

Guest Editor's Introduction to Special Issue on Ghadar

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Remembering is an important part of the human condition. It evokes nostalgia but yields a rich crop out of uncharted fields of human past. One such area is the sacrifices and struggle of the Indian pioneers of North America. The more we dwell into its recesses, the more we get to know the truth. Historians, researchers, amateur writers, activists and publicists have gone into the process of knowing more about this past with a view to find out the roots of present complexities. Since human beings carry consciousness, this urge to know the past is imminent. The present volume is dedicated to those pioneers who passed through variegated forms of difficulties, social segregation and political intimidation in the first two decades of the 20th century. Their perseverance, endurance and cultural resourcefulness provided inner strength to move forward which they did with heads held high. They embodied values in the Ghadar movement which symbolized secularism, humanism and universality of human struggle. Some of the pioneers carried on social, cultural and academic work with these values in their chosen fields. They have also been remembered in various ways. However, their role deserves a separate volume. Thus, remembering the pioneers after about a century through these research papers is one way of paying long overdue gratitude to those who experienced the limits of human nerves and depths of endurance.

We have a galaxy of Indian pioneers in diverse fields. They have proved their mettle in a number of ways. It is difficult to bring in their contributions in one volume. However, one such pioneer was Sardar Mahan Singh Dhesi who reached the Western Coast of the USA in the early decade of the 20th century. He participated in the deliberations of the Khalsa Diwan Society and provided social and cultural support for sustaining community life. Rich with cultural resources, he continued to perform such task in the 1920s and 1930s till his last days in 1945.

Migrations in human history evolve around search for resources and climatic contingencies depending upon geographic limits. Such migrations continued throughout the Afro-Asian and European Continents since time immemorial. *Homo Sapiens* learned the ways to survive in harsh conditions, struggle for food and shelter and moreover, navigate through the river streams, high mountains and thick forests. With the discovery of the New World i.e. America and other geographical regions like Australia, the human urge to capture resources for exploitation took quantum a jump. Such a drive was facilitated through fast means of communications. However, the Indians were exposed to such migrations through the land route *via* the Central Asia. With the discovery of

the sea route to India in 1498, these migrations impacted the history of Indian sub-continent. In the early phase, merchants, sailors, missionaries and adventurers ventured into uncharted geographic locales. Soon, the frontiers of the globe appeared within human reach. The geographical discoveries and innovations provided sinews to the emergence of empires in the 18th and 19th centuries. In the process, the British Empire gained military, economic and political prominence.

By the middle of the 19th century, the British Empire could consolidate exploitative mechanism both over men and material. With its implicit support, the British East India Company could withstand the greatest challenge in the form of Uprising of 1857. Though the Company withered away under the variegated blow of the insurgents, yet the Empire grew in strength and consolidated its hold both economically and politically. It unleashed repression which caused migrations of the people to South Asian Colonies. Moreover, forced incorporation of the Punjab in 1849 within the imperial framework gave rise to incipient resistance among the Punjabis. Famines, epidemics and economic hardships forced the Punjabis to move towards better avenues of livelihood. The colonial state provided employment in the police, army, plantations and other artisanal and menial jobs. By the last decade of the 19th century, a large number of Punjabis had moved to the South East Asian colonies and the Far East. In the close of the 19th century, the Sikhs had reached the Western Pacific Coast of North America. However, their arrival was resisted for various reasons both at social and political levels. Nevertheless, the march continued with persistence and perseverance which was backed by cultural resoluteness.

In the first decade of the 20th century, the Indians and especially the Sikhs began forming community gatherings. Thus, they started organizing themselves, opening printing presses, starting newspapers and voicing their immediate concerns. In 1912, a *Gurdwara* at Stockton was established; the Khalsa Diwan Society was formed; meetings were held for social cohesion and political consolidation with a view to meet challenges at the social and political levels. They, along with other Indians, were commonly called as the Hindus and viewed as the 'yellow peril'. Moreover, they often became the butt of racial venom and violence. In the process, a number of individuals remembered as the pioneers, provided leadership and mobilized resources which culminated in the formation of the Ghadar party and its source of communication, the *Ghadar* paper in 1913. The Ghadar party questioned the working and policies of the American, Canadian and the British governments in India and England. This questioning culminated in challenging the might of the British Empire through legal, political and military means. The Ghadar party was transformed into a movement with global implications. The present volume sheds light on some aspects of this movement which have remained either under-explored or stereotyped with intended biases. These contributions question some of these stereotypes and intend to further extend possibilities of historical interpretations of the Ghadar movement.

