

Effect of the sacrificial traditions of Sikh heritage on the journalism of Ghadar Movement

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After annexation of Punjab by the Britishers, a new form of revolution comes in force in the shape of different movements. The activity of Punjabis joining the British Army and going to reside in far off colonies begins with. Historically, this period can be taken as reawakening of numerous movements. After defeat of the mutiny, many campaigns rose from the soil of Punjab made the people mobilized against the British rule. Alongwith economic aspect, even the religious awakening and political awareness also now became apparent as helpful elements in the uprising of these movements. In this context, the role of Namdhari Movement, known also as *kuka* movement, can be taken as most significant.¹ For the later-on birth of the revolutionary ghadar movement on the soil of North America, this kuka campaign can be taken as its base which re-enlivened the sacrificial traditions of Sikh heritage of medieval times and founded the revolutionary struggle in the most truthful and trustworthy ways. On getting an inkling of the mutinous mood of the Punjabis, the British masters undertook numerous ways and means to keep them under control. For this, Punjabis used to be sent to other colonies under British rule to maintain law and order there and, to suppress their mutinous intent, the foreign policy was put in use. On the other hand, the Punjabis, badly held in economic recession and other problems, had no other alternative. During the initial years of twentieth century, the political and economic turmoils in Punjab compelled many Punjabi farmers to move out to alien lands in order to appease their bellies, get rid of loans and to make themselves prosperous. During these

¹ਗੁਰਚਰਨ ਸਿੰਘ ਸੈਂਸਰਾ, ਗ਼ਦਰ ਪਾਰਟੀ ਦਾ ਇਤਿਹਾਸ, ਪੰਨਾ 16.

days, the lands in America and Canada were developing on the form of capitalism. Capitalists needed badly the cheap and strong and skilled workers. When Punjabi farmers got wind of the need of workers in America and Canada at daily wages of rupees five or six, they set their caravans in that direction.² This was the time when the Punjabi soldiers in British army were paid rupees nine only per month while fighting on the frontiers of east Africa, Egypt, Burma, China, Iran or on the western borders of India. Meanwhile, the Sikh soldiers came to know about another English-ruled domain Canada where they could earn more while working and living in better conditions. After these revelations only, the emigration of Punjabis on alien lands made the beginning in true sense. In America, Baba Visakha Singh Dadehar and Jawala Singh Thathian started organizing the Indians in these areas and, on 24 October 1912, established the Pacific Coast Khalsa Dewan Society Gurdwara. After formation of the National Organization like Vancouver, Baba Sohan Singh Bhakna mobilized other patriots to make the natives strung in one form and thus, on 21 April 1913, established the organization named 'Hindi Association of Pacific Coast' in Austria. Later, it became popular under name of Ghadar Party. On 1st of November 1913, a weekly paper in Urdu was started from San Francisco. In Gurmukhi, the weekly paper 'Ghadar' in Punjabi began in December 1913. Afterwrds, the paper started getting published in other languages – Hindi, Gujarati, Bengali, Nepali and Pushto. In initial editions of 'Ghadar', Gurbani hymns are found written in the centre under somewhat alteration and 'Bande' and 'Matram' were written on end-corners separately. These are the editions of those times when Shahid Kartar Singh Sarabha was the Editor of this Punjabi paper. After some time, the revolutionary veterans became

² ਹੀਰਾ ਸਿੰਘ ਦਰਦ, ਪੰਜਾਬੀ ਦੁਨੀਆਂ, ਫ਼ਰਵਰੀ 1960 ਪੰਨਾ 14-15

active in struggle for freedom in the country and many of them sacrificed their lives or suffered long jail-terms.

