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THE POLITICAL EVOLUTION OF SIKHS IN CANADA BEFORE WORLD WAR I

Norman Buchignani

Sikhs and other South Asians in early British Columbia have been cited as a classic case of political subordination on the basis of race. While they were in fact denied easy access to power, South Asians were able to contest their subordination with results out of proportion to their numbers. They were able to effectively use "traditional" socio-religious organization towards political ends. Effective leadership was forthcoming locally and through an early influx of Indian revolutionaries, many of whom were not Sikh. Although thes individuals were at first easily mobilized to support only those issues of direct concern to them, continued lack of success in these objectives converted many to the cause of Indian revolution. In conjunction with South Asians in the United States those in Canada organized one of the most important early Indian independence movements dedicated to violent revolution.

The position of South Asians in Canada in the period before World War I is often cited as a classic case of political subordination on the basis of race, and in an overt sense this characterization is true. Like their Chinese and Japanese compatriots they were subjected to severe political and economic liabilities. They could not vote, hold office, work for the government, hold government contracts, or be employed by holders of government contracts.[1] Immigration was totally banned and *defacto* discrimination denied them access to

1 Angus, H., "The Legal Status in British Columbia of Residents of Oriental Races and their Descendants" in Makenzie, N. (ed) : *THE LEGAL STATUS OF ALIENS IN PACIFIC COUNTRIES* (Oxford University Press) 1937, pp. 77-87.

many occupations and forced them to accept lower wages than Canadians of European origins. Compounding these political and economic restrictions were extremely negative racial stereotypes and virtual social isolation.

At the same time, such a (literally) black and white picture severely distorts the political situation of that era, for it neglects totally the other side of what was admittedly a very unequal political battle; how did South Asians in Canada react politically to their subordination ? This paper outlines some of the constraints, objectives, techniques and results of South Asian political activity in Canada from their first entry into British Columbia at the turn of the century to the end of World War I.

Constraints on South Asian Political Activity

One must first look at the maximal constraints of South Asian political action for it is impossible to otherwise evaluate South Asian political results. These constraints were very formidable. From the first, South Asians were denied access to formal politics on a footing with others. In sharp contrast to many European immigrants, South Asians had a subordinate entry status, which was a political liability in itself. For example, British immigrants made up 31% of the Vancouver population in 1911, and yet British immigration was only a minor political issue. Indeed, Britsh immigrants were a potent political force. In contrast, as early as September 1904, Vancouver's city government was protesting to Ottawa about South Asian immigration; at that time there could not have been more than one hundred of them in the whole province.[2] By their exclusion from the provincial voter's list South Asians were quickly disenfranchised both municipally, provincially, and federally. Moreover, most British Columbian provincial politicians were overtly unsympathetic to South Asian interests; an anti-Asian stance was a pre-requisite to office.

South Asians also had limited access to the economy. With few exceptions immigrants either came without marketable skills or were denied the ability to excercise them. Most became unskilled laborers.

2 T.F. McGuigan, Vancouver City Clerk, to W. R. Scott, 15 Sep 1904, *Immigration Branch Records of Canada* (henceforth, *RG* 76), no. 536999, part 1.

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Because this economic base was initially weak it took several years before immigrants were financially secure enough to support substantial political activities.

Moreoveer, South Asians were numerically few. Very few immigrants came to Canada before 1903, and only ten were recorded as arriving in that year.[3] Subsequently, South Asian immigration increased rapidly to a peak of about 5,200 at the end of 1907.[4] Over 95% of these were Sikh. Immigration was terminated in January 1908 by a Canadian government requirement that immigrants arriving on the Pacific Coast come to Canada on a continuous passage from their country of origin. Because there were no such ticketing arrangements from India to Canada this Order in Council (PC 27 of January 8, 1908) effectively stopped the immigration of South Asians to Canada until after World War II. Many of those who came in this early period moved on to the United States or returned to their homes in India or the Far East. The effective population of South Asians during the period in question was about 2,500 -not enough to be either a physical, economic, or political force of consequence.

Moreover, both the British and the British Indian governments did everything that they could to discourage the establishment of a South Asian community in British Columbia. They had found that South Asian communities established in British settler societies, in Britain, or in Europe undermined the colonial control of India. These things considered, the British government did what it could to assure that another such problem did not arise in British Columbia. The British authorities actively collaborated with their Canadian counterparts to terminate immigration They never publically supported South Asians in Canada, with the exception that the British Government sent a stream of confidential requests to the Canadian government to make minor changes in their discriminatory policies in order to lessen the political difficulties of the parent government. So concerned were they about the possibility of seditious activity in British Columbia that from 1908 until the 1920's they kept tabs on it through a system of spying, mail opening, and the subversion of South Asian leadership.

3 W.D. Parmelle, Deputy Minister of Trade and Commerce to J. Smart, Deputy Minister of the Interior, 19 Oct 1904, *ibid.*

4 Anonymous, "Hindoo Immigration to Canada", *ibid.*, n.d.

Finally, South Asians labored under an extremely negative social identity, which provided a rationale for their exclusion from power and which made it difficult for their claims to be seriously considered. Letters from immigration officers in Vancouver and Victoria illustrate the basic outline of this stereotype as early as August 1906. South Asians were "not a strong race" who were "in many cases weak and lazy"; hence, they were not suited to work of the sorts done by the Chinese and Japanese; they would not assimilate and were "a quarrelsome and contentious race".[5] "Cringing and servile people." they were "the most litigous people (he) ever saw." They were seen as untruthful, physically aggressive, and a danger to white women.[6] Their media image was even worse than that of the Chinese and the Japanese.[7]

Goals

The objectives of most South Asian immigrants were initially pragmatic, non-philosophical and apolitical. At the beginning most of these immigrants were sojourners. They came to exploit the enormous wage differential between Asia and Canada. This motive resulted in an accent on savings, a restriction of expenditure, the creation of techniques to lessen costs such as collective housing and meals, the prevalence of job mobility, and a far stronger commitment to affairs in their source countries than here. Almost without exception those who were married left their families with kin and came here alone.

This sojourner mentality initially limited political concerns about most of the restrictions which had been placed on them. The inability to vote was of no consequence, in as much as few considered staying long enough for the privilege to be relevant. Job discrimination could be tolerated, for jobs could still be found that allowed the rapid accumulation of savings. The impact of prejudice was mitigated by a turning inward to the South Asian community. Nevertheless, the role of sojourner was only one of several options, and as the years passed it

5 Dr. G.L. Milner to W.D. Scott, 16 Aug 1906, *ibid.*

6 Dr. A.S. Munro to W.D. Scott, 16 Aug 1906, *ibid.*

7 Indra, D., "South Asian Stereotypes in the Vancouver Press", *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 2(2) : 166-189, 1979.

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became a far less predominant one than it had been at first. Many eventually decided to stay in Canada, and this commitment generated concern about restrictions which were irrelevant earlier.

Dwarfing all other limitations in importance was the ban on South Asian immigration, which directly negated any intent to settle in Canada by forbidding the wives and children of those who were here from joining their husbands and fathers. Most immigrants were married and virtually all the rest expected to become so, and as such the law guaranteed that husbands were to be separated from their families by a journey of four months. No other issue provoked such great commitment or did so much to crystalize the political structure of the South Asian community.

