

Gadaris, Gadar Party and Anglo-Vedic Games of the British

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Historians experience a dilemma when they take up their pen to write history of the Ghadr movement. It is mainly because there are myriad of aspects to the story that it becomes tough to negotiate transnational nature of the subject. Even the most realistic narration tends to end up in the dark alley of hegemonic interpretations. The writing of Ghadr history, according to these versions, has to conform to the imaginary view of Indian Nationalism. Historians, both in the East and West, attempt to pick only selective details, which may make the whole narrative either very simplistic or just an aberration of irrationally excited minds. They avoid engaging the core of the problem and fail to explain the contours of a wonderful dream that made thousands of countrymen mostly Sikhs to die for their country. Before embarking on their journey, many of them were baptized in Gurdwara Stockton, California. According to the Sikh tradition, when one takes a vow to offer one's head, the fear of death disappears. Ghadrists knew only one thing that they would die for their country, and they didn't even look back to see if the so called organizers had any actual plans for the great revolt. When the dream of one's own nation was born, it found its path to love, commitment and sacrifice. The ones who were initially in the forefront and who stayed back, the dream for them was just chimerical. They tried to run away from it, but could not ward off the shame that haunted them even in their graves. For others, it was to carry their heads on their palms, and bring the butchers of the British Empire to Indian people's justice. They honored all their heroes of the past, and left a legacy for the future that will keep on ringing notes of love, liberty, equality and fraternity.

The dream was so powerful that those who had it were transformed. The youngest Kartar Singh Sarabha's passionate energy to inspire others was undeniably irresistible. His friend Vishnu Ganesh Pingley demonstrated a rare courage in rejecting an appeal for mercy. The iron-will of many others horrified the judge who had to report it to Viceroy Lord Hardinge about their nonchalance and fearlessness. He personally intervened and commuted death sentence of 17 to life imprisonment. Seven of them kissed the noose on 17th November 1915 about nine months after the scheduled date of the Ghadr. Vishnu Ganesh Pingley was fearless and resigned to his fate; he didn't least think of disappointing his beloved friend Kartar Singh Sarabha. They along with many others rejected the advice of filing an appeal; engage a lawyer, and request any relief. They demonstrated their will to out rightly reject colonial occupation of their country. Baba Jawala Singh, known as the potato King, objected to the pronouncement of lesser punishment awarded in his own case in comparison to his other fellow beings. Baba Jawala Singh challenged judges to send him also to gallows. Such was their spirit, brotherhood, and unity for a nation of their dreams.

The young Sarabha wrote a poem before going to the gallows that urged countrymen never to hesitate to walk on the path of freedom with their heads on their palms. He appealed to his countrymen to keep them in their memory and also pointed out that mere high-flown language wasn't enough for the love of their country. Before going on his journey he had witnessed the empty enthusiasm of some leaders who he knew wouldn't take their first step in the path of service to their country. The following poem was written by Sarabha who was among the first seven to be hanged to death.

O Indians, do remember us when we leave.

Never throw us out of your mind.

we are kissing the noose for our country

Don't get scared to see us this way

Our death will fill hearts of our countrymen

with unbounded love for our nation

O countrymen, shine like moon

don't let dark clouds overpower your spirits

O friends, never betray your country

That will mean slur on the name your land.

Like Moola Singh, Kirpal Singh and the Nowab

And Amar Singh who betrayed the nation

Jails are colleges for the patriots

take admission and get degrees there

Dear brothers, follow the same path

to reach the abode where we are going.

Har Dayal

The English are on the whole a truthful people; that are perhaps their characteristic virtue. Whatever policy the State may adopt, the individual Englishman is a reliable person. He keeps his word. And the English Government also keeps faith with its friends, partly from policy, and partly from the national habit of truthfulness. The Englishman has acquired a reputation for truthfulness in Asia. The Englishman has acquired a reputation for truthfulness in Asia. Several years ago a hotel proprietor in a small island in the West Indies said to me: "The English are different from other people. If an Englishman says he will do a thing, you may be sure that he will do it" The English also trusts others, as he wishes that he should be trusted.--- Lala Har Dayal¹

Har Dayal makes the above statement in 1918 in his book *Forty Months in Germany and Turkey*, which critics interpret, was his abject surrender to the British Empire. He begs for amnesty and seeks for permission to go back to India. His grand betrayal made many Ghadrists to introspect on the whole genesis of Ghadr Party and what took place subsequently. Har Dayal's book came out when his closest friends in the Ghadr were executed and sent to life imprisonment. He could not write a word for them who went to gallows bravely. Most of them were called ideologically Ghadrists until then, but had committed no crime to be awarded death sentence. So much blood had been shed, but Har Dayal, instead of taking any responsibility, doled out brazen advice to remain subservient to the British for long. Har Dayal asked Ghadrists to betray their cause, "It is to be hoped that these young Indian enthusiasts will also give up the fruitless revolutionary methods which have made them the dupes of cunning German imperialists during this war."² Ghadrists had only one cause, and that was total freedom for their country.

The idea of German help and connections was thrown by Lala Har Dayal at the behest of Virendranath Chattopadhyay, and Chandrakant *Chakarvarty*. Whatever money came from the Germans was invested by Pandit Ram Chandra and C Chakravarty in real estate. It is a known fact that Germans' help was never rendered to Ghadrists who went to the battlefield.

The blood of freedom fighters only prompts Har Dayal to say, "Now they must be awaked to the sober reality, which teaches them that their destiny is linked with that of the English people for a very long time to come."³

Historians have never analyzed his statement in the context of what happened during the World War I and the Ghadr movement. What is the 'sober reality' and who are "They?"

