

Singh, Randhir

1945      Ghadr Heroes: Forgotten Story of the Punjab  
Revolutionaries of 1914-15.  
People's Publishing House, Bombay.  
pp. 1-33.



India - History - British occupation  
1765-1947

## THE GHADAR HEROES

FORGOTTEN STORY OF THE PUNJAB  
REVOLUTIONARIES OF 1914-15

by

RANDHIR SINGH

Based on interviews with Baba Sohan Singh Bhakna, oldest of the Ghadar heroes yet living and fighting for Indian freedom.

1945  
D  
People's Publishing House

BOMBAY



## INTRODUCTION

IN this pamphlet we present to our readers an account of one of the most stirring episodes of our national history—the epic struggle of the Ghadar Party heroes of 1914-15. It is a brief record of the lives of men for whom death held no terror—a record of their work, of their suffering and sacrifice extending over a period of thirty years.

For the average political worker of today it is a forgotten chapter of our history. Some of them have vaguely heard about the Ghadar Party, about the *Komagata Maru*, about the numerous hangings and shootings in the Punjab in 1914-15. Nothing more.

Here for the first time is a connected narrative of these events written on the basis of talks with Baba Sohan Singh Bhakna, the founder of the Ghadar Party and one of its foremost leaders. It tells of simple peasants who became revolutionists and dared to raise the banner of armed revolt at a time when our foremost national leaders could not think beyond "Home Rule." It tells what those who were hanged did and said. It tells of those who were sentenced to life transportation, how they fought in the Andamans, and what they are doing today.

The Ghadar movement was no ordinary terrorist movement. Its foundations were laid not in India but in America and not by middle-class youths but by Punjabi peasants—mostly Sikhs—who had gone there to earn money and became labourers in farms and factories. With little interest in politics when they left India these men from their own experience became conscious of their status as natives of a slave country. Out of that consciousness was born the Ghadar Party—the party of revolt, the party whose members dreamed of the day when they would return to India and lead armed rebellion against the British rule. They collected money—many of them donated their all—they bought arms, they trained themselves. Their membership reached 12,000.

In the outbreak of the war of 1914 they saw the opportunity



to strike. Batches after batches returned to India—nearly 8,000 in two years. Simple peasants as most of them were, they little realised the need for precaution, none of them knew the stupendity of the tasks ahead. Many of them were clapped in prison immediately on landing, others were interned—the number of these latter alone reached nearly 2,500. But hundreds managed to elude the police, spread themselves in different areas and worked underground.

Politics in those days meant mainly petitioning to the British Government. The Congress was nothing more than an annual gathering of distinguished Indians who—though many of them were genuine patriots—could not even dream in terms of revolt or any form of direct action. The masses of people had not yet entered the political arena. They seemed inert, apathetic.

To the returned Ghadarites, it seemed that the only way to overthrow British rule was to bring about a revolt by the Indian Army. They themselves were peasants and the army consisted largely of peasants—many of them their own brothers, relatives and friends. Large bodies of Indian soldiers were being sent abroad—to the battlefields of Europe and Asia. They resented it. They hated the idea of going out of their own country and dying at the behest of English officers who daily ill-treated them. And when the Ghadar people contacted them, many of them expressed readiness to revolt.

The plan failed. Treachery was the immediate cause of the failure, but the real cause lay deeper. A purely military revolt isolated from the people—except as a part of the mass movement—could not, in any case, succeed. Scores were hanged, hundreds sentenced to long terms of imprisonment, thousands interned.

Those sentenced to transportation for life—among them were old men of sixty as well as youths of twenty—waged countless battles in the Andamans and in Indian prisons against conditions which then were indescribably terrible. Nothing they vowed would break them. And nothing did break them. Eight of them died in the Andamans fighting to the last.

They emerged from prison late in the thirties after twenty years and even more—their bodies shattered but not their spirits.

They did not seek rest and quiet. They wanted to renew the fight.

But their own experience—an experience they had gained at the cost of the lives of the finest of their comrades—and events in India as well as abroad, made them realise that the old ways of work would not do. The entire people had to be roused, a mighty mass movement had to be developed, then only could the army be won over and the final bid for capture of power be made.