South Asians also sought to be who they were. They attempted to maintain their sense of self and provide continuity with their past by maintaining a South Asian way of life to the extent that local conditions allowed it. In this they largely succeeded, primarily as a result of the very caste line which indicated their subordination; the factors which isolated them at the bottom of British Columbia society also allowed them the ability to maintain a substantial proportion of their cultural traditions. Once they had established a relatively firm economic base, the caste line also required them to develop a range of religious, social and political organizations, which created a substantial measure of community and belongingness.

To an increasing extent, South Asians also desired a degree of social respect from others. The pressures of subordination appear to have heightened conflict and competition for status within the community. Still, this did not eliminate concern for what others thought of them. Stigmatization generated great bitterness among South Asians, but their minority position gave them few means to directly deal with it. Throughout the period in question South Asians never were to discover effective means to mitigate their poor social image in British Columbia.

Finally, the South Asian elite rather frequently made the maximal claim that their community wished to be able to participate fully in Canadian society, enjoying all the rights and privileges of others. In

retrospect, this seems to have been more of a political strategy than a real goal, because for most South Asians such an abstract thing was entirely subordinate to more concrete and immediate objectives like earning a living and securing the reunion of their families. It nevertheless was to be one of the more important means by which local South Asians were to keep their plight visible in the eyes of the British Government, and was constantly used for this purpose.

Thus, in overview South Asian political action was circumscribed from the first. Economic issues never became the rationale for concerted political action, despite the fact that South Asians were highly concerned with economic success; they tolerated discrimination in the workplace and wholeheartedly embraced the "free enterprise" entrepreneurial ideology of the times. Similarly, restrictions of their social and political privileges which would be intolerable to anyone today were not sufficient to move what was initially a politically unsophisticated community to protest. Only the ban on immigration was sufficiently contradictory to individual objectives as to become a political rallying point.

Resources

South Asian personal and community resources were not comparable with those of others who wished their subordination. Nevertheless, South Asians made rather good use of them to achieve their personal goals. These resources are separable into those stemming from the particular socio-cultural background of South Asian immigrants and those which derived from the leadership material which was available to them.

There were many things in the background of most of these early South Asian immigrants which were to be potent ingredients in building personal and community power. First of all, most of them shared a common heritage. Over 90% of them were Sikh Jats, and as such they shared common ethnic, social, economic, linguistic, religious, geographical, and historical roots. This Sikh background was directly contributory to community solidarity. Sikhism has been born in conflict with others, and as such Sikh social organization has incor-

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porated many devices to deal with the conflict.[8] Sikhs have strong group identity, validated by a history of military and political success brought about through collective action. As a religion, Sikhism emphasizes communal solidarity and provides religious rationales for its defense.[9] In addition, the shifting political panorama of the Punjab has developed techniques of political alliance to a fine art. The negative consequence of this has been incessant factionalism, but the very same mechanisms are frequently used to form mutual interest alliances of considerable scope.[10] High individual status was a qualification for leadership, but leaders could lead only when they produced results. Followers gave support only when they thought the issue at hand involved them. This was generally true in British Columbia.

In Canada techniques of alliance formation combined with heightened competition for status to produce a very volatile sttuation. Personal differences, rivalry and divergent self interest often drove wedges between one individual and another, but that inevitably forced both individuals into alliances with others. Alliances based upon one interest (say, economic) did not necessarily transfer over to other areas of life. On the other hand, universal issues would generate solid community support.

Beyond their political functions, these various aspects of Sikh heritage allowed immigrants to develop strong support systems within the community to provide for collective group welfare; financial assistance, information, and the like flowed quickly through the community and this assisted these new immigrants in quickly developing a

8 Buchignani, N. and Indra, D., "Inter-group Conflict and Community Solidarity : Fijians and Sikhs in Vancouver", *mimeo*, 1979.

9 Leaf, M : *INFORMATION AND BEHAVIOUR IN A SIKH VILLAGE* (University of California Press) 1972.

10 Pettigrew, J : *ROBBER NOBLEMEN, A Study of the Political System of the Sikh Jats* (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul) 1975.

secure economic base.[11] Similarly, Sikh religious organization provided the means to get people together in public, and Sikh temples were soon being used on a regular basis for political meetings. Frequently, officials of the local temples were at the same time religious leaders, legitimate community leaders, spokespersons to the government, and political activists. At Sikh services, the practice of asking for donations for the poor was likewise expanded in order to collect contributions for political causes.

As small as it was, the South Asian community thus did have some substantial sociocultural resources at its disposal. These were given direction by a series of community leaders, some of whom turned out to be quite able; this, too, cannot be altogether separated out from Sikh heritage, for the ongoing political contest among Sikhs constantly generates winners and losers, leaders and followers. Leadership was a position that had to be maintained.

Local Sikhs were provided leaders through two processes, one indigenous and the other not. Several individuals rose to positions of leadership in British Columbia by slowly developing support among their fellow immigrants for their leadership abilities. Individuals like Bhag Singh, Balwant Singh, Harnam Singh, and Mewa Singh (who all were to die in revolutionary activities) came to Canada as typical immigrants and rose in the Vancouver community on the strength of their political acumen. Many were religious leaders as well. It was only in the 1920's that an indigenous South Asian economic elite was strong enough to act as community spokesmen, and in the period in question politico-religious leaders predominated. The only indigenous leader who was particularly well off was Uday Ram, a Bengali shopkeeper.

11 Poor economic conditions made 1907 a hard year. Many were unemployed during the summer months and most of those who were working were laid off when winter arrived. Despite this, the local immigration inspector was able to report on 18 November that he had collected bonds totalling $3,800 from South Asians as security against new immigrants being indigent. By 14 December 1908 the Governor of British Honduras was able to report that "all indigent Hindoos in Vancouver wore provided for by the Hindoo community." See Gov. Swayne to the Governor General, *Governor General's Files* (henceforth *RG* 7), G21, v. 200.

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These indigenous leaders had much in common with each other and with other immigrant South Asians. They had experienced the trails of immigration and settlement together. Most of the dozen or so individuals who provided locally evolved leadership to the community were Sikh Jats and closely approximated the class statutes of other immigrants. Most worked at jobs no different than other community members. None of them were fluent in English, which was a liability shared by most South Asians in British Columbia.

These background commonalities were the source of both strengths and weaknesses in South Asian leadership. On one hand, these leaders were constrained by their background, sympathies, and situations to rather closely reflect the interests of other community members. On the other, these indigenous leaders had considerable difficulty in confronting governmentally imposed restrictions, for they did not have the necessary communication skills and politico-legal knowledge.

This left the door open for a different sort of leader. At the same time as this indigenous leadership was evolving, South Asians received leadership from educated, literate individuals who came to British Columbia specifically with an interest in political action. These included Sikhs like Teja Singh, M.A., Sundar Singh, Nand Singh Sirha, and Bhagwan Singh, who were constrained by their backgrounds to act as both political and religious leaders. These elite Sikhs were joined by South Asians of other backgrounds, notably Taraknath Das, Guru Dutt Kumar, and Hussain Rahim (alias Chagan Khairas Varma). All three of them came to British Columbia with revolutionary goals.

Strategies and Techniques

One might expect that during the first few years South Asians would have concentrated on establishing themselves economically and that they therefore would have shown little political activity, *per se*. This was not the case, largely because of the early arrival in Canada of Indian revolutionaries. Because these individuals differed quite widely in background and temperament it is difficult to summarize their intentions in coming to British Columbia. Nevertheless, all desired to sow revolution among people that they thought would be

sympathetic to their cause because of the ill treatment they had experienced at the hands of Canadians. They tried to do this through several strategies.

