial crisis' with wider repercussions. The author seeks 'to decenter' the Empire as it impacted every part of British possessions. The rapidity and spread of the Uprising surprised every quarter of British opinion. The Kanpur massacre provided *causus belli* for retributory justification. Nevertheless, the British attempted for causation to explain the eruption. There were multiple causes. The cause most bandied about was the cartridge question, though the British denied it on the outset of the Uprising.

Conceptually, the author navigates between the use of terms mutiny and uprising as it was 'more than a military mutiny'. Thus, he settles for the later without abandoning the former. Four Colonial sites: Ireland, Jamaica, Southern Africa and New Zealand were integral parts of the Empire yet with distinctions such as historical, cultural and geographical. Empire was united by 'dynamic' links. It was a *source* of British power at the global level as it drew resources from across the globe. By 1850 onwards, the Empire had changed drastically as a result of rapid expansion of means of communications.

The news of the 1857 spread across the Empire through ships, boats and the press. Early narrative transferred was 'a racialized discourse prompted by the atrocity stories'. It became a public spectacle at home in Britain. The Government of India moved towards nearby colonies such as Mauritius, Ceylon and the Cape Colony for resources both men and material. Thus, regiments were redeployed from the West Indies, Ireland, Canada, Australia and New Zealand for service in India. In England, Indian Mutiny Fund was established. Prayers were held for religious consolidation across the Empire. The Government of India planned to transfer rebel prisoners either within India or throughout the British Empire. Different colonies rooted for free labour out of Indian rebels for economic development. Columns of newspapers were filled with such claims. However, there was a fear of spread of grievances overseas and danger to other colonies. Widespread violence in India caused fears and panic in some of the colonies that the rebels could bring in with their transportation. Nevertheless, economic gains overpowered. It was hoped that the empire's potential weaknesses could become its potential strengths. The 1857 Indian Uprising raised the questions of colonial

responsibility and imperial unity. The relationship of the British Empire with the colonies is put forth through the concept of 'great body corporate'.

The 1857, 'fueled anxiety' throughout the Indian Ocean World. There were fears that unrest might provide 'a unifying force for colonized people across colonial borders'. The Irish nationalist press 'fueled colonial anxiety' and questioned the veracity of British newspaper reports which usually emphasized Indian brutality and downplayed British acts of violence. In fact, radicalized Irish newspapers propagated anti-British and pro-Catholic sentiments. Irish newspapers 'openly discouraged' Irish enlistment in the British Army as well as the militia. This was vital as the Irish constituted more than 50 per cent of the East India Company's "white" soldiers. Similarly, in New Zealand the settlers feared that newspapers might antagonize Maoris and incite rebellion. Similarly, the Africans voiced frustration with the British rule and expressed admiration for the "black" Indians. In response to such reports, the British prepared themselves for the possibility of rebellion throughout the Empire. They intensified surveillance of colonized people.

Defence of the Empire was put on the 'martial races'. The British had evolved the ideology of martial races in the early 19th century. By 1850, more than 80 per cent of the Company's troops were Indians. The Bengal Army was depicted as 'the showpiece' of the Indian Army. It was the Bengal Army that had revolted. The British looked for individuals to suppress the Uprising. They turned towards the Punjab. By June 1858, there were 80,000 soldiers in the Bengal Army and about 50,000 paramilitary police. Of the grand total, about 75,000 were Punjabis, including 23,000 Sikhs. By 1859, the character of the Indian Army had changed altogether. Others were Nepalese Gurkhas and recruits from the lower castes. Loyalty was the main principle for recruitment within the army. Distinctions were introduced with a view to weaken solidarity and to create a counterpoise. There were proposals to bring in African soldiers. However, this idea was taken as a weakness. Another plan was to raise irregular corps. The Peel Commission recommended reorganization of the Indian Army. The idea of 'martial races' was also extended to New Zealand.