Sober Reality: Is it that so many have been shot dead at Budge Budge, and so many hanged, and hundreds of Sikh soldiers fatally shot by the firing squads for allegedly showing tendency to mutiny? For Dayal these sacrifices, instead of kindling the patriotic fire, must awake them, and teach them hard lesson of greatness of the British Empire. Har Dayal is often addressed as a Hindu intellectual and sometimes even called 'Chanakya' of Indian freedom movement. Was he following Chanakya when he played as an *agent provocateur* for sending so many to gallows? We know Chanakya advice to Chandargupta "Son, one should never be too upright. You have just returned from a hunt in the forest, haven't you? Didn't you notice that it is always the straight trees that are cut down where the crooked ones are left standing?"⁴ By the time Har Dayal wrote "Forty Four Months," the first World War had ended with 80,482 deaths of Indian soldiers in which a large section of Sikh soldiers was represented.

THEY: We must interpret Dayal's "They," as Ghadrists who were mostly Sikhs of California. Lala had two sets of opinions about his "They." We know nothing about what he told his American friends, who were among socialists, members of Asian Exclusion League, Theosophical Society, Presbyterians, Unitarians and associates of Vedanta Society. Much has been written about what Har Dayal told Sikhs on the Pacific Coast in 1913 when he extensively travelled to deliver lectures and raise funds for the newly constituted Ghadr Party. However, very little attention has been given to analyze his interaction with Americans.

Dayal won wide support among Sikhs for what he preached to them. Many historians elevate Dayal, on the basis of his lectures and a few essays, as the founder, architect, and the engine of the Ghadr Party. In such attempts, they delink Ghadr from the history of riots of Bellingham, Everett, and many other places in California. They hide the role of Asian Exclusion League and some Swamis complicity with AEL. They refer to Honduras episode sketchily but don't consider it as a major incident. They tend to overlook the role of Professor Teja Singh in organizing Sikh community in England, Canada and USA. They only start with Lala Har Dayal, Vinay Sarvarkar, and Ras Bihari Boss. In order to get the complete picture, we need to reconstruct the whole story in the original context as it developed following the constitution of the Ghadr party.

Har Dayal's white audience quite often rallied around him for his Anglo-Vedic knowledge. Theosophical Society and Vedanta Society were attracting Americans for eastern mysticism that was interpreted as fulfillment of western ideals. When Dayal's mentor Lala Lajpat Rai came to the US, he was armed with many letters of introduction to officers of Theosophical Societies. Similarly, Lala Hardayal had many such connections through secret societies. His views in these circles were different from what he

preached among Sikhs of California. We owe it to Agnes Smedley who left some traces of Har Dayal's opinions among whites.

When Lala Har Dayal was served warrants, he was ready to deliver his lecture to about 200 Americans from different walks of life. Some accounts say they were socialists. Smedley, a young American girl who socialized with Lala Har Dayal, Lala Lajpat Rai, Bhagwan Singh, and M.N. Roy, and Chattopadhyaya at different times and places, and who had very intimate relation with most of them, has profiled them in her writings. As an American she notes their overall personality and frankly states her impressions about them. To Smedley, Har Dayal is a high caste Hindu, who had low opinion about the very people who he wanted to lead. Apparently, he considered Sikhs as low caste, uneducated, and savage in their thinking. According to laws of Manu and Chanakya maxims, Shudras' aspiration of liberty, equality and fraternity are threats to Aryan nobility which should be preemptively dealt with. These codes also sanction a highly devious plot in which 'awakened Shudra' could be exterminated in a manner that their murders should glorify the Arya's hegemony on the one hand, and teach a hard lesson of sobriety on the other.

Smedley noticed that the nation's racist Xenophobia, was most extreme in case of California's Sikhs as racially inferior, unassimilable, 'unclean and 'ragheads. The working class laborers, middle-class progressive reformers and even the socialist Party expressed their hatred for 'Hindus,' a derisive term for Sikhs. "Stigmatized, ridiculed, and bullied for maintaining their customs in America, discriminated against in theatres, restaurants, and hotels, charged higher rents than Caucasians for substandard housing in undesirable sections of town they faced the most limited opportunities for work and the lowest wages of all Asian groups... Agnes found it easier to identify with California's beleaguered Asian community than with Bay Area Socialists who wore buttons urging workers of the world to unite while simultaneously advocating Asian exclusion."⁵

The biographer of Agnes Smedley, Ruth Price illustrates how Har Dayal discouraged her (Smedley) from joining with Sikhs in their struggle to oppose *Land Alienation Act* by which they couldn't own or lease land. "Many Indians immigrants as citizens under the British Crown considered appealing their right to own property in the United States through British constitutional channels. Har Dayal, for one, believed such efforts were futile."⁶

High-caste Hindus who identified with the Anglo-Aryan principles were naturalized as citizens. As mentioned earlier, the case of Akhay Kumar Mozumdar, the first Indian to

gain naturalization on the West Coast refers to the phrase “pure-blood Hindus.” Mozumdar distinguished himself from other Indians and argued “The great bulk of the Hindus in this country are not high-caste Hindus, but are what are called sikhs, [sic] and are of mixed blood.” Emphasizing the class, and religious differences between him and the “mixed blood” Sikhs, Mozumdar stated, “The laboring class, those who do the rough manual labor, are not high-caste Hindus at all, but are in an entirely separate class, having quite a different religion and a different ancestry.” He concluded, “The high-caste Hindus always consider themselves to be members of the Aryan race.” Largely accepting his claim to racial purity and thus superiority, the court granted Mozumdar citizenship.”⁷

It should also be seen in the background of Congressional Hearing on February 14, 1914 in which Dr. Sudhindra Bose’s “Aryan” cards was basically used to exclude all Asians due to their non-Aryan backgrounds and low caste status. But since “pure-blood” Hindus were few and educated, there was no bar for their naturalization, as court granted Mozumdar citizenship on that basis. Testimony of Bose at the Congressional Hearing was a major damage to the immigration of all Asians. The irony of the case is that Pacific Coast Khalsa Diwan Society Stockton sponsored and funded the delegation mistakenly believing Har Dayal and Bose to be their loyal representatives. Later, the American immigration and Justice department unabashedly followed the Aryan interpretation to deny citizenship rights to low caste Asians. Bhagat Singh Thind, being a Sikh, is understood to have lost his high caste, therefore, was denied citizenship on the basis of these arguments.