First of all, they sought to establish themselves as spokesmen-middlemen between the South Asian community and others, notably the government and the media. They were able to achieve these middleman roles, largely because of an utter lack of qualified competitors. Without English or the skills to deal with Canadian bureaucracy on its own terms, community members ceded a degree of leadership to those who demonstrated that they could do these things well. The indigenous leadership was caught in the same position as other immigrants, and were forced to make alliances with these "outsiders," many of whom they did not particularly like or trust.[12] These alliances tended to be very unstable.

Secondly, these incoming leaders sought to establish a variety of local organization towards the end of mobilizing political support within the community; these were occasionally effective, as we shall see. Thirdly, they sought to propagate their ideas through their own print media ; they generated a number of newspapers and circulars espousing Indian independence and attacking the conditions of South Asians in British Columbia, some of which achieved rather wide circulation.[13]

These early (pre-1910) revolutionaries worked in rather different ways than each other, though they all at one time or another were in association. The following example illustrates the variety of their activities :

> Taraknath Das was a Bengali revolutionary who arrived in New York in July, 1906. He then went to San Francisco, where he and others started the Indian Independence League. In 1907 he went to Vancouver with the specific intent to do revolutionary work.

12 One such alliance was between Taraknath Das, Bhag Singh and Balwant Singh. Another allied Teja Singh with the Vancouver temple committee.

13 Examples were H. Rahim's *Hindustanee* (1914-1915), Sunder Singh's *Aryan* (1911-1912), G.D. Kumar's *Swadesh Sewak* (1910-1911), Taraknath Das' *Free Hindustan* (1908-1910), and Sunder Singh's *Sansar* (1912-1914).

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There he worked as an interpreter for the American Immigrrtion officials until he was fired because of Canadian concern over his polilical activities.[14] In 1908 he established a revolutionary school at Millside, New Westminster, which was closed down because of British Indian government objections.[15] In April he started the newspaper *Free Hindustan* in Vancouver. Also in 1908 he and local Sikhs organized the Committee for the Management of Sikh Gurdwaras and Temples. In 1909 he moved the paper to Seattle because of government objections to it. He was active in the formation of the *Ghadar* Party in San Francisco in 1913, and in 1914 was involved in an attempt to smuggle arms into Vancouver and in making bombs.[16] In the subsequent year he was active in Japan. He was sent to Berlin in 1916.[17] In 1918 he was sentenced to 22 months in jail in the *Ghadar* Conspiracy trial in San Francisco.[18]

Das was a bit exceptional among these early leaders in that he was highly mobile, and hence did not remain in British Columbia long enough or continuously enongh to become an ongoing spokesman for local South Asians. He did, however, have considerable support there, and a number of key associates, notably, Guru Dutt Kumar, Bhag Singh, Balwant Singh, and Harnam Singh. He was also exceptional because of his total commitment to Indian revolution. He made few attempts to act as an intermediate between South Asians and the government. Instead, he provided an important information and ideological link between those in British Columbia and those elsewhere. Like many contemporary revolutionaries he was an activist and not a theorist, and he had no time for those who thought in terms of gradual change. He was expressly non-communal.

More typical than Das would be Bhag Singh and Balwant Singh,

14 T.R. McInnes to F. Oliver, 23 Mar 1908, *GR 76*, no. 536999 , part 2.

15 "Indian Seditious Movement Directed from Pacific Coat", L iverpool *Courier*, 21 May 1908.

16 Anonymous, "Note on the Hindu Revolutionary Movement in Canada", *RG* 76, no 536999, part 11.

17 W. Scott to Sir Joseph Pope, 16 Jan 1916 (RG 76, 536999, part 9).

18 Mathur, L. : *INDIAN REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENTS IN THE UNITED STATES*, 1922, (Delhi, S. Chand) 1970, p. 166.

who were the president and priest, respectively, of the Vancouver temple.

> Both came as relatively poor immigrants, who worked alongside other Sikhs. They slowly built up their support among their compatriots, aided by their rising position in the religious structure. In their capacities as community leaders they slowly became more and more antagonistic to British rule.[19] These feelings were exacerbated by the prolonged attempt by the Canadian government to deport their wives and children as illigal immigrants (see below). They became confirmed revolutionaries and were extremely active in ihe Komagata Maru affair. Bhag Singh was subsequently assassinated by Bela Singh, a police spy.[20] Balwant Singh was later hung in connection with revolutionary activity in Thailand.[21]

Despite the intense convictions of these and other revolutionaries, direct conversion of local South Asians to their cause was not possible. While Sikh suspicions about the British had arisen because of unsettled conditions in the Punjab, they were by no means revolutionaries. A great many had supported British rule in India and elsewhere as sepoy troops and most had come to Canada for exclusively economic reasons. Any support that these leaders were to get in the early years was to stem from their espousal of immediate Sikh grievances, principally with regard to the immigration question. South Asian leaders were forced by necessity to expend a considerable amount of energy on this question even if they thought that the problem was entirely subsidiary to the goal of Indian independence.

These leaders fought the immigration battle through a number of strategies and techniques. These were in turn based on two necessary conditions to which leaders addressed themselves continually. First, it was important that leaders manage the ongoing situation in such a way as to convince the community that the immigration ban directly affected them; this was not automatically the case, especially in the early years. The continuous journey restriction of January 1908

19 "Note on the Hindu Revolutionary Movement in Canada", *Op. Cit.*

20 Ferguson, T.: *A WHITE MAN'S COUNTRY, An Exercise in Canadian Prejudice* (Toronto, Doubleday)1975,pp. 151-154.

21 Josh, Sohan S.: *HINDUSTANI GADAR PARTY , A Short History* , in 2 volumes (New Delhi, People's Publishing House) 1978, pp. 22-35.

applied only to new immigrants, and hence was of no direct consequence to those already here. Still, by March, Taraknath Das, Uday Ram and others were able to build up cosiderable mass support of the issue by popularizing the plight of potential refugees who had been rejected in the previous few months.[22] In late 1908 Teja Singh was able to keep the issue alive by adroitly manipulating a proposal by the Canadian government to send indigent South Asians to British Honduras to make it appear to be a devious plot to deport all South Asians (which it nearly was). Keeping the issue alive thereafter was easier, as more and more individuals sought to have their families come to Canada.

Perhaps equally important was the development of sufficient financial support within the community to carry out a forceful protest. This was done primarily by using the religious infrastructure as a device for bringing people together. Sikh temples across British Columbia became the major communications links to transmit information about the immigration fight. They also brought individuals together to discuss strategies, report results, and collect funds.

One of the most common South Asian strategies was to make personal presentations to the government on the part of the community. As early as December 1906 Saint Nihal Singh interceded on their part with Frank Oliver, then Minister of the Interior in Ottawa.[23] In 1909, Teja Singh was sent to England to muster public support for the South Asian cause.[24] At the same time Balwant Singh left for India, allegedly in order to see his family; but it was suspected that he went to agitate among Punjabi revolutionaries.[25]

22 T. McInnes to F. Oliver, 3 April 1908 (*RG* 7, G21, v. 199); confidential memo from Mackenzie King to the effect that certain Hindus are using Vancouver for sedition, n.d. *RG7*, G21, v. 209.