The 1857 Uprising created distrust of the Indian soldiers among the British. It gave way to racial and cultural determinism. There was a desire to avoid any possibility of future insurrection. Racial antagonism was evident in Britain regarding Indian capacity for self-government. Consequently, racial attitudes heightened among the British. The usage of terms such as 'nigger' and 'blacklie' became widely used in reference to Indians. The Uprising reverberated in Jamaica as the Morant Bay Rebellion in 1865, the Fencian Uprising in Ireland in the late 1860s and 1870s and the New Zealand Wars of the 1860s. The colonial officials accepted brute force as a legitimate response to "native" resistance movements. The Uprising created lasting "colonial culture of fear". The political bodies in England turned to memories of 1857 to legitimize colonial force. The Uprising shaped settler and official responses to colonial conflicts. The show of leniency was clubbed with the threat of force. In fact, the Uprising cultivated 'the great fear' among the British throughout the Empire.

The work is a significant advance in the historiography of the British Empire.

It takes Empire as 'a unified entity or cohesive whole'. The 1857 Indian Uprising reflects such an integration both in perception and praxis. In the work, the Uprising turns into 'an imperial crisis'. It brought in imperial consciousness and exposed the underbelly of the Empire. It resurfaced as a model of suppression whenever there was a colonial conflict in the colonies. The colonial violence brought in an urge among the natives to meet it with nationalist force. The Ghadar movement in the middle of the second decade of the 20th century took the 1857 Uprising as a template for revolution. It once again brought the Uprising to the centre stage. Not surprising, the Ghadar was brutally crushed which culminated in the Jallianwala Bagh massacre of 1919. The author concludes his argument by saying that the Uprising was a 'defining moment' both for the Indians and the British. Thus, 1857 is no longer an insular, India-centric, and episodic but integral to the vitals of the British Empire. In this context, the author has a strong point that would enrich the historiography of the British Empire.

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Seema Sohi, *Echoes of Mutiny: Race, Surveillance & Indian Anti-colonialism in North America*, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. ix +271

Echoes of Mutiny, published in the centenary year of the Ghadar movement, is an account of the radical activities of Indians in North America in the first two decades of the twentieth century. The book seems to challenge the understanding in which the history of Indian radicalism in North America is often reduced to the history of the Ghadar Movement. The Ghadar movement, as it appears in this book, was only a well-known episode of the radicalism which began several years before the movement.

Seema Sohi's book has six chapters. The first three chapters discuss the rise of anti-colonialism and antiradicalism in North America in the years preceding the First World War. The remaining three chapters discuss the post-war anti-colonialism and antiradicalism.

In chapter 1, Sohi provides background to Indian migration to North America. Sohi argues that the colonial economic policies impoverished the peasants in Punjab, who migrated to North America in order to earn a decent income. At the same time, intellectuals like Har Dayal found a niche in the USA, where they organised the discontented migrants. Within a few years from the arrival of the first wave of migrants, both the USA and Canada made several laws to prohibit the migration, in fear of what was referred to as the "yellow peril". They invoked the public charges clause, under which a migrant to the USA could be denied entry on the grounds that the migrant would not find employment, and is likely to turn into a burden on public funds. In 1908, the Government of Canada passed the Continuous Journey law by which the government "made it unlawful for any immigrant who did not arrive by a 'continuous journey' from his country of birth or citizenship to enter Canada" (p.27). Such provisions had drastically reduced the

number of immigrants. Between 1910 and 1913, the US, Canadian and British Governments also developed a transnational intelligence network to monitor the activities of the Indian immigrants. In response to these harsh policies, the disillusioned Indian immigrants developed anticolonial consciousness against the British rule in India, which they believed was root cause of their misery.

In chapter 2, she discusses, perhaps for the first time by any scholar, the ideas and theories of Ghadarites, what she believes constitutes anti-colonialism. She argues that the Ghadar Party was not alone in shaping anti-colonialism. Leaders like Lajpat Rai and M. N. Roy, who stayed in North America during the War years, also contributed to it. She believes that though these diverse currents of radicalism had considerable differences, yet they can be combined under the rubric of anti-colonialism.