Into the mass movement these veterans plunged and to that movement they brought not only the great traditions of 1914-15 but their own ardour, their selflessness, their dauntless courage. They built Congress organisations to the highest committees of which many of them were elected; they built up in co-operation with comrades young enough to be their children and even grandchildren a great kisan movement, they played a leading role in laying the basis for a powerful Communist movement in the Punjab.

Old in years but young in spirit these men who in 1914 had stood in the forefront of the forces fighting for freedom, now once again demonstrated not merely their steadfastness and courage but also their capacity to learn anew, to imbibe new ideas and take their place in the front ranks of freedom fighters—under the banner of Communism.

Almost all the Ghadar Babas, comrades of the immortal Kartar Singh who even when standing under the shadow of the gallows could not be persuaded to petition for mercy, are today inside the Communist Party.

Each name—Baba Sohan Singh Bhakna, Baba Kesar Singh, Baba Rur Singh, Gurmukh Singh, Prithvi Singh and others—is a legend, each has a story that would fill pages. The love and respect that these names evoke in the rural areas of the Punjab has to be seen to be believed.

Great events have happened since 1914, when these men came to India. Our people have since then built up a powerful national movement. The flame of revolt that these heroes sought to kindle has today spread to every corner of the country. The basis has been created to make the final bid for the capture of power.

At this critical stage of our history the life-story of these



## INTRODUCTION

Ghadar veterans who staked their all for winning freedom, who suffered and sacrificed as few have done, should inspire our countrymen and lead them forward.

December, 1945. AJAY GHOSH.

# THE GHADAR HEROES

## For A Livelihood

DURING the last decade of the 19th and in the opening years of the 20th century, thousands of Punjabi Sikh kisans, young and old, left their country and went abroad to earn their living. They had found it increasingly difficult to eke out even a scanty living on their own little patches of land.

The period was one of ever-deepening economic crisis. The 150 year old process of imperialist exploitation was having its full effects. The entire Indian economy lay shattered with little sign of regeneration. Urban handicrafts had disappeared and village artisans were facing ruin. Pressure on land was increasing; sub-division and fragmentation of land and expropriation of the peasant went on at a rapid pace; agriculture deteriorated. Simultaneously the burden of debt, rent and land revenue was mounting. Famines completed the disaster. Agriculture had become a mere gamble.

In sheer desperation and in the hope of earning a livelihood elsewhere the peasants of the Central Punjab districts, sturdy and adventurous, began to migrate abroad. Thousands mortgaged their land, sold their cattle and implements, raised a little cash on loan and bade farewell to their native land.

The exodus quickened as the 20th century advanced. They went to Burma and Malaya, to Singapore and thence to Hong-kong, Shanghai and to other parts of China and even to Australia. Strong of build, they got jobs in the Police or served as watchmen. Others became traders and contractors. They were making more money than at home, and felt satisfied. The natives of these lands, however, regarded them as mere cogs in the machine of foreign oppression and exploitation and therefore hated them.

They got news of still higher wages and better prospects in



America. The fortunate ones, who had got there wrote back home and to their friends and relatives abroad. The stream of Indian emigrants turned still further east, towards this new land of opportunity. On the eve of the First World War, there were over 15 thousand Indians, mostly Punjabi Sikhs, in America and in Canada.

### The Curse Of Slavery

In America the factory owners and farmers paid them well. They were earning two to three dollars (six to nine rupees) a day each. Still with their great capacity for work and lower standard of living they were cheap as compared to American labour. Competition and conflict were inevitable. But the period was one of "prosperity" and it passed without much trouble.

Then came the economic crisis of 1907 accompanied by widespread unemployment and wage-cuts. The American workers organised in their trade unions fought back the capitalist onslaught, but not so the Indian labourers. Unorganised and actuated by the single motive of making money, they were often and easily utilised by the factory owners as black-legs. Their strike-breaking, as during the railway strike at Tacoma (Oregon), won the Indians the contempt and hostility of American workers. Widespread anti-Indian sentiment grew and took root. Gangsterism, the typical outcome of American labour conditions, followed in its wake. Indian lodgings in the towns of William, Ebert, St. John, Tacoma and elsewhere were attacked and looted, the labourers themselves forcibly pushed into cars and lorries and left stranded far away outside the town. The police was forewarned, knew what was happening and connived at it.