23 Saint Nihal Singh to F. Oliver, 12 Dec 1906, *RG* 76, no. 536999, part 1.

24 It was thought by the government that his trip to England was a cover for revolutionary activities. Teja Singh saw Gandhi while in London. W. Hopkinson to W. Cory, 7 Mar 1910, *RG7*, G21, v. 200.

25 Hopkinson to Cory, 30 Oct 1909, *RG7*, G21, v. 200.

Occasionally these personal representations were a great nuisance to the Canadian authorities, who had been frequently cautioned by the British Indian government to keep South Asians out of the news. Local leaders know this, and did all they could to publicize representations made to the visiting Gaekwar of Baroda and Premier McBride in 1910.

The South Asian community was to use these delegations well into the postwar era, even though it was recognized very early on that they were expensive and were frequently ineffective. In retrospect, it was the least successful technique they employed, as judged by the criterion of changes in law; representations did not even provoke extensive bureaucratic comment. Realizing this, there were soon attempts to modifiy the technique. For instance, when in 1912 an elite delegation returned from Ottawa empty handed they were met by a constituency revolt. In the absence of Teja Singh and Sundar Singh a working class temple committee was organized. This new committee pressed for a working class delegation to be sent to England in 1913. This delegation eventually reflected the makeup of the commitee, but also failed to produce a definitive result.[26]

Almost without exception, local leaders also represented individual South Asians in their personal immigration problems. They saw clearly that every case where an immigration decision was made directly affected the situation of everyone, either by confirming the restrictions then in place or by attacking them. Consequently, the most frequent leadership activity was intervening on the part of individuals caught up in the immigration machinery. Leaders made personal representations to local immigration officials in Vancouver and Victoria, wrote letters to Ottawa on their behalf, provided legal assistance, served as defense translators at official hearings, and mobilized support within the community; this was even done for those subject to deportation upon arrival who had never been part of the local community.

26 Balwant Singh, Narain Singh, and Nand Singh Sirha eventually went to England and India. They were not granted an interview by the Secretary of State for India. Their representation to the Viceroy of India was more successful. India assured them that the requirement that immigrants have $200 in their possession would be waived for wives and children and that India would pressure the Canadian government on the continuous journey restrictions. Secretary of State for the Colonies to the Governor General, 4 Mar 1914, *RG* 76, no. 536999, part 9.

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From 1908 on, South Asians also used formal petitions of grievances as political tools -ones which worked more effectively than they realized. Local revolutionary leaders knew that the British India government was extremely sensitive to reports that Indians overseas were being treated badly. Consequently, they consciously used petitions to high British and British Indian officials in order to put pressure on the Canadian government. This technique was more effective than personal representations simply because (unlike the latter) petitions were not transient phenomenon, and had therefore to be handled bureaucratically. In virtually every case these petitions were forwarded through official channels to the Governor General with requests for clarification. They were then duly sent to the appropriate department, thereby initiating a reverse chain of letters which eventually ended with a letter to the petitioners.

South Asian leaders also made a considerable effort to lobby support within a wide range of Europeans associations. Sundar Singh was particularly effective in this, and petitions from these various organizations to the government are to be found amply sprinkled through the archival material. While none of these representations had the immediate effect of modifying the government's position on immigration, each one required the bureaucracy to react to it, and a number of them egendered internal bureaucratic discussion about possible changes in the regulations.

Moreover, the battle over immigration was not restricted to personal pleading. South Asians used every legal device available in order to challenge the immigration regulations. No deportation was automatic, for each case was challenged in the courts. Local challenges to the restrictive Orders in Council pertaining to South Asians resulted in court decisions that those regulations were *ultra vires* in 1908, 1910, and 1913.[27] Although the regulations were in each case rewritten, successful challenges resulted in a number of individuals being allowed into Canada and over the long term they weakened the resolve of the government to keep its immigration ban total. They also made for bad press, especially in Eastern Canada and England.

27 Andracki, S. : *THE IMMIGRATION OF ORIENTALS INTO CANADA WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE CHINESE*. Ph.D. Dissertation, History Department, McGill University, 1958.

Court challenges had two other important consequences. Local immigration officials knew in advance that their activities would be closely scrutinized by South Asians and their lawyers, which resulted in a number of people being let in for fear that a court case would go against the Government. Intense pressure against the regulations in the courts also pressured the federal government to begin a process of allowing individuals into the country as an act of grace -a process which was to increase in importance throughout the next decade.

Leaders also made good use of the English language media. The South Asian elite was not reluctant to approach the newspapers to explain the plight of their compatriots, and news items stemming from these interviews constituted virtually the only positive local press on South Asians in British Columbia. Scurrilous articles attacking South Asians were frequently responded to through extensive letters to the editor by local leaders. News of petitions and delegations was routinely forwarded to the newspapers. Throughout the era, local leaders were able to put a surprising amount of pressure on the government concerning the immigration question by exploiting the more liberal atmosphere of the eastern Canadian press; supportive editorials in the East began to appear as early as September of 1906.[28]

South Asians also published a number of English language newspapers and pamphlets. These included several erratically issued English language newspapers published in British Columbia and one published in Ontario (see note 13). These papers were clearly aimed primarily at two audiences : European Canadians and an overseas audience of those sympathetic to the Indian nationalist movement.[29] As such, the English language papers were specifically political devices. In addition to newspapers, local leaders published a number of pamphlets and magazine articles attacking their subordination.[30]

28 Ottawa *Free Press* 22 Sep 1906.

29 It should be noted that a number of these papers were banned from entry into India because of their revolutionary content. Indeed, *Free Hindustan* was far more radical than the more well known *Bande Mataram.*

30 Pamphlets included, *An Appeal for Fair Play for the Sikhs in Canada* (1913), *The Hindu Case* (1915), and *A Summary of the Hindu Question* (1911), all authored anonymously.

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South Asians were also willing to directly confront the government on the immigration question, either in the hope that the government would change its policy or that they might be able to circumvent the law by stealth or force. In a way, the frequency of their court challenges of the immigration regulations is indicative of this strategy, but far more bold steps were sometimes taken. Potential immigrants were so frequently willing to bear the expense of coming from Hong Kong to directly challenge Canadian deportation proceedings that shipping companies eventually refused to sell tickets to South Asians who could not show that they were already legal residents of Canada. The most massive example of this sort of direct confrontation was that of the 376 passengers of the *Komagata Maru*, the leadership of whom realized that they were in violation of the immigration regulations when they sailed from the Far East in early 1914.[31]

Moreover, South Asians did not restrict their confrontations over the immigration restrictions to legal ones. A number of individuals surreptitiously walked across the Washington-British Columbia border into Canada; others escaped from incarceration pending their deportation; between 1910 and 1915 it was common for new (illegal) immigrants to gain entry to Canada by misrepresenting themselves as returning residents.

An Example of Political Action : Removal of the Ban on the Immigration of Wives and Children

Perhaps the clearest means of illustrating these techniques is to consider an important issue in the immigration conflict and how it was resolved. During this period there is no better example than that of the ban on the immigration of the wives and children of those already here. The immigration restrictions of 1908 effected a complete ban, in that even the wives and dependent children of legal Canadian residents could not come to Canada. So tightly were the regulations interpreted that hundreds of legal residents who had temporarily retur-

31 See the Governor of Hong Kong to L. Harcourt, 8 Apr 1914 and the Governor of Hong Kong to the Governor General, both *RG7*, G21, v. 211.

ned to their homes in India or the Far East had great difficulty in coming back, and the right of South Asians to visit Canada was frequently denied. Let us consider how this issue was approached between 1908 and the onset of World War I.

