

# The Gadar versus Native and Foreign Elites

DR. TEJWANT SINGH GILL

In 1914, the Gadarites, mostly from Punjab, Jat-Sikh by birth, initially in America to earn money to support their joint families in their native land, took up the cause of Indian independence. It was for the first time that a determined effort was made to liberate the motherland in the wake of her subjugation, initiated by the East India Company and carried to its administrative, organizational and institutional end by the colonial government ensconced in England. They landed in Punjab, their native land, charmed with the fantasy that the war for the independence of their motherland they were going to launch was to be fought in the open battlefield. In this open battlefield they could suffer reverses for some time but victory would be theirs in the long run. Their fantasy projected this long run to be very short in deed. This was because the seeds of this fantasy were already in their blood. Evidences from the folklore and events from the history of the past were there to nurture them. Had the historical juncture been the same as the folklore showed and the events of the past upheld, this fantasy would have changed into reality. Their courage to face the enemy wielding enormous power, their feeling of sacrifice to suffer reverses, even to lay down their lives for the cause, would not have gone in vain.

But the historical conjuncture, when they took up this world-historical task, presented a different picture. The motherland, particularly Punjab, their native land that their fantasy had conjured up as an open battlefield, was in reality a fortress. It was well-buttressed by measures ranging from the local to the provincial level. Civil, administrative, judicial, legal, social and religious measures were in promulgation. Its ramparts and entries were well-protected against frontal assault from within or without. The responsibility for protecting the fortress rested with the agents, enjoying the status of elites, entrusted with responsibility through ingenuity of extraordinary kind. The result was that the elites were unmindful of sovereignty and were content with suzerainty exercised by the colonial rule. They wanted that the vast multitude of the motherland, including the people of Punjab, should follow their dictates without any demur whatsoever. Such suzerainty, opening the prospect of wellbeing but at the same depriving them of the feeling of sovereignty, led them not only to maintain the new system but also to consolidate it further. Under no circumstances did they want the feeling for national independence to germinate in the minds of the Indian population in general and the people of Punjab in particular, who only half a century back had lost sovereignty and come under the ambience of suzerainty.

To grapple with the whole problematic of the loss of sovereignty, recourse to suzerainty and insurgency by the Gadarites to subvert this arrangement, the scope of the paper has to be broad and general from one aspect and specific and concrete from another. With evidences drawn from social, cultural, religious and literary sources, effort is made to show that persons, upholding this category at that historical conjuncture were agents, supporters, advocates and upholders of the system the colonial rule had established in Punjab after the dissolution of the reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. They did not favor any fundamental change in its economic, political, administrative and cultural complexion. If at all they approved of any change, it was to be gradual, seeking only to improve the functioning of the system's diverse organs. It was the indigenous form of "transformism" they practiced. Antonio Gramsci(1891-1937), whose thinking went beyond his country to cover several continents, meant by such phenomena only secondary and partial change in the system. Under no circumstances was it to be revolutionary designed for primary and fundamental reconstruction of the structure and the superstructures of society<sup>1</sup>. So it was the maintenance of the colonial rule in India, including Punjab, the foreign and native elites envisaged to consolidate from the beginning of the last quarter of the 19th century.

The state of affairs in Punjab was such that from that moment, such elites were actively engaged in various spheres only to consolidate the system ushered in by the colonial rule. As a result, under the aegis of the colonial government the longing for independence, if at all it seemed to germinate, remained dormant and ended up as a call for the restoration of the already discredited feudal system. Such was the pitiable end of the solitary effort Bhai Maharaj Singh (?-1656) made to restore Maharaja Dalip Singh to the throne usurped by East India Company in Punjab. In India also, the same happening took place in a more striking way. The last Mughal ruler in Delhi and the kings/queens of various other states disparately launched what came be called the Gadar of 1857 but the result was not different in any way.

The Gadarites felt that the Gadar of 1857 was the first war of national independence. The crucial factor that did not let it bear fruit was the Punjabis, particularly the Sikhs, did not take part in it. To urge to tread where their forefathers had faulted showed the nobility of their character, rather excessively. Rather than actual, it was imaginary. After all, scores of eminent historians, including Dr Ganda Singh (1900-1987) have unambiguously proved that it was not war of independence. If the Punjabis, particularly the Sikhs, did not take part in it, they were not to be blamed. If any blame accrued to them, it was similar to one those kings/queens were not free from for not coming to the aid of the Sikhs during the Anglo-Sikh Wars, fought less than ten years back. Even when they revolted against the English, they could have raised the claim of Maharaja Dalip Singh (1838-1893) to his lost kingdom. Such a step might have earned them support from a section of the Sikhs. This is speculation that needs historical study. Its

literary expression is to be found in Sant Singh Sekhon's marvelous play, *Moian Saar na Kai*(the dead were not aware)<sup>2</sup>.