The economic crisis passed and with it the organised gangsterism. But anti-Indian agitation continued. The American outburst of the past few years had been directed as much against other European and Asiatic emigrants as against the Indians. But these others were free people and their Governments could be relied upon to safeguard their interests. In one case of gangsterism, against the Japs in California, the Jap Government saw that for every single dollar of damage done to its citizens ten dollars

were paid; but the British Consuls and the British Ambassador refused to intervene on behalf of the Indians. For the first time it dawned upon the Indian immigrants that they were slaves.

The Indians in America were mainly concentrated in California, Oregon and Washington. Men like "Potato King" Jwala Singh, his partners Wasakha Singh and Santokh Singh, Sohan Singh Bhakna, Kesar Singh, Kanshi Ram—these and many others were making good money. But now, on looking round, they found that money could not buy respect for them.

Everywhere they were insulted and despised. In hotels and trains, parks and theatres, they were discriminated against. Everywhere hung notice-boards: "*Hindus\* and Dogs Not Allowed.*" A white man refused to sit at the same table with Sohan Singh Bhakna; another said to Kesar Singh, "You deserve not a job but a bullet"; still others would ask them about their population, sharply adding with a sting, "Three hundred millions! Men or sheep?"

So it went on. There were, no doubt, American friends both inside and outside the Labour Movement with greater sense of justice and politeness. But all they could do was to offer the consoling explanation, "Americans hate slavery—and you are slaves." What had passed unnoticed all these years became the most glaring fact of their life, indelibly imprinted upon every Indian mind—yes, they *were* slaves.

The position was no different in Canada. The Canadian authorities at first advertised the unhealthy Honduras as "the best land on the face of earth" and wanted the Indians in Canada to migrate there. A deputation led by Bhagwan Singh, Balwant Singh and Sant Teja Singh found this "heaven" a veritable hell and let out the truth. The Indians refused to settle down in Honduras at "Government expense" or otherwise.

Now came the notorious Immigration Law of 1910. No Asiatic could enter Canada unless he carried two hundred dollars with him and had undertaken a continuous journey with a "through" ticket from his native country to Canada. Evidently this was

\* The word "Hindu" is used in America for all Indians.



intended to hit the Indians, a slave people without any shipping services of their own.

## Birth Of A New Idea

The burning shame of having been born in a slave country made the Indians appreciate all the more strongly the worth of American democracy. In that democracy with its political equality, its respect for the rights of the common citizen and its atmosphere of freedom they began to see the highest achievement of man in the field of government.

Thus the flame was kindled. Out of their sense of national humiliation and their newly acquired ideals of democracy came a new awakening. They looked round and saw new national movements arising in Ireland, China, Egypt and Turkey. Revolutionary intellectuals like Hardyal and Barkatullah, till now working in isolated groups and anarchistically inclined, came into healthy contact with the mass of Punjabi labourers. Soon the Gurdwaras at Stockton in California and Vancouver in Canada became centres of intense political activity.

In the fields of California, in the factories of Oregon and Washington, in centres separated by thousands of miles, a new idea was being born—the idea of revolt against British rule.

The time was ripe for consolidating the awakening into an organisation and a movement.

## The Ghadar Party

Sohan Singh Bhakna who was at that time working in a timber factory at Astoria took the initiative. A meeting was held there on 13th March, 1913 to which came 120 Indians including forty representatives from towns and factories of Oregon and Washington. Another, a bigger and more representative gathering, was held on 1st November, 1913 at San Francisco to confirm the decision of the last meeting. 15,000 dollars were collected at these two meetings and the Hindi Association of America was founded. It was decided to bring out a weekly paper "*Ghadar*", named in commemoration of the Mutiny of

1857, in Urdu, Hindi, Marathi and Gurmukhi. This gave the Association its now hallowed name—the Ghadar Party.

Prominent among the founders were Sohan Singh Bhakna, Jwala Singh, Wasakha Singh, Santokh Singh, Kartar Singh Sarabha, Kesar Singh, Prithvi Singh, Rur Singh, Nidhan Singh Mahesri, Nidhan Singh Chuga, Kanshi Ram, Jagat Ram, Karam Singh Cheema, Bhag Singh Canadian, Sher Singh, Lal Singh, Udham Singh Kasel, Santa Singh Gandiwind and Harnam Singh Tundilat—names that recall the epic of life-long battles and super-human sacrifice in the cause of country's freedom.