It is a fashion with many historians to download the official version of the Ghadr movement and make it the final truth of the struggle for freedom. Such a version starts with Lala Har Dayal and ends up with his scholarly accomplishments for freedom the meaning of which he had no imagination, commitment and will to achieve. His writings appear to be thought-provoking and genuine expression of feelings, but Hardayal couldn’t sustain his argument when he was interrogated by the immigration officials at the Angel Island on March 26 1914. “But he stated that violence was not the answer.” Besides giving anti-British statement for the press, Hardayal backs out of his earlier stand on an armed revolt against Britain. 200 Sikhs attend his hearing and pay \$1000/ for his bail. The immigration official interrogated him about his illegal use of the country for spreading his propaganda; Hardayal suggested to the immigration official that he could leave for some other country if he couldn’t preach in the U.S. Commissioner General of Immigration Caminetti admitted there was no legal jurisdiction to deport him. One fails to

understand why did Har Dayal suggest himself that he would do his propaganda from some other country? Why no lawyer was engaged, or insisted?

But it is very important to review activities of Canadian Immigration inspector William C Hopkinson and Lala Har Dayal from January, 1914 to March 28, when Har Dayal jumps the bail to leave for Switzerland. After the meeting of December 31, 1913 in Sacramento, all Ghadrists go to Stockton for celebrating Gurburb of Guru Gobind Singh. On January 3, 1914, they participate in the First Sikh Parade organized with special permission of the city Mayor. To accommodate big gathering, a special hall was booked. All members and recruits of the Ghadr party planned next phase of their activities. Two options were put before members: they should either join the bandwagon of the Ghadr to overthrow British in India or they should suffer indignities living in America. As the information about Anti-Hindu Immigration Bills in the US Congress by two Congressmen of California and signing of the "Land Alienation Act" was provided, the second option appeared unattractive and unrewarding. Laws for restricting immigration of South Asians became more and more stringent and punitive. But the Pacific Coast Khalsa Diwan Society differed with Lala Har Dayal's contention that there was no use of wasting time on American citizenship, because he thought nothing would come out of it.

Har Dayal at this time was looking for maximum funds for the Ghadr party. But when a large number of people suggested that they shouldn't give up on the legal battle, Har Dayal, promised to recommend names for the delegation for Congressional hearing. Erika Lee and Judy Yung state that in February 1914, Har Dayal appeared as part of a delegation of South Asians who travel to Washington, D.C., to protest against congressional bills. But before this, Har Dayal, on January 19, 1914, appeared in a San Francisco court requesting an application for U.S. citizenship.⁸ Maybe Har Dayal wanted to get citizenship for himself on the basis of his education and high-caste Hindu status. It takes place 20 days after the Sacramento Ghadr conference in which decision is taken to go back to India for waging an armed struggle. But three days before this, Har Dayal on January 16, 1914, throws a dinner party for Ram Chandra in which he announced that he (Ram Chandra) would take over the editorship.⁹ It shows Har Dayal was already preparing for his sudden exit from the scene, and at the same time, was trying to get American citizenship so that he could return without any hassles. Har Dayal unilaterally took decision to appoint Ram Chandra without taking anybody of the Ghadr party executive member in confidence.

Next, his trip to Washinton, D.C. is jointly monitored by the British Embassy and the US Immigration department. The request to issue warrant for Har Dayal's arrest are initiated by the British Embassy, and the subsequent theatre of his interrogation was also followed with the express knowledge of the British officials. It was very common with the British administration to arrest some of its collaborators so that they could win honorable place in people's minds. As

the British Embassy had once convinced the US State Department that Annie Besant's arrest in India was merely a ploy. The US state department was alarmed when she distributed copies of Woodrow Wilson's lecture in the public. The British were trying to establish Besant's credential among educated Indians as a great freedom fighter. But when theosophists' propaganda against British India caught fire in international media, it made the British Embassy to write to the US authorities that "Besant's support for Indian home rule was not genuine, but rather little more than a ploy calculated to attract Indians to the religion of which she was a high priestess."¹⁰ Likewise, did the British Embassy in the US tell American authorities that the arrest of Har Dayal was just a ploy to attract most 'undesirable immigrants' to the Ghadr of which he was promoted as the architect, and whose plans were to discourage naturalization of 'inassimilable Sikhs', and push them direct in the firing line of the British India ?

What purpose Har Dayal's arrest served?

British Embassy and the US Immigration officials after Lala Har Dayal's departure don't involve any other Ghadr activist in any case until the U.S. enters the World War I. Har Dayal was removed on the plea that he was exciting South Asians against the British Empire. But there were many more in the Ghadr party who were recruiting Sikhs to go to India to wage an armed rebellion. Why the British Embassy and the American Immigration didn't pay any heed to those activities? Wasn't the deportation of Har Dayal entirely a British ploy to advertise his case as most important Leader of the Indian freedom movement, and then to convince Germany of his great utility in World War I? Germany allowed him to be part of the Berlin Committee. Forty Four months he spent there is the duration of World War I. On what basis, the British granted him amnesty, if he had been the most dangerous among South Asians? How many less dangerous Ghadrists had already been executed, imprisoned for life, and their properties confiscated? Was Har Dayal sent on a highly secret mission to Berlin? These questions need to be answered.