The nobility of character shown by the Gadarites because their forefathers did not align with imaginary claim of the 1857 rebels showed a lapse in their historical memory. They blamed Rani Jindan (1817-1863) for not sending ammunition to the Sikh armies in their fight against the English. They had no word of sympathy for her defiance of the English, her stay as an exile in Nepal and from there her verbal support of the 1857 rebels. More regrettable was their silence over the struggle that a few years earlier Bha Maharaj Singh had tried to launch to drive out the English from Punjab, then visualized as the lost Sikh kingdom. His capture, deportation to Singapore and painful death, after contracting arthritis and cancer did not figure in their memory. Likewise, Tipu Sultan (1750-1799), who decades before proved himself really patriotic did not tickle their remembrance.

With the start of the First World War, the Gadarites, departing from the earlier path of revolt, took up cudgels for setting up a new system, vaguely secular, democratic and equalitarian. Their revolt was to begin from Punjab, which in their fantasy, was the best site for open warfare. However, the foreign and native elites ensured that nothing of the sort could happen. Their activities carried at different levels and in diverse fields did not let Punjab change into a battlefield for such a confrontation. They managed to keep Punjab a well-protected fortress, impregnable to any assault whatsoever. The British rulers ensconced in London, on the score of intelligence reports published in the British press, alleged that the Gadarites, landed in India, particularly Punjab, were agents of the German government, then at war with England. To their mind, its natural corollary was that they were no less the enemies of India, then a colony of the empire over which the sun did not set any time during day or night. In India, right from the Viceroy of the country to the Governor of Punjab, the judiciary and the civil-cum police administration were on their toes to put them behind bars, the moment they reached their designated stations after sailing desperately across the Pacific. Not stopping at that, they were eager to send those enemies of the colonial rule to the gallows or award them exemplary punishment such as life-sentence in notorious jails without or within the country.

Then in India, there was no organization, institution or political party to empathize with the Gadarites who, by sacrificing their all, had taken up the cause of Indian independence with singular audacity. At the geographical level, it was all a void for the tactic employed by the colonial rule had ingeniously confined its suzerainty to two-third of the Indian subcontinent. The remaining one-third of India was under the control of the native princes, who always aspired to remain in the good books of the colonial administration. In hundreds of states disparately spread over India, no voice worth the name could rise in sympathy with the

Gadarites, particularly when the memory of the brutal suppression of the so-called 1857 uprising was fresh in their mind. In the rest of the country, except for terrorists in Bengal, there was none who could side with them. The Congress Party talked only of Home-rule and was always eager to guard the British administration from any embarrassment of the sort. In Punjab, the feudal lords in the Muslim and Sikh communities, along with traders from the Hindu society, were dominant to such extent that the masses were left only to reciprocate their vital interests. Their opposition to the Gadarites was a fore-gone conclusion.

Likewise, were opposed to them the custodians of the gurdwaras, who had begun to wield ownership of these religious places, otherwise meant for the spiritual and ethical amelioration of the Sikh masses. In this insidious attempt, they had the overt or covert support of the colonial government. Without any help or support from the landlords who were on the right side of the colonial rule, the religious places dared not provide them shelter of any sort. So the Gadarites were rendered homeless in their own country and homeland. Per my information gathered in the course of translating Bhai Kahan Singh Nabha's *Mahan Kosh* (Encyclopedia of Sikh Literature) into English, in Punjab there was hardly any gurdwara of which the custodian was from outside the Nirmala and Udasi sects.<sup>3</sup> These custodians sought to ingratiate themselves with heads of the villages and through them with the administration meant to stabilize and consolidate the colonial rule. Thus the inhabitants of the villages from where the Gadarites had migrated several years back now accosted them with alien looks. Setting aside the familial and collateral lies, they turned their back upon them, little realizing that they were the first to take up the cause of national independence and wage war that, due to no fault of theirs, proved futile but in the long run was to add a glorious chapter in the annals of India and Punjab.