By 1910 a growing number of local South Asians had decided that their commitment to Canada warranted moving their families to Canada, which began a conflict between them and the Canadian government that was to last almost fifteen years. For local leaders it was the issue *par excellence;* it directly involved virtually every South Asian resident of Canada while at the same time it provoked sympathy from non-South Asians who thought it unfair and immoral that husbands be legally separated from their wives.. It should be noted that neither Chinese nor Japanese male immigrants were subject to the same liabilities; Chinese wives would be allowed to leave upon payment of the $500 head tax, and there were no restrictions on the immigration of Japanese wives. South Asians took this very badly, for of the three groups, only they were British subjects. For a generation they had been told that their status as British subjects made them "citizens of the Empire" and the equal of all others. The inability of they or their families to come to Canada directly contradicted this legitimation for British rule in India. Thus, the battle for the entry of wives and children was a highly symbolic one where South Asians stood together. It was at the same time the single issue where they could exert the most leverage. Initially, the only individuals whose wives were here were elite leaders -Teja Singh, Sundar Singh, and Uday Ram.[32] None of them were typical immigrants, in that the former two were of independent means and the latter was one of the first South Asians to run a substantial business in Canada.

The first South Asian protests against this restriction were in the local British Columbia press, where until 1910 it was simply part of the larger question of South Asian immigration. In that year agitation began in earnest. In November a group of local South Asians under the leadership of Uday Ram almost put together a continuous passage

32 Mrs. Sundar Singh and Teja Singh evidently came to Canada with their husbands when this was still legal. Mrs. Uday Ram arrived 18 February 1910 and was admitted "having fulfilled the requirements" W. Hopkinson to W. Cory, 19 Feb 1910, *RG* 7, G21, v. 200.

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scheme with the local CPR shiplines agent. Late in 1910 Bhag Singh and Balwant Singh left for India to get their families, thereby initiating a sequence of events which was to lead to a critical situation in 1912.

In early 1911 the local immigration officials grew fearful that a massive assault on the immigration restrictions was forthcoming. They reacted to this by refusing to issue identity certificates to those individuals who wanted to visit India.[33] Without such certificates there was no guarantee that they would be let back into the country. South Asians responded to this by coalescing into a number of political organisations.[34]

It soon became evident that the attempt by Bhag Singh and Balwant Singh to get their families into Canada was not going to be an easy one. They had been refused tickets for a continuous passage in Calcutta, and when they arrived in Hong Kong they found that the steamship companies would not sell them tickets to Canada. They, like many others, were stranded in Hong Kong. This instigated a flood of petitions and protests to the Canadian and Indian governments beginning in April.[35]

Ill feeling against the government increased when Hira Singh returned to Vancouver in mid-year with his wife and child. He was admitted, while his wife and child were held for deportation. After a vigorous protest on the part of the community they were let in as an act of grace 1 August 1911. Almost immediately the situation of Bhag Singh and Balwant Singh returned to prominence, for it was learned that they had arrived with eighteen others in San Francisco, where Taraknath Das, Teja Singh, and Subhindra Nath Bose had unsuccessfully tried to get them admitted. Bhag Singh and the others returned to Hong Kong, and the local community met to send a dele-

33 Hundreds applied for them. J. MacGill to W. Scott, 10 May 1911, *RG* 76, no. 536999, part 4.

34 During this period the Vancouver temple committee became a primary organizational force. The Hindustani Association (organtzed by Sundar Singh) and the United India League (organized by H. Rahim and Atma Ram) were also very active.

35 "Petition of Vancouver South Asians to the Governor General", 26 May 1911, *RG* 76, no 536999, part 4 ; petition to Lord Crew, 16 Apr 1911, *RG* 7, G21, v. 291.

gation to Ottawa. The Hira Singh case was seen as an initial wedge to eliminate the restriction, and preparations were afoot to guarantee a similar result when Bhag Singh and his group eventually arrived in British Columbia. The leadership once again approached local shipping agents on the possibility of selling (lucrative) continuous passages, and the latter applied pressure on the government to have the regulations changed. An earlier petition from the Vancouver South Asian community to the Governor General had been 'leaked' to the Eastern press and produced considerable editorial comment attacking the governmental restrictions on wives and children. Another petition to Lord Crewe had resulted in a stiff protest from the Government of India to the Canadian government.[36] As a consequence of the mounting pressure the Department of the Interior sent F. C. Blair to the Pacific Coast in December 1911 to investigate the situation. The announcement of his trip provoked violent reaction in the British Columbia press, and his report was never made public.[37]

Near the end of 1911 Sundar Singh began an intensive campaign in eastern Canada to gather support for South Asians from eastern organizations. He addressed the Empire Club of Canada and the Canadian Club of Toronto, and got a number of church groups to petition the government on the question of the separation of wives and children from their husbands.[38] In late 1911 Sundar Singh, Teja Singh and Raja Singh personally visited Ottawa to argue their case. Over $1, 500 was raised to support their trip.

On 12 Janury 1912 Bhag Singh and Balwant Singh returned to Vancouver and their wives and children were immediately held for deportation. The fight was on. Only two days later the Vancouver Khalsa Diwan Society sent a petition to the Minister of the Interior; this petition worked its way down to W. Scott, who as Superintendent of Immigration was to be the principal government actor in the

36 Government of India, Department of Industry, to Lord Crewe, Secretary of State for India, 14 Sep 1911, *RG 76*, no. 536999, part 4.

37 Even the eastern Canadian press reacted negatively to Blair's trip. See the editorials in the Ottawa *Journal*, 4 Jan 1912 and the Ottawa *Free Press*, 4, 6 Jan 1912.

38 Petitions instigated by Sundar Singh were made by the Pardale Presbyterian Church, Toronto, the Women's Missionary Society of the Methodist Church of Canada, and the Canadian Conference of Friends.

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affair.[39] South Asians went directly to the courts to challenge the law and the families were quickly freed on bail. Even so, the representation to Ottawa came to little. Although the Minister of the Interior was willing to see the restriction on wives and children lifted, public sentiment in British Columbia was so against such a change that he did nothing. Prompted by this and by the rumor that another 300 South Asians were coming to test the law, W. Cory decided on 22 April 1912 to deport them.[40] South Asians countered with a writ of *habeas corpus*, which forced the immigration department to temporarily release the women and children on $2,000 bail.

This decision of Ottawa to deport these families was actively denounced by South Asians, and the government received a great deal of adverse reaction in the eastern press. So strong was the press response that the virulently anti- Asian MP, H. A. Stevens, suggested to Cory that they be let in as an act of grace. Cory conceded the point (for he was afraid of the court case going against the Department) and they were allowed in on 23 May 1912.[41]

By itself, this incident might seem to have been of little importance. Two women and three children were allowed to enter Canada, but the law remained unchanged. Nevertheless, it did have some significant consequences. It focused the attention of both Canadians and Indians resident in India on the situation of South Asians in Canada. It provided the rationale for further petitions to government.[42] Thereafter, the government began to make it easier for South Asian temporary visitors to enter the country.[43] It also provoked several more worried rebukes on the part of the Government of

39 Petition of the Khalsa Diwan Society to the Minister of the Interior, 23 Jan 1912, *RG* 76, no. 536999, part 4.

40 W. Cory to W. Scott, 22 Apr 1912, *ibid.*

41 W. Cory to M. Reid, 23 May 1912, *ibid.*

42 For instance, in August 1912 a petition was sent to G.K. Gokhale, then a member of the Legislative Council of India.

43 Committee of the Privy Council to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, 16 Nov 1912, *RG* 76, no.536999, part 5.