Free India destroys records of Ghadr history, Why?

Surviving leaders of the Ghadr movement tried to understand why they didn't receive any support from the public. Why Ghadr's sphere was only confined to Punjab? Why were only Sikh regiments asked to mutiny, not any other? Why did not funds, weapons and support follow Ghadrists? On September 19, 1955, a committee consisting of seven members was constituted to write accurately the history of Ghadr movement. Many surviving Ghadrists were still alive. Baba Sohan Singh Bhakana, the founding president of the Ghadr Party, was again made the head of the committee for writing history of Ghadr. Gurcharan Singh Sainsara, became the secretary. Baba Gurmukh Singh Lalton, Dr. Bhag Singh, PhD., Professor Sant Singh Sekhon, Giani Hira Singh Dard and Sohan Singh Josh were taken as members.

Gurcharan Singh Sainsara began his research in 1956. He interviewed former Ghadrīs, their families, went to many libraries, archives and looked for letters, original manuscripts written by members of the Ghadr party. In March 1956, he got permission to research in National Archives New Delhi. The permission was granted to explore all British documents except military, intelligence, and covert action files. Sainsara and his colleagues spent six months' time in New Delhi's National Archives. After exhaustive search, Sainsara took 700 notes from various files. As per rules of the National Archives, all 700 notes were submitted to the concerned department for official permission to use them in writing history of the Ghadr movement. To their utter shock and dismay, the Union Home Ministry revoked the permission to study related files and all 700 handwritten notes were confiscated. The notes only covered the year 1914. They came back home and felt helpless to complete the true story behind Ghadr.

Baba Sohan Singh Bhakana decided to meet the Prime Minister Jawahar Lal Nehru. He led a delegation of well-known nationalist leaders comprising of Dr. Saifudin Kitchlu, Raizada Hans Raj, Baba Gurmukh Singh, Baba Sher Singh Beyeen Poyeen and Dr. Bhag Singh. Nehru gave a very sympathetic hearing and promised to intervene in getting confiscated notes. But after two months, Nehru replied that concerned files were secret, and not meant to be shown to people. The files from which notes were taken were unclassified. The committee expressed its bewilderment in the following terms:

“We don't know why Indian Government wants to hide all cruelties and indignities that were inflicted on freedom fighters to suppress the movement? Why won't the Indian Government of Free India let the British policies toward Indian National freedom struggle come out in the public?”¹¹

The question why Indian Government would hide the British policies against India's freedom movement remains unanswered till today. The committee expressing powerlessness states, “The attitude of the Indian Government has rendered us helpless in throwing light on many aspects of this history. Ghadrīs who were hanged to death, and those who were thrown in prison in Third Lahore Conspiracy case couldn't be researched. The verification of Dr. Khankhoji's statement couldn't be completed. We could neither explain Burma and Siam expeditions nor the rebellion of Singapore and Mesopotamia. The atrocities suffered by Ghadrīs in Jails could not become part of the history.”¹²

Great Britain destroys key documents related with Ghadr

It is a fact that records related with these struggles have been selectively destroyed both in India and Great Britain. Indian politicians who took over from the British were in active collaboration with them since 1800's in times of Ram Mohan Roy and Dwarkanath Tagore. The Anglo-Vedic alliance jointly crafted policies to suppress genuine freedom fighters, and promote

the reciprocal rebels. Therefore, what is damaging for the British Empire, so is for the Image of the Indian National Congress and Arya Samaj which were birthed by Theosophical Society of India. The destruction of records enabled Britain and India to write their official versions of history. In the absence of records, scholars appropriate whatever is available to them.

Sohan Singh Josh expressed similar doubts about British and Indian politicians. In an effort to correctly write the history of the Ghadr movement, he went to archives in England, Canada, and USA. When he was in London in 1974, he researched India Office Library Records. He found that thousands of documents related with Ghadr in the indexes of subjects had been stamped “destroyed.” He expressed his surprise that the same happened in India’s National Archives in New Delhi. In India, Josh said, he could not understand the meaning of “Not Available,” or “Destroyed.” Josh was also known as one of the Ghadrists, who joined in the movement in 1920’s. He had the firsthand knowledge about how things shaped up, and how these are represented in modern histories of East and West. He comments:

Why have the former British rulers destroyed so many historical documents dealing with the fate of India? One must ask oneself this question. There is something fishy about it. The reason seems to be that the British rulers wanted to hide some of the most heinous and shameful crimes committed by them against the people of India in order to perpetuate their stranglehold over our motherland. The documents must be of a highly secret nature involving and implicating the British enslavers in political, social and moral crimes against our nation. They wanted to hide the criminal designs cooked up behind doors to kill lakhs of our innocent people.....They wanted to hide the criminal plans hatched by them through which they set one community at the throat of another in order to create communal riots and mutual slaughter. They wanted to hide criminal schemes by which they now and then crushed our political movements and bribed traitors who stood by them in times of their need, and whose names they did not want to divulge. Some such must be the criminal motive in destroying these valuable documents.¹³

Josh complains that Indian historians overlook these facts, perhaps, believing it a privilege of the British rulers to destroy historical documents. The history in school textbooks, according to Josh, only shows British’s continued presence in India. The British contagion runs through theories like “academic neutrality,” and “academic detachment.”