So far as the alien elites, ranging from the Viceroy to the administrators, were concerned, to safeguard the interests of the empire, sprawling over half the world, was their chief concern, which was understandable enough. In the garb of White Man's Burden, the civilizing mission had become a mania with them. It was their conviction that in the colonies comprising integral part of the empire, they had assumed the onerous task of spreading responsible governance and applying the rule of law, where according to their oriental studies no such factors had ever operated in the course of history. This was true to a considerable extent, so far as the rule of British imperialism in India was concerned. In the comparative context, two justifications could be made on its behalf. One, except in South Africa, the British imperialism did not employ the most glaring political evils, genocide, ethnic cleansing, terror and torture, to the extent to which other imperial rules, the French in Indo-China, the Spanish in Latin America and the Dutch in the African territories resorted with impunity.<sup>4</sup> Of course, there were reasons for not doing so. The utmost interest of British imperialism in India, where the whites were in miniscule minority

as compared to the vast population, direct and brutal suppression could not deliver the good. In its perception, the vested interest hinged chiefly upon privileging the English commerce over the craftsmanship and cottage-industry of the country under rule. Then it had the urgent need to recruit soldiers in the army and guards in the police for consolidation and stability in other colonies. Only from India, could they be available in surplus. To give the impression that things were calm and forward-looking in their native land, the colonial rulers also introduced certain measures to improve the social situation. The abolition of discredited custom like female infanticide, the establishment of rail-road and postal system, introduction of school education, were such measures, introduced for over-all amelioration. At the face of it, these measures seemed philanthropic, which at the level of general education, travel and communication etc they were without any shadow of doubt. But at the economic level, they caused economic deterioration social misery, particularly in the eastern Punjab. As Prof Brij Narain(?-1947) was to show in *Indian Economic Problems*, the whole of rural society got embroiled in poverty, more than before the colonial rule.<sup>5</sup> Only land mortgage could provide escape from it but that too very temporarily indeed.

In Punjab, the colonial rule did take additional steps as well, meant to make the people of Punjab forget for the time being the great blessing the Sikh rule under Maharaja Ranjit Singh had bestowed. This blessing was that for the first time in history, stretching back to more than two thousand years, the people had felt safe and secure from invasions and assaults, continually mounted by invaders from across the western border. Only during this rule, safety and security were assured to such extent that the Punjabis could blunt the wild tribes across the river Indus, as was evident from the conquest of the Jamrod fort by the Sikh army and the presentation of Kohinoor, the symbol of rule, by the Afgan ruler of the time to Maharaja Ranjit Singh. As a result, the forging of the Punjabi people, fragmented as three religious communities, into a unified nationality, if not an organic nation, was very much on the card. It was this forging that Shah Mohammad (1780-1862) till this day the only national poet of Punjab, celebrated as the most crowning achievement of the rule of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. In his illustrious composition, *Jangnama Singhan te Frangian* (narrative of war between the Sikhs and the English), he thus paid tribute to the rule of the late Maharaja:

The Hindus and Muslims lived in peace  
No hiatus between them was to be seen,  
Never into Punjab, holds Shah Mohammad  
The third race had ever entered as now.<sup>6</sup>

For Shah Mohammad, the Hindus and the Muslims formed the two components of this unified nationality. Though he refrained from openly articulating it, this cultural phenomenon happened under the political hegemony of the Sikhs. However, with the advent of the colonial rule, the reverse of it happened when the three communities hardened their confessional identities and the realization of mundane interests became their chief concern. This included economic survival, material progress and employment on regular basis. What the colonial administration did on this score, led the people into a charmed circle, wherein matters of vital concern, identity, self-reliance and independence, vanished into thin air.

The new picture that emerged in Punjab was of fragmentation, disunity, concern for personal good acquiring communal color. It was a contingency exalted as necessity. Even within the same community, fragmentation and disunity became glaring enough. For example, the canal-system, newly setup in the western Punjab, resulted in the settlement of thousands of families from eastern side. Among them, large percentage was of those who had either sided with the British in the Anglo-Sikh wars or had kept a distance from either side. Their settlement on lands, made cultivable by canal-water made available in opulence, led them to believe that they were privileged as against those who lived in the eastern Punjab and were victims of famine and starvation. It was only in the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that those privileged beings felt alienated when the British administration declined to grant them ownership of land allotted earlier.

In the western part of Punjab, regarded the granary of raw material for factories located in the various cities of England, protest raised its head under the slogan, *Pagri Sambhal Jatta* (take care of self-respect) movement. This protest was led by Lala Lajpat Rai(1865-1928) and Ajit Singh(1881-1928), the uncle of Bhagat Singh(1908-1931), later on to become an iconic martyr. Failing to align around itself even the affected ones of the Sikh community in the western Punjab, it failed to elicit response from their brethren in the eastern wing as well. Even if the Sikh community had united, it is doubtful if, in the absence of active support from the Muslim landowners and the Hindu traders, this protest could have caused any upheaval. The crux of the whole thing is that the unity which the whole Sikh community, with support from the well-meaning Hindus and Sufi-minded Muslims, had forged in the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century against the assault mounted by Ahmad Shah Abdali(1726-1773), with connivance of the subedars of Lahore and Sirhind, was nowhere in evidence. This problematic is best portrayed in the historical plays by Sant Singh Sekhon (1908-1997). Particularly *Vada Ghalughara* (the big holocaust) and *Waris* (the inheritors).<sup>7</sup> If after several years, ownership rights were granted, it was primarily to keep this granary actively aligned with the commercial interests of England. The role played by the protest movement was basically of the ancillary sort. If it caused any unrest, it was momentary, noticeable for the fact that Ajit Singh escaped arrest, went into exile

for the rest of his life. Only when the British left, did he return, sadly enough to breathe his last on the independence-day.