India.[44] Within the community it focused attention on the immigration question, and funds were easily collected to send a deputation to England and India to argue the South Asian case.[45] It vastly increased the confidence of community members that they could work effectively together. It also increased the credibility of indigenous leaders. It began a small scale process of allowing wives and children of local South Asians into the country, given that they applied beforehand through a European intermediary, thereby weakening the commitment of the government to a total ban on immigration.

This incident also became the legal training ground for several other deportation cases in 1913 which South Asians won. On 17 October, 39 new arrivals were detained for deportation in Vancouver.[46] After a number of legal manoeuvers the local leadership got both the continuous journey restriction (P. C. 920 of 1910) and the $200 requirement (P. C. 226 of 1910) declarede *ultra vires*.[47] Fourteen more were let in by the courts in December, forcing the government to create altogether new legislation to ban South Asians. The continuous journey and $200 requirements were rewritten as P. C. 23 and P.C. 24 of January 1914. To make doubly sure, P.C. 2642 of 8 December 1913 forbade all artisans and laborers from arriving at British Columbia until the end of March 1914; this regulation continued in effect until the end of World War I.

By the beginning of the War these immigration cases and the notorious Komagata Maru incident forced the Indian administration to redouble its efforts to get the law changed, especially in the light of the British need for sepoy troops. Britain and India were particularly adamant on the point of the admission of wives and children at the Imperial War Conferences. This finally resulted in P.C. 641 of

44 *Memorial* 82 of the 1912 from the Department of Commerce and Industry, Emigration, to Lord Crewe, 19 Dec 1912, *RG 7*, G21, v. 202 ; Under-Secretary of State, Colonial Office to the Governor General, 9 Dec 1913, *ibid.*, v. 203

45 See Sirha, N.S., "Indians in Canada : A Pitiable Account of Their Hardships by One Who Comes from the Place and Knows Them", *Modern Reivew* 2 : 140-9, 1913.

46 Hopkinson to Cory, 20 Oct 1913, *RG 76*, no, 536999, part 6.

47 G. Milne to W. Scott, 24 Nov 1913, *ibid.*, part 8.

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RG 76, no, 536999, part 6.

3, *ibid.*, part 8.

26 March 1919, which formally allowed the wives and dependent children of legal South Asians to come to Canada.[48]

Revolution

The immediate nature of the immigration issue overrode personal enmity and factionalism within the South Asian community, with the exception of the small faction that was allied with the police informer, Bela Singh. The issue brought individuals together from a variety of backgrounds, and united Sikhs with non-Sikhs. It produced a complicated and shifting structure of leadership and the political support of 'outsider', msddlemen, of 'grassroots' community leaders, and eventually of a rising economic elite.

As mentioned, revolutionary thought was present in British Columbia from the earliest days of South Asian immigration. Finding it virtually impossible to operate effectively within India, revolutionaries and nationalists had dispersed across Europe and Asia by 1905 and it was reasonable that a subordinated group such as that in British Columbia would be good revolutionary material. This potential attracted leaders like Teja Singh, Sundar Singh, and the far more radical Tarak Nath Das to come to Canada very early. They, Guru Dutt Kumar, and Hussain Rahim quickly moved into leadership roles in the community. They were eventually to be instrumental in forming one of the most important revolutionary movements of the era outside of India *the Ghadar* Party.

Over the first years (1907-1911), these individuals were not particularly successful in mobilising strong support within the community for revolutionary action; securing an adequate income and the immigration question were far more concrete issues. Moreover, pro-British sympathies were common, and these revolutionaries were in any case cast as outsiders beacuse of their class or ethnic backgrounds.[49]

48 The word "formal" here is important. The Canadian government did not put into place a practical system to process immigration applications until 1923.

49 Teja Singh, Sundar Singh and Taraknath Das were all university trained and each had taught in one or another capacity. Both Kumar and Rahim were also highly literate. Four of the five started newspapers in North America.

At first, it was far easier for a Sikh to rise to a leadership position than a non-Sikh. This was particularly evident in the case of Teja Singh, who used his Sikh ethnicity and his acknowledged religiosity to great advantage. He adopted a paternal relationship to his constituency, much in the way such a leader would in the Punjab. He gave talks on religious themes and labored to get other South Asians to provide financial support for indigent individuals during the hard winter of 1908. He argued forcefully against the proposal to send South Asians to British Honduras, and through this issue began to advance the thesis that the British were not to be trusted, either in Canada or India.

Teja artfully used tenets of Sikhism to support his leadership and revolution as well. He constantly maintained that community political decisions should be made in open forums, thereby supporting Sikh notions of democracy. He freely mixed religious, ethnic, economic, and political notions together; one day he would appeal for funds for educational development in the Punjab while on another he would be supporting violent revolution in India.

Teja's use of ethnicity as a leadership resource also led to certain difficulties -difficulties which were to plague revolutionary activists throughout the period. Once Teja attempted to legitimate his control by arguing that he spoke for Sikhs he automatically came into conflict with other Sikhs with leadership aspirations. For instance, when Sundar Singh appeared on the scene in 1909 a situation of mutual distrust quickly arose and they were unable to work together until 1912.

The limited size of possible community support and the role ethnicity played in collecting it also affected the leadership strategies of Taraknath Das and G. D. Kumar. Both Das and Kumar would have no doubt acted differently than Teja Singh and Sundar Singh under any circumstances, for they were more revolutionary and were less tied up with the specifically ethnic concerns. Still, because they were not Sikh they could not count on automatic support from the majority and therefore had to build their community power base from scratch.

In 1908, Das and Kumar began to consolidate support as public spcakers on community issues, but it is clear that they had very little

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effective power. In contrast to Teja Singh, they offered a program of undiluted revolution and hatred of the British which, while producing few revolutionaries, suited the emotional state of the times. They also attempted to achieve a platform for their ideas by direct propaganda and by organizing community associations in which they would have a substantial role. Das's 1908 Millside "school" alternatively taught English and revolution; his English language paper **Free Hindustan** was expressly revolutionary; in 1909, Kumar started **Swadesh Sevak** House in Vancouver, where he gave night classes in English to working class South Asians.[50] His Punjabi language paper **Swadesh Sevak** was aimed directly at polarizing the local community against the British. In 1910, Kumar formed the Hindustani Association which sent a number of petitions to the government, despite its lack of ongoing organization.

Das and Kumar were eventually forced into alliances with other elites, and during the period 1910-1913 were responsible for maintaining a measure of agreement among a very disparate leadership. Das's early friendship with Uday Ram and his later (1910) alliance with Teja Singh allowed Ram and Singh to partially reconcile differences. In a similar fashion, as non-Sikhs, Kumar and Das were able to mitigate the conflict between Teja Singh and Sundar Singh. When Hussain Rahim arrived in 1910 the structure of elite leadership was firm enough to quickly incorporate him into it as a principal ally of Das, Kumar, and Teja Singh.

Two factors contributed to the steady rise of revolutionary sympathies from 1910 to 1915. The first of these was increasing frustration over the immigration question, upon which revolutionaries tried to capitalize at every opportunity. Every step in the battle to secure the entry of wives and children was used as a teaching experience about the nature of British rule.