Picturesque immigrants and Threats to the White Landscape

East Indian immigrants in the white landscape looked very picturesque due to their turbans. Their popular entry points on the Pacific ports were San Francisco, Seattle, Victoria or Vancouver. A few also entered by way of New York, New Orleans and Montreal. The presence of East Indians in the first decade of their arrival totally transformed the agenda of Exclusion Leagues meant for Japanese and Chinese. A few thousand East Indians posed so grave a threat to the white supremacists that they became hysterical in their response. The turbaned East Indians initially were identified as Sikhs, but as the Exclusion Leagues gathered their arsenals for driving East Indians out of Yankees lands, they were interpreted as Hindus. It became a convenient term to distinguish them from Red Indians, but also a vehicle for directing their derision to their low-caste status. It is also the time when hordes of Swamis had successfully set their spiritual centers in most of the US metropolises. They were high caste and highly educated. They freely interacted in circles of American professors, journalists, artists, and mystics. Average North Americans came to know about India from Swamis; they uniformly told that most Buddhists, Muslims and Sikhs were converted originally from Hindu Untouchables. Majority of these immigrants were Sikhs and Muslims. Therefore, the term "Hindu" categorically got attached with uncleanness, disease, and pestilence. The high-caste Hindus were known as Pundits, Brahmans, Swamis and Eastern Mystics.

The Clash of perspectives:

It is significant to reconstruct the site from where Ghadr developed, and where mutually exclusive perspectives clashed. The three main actors were: The Aryan Hindu, The Sikh, and the Exclusionist. What was the Aryan Hindu's standpoint? Where did he situate himself? How did he perceive the ongoing unrest among East Indians from 1906-1919? How did the Sikh consciousness react to the situation of extreme violence and humiliation? What premises the Exclusionist provided for their violence and anti-immigration measures?

The Aryan Hindu Standpoint:

The place of Swamis, Brahmans, and Rajputs before and after the annexation of Sovereign Punjab makes an interesting study. The grand alliance of Rammohan Roy and Dwarkanath Tagore, in the beginning of nineteenth century, with the East India Company consolidated British positions in India. Its brutal impact was witnessed when it permanently ended the Marattha power. In the following fifty years, the same alliance brought the fall of Punjab in 1849. The British didn't suitably reward Hindu-Muslim elites for the annexation of Punjab, the trouble, therefore, kept brewing until it burst into the Mutiny of 1857. To reclaim the Hindu back to the heart of colonial policies, the

British innovate entirely a new strategy. It also includes isolating Muslims from the emerging breed of Hindu intellectuals until a suitable opportunity occurs.

The British policies after 1857 mutiny made a major turning point. The program to Christianize India was deferred for two decades. Missionaries got a new agenda which was more academic and attractive-- a special curriculum for teaching them English through translations and reinterpretations of ancient manuscripts. They were given the task of educating upper caste Hindus about their ancient systems of thought. The revival of Vedic periods and common Aryan ties achieved better results than the agenda of conversions. By the end of nineteenth century, a new breed of educated Aryan Hindus was ready to follow inscrutable directions. A spate of reform movements in 1880's gave birth to numerous sects in major religions. Ahmadiya, Arya Samaj, Dev Samaj, Singh Sabha, Namdhari, Nirankari, Radha Swami, to name a few, created a lot of heat for mutual clashes. Surjit S. Gandhi, a Punjab historian describes it in the following terms:

“The Arya Attack on Sikhism attained a new fervor early in the twentieth century. It was the result of the increasing religious intensity of the militant Aryas as expressed in the public ritual of reconversion. These Aryas began in 1900 to convert low caste Sikhs *en masse*... The attack on Sikhism on ideological level also harmed the Sikhs. The British scholars and Christian missionaries began to interpret Sikhism merely a social reform movement. The Arya scholars likewise treated Sikhism only part of Hinduism.”¹⁴

Swamis' English education and British Empire's special interest in their career across continents promoted many organizations with a view to utilize their spiritual, intellectual and strategic resources. Vedanta Society and Theosophical Society provided platforms for Eastern and Western perspectives to cohere together to form new parameters of peace in the world. Any other set of thought was considered disruptive, deviant and derogatory. The Sikhs who came to settle on the Pacific Coast were the unambiguous target of missionaries and Aryas. Therefore, they were vulnerable to misinterpretation, misrepresentations, and mistreatment of secret societies.

The Sikh Standpoint:

The majority of Sikhs, as mentioned before, came from the military backgrounds. Their overrepresentation in the British Army excelled in all fields. Sikhs had maximum number of deaths in the battlefields, maximum number of awards, and records of rare courage in key battles. The British encouraged the soldiers to be true Sikhs so long they were fighting for them. The former soldiers in Canada and the US carried their war medals with them. They were given the impression as if they would live respectable life if they moved to British controlled territories outside India. First as citizen of British India, and

second as Veterans of the British Army, they thought they would be welcome in foreign lands.

But when they faced extremely hostile environment, they introspected on their loyalty to their British masters. The double edged affliction wrought self-realization on the one hand, and anguish of injustice on the other. Their experience with the British Consulate office in Canada and America in the wake of atrocities, indignities, and violence, woke them to their statelessness and sterility. But Swamis, on the contrary, not only got a privileged status, but also were at the center of ideological support to the colonial west. Their association, therefore, was more with the exclusion leagues than with the laborers. But the laborers, naive as they were, couldn't understand these connections. They greatly relied on upper caste Hindus trusting their abilities and education to solve their problems.

The Exclusionist Standpoint:

On the other hand, some Americans perceived the situation from entirely a different angle. The tide of turbans was associated, in their minds, with territorial occupation by the most undesirable aliens. Sikhs' hunger for agriculture land, resolve to succeed in spite of all odds, and their insistence to keep their picturesque lifestyle are nagging questions for the exclusionist Leagues.