In chapter 3, Sohi shows how in response to anti-colonialism a trans-national surveillance network developed which brought together the Governments of North America, Britain, and the British government in India to watch and control the activities of the Indian anti-colonialists like Har Dayal, Taraknath Das and Madame Bhikaiji Rustom Cama. The chapter also explains how the Indian anti-colonialists responded to this by building a critique of the US and Canadian repressive policies.

In chapter 4, she discusses the various cases in which the Indian migrants to US were denied entry. The authorities used various legal provisions to restrict the entry of Indian labourers. For instance, the US authorities denied entry to Indian migrants on the clause that they will become "public charges". Indians contested these insinuations, and argued that they will not become public charges. Similarly, in response to the hostile immigration policies, the Indian migrants had started using entry from the Philippines as an easier way to enter into the USA. They argued that since they were travelling from one part of the USA to another part of it, they cannot be denied entry into the mainland. Indian migrants fought legal battles, as well as they pressurizing the government with their letters, and articles published in the press. The most well-known episode of history of this protest remains the *Komagata Maru* incident, which received global attention. All these incidents radicalised Indians and at the same time exposed the racist policies of the US and Canadian Governments. Sohi argues that Indians now understood that the cause of their worldwide deprivation was the colonial rule in India. Accordingly, they turned their goal to the overthrow of British rule in India. The importance of Sohi's work lies in introducing us to the legal struggle of migrants in the years preceding the *Komagata Maru* incident, much of which was earlier unknown. Chapter 5 shows how with the outbreak of the First World War, under the aegis of the Ghadar Party, several shiploads of the migrants came back to India to liberate their motherland from British rule. The planned rising could not take place, as the British authorities took all the precautionary steps. After the failure of the planned rising in Punjab, the Ghadarites joined the Berlin India Committee. The Committee had two plans. First, a ship carrying arms was to reach Karachi. The plan failed miserably. The other plan was to organise a rising of Indians in Siam with the help of Germans. That also failed.

In chapter 6, she examines the conspiracy cases, which led to a global

crackdown on the activities of the Indian anti-colonialists. These trials were conducted in Lahore, Meerut, Bengal, Singapore, and Mandalay. In the United States, they were known as Hindi Conspiracy Trials, the most famous of which were the San Francisco Trials. In this chapter, Sohi explains that in the San Francisco Trials, both the US and British secret services worked together to gather massive evidence against the anticolonial activities of the Ghadarites. After the War, the “Yellow Peril” became the Bolsheviks’ led “Red Scare”. Sohi further argues that both the US and British intelligence networks expanded in response to these challenges. On the other hand, the Indian anti-colonialists asserted that they were not hatching any conspiracy, it was rather an open rebellion against British rule in India. They “insisted that they had done nothing different than what American revolutionaries had done when they overthrew British rule 130 years earlier” (p. 189). In this way, Sohi narrates the story of interplay between Indian anti-colonialism and North American antiradicalism.

In fact, the history of Indian anti-colonialism in North America has never been told so well. It is perhaps the most up-to-date account of the Indian anticolonial movement. The contribution of the book lies in introducing the history of Indian radicalism in the years preceding the War, which had remained largely up to this time.

On a critical note, the book is intellectually unsatisfying. It is rich in facts but poor in arguments. It has broadened our understanding but not revised it. As a result, the reader is not likely to gain much from this book. The terms like “anti-colonialism” and “antiradicalism” are vague. They illuminate but they also mystify. On the whole, Indian radicalism in North America has yet to receive any critical gaze. Historians continue to uncritically produce from the writings of the radicals (e.g., Chapter 1 in this book). What awaits is a considered judgment of the events, perhaps something on the lines of Alexis De Tocqueville’s classic interpretation of the French Revolution.