An equally imortant and related factor was the rise of a truly grassroots Sikh leadership in the persons of Bhag Singh, Balwant Singh, Mit Singh. Harnam Singh, and others.[51] Balwant Singh and

50 Hopkinson to Cory, 17 Jan 1910, *RG* 7, G21, v. 200.

51 Others who figured significantly included Hira Singh, Raja Singh, Dalip Singh, and Gurdit Singh. Active non-Sikhs included Atma Ram and Sohan Lal.

Bhag Singh harbored considerable antipathy to the British prior to the attempt to bring their families to Canada. Thereafter, they were committed revolutionaries, who used their respected places within the Sikh community to convert many others to theirs cause. As principal officials in the Vancouver Khalsa Diwan Society they were able to do the Sikh equivalent of preaching revolution from the pulpit. Coming from the same class background as their followers, they inspired far greater trust and commitment than did the elite.

As this leadership consolidated, revolutionaries moved from talk to action. In 1909, Teja Singh went to England to confer with activists there. Along the way he established contact with Indian nationalists in California and New York.[52] Das acted as a conduit for revolutionary ideas in his constant circulation up and down the Pacific Coast; he was organizing Indian students at the University of California at Berkeley as early as 1910.[53] Rahim was caught with information on making explosives in the same year; he was also found to be in communication with Madame Cama and S. Krishnavarma. In the subsequent year Das and Teja Singh unsuccessfully attempted to get Bhag Singh and Balwant Singh landed in San Francisco, and in the process strengthened the ties between revolutionaries in British Columbia and California. Also in 1911 Das and Kumar began an Indian Independence society among Indian students in Seattle.[54]

By 1912 the political isolation which characterized the beginnings of revolutionary activity started to break down, and this in turn increased the sophistication of the movement. Despite the constant monitoring of their mail, local leaders were able to keep in touch with nationalists in Europe and India; papers like Madame Cama's **Bande Mataram** were circulated widely. H. Rahim, G. D. Kumar, Bhag, Balwant, Raja and Sundar Singh were members of the Socialist Party in Vancouver. These same individuals actively translated literature

52 Hopkinson to Cory, May 1909, *RG 7*, G21, v. 201.

53 Hopkinson to Cory 26 September 1910, *RG 7*, G21, v. 201. His connections with nationalists in San Francisco went back to 1906.

54 Hoskinson to Cory, 6 Nov 1910, *RG* 7, G21, v. 201.

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55 Das, T, "Our Welcom to the C

56 The rise of *Ghadar* has been w its activities in California, India Singh, Khushwant, : *GHADAR 19* R & K Publishing House) 1966 ; Ghadar in *Journal of Indian History*

57 Both were affiliated with the Ic

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from the International Workers of the World into Punjabi. Interest grew in independence movements outside of India.[55]

1912 also marked the beginning of a concerted effort to develop an explicitly revolutionary organization on the Pacific Coast, which materialized into the *Ghadar* movement in the following year. Berkeley and San Francisco were to be the geographical centers of the movement, but it was intimately connected with activities in British Columbia. The key individual in the formation of Ghadar was Lala Har Dayal, who arrived in San Francisco in 1911 at the suggestion of Teja Singh. Educated, politically astute, and verbally adept, he was able to unite what had previously been two quite separate groups: Indian students in the San Francisco area and working class Sikhs in the rural areas of California. Like his counterparts in British Columbia, he was closely affiliated with the IWW and the socialist movement.[56]

British Columbian revolutionaries helped build Ghadar from the very beginning. Das was almost as prominent a speaker in San Francisco as Har Dayal in 1912, and the two collaborated closely in the crucial months of Ghadar's establishment.[57] Har Dayal's radical activist orientation was well in accord with British Columbian sympathies, and by December 1913 the Vancouver temple committee was overtly pro-Ghadar: articles from Ghadarite publications were being publically read at political meetings in the temple, and increasingly militant action was being advocated against local immigration officials and their spies. Ghadar publications were sent all across British

55 Das, T, "Our Welcom to the Chinese Republic", *Span of Life*, March 1912.

56 The rise of *Ghadar* has been well outlined elsewhere, at least with respect to its activities in California, India, and the Far East, See Josh, *Op. Cit.* and Singh, Khushwant, : *GHADAR 1915, India's First Armed Revolution* (New Delhi, R & K Publishing House) 1966 ; A series of articles by Spellman, John W. on Ghadar in *Journal of Indian History* (Trivandrum) 1959.

57 Both were affiliated with the local International Workers of the World.

Columbia.[58] Plans were afoot to publish the newspaper **Ghadar** in Vancouver.

Revolutionary sentiment continued to be argumented by immigration troubles in both 1913 and 1914. Late in 1913, Bhagwan Singh (a respected priest and revolutionary) was deported, but not before a massive outcry from the local community.[59] Bhagwan Singh kept in contact with local leaders as he rose to prominence in the Ghadar organization in San Francisco. Cases such as his served as examples of the abuses which revolutionaries wished to eliminate. All that was needed was for Ghadar to create a concrete course of action for the movement to collect mass support.

This plan was to evolve in late 1913 and 1914. The earliest Ghadarite publications already held the germ of the idea in their espousal of violent revolutionary confrontation as the only course which could lead to Indian independence. Freedom was non-negotiable, and elite Indians who compromised with the British only confused the situation. The Brirish were the enemy, and they should be eliminated.

At first glance, such a program appears to be quite naive, but it was a fairly sophisticated product for its time, especially by 1914. One could point to **Ghadar's** almost total lack of class analysis of Indian society as evidence of this naivete, but when one considers the heavy influence of IWW, anarchist, and popular socialist thought upon *Ghadar's* leaders this makes some sense. In essence, **Ghadar** took the simplistic two class model of industrial society used by popular socialists and converted it into a two race model of Indian society; bosses and workers were converted over into the British and Indians, respectively.

Their espousal of violent revolution also shows a heavey influence of popular North American leftist thought. Like the IWW and others, **Ghadar** said little about what the future would be like should such a revolution succeed. In this, they were infected by the optimistic conviction of leftist circles of the day that once the bosses were out of the way everything would easily come right.

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Ghadar economic analysis also owed much to the radical labor movement. Ghadar saw the economic role of the British in India as being simple parasitism; the British drained India of its wealth, thereby impover ishing most Indians. **Ghadar**, the **Hindustanee** and other Ghadarite publications are filled with articles contrasting Indian poverty with the wealth extracted from India by the British, which look very mrch like IWW characterizations of greedy bosses and destitute workers. Ghadar never sought to clarify the economic role of the British in changing the basic character of the Indian economy nor did it outline how things could be otherwise after the British were gone.

Early in 1914 Ghadar found the final missing ingredient for their ideological package, a plan for action. It had become evident to Ghadar that a major European war was eminent and that this could allow them to put their revolutionary ideas into play. Such a war would drain India of its European and sepoy troops. At that time Ghadarites would return to India and to places where there were sepoy troops overseas, where they would talk the sepoy garrisons into mutinying. Thereafter, they would raid arsenals for more arms, attack businesses and government to collect funds, and raise a popular revolt. They believed that once a local revolt was successful it would spontaneously spread across the country.[60] As the Ghadar poster "The Bugle of the Army of the Mutiny" argued :

> We must return to India and start a revolution. Get on a boat and go to your country and prepare some men to fight for the mutiny.[61]

The growing impact of Ghadar ideas dramatically increased the

58 The intelligence report "Note on the Hindu Revolutionary Movement in Canada", *op. cit.*, lists 60 British Columbia addresses to which *Ghadar* was being mailed.