The Sikhs in particular and the Punjabis in general could not unite around the issue that concerned their livelihood. Their siding with the Gadarites, reviled and maligned by the press and the administration, was improbable, if not impossible. Only religious feeling, fostered upon the belief that ignoring injustice in the world comes in the way of union with the Divine, while one defies injustice, the Almighty is on his side and martyrdom is the highest reward in a situation like this, could have impelled the people, particularly the Sikhs to show solidarity with them. But this was not to be for Sikhism, at this juncture, was divided into various sects and with the exception of a solitary one and that too at a particular historical juncture, to remain on the right side of the colonial rule was the best option before them. This was how its scenario appeared to Mohan Singh (1904-1978), the great Punjabi poet of the 20<sup>th</sup> century;

What though its branches so far joined,  
Its sprouts so far one in essence,  
Are among themselves split,  
Within themselves are cracked.  
Some to the East have trod,  
Some to the West are gone,  
Some from the towns operate,  
The countryside some uphold.  
All are sprung from the same root,  
The same blood flows in all.<sup>8</sup>

The poet wrote this poem in the beginning of the thirties. However, the state of affairs, as it was two decades earlier, can be gleaned from its sober and subtle reading. The actual picture was depressing, promising no hope of rejuvenation though such hope is held out in the poem. There were sects, which instead of resistance, preached the message of adaptation and accommodation and they dared not take a stand against the colonial rule. In fact, most of the gurdwaras had persons either from the Udasi or the Nirmala sects as their custodians. For their discourses, delivered in the aftermath of recitation from Gurbani, they usually drew upon the ancient compositions, *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata* and *Gita*, meant to negate Gurbani's forward-

looking teaching. Later on they were replaced by the compositions of Mahakavi Santokh Singh (1787-1843), written in the spirit of these ancient classics rather than Gurbani. More damaging than this was the fact that these custodians had begun to harbor the ambition of becoming the owners of the gurdwaras. In this, they drew support from the colonial administration, to which any change in the status quo could seem a law-and-order problem in the immediate and anti-government uprising in the final instance. In this way, the administrators, Muslim and Sikh landowners, Hindu traders, the heads of religious sects and the custodians of the gurdwaras formed a solid bloc. The various constituents of this solid bloc had hardly any dissensions among themselves. If at all, there were any, those were of non-antagonistic sort. For the Gadarites to draw support from this bloc or any constituent of it was not possible at all.

The bloc that they hoped to forge could only cater to fantasy and not actuality. In their fantasy, the peasants from the countryside, soldiers from the military and the intelligentsia swayed by historical memory could be at the helm of the Gadar, for which a particular date was also fixed. What actually emerged was the very opposite of it. Only the collaterals of the Gadarites, that too in some cases and their former classmates in schools came forward to side with them. They derived their model either from such a hero of the folklore as Dulla Bhatti who dared defy emperor Akbar(1542-1605) or rural outlaws like Jagga or Jeona Maur, for whom intransigence provided the occasion to help the destitute people in dire need of monetary help. Hardly any person from the intelligentsia whom historical memory would have led to regard the Sikh Gurus as illustrious, albeit perfect human beings, capable of facing the greatest odds in life, came forward to stand with them. Such historical memory did not pervade the mind of the Sikh intelligentsia then. It was later during the thirties under the impact of Marxism, brought into Punjabi discourse for the first time by Bhai Santokh Singh(1893-1927) in the twenties that this religious factor, become cultural, began to play a role both in literature and politics. **9**

It is significant to note that, after Dr Har Dyal (1884-1938) escaped to Germany, Bhai Santokh Singh became the general-secretary of the Gadar Party. During his internment, resulting from the San Francisco Conspiracy Case, he came to realize that, in spite of the courage, sacrifice and bravery shown by his associates to cause uprising, as their fantasy had led them to do, it was hardly the way to liberate India from the yoke of the colonial rule. On getting invitation to attend the fourth annual meeting of the Comintern, he went to Moscow and during stay of more than a year imbibed the Marxist, particularly the Leninist way of not only liberating India from the colonial rule but also of bringing about socialism in the country. On his return to Punjab, he organized Kirti-Kisan Party and started the journal *Kirti*, in which appeared his articles holding the Sikh Gurus as illustrious personalities. Its best example was Guru Arjan (1563-1606), who single-handedly challenged the Mughal rule and with his martyrdom shook it to its roots. **10**