In 1905, more than sixty anti-immigration groups jointly vowed to preserve the 'Caucasian race upon American soil.' Samuel Gompers, president of the American Federation of Labor in 1908 expressed the typical mood of the exclusionists at that time. "Sixty years' contact with the Chinese, and twenty five years' experience with the Japanese, and two or three years acquaintance with Hindus should be sufficient to convince any ordinarily intelligent person that they have no standards... by which a Caucasian may judge them." ¹⁵

Gompers's Caucasian standards of judgment apparently apply only to India's Brahmins and their collaborators. Chinese, Japanese, and Hindus (Sikhs, Muslims and Buddhists), according to these standards, don't fit anywhere in his design. Dr. Sudhindra Bose's argument before Congressional committee in 1914 compares with that of Gompers. Bose provided 'ideological' basis to the law makers to fashion their all judgments according to the Caucasian standards. The contagion spreads to all branches of government and judiciary. Any contrary voices were either vetoed or just silenced in the name of European nationalism.

The constitution of Asian Exclusion League advertised itself to be the true voice of American whites. Its business was run in a highly organized manner. Minutes of

meeting, reasons for excluding undesirable aliens, and strategizing action plan were all recorded. Five hundred white militants represented the League's agenda when they attacked Sikh laborers in their deep sleep. The abrupt violence left them totally shattered. The Weekly newspaper, *'The Outlook'* analyzed data gathered from various newspapers in its issue of September 14, 1907 as such:

If the wrecking of a small Japanese restaurant in San Francisco by hoodlums, in the judgment of certain excitable people and newspapers, almost made war with Japan inevitable, how much greater, logically speaking, must be the danger of war between the United States and Great Britain if the story told last week in press dispatches from the State of Washington is a true one! According to this story, as a result of mob violence in the town of Bellingham, six badly beaten British subjects went to the hospital, four hundred fled to the jail for police protection, and seven hundred and fifty were driven away, beaten, hungry, and half clothed, to make their way to Canada and the protection of the British flag. The subjects of Great Britain who were thus maltreated were Hindus. Probably not one out of a hundred of our readers in the East, has been aware of the fact that a racial question with this class of Asiatic was brewing in the Northwest. It appears that many hundreds of Hindus have been employed in the mills in the neighborhood of Bellingham; that they were displacing white employees, and that the outbreak came from five hundred white men who raided the mills where the foreigners were employed, battered down the doors of lodging-houses, dragged the Hindus from their beds, and drove them with violence from the town. It is stated that most or all of the Hindus were Sikhs... As *The Outlook* has pointed out in other cases, the United States not only should have but does have authority to require from the State Government proper action in the way of redress and reparation. Meanwhile it is amusing to note, as a contrast to the Japanese flurry, that no human being predicts any serious disturbance of amicable relations between the United States and Great Britain.¹⁶

The reporter of *The Outlook* identifies accurately victims of violence as 'the British subjects,' Hindus, and Sikhs. He analyzes the truth by inviting attention of readers to victims' powerlessness. The size of the British Empire was way bigger than that of the US. Normally, the humiliating treatment to 'the British subjects' could strain bilateral relations of the two countries. But what the reporter emphasizes is that British India was only interested in using the Indian subject for the Empire, and could easily get away with moral obligations for their welfare in other countries. But Japan in this regard, was entirely on the other end of the spectrum. The reporter tries to make clear by saying, "most or all of the Hindus were Sikhs." Their imaginary identity as 'Hindus,' or the

'British Subjects' was a sign of their emasculation. To deal with their extreme alienation, they identify with the 'Sikh culture' as the only recourse to put together their shattered selves. In their effort to reconstitute their response, they envision for themselves a larger role, the harbinger of freedom for their subjugated nation.

Nayan Shah in a study, comments on Asian Exclusion League's activism in 1907 that propelled a spate of hate crimes against the 'most undesirable aliens.' The opening of League's chapters in America and Canada prepared grounds for organized crimes. The collection of ten thousand three days after the Bellingham riot was seen as a mandate for exclusion of Sikhs. Arthur Fowler's advice of making The Bellingham Riot exemplary only demonstrates how serious and complex the problems of Punjabi pioneers were in the first decade of the twentieth century. One month after the Bellingham Riot, the murder of Darrah Singh, an educated and well-dressed Sikh by Edward Bowen, a twenty one year English laborer shocked the community to devise some plans for their defense. Bowen's version of portraying Darrah Singh as a sexual predator, and his killing as a defensive measure to save his honor, didn't go well with the Jury. All evidence collected by the prosecutor established Darrah Singh's innocence, and Bowen's inconsistent lifestyle. The decision of the Jury to convict Bowen for murder restored some sense of justice in the beleaguered community. Shah provides details of circumstances that prevailed one month before Darrah Singh's murder:

"Three days after the Bellingham Riot, a crowd of 10,000 people gathered for an anti-Asian parade organized by Vancouver's newly established chapter of the Asiatic Exclusion League (AEL). The San Francisco-based white labor political organization had established chapters in Seattle, Bellingham, and Vancouver during the summer. Arthur Fowler of the AEL's Seattle chapter traveled to Bellingham on September 6, 1907, to assess the impact of the riots and traveled onward to Vancouver to participate in the parade. At the parade, he delivered a rousing speech and urged Vancouver residents to follow the example of the Bellingham driving-out campaign as a solution to Vancouver's Asian problem. He urged the crowd to march on Chinatown, and that night, a mob did so and destroyed the businesses and lodging houses of hundreds of Chinese and Japanese residents."¹⁷

Conviction of Bowen did not dampen spirits of Asian Exclusion League. Its members made it their favorite sport to hunt 'Hindus' and warn owners of sawmills against their employment. Exclusionists even pressured the city council to pass restrictions against business owners from employing East Indian labor. The Bellingham's incursion against Sikhs provided whites to sink their ethnic differences and identify with white America. The valorization with their new persona had political implications as it could polarize

majority votes to serious advocates of exclusionism. The election year was round the corner. The politics became more geared towards excluding Hindus first of all as they were more visible and inassimilable.