Amandeep Bal has focused on the pioneer Indians in North America. In 1897, a contingent of Sikh soldiers travelled from Montreal to Vancouver by train. They were fascinated by the mountains, forests, rivers and lakes of Canada. In April 1899, four Sikhs arrived in San Francisco for work and started earning money. They worked on the farms, timber and lumber mills. In the early phase, they encountered discrimination. They linked their social position there with their status at home *vis-a-vis* the British. They learnt new ideas and shunned many of their old values. Moreover, exposure to the West opened their mind. They began raising questions which were never raised by men of their class and educational background. They lived and succeeded in a hostile social environment marked by social discrimination and immigration restrictions. They initiated the process of social and political mobilization of the Indians in general and the Sikhs in particular which culminated in the formation of the Khalsa Diwan Society in 1907 and the Ghadar Party in 1913. Gurdev Singh Sidhu attempts to highlight the significance of the Holt Farm as a nursery of the Ghadar movement. Enterprising Sikhs such as Bhai Jawala Singh and Bhai Visakha Singh took the Holt Farm on contract. Bhai Jawala Singh emerged as the 'King of Potatoes'. He brought in Bhai Naudh Singh and Bhai Santokh Singh. It became a site for meeting, shelter and even training. Almost all prominent Indian personalities visited the Farm. It was known as *Bhaian Da Dhera* (The Home of Brothers). A makeshift *gurdwara* was established within the Holt Farm. Secret political meetings were held. In fact, it worked as the foundation place of the Ghadar party.

Darshan Singh Tatla brings into light an uncharted, yet 'a fateful encounter', between the Sikhs and the educated Hindu elite on the Western Pacific Coast of North America. Existing historical studies emphasize the role of Har Dayal in inspiring Sikh workers for rebellion. This paper questions the basic premises of such an interpretation where the Sikhs, semi-literate as 'a malleable material' seem to be acting as pawns in the hands of Har Dayal. Tatla questions the intellectual and ethical positions of Har Dayal for making such a claim. He argues that the Sikhs' reactions, strategies and their religious and cultural sensitivities must be taken into account while exploring the encounter with educated Hindu elite which appeared on the scene much later. Seema Sohi traces 'the fate 330 million Indian' as their fellow brethren faced racial exclusion and state repression across the British and American Empires. The *Komagata Maru* crisis acted as a touchstone of Western values of Justice and Equality as bandied about by the British and the Americans. It clearly 'exposed the hypocrisy of British imperialism as well the racially discriminatory practices of the US and Canadian Governments'. Chhanda Chatterjee has covered three different locales, the Punjab, Canada and Calcutta, in context of the Sikhs that culminated in the origin of the Ghadar movement. The Punjab and Calcutta shared a lot in exposing the imperialist exploitation and struggle for independence.

Karanbir Singh traces the early life of Sohan Singh Bhakna, the first President of the Ghadar Party. Sohan Singh Bhakna, born in a maternal village near Amritsar grew up in a landed family with sufficient landholding. However, he dissipated his adulthood in the company of a coterie indulging in drinking,

hunting and other pursuits of life. His extravagant lifestyle caused mounting debt. He mortgaged his share of holdings with a view to wriggle out of debt. However, influence of a saintly person by the name of Baba Kesar transformed him in all forms. He returned to farming. But the debt burden was becoming unbearable. His was the story of most of the peasants who opted for migration to North America and South East Asia. Bhakna reached California and led the life of a dedicated person who inspired revolutionaries for generations. Sukhdev Singh Sohal reconsiders the role and contribution of Lala Har Dayal who gained prominence in the Ghadar party in the shortest possible time. In fact, he represents an epiphenomenon as the ground was well prepared for the Ghadar movement long before his arrival on American soil. The movement followed its course, carrying travails and tribulations in its train. In the process, it yielded a rich crop of sacrifices. However, Har Dayal escaped and longed for return to England, the heartland of British imperialism carrying no charge of sedition. His silence about the Ghadar as a process requires an explanation. Raj Kumar studies the Ghadar movement in the context of World War I. The War was taken as an opportunity. It paved the way towards *Illan-i-Jung* (Declaration of War). The Ghadarites fought against all the odds. They resorted to various stratagems. Sharanjeet Nijjar revisits the Indo-German ‘Conspiracy’ which exposed the scheme of the Germans to assist the Ghadarites against the British. It led to the Indo-German Mission to Kabul. However, the British and American intelligence agencies smashed the coordination of the Indo-German Plot. With entry of the USA into the War in 1917, the working of the Ghadarites became near impossible. They were forced to appear under the Chicago or San Francisco Trials.