After these stalwarts, glaring changes were made on the title page of 'Ghadar'. The Gurbani hymn was replaced with the words: 'O valiant young Indians! Take up the weapons'. Such changes on the title page of 'Ghadar' did not come of its own, but were introduced in a planned way. Ram Chander started writing his name as Editor on the first page and then, getting aside of the party, he started a parallel paper 'Hindustan Ghadar' at party's expenses. Initially, S. Kartar Singh Sarabha remained Editor of the Punjabi version of this paper. Other revolutionary writers included S. Harnam Singh Tundilat, Bhai Santokh Singh Dhardeo, Bhagwan Singh Pritam, Munsha Singh Dukhi, Kartar Singh Latara, Basant Singh Chaunda, Mehbub ali, Inayat Khan, Ram Chander, Khem Chand Das, Mohan Lal, Pirthi Singh Azad, Bishan Singh Sada Singh Wala and Nidhan Singh Maheshwari who remained associated with the Paper. The writers used mostly their sub-names or the pen-names. Under assumed names such as Dukhia, Ghadar da Sipahi, Pritam, Faqir, Punjabi Singh, Sewak, Baghi, Jachak, Iqbal, Humdum, Azad, Yakdam, Nastik, Sach, Hind Sewak and Nidharak, the purpose was whereas to highlight the real motive of the movement rather than individual popularity, it was meant equally to keep secret the identity of 'Ghadar' under state of political compulsions. Main purpose of the writers was to rouse political awakening among the migrants so as to prepare them for struggle for freedom of India. These papers are so prominent in journalism that these proved milestones of awareness for the next generations. Under a missionary spirit, these journalists took cue from their past to make journalism as means of attaining independence. Through this Paper, we come to know of cultural challenges, social sufferings, and horrors of the British rulers and the sores of servility. Narrations of the 'Ghadar' expose such issues to the readers that rise from coercions in foreign lands and slavery in the country. Enlightening the native slaves, 'Ghadar' prompts them on the path of struggle for freedom. He himself is proponent of the revolutionary zeal and stirs the

reader also to take immediate step in this regard. For a journalist of ‘Ghadar’, his writing is not a mere writing only; it is struggle for freedom and he is committed to strengthen the movement by means of media. In these saffron robes, the ‘Ghadar’ pronounces that we should bereave ourselves of fear and selfishness. Rubbishing aside the frivolous differences amongst ourselves, we should have neat and clean visions of our patriots of independence. What is this life? Numberless species go extinct while moving about on this earth. Millions of people die without doing anything worthwhile. Took meals, wore clothes, got married, bore children and brought them up and then left for ever. Worthwhile living is that wherein the individual does numerous deeds in this brief life. He should help in guiding others and fight against the tyrants.³ ‘Ghadar’ appears in light of prompting the Punjabis to fight for human rights and motivate them to struggle for freedom of the country.

‘Ghadar’- the proponent of finishing British Empire through armed revolution – indulges in negotiations with the moderate leaders and presents those as mode of dual approach. While misleading the Indian youth, detracting them from the path of revolution and throwing their strugglesome effort in chilly bin, these leaders could not save themselves from the sharp tune of revolution. Whereas the pro-English Khans and Bahadurs and feudal lords remained stuck as pros of the critics of revolutionaries, even the anti-political national leaders also could not save themselves from this effect. It is found written in Punjabi version of weekly ‘Ghadar’ that sixty or seventy students had joined this influence of servility till then. That is this if all the pseudo leaders of India had bonded themselves to live in servitude. These proponents of slavery have been looting the honour and wealth of the country and now they were depriving the Indian youth of education and wanted to sacrifice them for the English. At this time, it is clear to everyone that this is the right time to free ourselves alien rule. But the ones who are engulfed with the tallow of slavery, they can see nothing but slavery only. Youth of the country are preaching for revolution. The ones doing hard labour

³ ਸ਼ਪਠਾਹਿਕ ਪੱਤਰ ਗ਼ਦਰ, 23 ਦਸੰਬਰ 1913.

for nine hours daily are sacrificing the Indians and Gandhi has taken contract for slavery of Indians. He is a bad example for the young Indians.⁴ Severe criticism of the timely pro-British Indian political policies is found in 'Ghadar' weekly.