“From every standpoint it is most undesirable that these Asians should be permitted to remain in the United States. They are repulsive in appearance and disgusting in their manners. They are said to be without shame and, while no charges of immorality are brought against them, their actions and customs are so different from ours that there can never be tolerance of them. They contribute nothing to the growth and upbuilding of the city as the result of their labor. They work for small wages and do not put their money into circulation. They build no homes and while they numerically swell the population, it is of a class that we may well spare... There can no two sides to such a question. The Hindu is a detriment to the town, while the white man is a distinct advantage..”¹⁸

The editorial of Bellingham Herald, September 5, 1907 condemns the senseless violence. He also upbraids police’s role in remaining mere spectators to the hoodlums. But the editor’s conclusions are from the point of view American decency that was compromised. His views on Sikhs’ assimilation are, however, the same as in most other editorials.

“The Hindu is not a good citizen. It would require centuries to assimilate him, and this country need not take the trouble. Our racial burdens are already heavy enough to bear... Our cloak of brotherly love is not large enough to include him as member of the body politic. His ways are not our ways; he is not adaptable, and will not in many generations make a good American citizen. Moreover he is not even a good workman... But such exhibition of man’s inhumanity to man as that of last night should not be tolerated. Such lawlessness is an outrage upon American decency.”¹⁹

Seattle Morning Time’s report analyzes the problem from a sociological standpoint. He interprets whites’ preferences for meat and comfortable beds more urgent than Hindus’ vegetarianism and alleged tendency to live in a filthy corner. A new definition of righteousness emerges from the reporter’s standpoint, in which violence against the ‘undesirable aliens’ can hardly be called ‘indignation.’

“It is not a question of race, but of wages; not a question of men, but of modes of life; not a matter of nations, but of habits of life... When men who require meat to eat and real beds to sleep in are ousted from the employment to make room for vegetarians who can find the bliss of sleep in some filthy corner, it is rather difficult to say at what limit indignation ceases to be righteousness.”²⁰

Bellingham Herald's report of September 9, 1907 mentions white men indulging in stone throwing at 'Hindus' who asked for police protection for all Sikhs living in other places. The report, "Everett Hindus Ask For Police Protection." also points to the lackadaisical approach of the police.

Anaconda Standard (Montana) November 2, 1907 reported "Assault On Hindus Thirty Shots Fired." The gun attack on Sikh laborers left one man 'Bingwan [or Bhiningwan] Singh dead. Six men were arrested though no reports of further action were recorded.

Bellingham Herald, November 6, 1907, p 2 reports Rowdies are Arrested For Murdering Hindu. Five white men fired 30 rounds which killed on Bhagwan Singh.

"Hindus living in a shack at 2607 Norton appealed to the police yesterday for protection. On Friday Night their shack was stoned by a number of white men, and the Hindus are in fear of a similar treatment to that given their countrymen in Bellingham."²¹

Mill owners resist pressure of the white laborers and retain East Indians at par with whites, but labor leader started giving warning of violence in case they failed to obey their dictates. *Bellingham Herald* of October 2, 1907 gives the following title to the report, "HINDUS WARNED TO LEAVE EVERETT; Millmen Refuse to Discharge Dusky Workers and Replace Them at Same Wages by Whites – Claim is Made That It Is an Attempt to Force Down Wages. TRIED TO TROUBLE, Labor Leader Says Hindus Should Leave, as All Peaceful Means Have Been Exhausted."²²

Everett Herald November 4, 1907 reports "HINDUS ARE LEAVING CITY ; ALIENS, ALARMED BY SATURDAY'S DEMONSTRATION, ARE TAKING DEPARTURE; MANY GOING TO PORTLAND; REPORTED THAT SHOTS WERE HEARD SATURDAY NIGHT – EMPTY SHELLS FOUND." The reporter's tone appears to be sympathetic, appreciative, and somber because Sikhs have finally decided to leave and try their luck somewhere else. Sikhs protest in a unique way. Majority of them were veterans of the British Army who fought risking their lives for the British Raj. The treatment they received at white men's hands was worse than dogs. They organize a march wearing their military uniforms and medals to make a very significant statement. The message is undeniably strong and multidimensional. In spite of their military backgrounds, they chose to remain peaceful even when some of them had lost their lives in the unprovoked violence. Secondly, it is also a message to British India that instead of dying for their unjust Empire, they would prefer to die for their own free country.

“Every Hindu who owns a medal sported it today as the Asiatics walked the streets in the safety of daylight, making preparations to leave Everett for British Columbia and Portland, where they intend seeking new and friendlier pastures. Tall, erect, decorated with medals awarded for signal bravery while in the British military service in India, the Hindus went down with colors flying, bowing to the inevitable stoically, uncomplainingly, voicing no expressions of anger against their enemies, speaking nothing but regrets that the white man to whose free country they came, refused to permit them an opportunity to make a living...”²³

In 1908, White mob attacked Sikhs in Marysville, California. The help sought from the British Consul was denied. White mobs again struck in Oregon on March 22, 1910, in which many were seriously injured. The Mayor’s intervention saved the situation from further escalation.