How offensive this altered recognition of the identity of the Sikh Gurus seemed to the orthodox circles became evident from the controversy that, in the third decade, arose around Gurbax Singh Preelari (1895-1977) terming them as *Param Manukh* (perfect human beings)<sup>9</sup>. The orthodox circles still looked upon the Sikh Gurus as divine personages who, as superhuman incarnations, performed tasks verging on the supernatural and the miraculous. The advocates of such view could not have afforded to side with the Gadarites, who claimed to draw inspiration from the Sikh Gurus and martyrs but at the same time regarded them as illustrious personalities or perfect human beings, without any flaw whatsoever. In the same breath, they eulogized heroic figures from Indian history, Rana Partap and Shivaji etc. who had likewise challenged the Mughal regime and remained intransigent even in the worst circumstances. This sounded heretical to the orthodox circles and they had added excuse to shun the Gadarites and ingratiate themselves with the colonial rulers, their Indian administrators, guardians of the judicial system and the police personnel.

Intriguingly enough, if any religious person sided with the Gadarites, he was Sant Randhir Singh (1878-1961),<sup>11</sup> whose orthodoxy crossed all the limits professed by the custodians of the gurdwaras. His orthodoxy was of a personal kind, nurtured upon the belief that only through his own rigorous efforts of the spiritual sort, the recitation of Gurbani strictly according to prescriptions suggested in *Guru Granth*, could he justify his Sikh identity, defined by the earlier nine Gurus in general and the last one, Guru Gobind Singh (1666-1708) in particular terms. He organized a jatha to impart his spiritual message with unmatched poignancy. In his recitation, special place was accorded to those compositions in which sacrifice of the self for union with the Divine found special mention. It was for the listeners to view this emphasis on sacrifice in secular terms to which the Gadarites were attuned with political purpose in mind. If not active collaboration, at least converging parallelism developed between the Gadarites and the jatha of Sant Randhir Singh for facilitating the cause of national independence. Before this converging parallelism could bear fruit, the notorious Bela Singh divulged the whole scheme to the colonial administration. As a result, Sant Randhir Singh was arrested, prosecuted and jailed for fifteen years at a stretch. During those fifteen years, he developed reticence about his role to facilitate the Gadar, which became absolute after his release in the early part of 1930. This reticence added to the enigma about his siding with the Ghadarites, for which impulse had come to him from different quarters, not political and secular but religious and spiritual.

The fact of the matter was that celebrated Sikh writers like Bhai Vir Singh (1872-1957) and Puran Singh (1881-1931) and scholars like Bhai Kahan Singh, the mentors of neo-Sikhism as they were called due to their proximity with the Singh Sabha Movement, preferred to profess parallel divergence from the contentions of the Ghadarites and even of Sant Randhir Singh. Of course their views about the Sikh Gurus were couched in wide-ranging scholarship as becomes

evident from Bhai Vir Singh's collection entitled *Dasmesh Chamatkar* (miraculous achievements of the 10<sup>th</sup> Guru) and Puran Singh's poems such as *Ik Nazar Bhai Nand Lal di* (a vision of bhai nand lal), in which Guru Gobind Singh appeared as incarnation of the Divine. So for both, union with the Divine was the quintessence of human life in face of which independence of the country and liberation from foreign rule were inconsequential. It was this very sway that in *Vilaiti Chithian* (letters from England)<sup>12</sup> impelled Bhai Kahan Singh, the greatest Sikh scholar, invariably to quote passages from Gurbani on observing some scene, an undulating wave or a blossoming flower, which poignant impressions on his mind. Nothing of the sort came to his mind from several compositions, like Guru Nanak's *Asa di Var* dealing with oppression and subjugation when he talked to those administrators who had remained integral part of the colonial rule in India. Thus numerous were the factors exercising dominant impact upon the commonsense of the people, which hindered the Gadarites from evoking positive response in their favor.