Thus, to upbeat the spirit of struggle for freedom and encourage the downtrodden, the valiants of 'Ghadar' set aside, in total, self-interest, self-pride and the bourgeois thought. The spirit reflects distinct in 'Ghadar'. Notwithstanding literally with this profession, the journalists of 'Ghadar' used this Paper solely for the purpose of promoting the revolution. They shed away the psychic-stain of illiteracy even from their mind. Rather, they could exhibit the leadership traits in themselves. Getting aware of one's entity and contemplating over it, anguish arose against the British Empire after going through reasons behind it. Proding through our heritage under effect of anger and contemplation, the migrant Indians stood face to face before it to realize a creative and revolutionary vision of fearlessness. It was this revolutionary and creative consciousness out of the dynamism of which came into being a new future.⁵

A prominent part of the 'Ghadar' is this also that the editorials appear to give prominence towards exposing the coercions of British Empire and thereby promulgation of initiating an armed revolution from foreign lands to finish these atrocities. In the first edition of 'Ghadar' in Urdu and Punjabi, we find versions of the use of media force to organize a people's campaign as main issue against the British rule. "To-day, on 1st November 1913, a new era sets in the history of India when a struggle against the British rule begins from foreign lands in vernacular. It is an auspicious day when the word 'Ghadar' – the paper published in Urdu and Punjabi - forebodes the uprooting of British rule in India. Publication of this paper at a place ten thousand miles away from home

⁴ ਸ਼ਪਠਾਹਿਕ ਪੱਤਰ ਗ਼ਦਰ, 17 ਜਨਵਰੀ 1915.

⁵ ਅਮਰਜੀਤ ਸਿੰਘ, ਗ਼ਦਰ ਲਹਿਰ ਦੀ ਕਵਿਤਾ ਦੇ ਸਮਾਜੀ ਤੇ ਸਿਆਸੀ ਸਰੋਕਾਰ, ਪੰਨਾ 73

is such an act that its glimpse makes our joy unlimited. What is our name? Ghadar. What is our aim? Ghadar. Where shall Ghadar be? In India. When shall it take place? In a few years. Why shall it be? Because the people have fed up from the atrocities of the British rule and they have become ready to sacrifice their lives for independence.”⁶

‘Ghadar’ whereas stimulates the people from foreign lands through the force of media and vernacular to take solid steps against slavery, it also includes within it the silent role of media pertaining to these important issues in India in the form of ‘Ghadar’. Editorials in the form of argumentative and sarcastic tone in ‘Ghadar’ hit hard the timely Indian newspapers. As is stated in ‘Ghadar’: ‘Punjab press is quite alert. On a minor lapse by a political leader, they drab him thrashingly. News come that Baba Gurbakhsh Singh Bedi arranged a show of dancing girls at the marriage of his son. As such, the Punjabi people are pushing him in a difficult plight.’ No doubt, we also express our dismay at this folly. But we question the Punjab newspapers who raise so many hue and cries on such matters but why do they entertain the English for months in Simla and offer gifts of millions of rupees to them when they leave for England with pension and loot of Indian treasures. Then why do these papers sorely? They don’t utter a murmur even. These papers do express dismay on the social lapses of rich men, but we express sorrow on the timidity of these papers.⁷ “Ghadar’ was a movement; rather than a mere paper. This newspaper ended up to be the first Punjabi paper at international level and it used to reach the countries where even very few Punjabis lived. This paper proffered honourable rank of status to the Punjabis living abroad for struggle for independence of the country.⁸

⁶ ਸ਼ਮਾਚਾਰ ਪੱਤਰ ਗ਼ਦਰ, ਦਸੰਬਰ 1913.

⁷ ਉਹੀ, ਜੁਲਾਈ 1914.

⁸ ਨਵਜੀਤ ਜੌਹਲ, ਵਿਦੇਸ਼ੀ ਪੰਜਾਬੀ ਪੱਤਰਕਾਰੀ ਦੇ ਦੋ ਦੌਰ: ਇਕ ਤੁਲਨਾਤਮਿਕ ਅਧਿਐਨ, ‘ਪਰਵਾਸੀ ਪੰਜਾਬੀ ਸਾਹਿਤ ਵਿਸ਼ੇਸ਼ ਅੰਕ 40’, ਖੋਜ ਪੜ੍ਹਕਾ, ਪੰਨਾ 127

In line with the prose write-ups in this Punjabi “Ghadar” weekly, even the poetry also presents a specimen of meaningful literary journalism. These poems prepared the people to get rid of hardships by following the path of struggle. In this poetry of people’s idiom, the victims took cue from their national legacy to forget their racial differences and fight against the tyranny of foreign rulers. In order to accomplish this ideal and revolutionary step, the contributors of ‘Ghadar’ highlighted the particular elements of dynastic extinction, caste extinction and class extinction and stressed upon the essence of equality, fraternity, cooperation and unity. We quote a line as specimen of this ideal:

*‘We think not of any caste or creed, we know not any low or fallen;
One brotherhood all the Indians have, and no crafty rite we follow.’⁹*

Writers of the contributions in ‘Ghadar’ were absolute detractors of Manu’s castes and they were fully motivated under their glorious history towards uniting the people against atrocities. The message that ‘Ghadar’ conveyed for getting rid of the clutches of slavery and making every sacrifice for independence is an invaluable contribution made by the literary journalism in Punjabi, and its effect is everlasting rather than timely. Quoting an example that when Kartar Singh Sarabha was entrapped with his companions under some tip-off by informers, they, rather than running away, started reciting this verse written by Kesar Singh Thathgarh:

Nothing can save us from sacrificing our head.

Shall fight to the last though we be dead.

Shall ever we roar and never run away.

With sword in hand, we plunge in the fray.

Cut the enemy into pieces and suck their blood

⁹ ਦੇਸ਼ ਭਗਤਾਂ ਦੀ ਬਾਣੀ .ਗ਼ਦਰ ਦੀ ਗੁੰਜ ਨੰ. 2 1916, ਪੰਨਾ 31,

We shall not run away though we be dead.

Kill the enemy or get ourselves killed.

So shall we finish the malady of cowardice and poverty.

As roaring lions, we shall sacrifice ourselves.

And shall fight to the last though we be dead.¹⁰

In the poetry of ‘Ghadar’, Sikh revolutionary spirit reflects everywhere and the revolutionary poets quote such examples as give a jolt towards struggle against tyranny and injustice in every way. This poetry hints towards those pages of history wherein we pass through various stages starting from the sacrifice of Sahibzadas of the tenth Master and then visualize the Sikh revolutionary spirit through the deeds of Banda Singh Bahadur, Akali Phoola Singh, Hari Singh Nalwa and the Sher-e-Punjab Maharaja Ranjit Singh. In order to get freed of the colonial loot of British empire, the paper ‘Ghadar’ idealizes the Sikh struggle against Mughal Empire. Verily, this like thought in ‘Ghadar’ prospered at such a time when the reins of this movement came in the hands of Panjabis wedded to revolutionary struggle. The daring bands who came forward for this armed revolution were none others but Punjabi migrants only. Not caring of their lives, they left the limits of America and Canada lands and set for India, especially Punjab, under a spirit of dare-devilry. With arrest of Hardayal in April 1914, the movement came in the hands of Punjabis and they, through exemplary sacrifices for bright future, set such a path on which the revolutionary youth followed to consolidate it. A revolutionary legacy can be visualized among these valiant ones that was flowing in their veins as an inseparable part of Punjab’s soil. That is why their revolutionary vigil against injustice made a quick rise and put

¹⁰ ਗ਼ਦਰ, ਕੇਸਰ ਸਿੰਘ ਠੱਠਗੜ੍ਹ, ਕਵਿਤਾ ‘ਬਣੀ ਸਿਰ ਸ਼ੇਰਾਂ’

them at such a struggle some path as made death certain while pursuing the struggle. In the simple and straight forward political awakening poetry of these veteran revolutionaries, the Sikh revolutionary spirit can be visualized everywhere.¹¹ The poem '*Panth Aggey Pukar*' published in 'Ghadar' is an example of it wherein the revolutionary poet quotes revolution from the national legacy.

He himself when prepared to leave for heaven,

Sent Banda as our savior Singho!

Banda did his best on coming here,

The Panth did prosper all and well Singho!

When Banda left for his heavenly abode,

The Panth took lead of all Singho!

Valiants were many there in Panth,

They became savior of the Panth Singho!

They suffered untold miseries,

But never left sword and shield Singho!

Then came Ranjit with might valorous,

Cruelly dealt with all rebels Singho!

Came warriors like Hari Singh Nalwa,

All liberal, pure and pious Singho!

Great warrior was Phoola Singh Akali,

Ever had his Faith in Akal Singho!