59 Teja Singh, H. Rahim, and Sunder Singh had previously been the unsuccessful targets of deportation attempts and Nand Singh Sirha and Harnam Singh were not allowed to return to Canada.

60 This program was clearly outlined in a conversation between Bhagwan Singh and an individual who was unknown to him a police spy (A. Steel to W. Hopkinson, 19 Aug 1914 *RG* 7, G21, v, 205.

61 February 1914, in *Punjabi*. This paper was widely circulated in British Columbia.

radicalness of South Asian politics in Vancouver during 1914. In January, H. Rahim started the **Hindustanee** and began sending thousands of copies overseas. Local revolutionaries began a concerted effort to isolate South Asians who collaborated with the Canadian government. The *Komogata Maru* incident further established the power of Ghadar leaders in the community, especially Balwant Singh and Bhag Singh. During the time the ship was anchored in Vancouver harbor Bhag Singh, Balwant Singh, Harnam Singh, and Mewa Singh were arrested in an attempt to smuggle arms to the *Komogata Maru*.[62] Subsequent to the *Komogata Maru's* forced departure, **Ghadarites** in the Far East spread political tracts among the passengers and were also able to smuggle to them a few pistols; these were used in the riot which ensued when the passengers were forced onto trains for the Punjab on arrival in India.[63]

Thereafter, local revolutionaries reacted violently against those who they thought had been responsible for the forced departure of the *Komogata Maru*. Two of Bela Singh's accomplices were killed in the ensuing months. Fearing for his life, Bela Singh went on the offensive and attacked his enemies during a temple service. He killed Bhag Singh and Badan Singh and wounded nine others.[64] Bela Singh was later acquitted on a charge of murder, claiming self defense. During Bela's first trial, immigration official and CID agent William Hopkinson was assassinated by Mewa Singh, this killing was jointly planned and executed by the revolutionary leadership. Mewa Singh was quickly tried, sentenced to death and hung.[65] Subsequently, Jagat Singh killed another of Bela Singh's accomplices (Rattan Singh) in an unsuccessful attempt to shoot Bela.[66] In April still another of

62 The four met with T. Das in Sumas, Washington 17 July. There they purchased four pistols and several hundred rounds of ammunition.

63 Government of India : *REPORT OF THE Komagata Maru COMMITTEE OF INQUIRY* (Calcutta, Superintendent of Government Printing) 1914.

64 Hopkinson to Cory, 10 Sep 1914, *RG*7, G21, v. 205.

65 Mewa Singh's trial lasted only two hours and the jury deliberated five minates before returning its verdict. Mewa Singh was hung 11 Jan 1915.

66 Vancouver *Province*, 19 Mar 1915.

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Bela's faction was killed and another two wounded by a dynamite bomb.[67]

Simultaneously, a movement arose to send people back to India to foster revolution there. As early as August 1914 over forty South Asians were attempting to secure passage to India, their way being paid for by the Vancouver temple committee.[68] They were denied registering out certificates, thereby making their return to Canada almost impossible. By the end of August more than one hundred more were attempting to secure tickets. Hundreds more left via San Francisco. In all, over three thousand overseas Punjabis returned to India in 1914-1915 alone.

Others from Canada spread Ghadar Ideas among Indians living in the Far East. Bhagwan Singh formed a branch of Ghadar in Yokahama.[69] Balwant Singh went to Thailand where he was instrumental in organizing thc party. He was arrested, tried and executed.[70] Sohan Lal and Harnam Singh were also executed.[71]

In retrospect, the attempted revolution in India was a disaster from the beginning. British and Canadian intelligence gathering net-works were excellent, and virtually all suspected revolutionaries of note who left the Pacific Coast were closely watched. Sepoys and police met every boat arriving in India with a significant number of returnees. Many were jailed or were confined to their villages. Those who remained free were unable to work in secret, and were soon arrested; they had found the Punjab population for the most part unsympathetic to their cause.

Moreover, the community's loss of leadership through emigration, death and incarceration was crippling. By the end of 1915, of the established leaders only H. Rahim remained. Emigration also robbed the local revolutionary movement of its most committed supporters.

67 *Ibid.*, 14 Apr 1915.

68 M. Reid to W. Scott, 10 Aug 1914, RG 76, no. 536999, Registering Out, part 1.

69 G.T. Davidson, Vice Consul, Yokahama, to the Government of India, 26 Apr 1915, *RG* 7, G21, v. 206.

70 Josh, *Op Cit.*, pp. 27-30.

71 *Ibid*.

Links with revolutionaries in California weakened accordingly, especially after the entire leadership of Ghadar in San Francisco was arrested in mid-1917 for violating the neutrality of the United States.[72]

Without strong leadership the movement foundered. The disastrous revolutionary attempts of 1915 disheartened many. Others in Canada continued along without a clear goal. By 1918 much of the sentiment remained, but revolutionary activity had virtually ceased.[73] Although Ghadar was re-established in San Francisco with a specifically Communist orientation it never was to develop the mass support which it had earlier. After the outrage at *Jallianwala Bagh* (13 April 1919) local concerns among South Asians in Canada became more and more concerned with exclusively Sikh issues.[74]

Some Concluding Remarks

In this brief account of South Asian political organization in the early part of the twentieth century one sees several things which contradict the stereotypic picture of the place of Asians in Canada. First of all, South Asians were far from passive. To the extent that their resources allowed it, they reacted vigorously to those limitations which they saw as immediately important. These protests centered upon the immigration question because it involved most immigrants directly, but the opportunities which it provided for leaders also determined that it would loom large in South Asian consciousness.

A blend of traditional mechanisms of social support and a dynamic leadership moulded South Asians into a political force far out of

72 Bhagwan Singh and Taraknath Das were both jailed as a result of this trial. During the trial a Canadian Sikh (Ram Singh) shot and killed the nominal leader of *Ghadar*, Ram Chand, because he had volunteered evidence against his compatriots.

73 Over 500 attended a memorial to Mewa Singh at the temple at Fraser Mills. Even to this day a memorial service is held each year to honor Mewa Singh in Vancouver.

74 In the 1920's local Sikhs actively supported the Akali movement. See "Revolutionary Activities Among Hindus (Sikhs) in British Columbia". *RCMP*, Mar 1927, *RG* 7, G21. v. 209.

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proportion to what might have been expected from a consideration of their numbers, their different socio-cultural backgrounds, and the liabilities placed upon them by other Canadians. Traditional means of generating Sikh solidarity created a sense of commitment that is unusual in similar situations: people willing to work, provide money, even die for the cause. A middleman leadership was able to convert this sort of solidarity into political power through the extensive use of Western institution -the media, the courts, the petition and personal negotiation.

Finally, it is important to stress that this whole complex of leadership and support changed continuously with shifts in the situation of immigrants and the political context in which they lived. At first, South Asian immigrants were largely apolitical, concentrating as they did on establishing themselves in Canada. Thereafter, they tended to coalesce only on reasonably concrete issues like immigration, and it was only after almost a decade of subordination and what appeared to be fruitless battles against it that revolutionary ideas gained a strong foot-hold. Paradoxically, the same strong leadership was able to develop revolutionary action within this community set in motion forces which led to its own destruction and to the consequent loss of leadership in the community -leadership that was never again to rise to the levels of political acumen and initiative as it did in those first ten years.