Those, who being collaterals, classmates or companions, were disposed to side with them, were faced with odds born of the new complexion, the colonial administration had imparted to rural life in the village. Each village had a jaildar, whom the administration granted substantial privileges. Next to him were lambardars, one in charge of each patti i. e. group of collateral families. He was in charge of collecting revenue from partners of his patti and deposit it in the government's treasury. In exchange he enjoyed certain privileges, primarily of giving evidence in court cases and getting paid for this. Thus the acquittal or prosecution of the accused depended upon evidence given by him. Invariably, the jaildar and the lambardars were agents of the administration in the village society and their main interest lay in keeping the village on the right side of the administration. This division, vertical in the first and horizontal in the second instance, made the task the Gadarites had come to execute, not only arduous but intractable as well.

The task was to liberate the motherland from the colonial yoke, the irrevocable urge for which they had acquired while making both ends meet on the soil of America. Before landing on the American soil, they were not aware of the huge task they would take upon their shoulders. After having landed on the soil of this continent, they were faced with a situation that had never occurred to them in their native land. In their native land, they had lived in joint families, subsisting upon land, barely worthy of decent cultivation. Though viable in size, the fields did not afford to feed the joint families. Scarcity prevailed particularly in the eastern Punjab to obviate which the mortgaging of land was the order of the day. To be free the land from mortgage was in fact the uppermost challenge before the youth. They could do so by seeking recruitment in the police and the army in the lowest ranks. This afforded them the chance to serve in those countries of Asia and Africa which were the colonies of the British. Their

dispensation made migration to foreign lands a charming proposition, the maximum charm of which rested with reaching Canada and America. Such was the impulse that had brought most of them to the soil of the new continent.

Once landed in America, they were faced with challenge and opportunity, they had never dreamt in their native land. In the first place, they were required to struggle to get jobs and in the second to retain them in face of opposition from the indigenous workers whose initial impulse was to regard them as grabbers. Discrimination was unavoidable, which they resented but with the passage of time, realized that much of the ire they were subjected to resulted from the fact that they were from a colonized country. If they longed to be treated with respect as human beings, it was essential that the country of their birth must be independent. Whereas in their native land, their destiny was irrevocably tied to scarcity, helplessness and indigence, here in America, for them, opened up the prospect of struggle, respect and prestige but only after liberating the country of their birth from the colonial rule. This was the incipient feeling, impelled and sustained by several impulses and urges, grew into a powerful fantasy.

They drew strength for their impulses and urges from the American War of Independence, which the colonies had valiantly fought against England towards the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The republican system that had come into being and the Constitution that had been framed were also source of their inspiration. However, the racial and political factors had so conspired that at this juncture, America had begun to safeguard the colonial interests of the British empire. Whether the Irish fighting for the freedom of their country or the Gadarites, intent upon causing an uprising in India, the American administration looked upon such people with disfavor, if not hostility. So, British agents were free to keep an eye on the activities of persons indulging in political activities. As was evident from Hopkinson's role, they were provided facilities as well. The American people in general approved what the American administration did in this regard. Nevertheless, there were individuals like the glorious Agnes Smedley (1892-1950)<sup>13</sup> who sided with those who, from the soil of America, chose to fight for the freedom of their countries. Their moral and political support through such organizations as, Friends for Indian Freedom, strengthened the resolve of the Gadarites to carry out their activities with renewed fervor.

In enhancing this fantasy, Dr Har Dayal (1884-1939) played the most memorable role. Known for his academic brilliance, he carried around himself an aura which mesmerized his proponents. It was believed that solitary reading of a book was enough for him to memorize it word by word. Likewise, it was believed that he topped in all the examinations he appeared during his career. As a result, the impulse to judge and evaluate what his contribution to the cause of the struggle could be both in the short and long run, did not dawn upon the simple but

genuine minds of his admirers. Of course, he was blessed with encyclopedic memory that helped him to embellish his speeches and writings with quotations drawn from various sources, Christianity that cast its spell during his early youth, ancient Hindu scriptures, which determined the leitmotif of his thinking, anarchism that impelled him to express heterodox views and advocacy of Esperanto that motivated him towards the cohesion of all without searching for coherence. The result was that rhetoric had become his mode of expression and communication which equipped his readers and listeners with fantasy, far removed from history and reality.

His rhetoric, supplanted by scholarship and like an arrow aimed at the issue of the motherland's deliverance, endeared him to the Punjabi youth who, from the challenges faced by them on the American soil, had realized the urgency of their country's independence from the colonial rule. In their simplicity, they believed that frontal warfare, rather than, war of position, was the mode to achieve the goal. The historical juncture also appeared to favor a leap into the vortex of frontal warfare against the British government, ruling over colonies spread over the whole world. The First World War was imminent in which Germany was the chief antagonist. After its unification in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Germany had begun to claim a place under the sun. Its implication was that Germany also dreamt of becoming a world-wide colonial power and it could be possible only by grabbing colonies from the British imperialism. So to deal a mortal blow to the British imperialism, the tactic of rendering help to its enemies was held forth, which to the Gadarites appeared as strategy of tremendous potential. After all, their forefathers had employed it with great effect against the two-pronged threat from the foreign invader and his native collaborators. Their commonsense did not let them doubt its efficacy and veracity. Dr Har Dayal's mesmerizing rhetoric did not let them realize that it could not succeed in the 20<sup>th</sup> century against a colonial power that not only ruled over a large part of the world but also had vast navy to frustrate any attempt to deliver weapons to its enemies, in this case the Gadarites arrived in India from America.