The British spread a very organized network of spies to monitor behavior of veterans of the British Army. They find it most important experiment because it doesn’t take too long for the contagion to spread in the army. The British don’t want to leave any segment unregulated. The height of resentment especially among Sikhs makes headlines everywhere. During this time, the British spies spread their network who successfully infiltrate in Punjabi gangs. They use the same old strategy of the Reciprocal Rebel. Many pamphlets, newspapers, and essays are written on the ruthlessness of the British rule.

The Honduras episode adds fuel to the fire. During this time, Professor Teja Singh role has already been mentioned. After he leaves, Theosophical Society, British intelligence, reciprocal rebels take over to create serious dissensions. Sikhs fail to understand the diplomatic game. Komagata Maru further fuels the anger. They form the Ghadr party to express their nationalistic aspirations. When the world is in turmoil, Ghadr play their part with stunning devotion to the cause of freedom. But many others get lost in the maze of their own tricks. The trials, executions, prison sentences follow and many surrender to the influence of the Empire.

The Birth of the Ghadr Party

The birth of the Ghadr Party after six years of organized violence of the Asian Exclusion League, white mobs, and network of British spies was not due to any single individual efforts as erroneously suggested by many Ghadr historians, but it was born out of the collective consciousness of Punjabi pioneers who sensed total absence of Indian Nationhood during their ordeals in Canada and the US. The Indian National Congress’s

failure to pass a resolution to condemn racial violence of 1907, British Consulate Offices' apathy, the White mobs' incursions made Sikhs' to explore their community resources to make up for the lack of nationhood. Most attacks were on Sikh identity and its inassimilable nature. Some gave in to pressures and changed their form, but others took cues from Sikh history and stuck to their stand. Professor Teja Singh's work and incorporation of Sikh Gurdwaras brought change in community's consciousness. Gurdwara became the site of Indian nationalism. They found some stability in their life which earlier was rocked by series of violent incidences against Punjabi community.

Arya Samaj intellectuals' intense efforts from 1900-1907 were to arouse memories of 1857 mutiny in which Sikhs' role was shown as a 'missed opportunity' for Indian freedom. Arya Samaj and Hindu Mahasabha jointly used provocative idiom against the British and incited anger of young men. But the extremist leadership took a U-turn after Madan Lal Dhingra killed Sir William Hutt Curzon-Wyllie at Imperial Institute, South Kensington, 1 July 1909. Most of the Arya Samaj leaders, who earlier provoked young men, were now completely reconciled with the British.

The pioneering influence during 50th anniversary of the 1857 mutiny was Ajit Singh who had joined Arya Samajis for greater unity of Indian people. When Lala Lajpat Rai testified against Amir Chand, and endorsed his execution, Ajit felt totally isolated in his dreams and desires for independence of India. Close on the heels of the Delhi conspiracy, Ghadr movement arose with all its might. Ajit Singh experienced a sense of frustration when many Arya Samaji leaders reversed their position to save their skin. The Arya Samaji leadership could not extricate itself from Theosophical influence, and that is why it could not understand clearly what it wanted.

Theosophy provoked Indians to seek limited freedom for India, while for collaborators it promised greater role in the administration. As Gandhi's entry into the political system materialized, the vision of Ghadr looked a violent and outdated movement. Ghadr changed into Babbar Akali Dal, Akali Dal, and communist movements. The original Ghadr transformed into myriad of tiny influences which were not big enough to dismantle the colonial administration. The two world wars had totally wrecked the Indian leadership and people were left with no choice except Gandhi and Jawahar Lal Nehru. The greatest set back was the partition of the country.

Reference Notes

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² *Ibid.*, 95.

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⁵ Ruth Price, *The Lives of Agnes Smedley* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005) 44-45.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 46.

⁷ Nico Slate, *Colored Cosmopolitanism: The Shared Struggle For Freedom in the United States and India* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012) 30

⁸ Erika Lee, Judy Yung, *Angel Island: Immigrant Gateway to America* (Oxford University Press, 2010) 167

⁹ James Campbell Ker, *Political Trouble in India: 1907-1917* (Calcutta: Superintendent Government Printing Press, 1917) p. 236

¹⁰ Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007) 84.

¹¹ Gurcharan Singh Sainsara P. 8

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¹³ Sohn Singh Josh, *Hindustan Gadar Party: A Short History* (Jalandhar: Desh Bhagat Yadgar Committee, 1976) 17-18.

¹⁴ Surjit S. Gandhi, *Perspectives on Sikh Gurudwaras Legislation* (New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers & Distributors, 1993) p. 13

¹⁵ Gordon Chang, ed., *Asian Americans and Politics: Perspectives, Experiences, Prospects* (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2001) p. 261.

¹⁶ Francis Rufus Bellamy, ed., "War With Great Britain ?" in *The Outlook*, Volume 87 (New York: The Outlook Company, 1907) 51-52

¹⁷ Nayan Shah, *Stranger Intimacy: Contesting Race, Sexuality, and the Law in the North American West* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001) p. 31

¹⁸ "The Hindus Have Left Us" *Morning Reveille* September 6, 1907, P.4 (Editorial)

¹⁹ "A Public Disgrace" *Bellingham Herald*, September 5, 1907, p. 4 (Editorial)

²⁰ *Seattle Morning Times*, reprinted in *The American* September 7, 1907 (Halberg, pp.150-151)

²¹ "Everett Hindus Ask For Police Protection" *Bellingham Herald*, September 9, 1907.

²² "HINDUS WARNED TO LEAVE EVERETT" *BELLINGHAM HERALD* October 2, 1907, p 1

²³ "HINDUS ARE LEAVING CITY" *Everett Herald*, November 4, 1907.