Rajit K. Majumder enquires into the ‘failure’ of the Ghadar which he considers ‘a limited revolution’. The Ghadar movement generated a patriotic fervor. It exposed the vulnerability of the colonial government during World War I. His premise is positioned on the pattern and pace of military recruitment during the War. The Ghadarites attempted the destruction of the imperial state ‘at an inopportune moment’. Social and political classes in the Punjab did not come forward in their favour. Certainly, it failed, yet the broader argument remains that failure at one juncture transforms into other forms. Does a failure exhaust all the possibilities in the impending future? The next two articles, by Jasbir Singh and Baljit Singh and Amrit Deol focus on the legacies of the Ghadar in subsequent decades. Jasbir Singh and Baljit Singh revisit ‘the Ghadar reading’ of Giani Hira Singh Dard who was a prolific Punjabi writer and contemporary to the Ghadar movement and its aftermath. His writings provide an alternative and enriching formulations for better understanding of the Ghadar movement. Amrit Deol considers the impact of Ghadar on Santokh Singh and Sohan Singh Josh on their understanding of the Punjab political situation and the context in which the monthly magazine, *Kirti* was conceived, how it evolved under Josh and its contribution formation of the *Kirti-Kisan* Party and the communist movement in Punjab.

The entry of the *Komagata Maru* into the Vancouver harbor haunted the Canadian Government. It took harsh measures and forced the ship to move out

of the harbor on July 23, 1914. The fate of the ship passengers continued to haunt the Canadians. Gurcharan Singh has worked on the *Komagata Maru* Apology tendered by Justin Trudeau, the Prime Minister of Canada on May 18, 2016 in the House of Commons, Ottawa, Canada. He delineates nuances, limitations and implications of the Apology. He argues that it 'yielded the littlest possible' as racism still continues in many forms in Canadian government rules and regulations. The volume carries a communication by Professor Autar Singh Dhesi to the American President Donald Trump. It has historical resonance with a contemporary reminder about 'the severe infirmity suffered by emigrants from subject countries'. It is time to acknowledge the fact.

The volume contains three book reviews which are relevant to the theme. Harminder Kaur examines the *The 1857 Indian Uprising* by Jill C. Bender. The author traces the ramifications of 1857 across four different colonial sites of Ireland, New Zealand, Jamaica and Southern Africa. It had imperial implications as the Uprising turned into 'an imperial crisis'. It was 'a defining moment' both for the Indians and the British. So the Uprising of 1857 is no longer insular, India-centric and episodic. Gagan Preet Singh reviews Seema Sohi's *Echoes of Mutiny*. It discusses the rise of anti-colonialism and anti-radicalism in North America. The US, Canadian and the British governments worked in tandem to check immigration of Indians. However, the *Komagata Maru* crisis radicalized and exposed the racial policies of Canadian and US governments. After the War, the Indian 'Yellow Peril' became the 'Red Scare' of the Bolsheviks. Sukhdev Singh Sohal takes into account *Ghadar Party Da Sahit* (in Punjabi) by Rakesh Kumar. The Ghadar literature reflects the yearnings, desires, dreams and designs of the Ghadarites through the medium of prose and poetry. They had a definite programme and policies. *Ghadar Dian Gujan* (Echoes of Revolution) is a classic example of revolutionary poetry. The work refreshes the literary sensitivities of the Ghadarites.

Certainly, the Ghadar movement was more than a political phenomenon. It was all-encompassing, with a dominant Punjabi ethos. It evoked human and universal values of high order. Moreover, it provided inspiration for social, cultural and academic upliftment especially in the rural areas. It also evoked potential in revolutionaries such as Kartar Singh Sarabha, the Babbar Akalis, Shaheed Bhagat Singh and Subhas Chandra Bose. Its remembrance in the centennial decade links it back to the early 20th century, full of travails, tribulations and trials when humans endured so much and expected so little. History takes a queer turn as we again confront the current exodus of Punjabis to foreign lands in the age of globalization.