The authority awarded to Dr Har Dyal, in recognition of his eloquence, self-denial and academic brilliance, enjoined upon him to enlighten them how this tactic, apparently of great potential, was essentially favored neither by time nor space. In stead, he enhanced its supposed efficacy and veracity by sharing stage with the German counsel in America. In a gathering addressed by both of them, he assured all help, of money and weapons, without realizing that any revelation of the sort could jeopardize the whole scheme. As the leading ideologue of such a risky adventure, Dr Har Dayal should have cultivated awareness of the German potential, the discrepancy held out by the assurance, the risk involved in executing it. He should also have pondered over the alternative strategy in case this scheme failed, which to a person of good sense could seem likely to fail in that situation. His thinking nurtured by academic resources

and little attuned to unity of thought and practice in the imperialist era had neither the intuitive instinct nor the intellectual elaboration to unravel these complexities. His awareness if any of the then German polity was limited only to the assurance held out by the German counsel. Fearing his arrest, he fled to Germany and the authoritarian attitude, colored by racial bias meted out to political émigrés in Germany, convinced him of the futility of seeking any help from that quarter. He sought to know nothing about the turmoil going on in Germany, the revolutionary change that under the leadership of Rosa Luxemburg (1871-1919), held the promise of granting liberation not only to the German people but also to the suffering humanity of the whole world.

After staying in Germany for sometime and then seeking refuge in Switzerland, he reconciled himself to the continuation of the British rule. This was a retreat that gave the impression of Dr Har Dayal having been the agent of the British rule from the very beginning. In her cogently written biography, *Har Dayal: Hindu Revolutionary and Rationalist*, Emily C. Brown called him a “Quixotic dreamer”, indeed a very apt definition of his personality, thought and character.<sup>14</sup> Such must have been the realization his associates like Baba Sohan Singh Bhakna (1870-1968), the president and Bhai Santokh Singh, the general Secretary in his place, might have formed about him. Significantly enough, none of them said a word against him and their reticence on this score was worthy of veneration.

Related to it is the issue whether Dr Har Dayal came to assume the leadership of the Gadar Party on his own volition or he was coaxed into it by certain quarters, bent upon misusing the fantasy overflowing it for purpose other than India’s independence from the colonial rule. No doubt, His academic brilliance, ascetic living and rhetorical expression and communication had won him admiration from diverse quarters. Lala Lajpat Rai, attached to Arya Samaj but a genuine patriot, encouraged him to play a greater role on the political stage. In London, he got close to Veer Sarvakar (1883-1966) then known for his patriotic zeal though later on, he got amnesty from life-imprisonment and after independence became the chief ideologue of Jan Sangh, rating Hindu communalism over all other contending considerations. However, he was closest to Bhai Parmanand (1876-1947), who was proud of the fact that he descended from Bhai Mati Das(?-1675), a disciple of Guru Teg Bahadur(1621-1675), martyred with him by the Mughal authorities. His closeness to Puran Singh, the great visionary Sikh, was also known to all. Surely, all these factors must have converged to encourage him to assume the leadership of the Gadar Party. No single factor could have could have provided him the impulse to take this risk that in the first instance jeopardized his academic career, and when he marked a retreat, earned him oblivion and censure, verging on ignominy.

Was there no other person capable enough, to articulate the agenda of the Gadar Party in ideological terms, articulate it with eloquence so as to sound convincing to the widening circle of the people and direct them to devise strategy capable of defeating the tactic of the bloc native and foreign elites had formed to keep the colonial system intact from subversion and defeat? At the historical conjuncture when the Gadarites landed in Punjab to cause uprising, there was none from amongst them who could execute this task. Most promising of them was Kartar Singh Sarabha(1896-1915), who was too young to assume this task though the courage that led him to the gallows, established him as an iconic martyr to be followed by others. Bhai Santokh Singh was to show this promise later after the failure of the Gadarites and their execution and imprisonment. The promise he showed by forming the Kirti-Kisan Party and starting the *Kirti* journal, withered with his untimely death at the age of 34 only.