On the whole, in many years to come, this book is likely to remain a standard introduction on the subject. The book is a must for anyone interested in the history of diaspora, modern American history and Punjab Studies.

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Rakesh Kumar, *Ghadar Party Da Sahit: Bagawat Di Chingiarhi* (Punjabi), (Samana: Sangam Publications, 2016) pp. 352.

The Ghadar movement was more than a political expression of revolt. It found its echo through poetry and prose, predominantly in the Punjabi language. The *Ghadar* paper embarked the coming of the revolt against the British Empire. Though it began its journey in North America yet its echo was felt across the globe. *Echoes of Revolt (Ghadar Dian Gunjan)* provided a new genre of revolutionary poetry in the early decades of the 20th century. The present work reassures the relevance of the Ghadar literature in the ignition of rebellion against

the might of the British Empire.

The Ghadar literature for a long time remained scattered in the pamphlets, booklets, the *Ghadar* paper and memoirs of activists and sympathizers. Giani Kesar Singh has rendered a phenomenal service in the collection of valuable material consigned to libraries, archives and personal libraries. Moreover, through his novels, he has recreated the Ghadar revolutionary yearnings and struggle through fictional yet identifiable characters. His efforts led to the publication of two classic works of the Ghadar literature: *Ghadar Lehar Di Kavita* (Poetry of the Ghadar Movement) (1995), and *Ghadar Lehar Di Vartik* (Prose of the Ghadar Movement) (2008) published by the Punjabi University, Patiala (Punjab, India) under the able editorships of Kesar Singh Kesar and Kirpal Singh Kasel respectively. These publications brought into light rich literary heritage of the Ghadarites. Moreover, in 2010, Ved Prakash 'Vartuk' collected and printed in a cyclostyled form the *Ghadar* (Punjabi) Vol. I, issues from Nos 1-52 covering the years 1913-14. It has been published by the Folklore Institute, Berkeley, California. It provides the feel of the original.

Moreover, the present work extends the genre of prose and poetry further by bringing into light unknown facets of the Ghadar movement, as reflected in both historical material and the Ghadar literature. Thus, the reader gets the idea of original writings of the Ghadar authors and poets with historical narrative updated by the latest scholars on the Ghadar movement. The author claims that the *Ghadar* paper 'created a tumult' within two months. Moreover, the paper stood for the necessity of two things put in bold font: paper (news) and powders (gun). Gun was taken as a symbol of bravery. The Ghadar literature charts out the emotional and revolutionary quotient of the participants who, though only little educated in colonial institutions, yet showed tremendous committed to work.

With the coming of the World War I, the *Ghadar* paper became more vocal. It addressed the Indians of the need to liberate Indians from British rule. The Ghadar writers mostly contributed under pseudonyms or anonymously with a view to ward off censorship. They used metaphors and articulated their views in rustic vocabulary to drive the point home. The *Ghadar* paper reported political activities and mobilization for funds in North America. The paper called upon the volunteers to reach India for waging a war against the British. *Aillan-e-Jung* (Declaration of War) was a statement of intent reflecting the strategy of the Ghadar.

The Ghadar literature delineates the nature and exploitative character of British rule. It transmitted the high drain theory to the masses through vernaculars of India especially the Punjabi in Gurmukhi script. By 1916, the publication of the paper reached about 10 lakh per week. *Gurdwara* as a site turned out to be a focal point of Ghadar activities.

The work has also published rare cartoons depicting the Ghadar sacrifices and policies. It has incorporated invaluable "official documents" relating to stated position of the US Government on the question of immigration and the Government of India on banning the *Ghadar* or *Hindustan Ghadar* in India. It carries pictures of Ghadar heroes and historical sites. It also provides information about the Ghadar publications. Moreover, inclusion of the Ghadar poetry

enhances the value of the work. The work adds to the existing source material on the Ghadar movement. However, the quality of printing is bit dismal which can certainly be improved in its next edition.

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