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Bhāi Vīr Singh's house



Bhāi Vīr Singh's room

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Gadar (ਗਦਰ) Movement

Many Sikhs and Pañjābī (ਪੰਜਾਬੀ) Hindūs were sent to Canada for labor work since Canada was under British rule at the time. However, some of them crossed over the border to the United States and settled in places mostly along the West Coast in cities such as Portland, Stockton, San Francisco, San Jose, and Los Angeles. They created places of worship like *Gurduārās* (ਗੁਰਦੁਆਰਾ) and established societies. However, they were subject to cruel laws preventing them from owning property or voting.

Many Sikhs and Hindū Pañjābīs who had experienced the freedom outside British colonial rule in the United States began a movement to free Hindostān from the British in the early 1900s, which was popularly known as the Gadar movement. The name which translates to mutiny (revolt against authority), was the name given to the newspaper edited and published for the Association of the Pacific Coast which was founded at Portland, USA, in 1912.

It is said that in 1908 about 5000 Indians had entered Canada. Many of them were studying at prominent universities. They got together and began the Indo-American National Association. A number of the members of this association were from prominent universities like Stanford and Harvard.

The majority of the Indians that came to the United States and Canada were Sikhs from the rural farming middle class and many were ex-servicemen. People like Amar Singh (ਅਮਰ ਸਿੰਘ) and Gopāl Singh (ਗੋਪਾਲ ਸਿੰਘ), who were in the United States in 1905 started preaching against the British. Tarak Nāth Dās (ਤਰਕ ਨਾਥ ਦਾਸ) and Rām Nāth Purī (ਰਾਮ ਨਾਥ ਪੁਰੀ) followed shortly after. They also started a paper called the *Āzādī kā circular* (ਆਜ਼ਾਦੀ ਕਾ ਸਰਕੂਲਰ) in Urdū. This paper was sent to the armed forces in Hindostān to arouse them too against the British rule in Hindostān. The Canadian government, which was under British rule, started harassing them. White labor was encouraged to harass foreign labor. The Canadian government further tightened the entry of the Indians into Canada.

In order to fight these unjust immigration laws, the Indians (mostly Sikhs) organized the *Khālṣā Divān* (ਖਾਲਸਾ ਦਿਵਾਨ) Society in Vancouver in 1907. That same year, under the leadership of Bhāi Bhāg Singh Bhikkhīvind (ਭਾਈ ਭਾਗ ਸਿੰਘ ਭਿੱਖੀਵਿੰਦ), the Indian immigrants organized the Hindostān Association. Its main objective was to establish Indian rule in India. This association also started two newspapers, *Pardeśī Khālṣā* (ਪਰਦੇਸੀ ਖਾਲਸਾ) in Pañjābī and *Svadesh Sevak* (ਸਵਦੇਸ਼ ਸੇਵਕ) in Urdū. These activities began to awaken the Indian immigrants and individuals like Bābā Sohan Singh Bhakhnā (ਬਾਬਾ ਸੋਹਨ ਸਿੰਘ ਭਖਨਾ), Harnām Singh Tundīlat (ਹਰਨਾਮ ਸਿੰਘ ਤੁੰਦੀਲਤ) and many others, who pondered over these unfair and unjust issues.

The First World War broke out in July 1914. On 5 August, leading members of the Gadar party declared war on the British and decided to take advantage of the fact that the British were also fighting the First World War.

However, the Gadar movement really began to take off in Portland when, in 1912, the Hindostānī Association of the Pacific coast was formed. Bābā Sohan Singh Bhakhnā became its president and G.D. Kumār (ਜੀ. ਡੀ. ਕੁਮਾਰ) the general secretary, later this position was taken over by Lālā Hardayāl (ਲਾਲਾ ਹਰਦਯਾਲ). The aim of the party was explained as: “Today there begins in foreign lands... a war against British Rāj (ਰਾਜ)... What is your name? Gadar! What is your work? Gadar! Where will Gadar break out? In India! The time will come soon when rifles and blood will take place of pen and ink.”

Simply put, their aim was to get rid of the British Rāj in Hindostān through an armed rebellion.

The first issue of their publication, Gadar, came out in Urdū in November 1913, and a few weeks later in Pañjābī. The paper was distributed to politico-Indian centers in the United States, Canada, Philippines, Fiji, Sumatra, Japan, Shanghai, Hong Kong, Hankow, Java, Singapore, Malaya Siam, Burma, India, and East Africa. Occasionally, Gadar published the following advertisement:

Wanted: Enthusiastic and heroic soldiers for organizing Gadar in Hindostān

Remuneration: Death

Reward: Martyrdom

Pension: Freedom

Field of work: Hindostān

The Gadar party president often visited the Indian groups to exhort them to join the freedom movement. The party's plan was to invade Kashmīr (ਕਸ਼ਮੀਰ) from China, then go for the Pañjāb, followed by other provinces. The members started getting training in the use of weapons and making of bombs; several got training in flying aircrafts also. The party carried out considerable propaganda in Japan.

Bābā Sohan Singh Bhakhanā and his companions left for India on 22 August 1914. On 29 August 1914, the first ship, with 26 Indians, left Vancouver and on the same day another ship, with about 65 Indians, left from San Francisco for India. According to government records, 2312 Indian Gadar men had entered Hindostān between Oct 1914 and February 1915. They continued to enter Hindostān and their number increased to more than 8000.

While in Hindostān, the Gadar party established a new press and published small pamphlets such as: Gadar Sandesh (ਗਦਰ ਸੰਦੇਸ਼), Ailān-e-Jaṅg (ਐਲਾਨ-ਏ-ਜੰਗ), Tilak (ਤਿਲਕ), Nādar Maukā (ਨਾਦਰ ਮੌਕਾ), and many others. The party also had factories that produced armaments. The party members also contacted students. Contacts were made with Baṅgāl (ਬੰਗਾਲ) revolutionaries such as Rās Bihārī Bos (ਰਾਸ ਬਿਹਾਰੀ ਬੋਸ).

When the preparations were completed, the party executives met in February of 1915 and decided to start the rebellion on 21 February. Their plan was to simultaneously attack and capture Mīām Mīr (ਮੀਆਂ ਮੀਰ) and Firozpur (ਫਿਰੋਜ਼ਪੁਰ) cantonments. The 128th Pioneer and 12 cavalry were to capture Meraṭ (ਮੇਰਠ) Cantonment and then proceed to Delhi.

The British government had the intelligence posted at railway stations in cities and in important villages. In fact, the government had even managed to plant informers in the Gadar party itself. Even though the British government was well aware of the Gadar party's movements, they were still able to murder policemen, informers, and attempts were made to derail trains and blow up bridges. When the Indian police was informed about their plan to attack, several different places were raided and 13 of the Gadar men were arrested. Arrests of Gadar men took place all over Pañjāb. The rebellion was smashed by the government even before it really began.

The Gadar men were tried by a special tribunal which was known as the Lāhaur (ਲਾਹੌਰ) conspiracy. In all 291 people were tried and 42 were sentenced to death. Others received lighter sentences from life in prison to being acquitted. Confiscation of property was ordered in many cases. No one appealed against these punishments. The contacts that the Gadar party had made with other countries, like