### References and Notes

1 In his *Prison Notebooks*, Antonio Gramsci employed this term in the Italian and European context. In this paper, effort is made to specify it in the Punjabi context of the colonial era. In my book, *Antonio Gramsci*, one chapter concerns the significance of his thought for understanding India and Punjab.

2 During his long life, Sant Singh Sekhon wrote seven plays on Sikh history. Tejwant Singh Gill has compiled and translated them into English. Sahit Akademi new Delhi has published them in one volume, *Sant Singh Sekhon: Seven Plays on Sikh History. Moian Saar na Kai* (the dead were not aware) is the play under reference. While dealing with the tragic life of Maharaja Dalip Singh, it raises the issue mentioned in the paper.

3 Regarded as the eleventh encyclopedia in the world, *Mahan Kosh* (Encyclopedia of Sikh Literatures), was brought out in four volumes by the great Sikh scholar, Bhai Kahan Singh Nabha. He took fifteen years (1913-28) to complete it. Punjabi University Patiala undertook to get it translated into English by Tejwant Singh Gill and Gurkirpal Singh in 2005. Three volumes have already appeared and the last one is expected to be out by the end of next year.

4 Full-fledged detail of this view may be had from *Ghosts of Empire* (2011) by the Ghanaian scholar, Kwasi Kwarteng. The fact that Ghana was a colony of the British lends credence to the author's contention.

5 *Essays in Indian Economic Problems* (1919) was his significant work to be followed by *Indian Economic Life: Past and Present*. These works brought him close to Bhai Santokh Singh and he wrote for his journal. He was a brilliant economist of the pre-partition Punjab, sadly to meet with death during the riots of 1947.

6 Shah Mohammad wrote his masterpiece, *Jangnama Singhan te Frangian* in 1850 after the annexation of Punjab. Its English translation by Sant Singh Sekhon and Tejwant Singh Gill appeared in *Bharti Journal of Comparative Literature* (1986) published from Guru Nanak Dev University Amritsar. Prof. Ayappa Paniker reproduced parts of this translation in *Medieval Indian Literature* (1996) published by Sahitya Akademi New Delhi.

7 They are available in the volume, *Sant Singh Sekhon: Seven Plays on Sikh History* (2011) published by Sahit Akademi New Delhi. *Vada Ghalughara* (the big holocaust) and *Waris* (the inheritors) deal with issue of great social-political and historical-cultural importance.

8 This poem appeared in Mohan Singh's first collection, *Saave Patar* (green leaves). Its English translation is available in *Dreams and Desires: 70 poems of Mohan Singh* (2003), done by Tejwant Singh Gill.

9 Reference may be made to a conversation with Tejwant Singh Gill about Bhai Santokh Singh, published in the journal, *Navin Duniya*(March 2011) published from Edmonton, Canada.

10 This happened in the first half of the thirties i. e. two decades after the Gadar was to be unleashed. The author was on sound footing for Guru Nanak had defined himself as a creature and Guru Gobind Singh had warned against his glorification. Still the orthodox circles were very vocal in reviling the author. Two decades earlier, such orthodoxy must have been more adamant. This issue is further explored in Tejwant Singh Gill's forthcoming volume, *The History of Punjabi Prose*.

11 Reference is to Sant Randhir Singh's *Jail Chithian* (2000, tenth edition). Detailed discussion of his ideology, language and style appears in Tejwant Singh Gill's forthcoming volume, *The History of Punjabi Prose*.

12 Bhai Kahan Singh Nabha wrote letters from England in 1914. Tejwant Singh Gill's forthcoming volume, *The History of Punjabi Prose*, carries detailed discussion of his ideology, language and style.

13 It is evident from her autobiographical novel, *Daughter of Earth* that she was in contact with the Gadarites before they went to India to launch their war of national independence. After their failure, she closer and valiantly fought for the political rights of Bhai Bhagwan Singh and

Bhai Santokh Singh upon the American soil. They were convicted and jailed and after their release, they could be repatriated to India. Only the struggle launched by persons like Agnes Smedley saved them from repatriation, which in India could have resulted in life-sentence or execution

14 Emily C. Brown, *Har Dayal: Hindu Revolutionary and Rationalist* (1975) Tuscon University Press, USA. There are several other books available upon him like Dharamvira's *Lala Har Dayal and Revolutionary Movements of His Times*. Most objective of them is the one by Emily C. Brown.

15 The idea of this metaphor comes from Antonio Gramsci who visualized the liberation of Italy from Fascism through indistinct but popular struggle. Only thus could the terrain be receptive to revolution, led by collective leadership, denoted by the ploughman fertilizing the field and sowing seeds to grow as crop.