Did the sinners kill them splitting apart,

¹¹ ਅਮਰਜੀਤ ਸਿੰਘ, ਗ਼ਦਰ ਲਹਿਰ ਦੀ ਕਵਿਤਾ ਦੇ ਸਮਾਜੀ ਤੇ ਸਿਆਸੀ ਸਰੋਕਾਰ, ਪੰਨਾ 34-35

Ever they chanted Akal Akal Singho!¹²

Such a political-awakening poetic composition is inspired from the proud legacy of Punjabis. Rather than making any entreaties, the writers preferred the path of sacrifice against the cruel tyrants. In order to put the people on this path, they used to cite the deeds of martyrs who, rather than submitting before the tyrants, sacrificed their lives and made firm the foundation of Sikh nation. We find such reflection in a daring poem published in ‘Ghadar’:

Had there been like Deep Singh to-day,
Who could have scoffed the Singhs why!
Had there been like Mani Singh Bhai,
How could have Hindustan spoilt why!
People call the Singhs as bad tempered,
Sent back rebellion of Delhi why!
Country would have been free now,
Did they create the storm so why!
Sons of lions we die like lions,
In cages we lie dismayed why!
Roaringly we shout and kill the Whites,
Sitting so humiliated in shame why!
Thirty crore men has India,
These four crore do rule why!
Look sharp to revolt for uprising,

¹² ਸ਼ਮਾਚਾਰ ਪੱਤਰ ਗ਼ਦਰ, ਕਵਿਤਾ ‘ਪੰਥ ਦੀ ਪੁਕਾਰ’, ਜਨਵਰੀ 1914.

You have abandoned the country's need why!¹³

The literary writers and columnists of the 'Ghadar' were not only pen-proficient but were equally true to the deeds. Whatever they wrote remained committed to it. The poetry in 'Ghadar' demands remembering the sacrifices of martyrs and following their foot marks. Historical references stand support to the fact that Kartar Singh Sarabha, while in lock-up with his companions, always used to recite the lines of last message of martyrs that was published in 'Ghadar' weekly.

Our death is life of the nation,
Shall do our duty before we go.
Our memory shall spur our sons ever,
To love the country after we go.
Ever shalt thou roar like sons of lions,
Never get called cowards erst you go!
Jails are colleges for the patriots of country,
Do engrave your name here before you go!
Gallows grant degree from the school here,
What misdeed you commit to pass before you go!
Many ones fail and pass a few,
Lose heart not countrymen before you go!
India is ours and Indians we are,
To children you teach this before you go!
O loving 'Pritama' wherever are we going,

¹³ ਸ਼ਮਾਚਾਰ ਪੱਤਰ ਗ਼ਦਰ, ਕਵਿਤਾ 'ਪੰਥ ਦੀ ਪੁਕਾਰ', ਜਨਵਰੀ 1914.

You also come the same way to us.¹⁴

The literature published in ‘Ghadar’ made such effect on the Punjabis living abroad or in India that the Paper became panacea for eradication of the caste-cult that was spreading in society as leprosy. References relating to die for freedom and living a life of self-respect were quoted from Sri Guru Granth Sahib. It were not only the Punjabis living in Canada and America who learnt Punjabi to read the ‘Ghadar’; rather in India also, many Indians in different parts of the country learnt reading Punjabi under enthusiasm to read the ‘Ghadar’. After undergoing the revolutionary stirring made by this Paper, the valiant living abroad developed such a spirit of unity that they fixed an aim to finish the slavery of British Empire in India and establish home-rule in the country. In every edition of the Paper, they talked of Independence and advocated extermination of the ones opposing this move. Along with, the natives living abroad were asked to go back to the country and make the people united to begin with the revolution. Giving detail of the hardships suffered under slavery on the alien land, the ‘Ghadar’ pledged to uproot the rule of British Empire. ‘Ghadar’ can justifiably be called ‘Baba Bohar’ – the grand root - of Punjabi journalism in foreign lands. The journalism of revolutionary movement, no doubt, was greatly influenced by the hereditary Sikh traditions of sacrifice; nevertheless, it made an equally deep effect on Punjabi journalism in the country also.

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¹⁴ ਗਦਰ ਕਵਿਤਾ, ਕੌਮੀ ਸ਼ਹੀਦਾਂ ਦਾ ਆਖਰੀ ਸੰਦੇਸ਼, 29 ਮਾਰਚ 1915