The resolutions founding the Ghadar Party laid down its aim as the overthrow of Imperialist Raj in India and the building up in its place of a national republic based on freedom and equality. This aim could be achieved only by an armed national revolution. Every member of the Ghadar Party was declared to be honour and duty bound to participate in the fight against slavery carried on anywhere in the world.

In the first elections Sohan Singh Bhakna and Hardyal were elected as President and Secretary respectively. Jwala Singh and Kesar Singh were elected Vice-Presidents, Kanshi Ram, Treasurer, Karim Bux and Munshi Ram, Organising Secretaries. An Organising Committee of most of the founding members as also a Commission of Three for more secret and political work were also elected. Kartar Singh Sarabha, Harnam Singh and Jagat Ram were to assist Hardyal in bringing out the *Ghadar*.

The Central Office of the Party which came to be known as Jugantar Ashram remained at 436 Hill Street, San Francisco, till 1918 when the Party built its own building at 5 Wood Street.

On 1st November, 1913 the first issue of the *Ghadar* came out carrying its flaming message of anti-imperialist national revolt. Every issue gave them "a rough account of the British Raj"—a narration of the untold suffering and utter degradation it had brought on the Indian people. To the fighters in the cause of freedom it promised only death and martyrdom—yet members began to pour in. The membership of the Ghadar Party soon swelled to five thousand. Subscriptions and donations began to flow in. Every penny of this sum raised by the sweat and toil of thousands of Indian labourers was precious and the leaders

note  
only  
Sikhs  
listed



knew it. They had themselves given their all and were working as whole-timers on sustenance wages.

The *Ghadar* and with it the organisation began to spread to Canada, Malaya, Japan, China, the Philippines, Fiji and the Argentine—and even reached out to India. In a few months America and Canada alone had over 72 branches of the Party.

The young Ghadarites soon established contacts with brother fighters of other lands, Czarist Russia, China and Ireland. And how proud they felt when one of them seeing 25 Indian revolutionaries living in Jugantar Ashram at the bare cost of 2 dollars a day said, "If India's sons can live, work and fight like this, the day of her freedom is not far off."

The Ghadar Party was more than a conspiracy; it was a whole movement.

And the British Government knew it. They tried to break it. They sent spies into the Ghadar Party, they imported them as Granthis (priests) in the Gurdwaras to denounce the leaders. They joined hands with the worst elements in America and even inspired and supported the anti-Indian agitation.

In March 1914 Hardyal was arrested as an "undesirable alien" for deportation. The Party bailed him out and sent him to Switzerland. The bail money was of course forfeited.

Hardyal failed to establish contact with the Ghadar Party after this and his role in the movement ended. But the storm continued to sweep on in America. The Party strengthened every day. In the meantime war-clouds were gathering over Europe.

### The Komagata Maru

The Canadian Immigration Law of 1910 affected not only future immigration, it also meant that Indians in Burma, Malaya, Singapore and China would remain stranded, unable to proceed further. And these were the men who had sold or mortgaged their all to get abroad. The wives, mothers and sisters of Indian settlers in Canada now reached the Canadian coast only to spend a few months in the Quarantines and then turn back. A storm of protest and indignation arose against it among the Indians

everywhere but the Secretary of State for India refused even to meet a deputation about it.

The Canadian Government evidently believed that they had said the last word on the matter.

But they had counted without the resourcefulness of men desperately anxious to earn a livelihood for themselves and now eager to answer back the arrogant challenge. Money was raised in America and Canada. A Japanese ship, the Komagata Maru was chartered at Hongkong by Baba Gurdit Singh. It took about 400 passengers aboard at Calcutta and Singapore and on 14th April, 1914 it sailed for Canada. The ship reached Vancouver on the 23rd of May. Every provision of the new law had been fulfilled but even now the Canadian Government refused to allow the passengers to land and ordered the ship to be taken back to India.

The passengers refused to obey the orders—the struggle began. Days passed, all provisions were exhausted and even water began to run short. Not satisfied with this and finding the passengers adamant, the Canadian Government threatened to use force. Canadian men of war surrounded the Komagata Maru and news went out that fire would be opened if they did not move away.

Already the Indian community in Canada and America had risen to a man to defend the rights of the passengers. 22,000 dollars, still due for the hire of the ship, had been collected and paid. Meetings and demonstrations had been organised everywhere—even Canadians had been moved and had protested against the use of force. Indignation was already reaching the boiling point when news of this new threat—the threat that fire would be opened if the Komagata Maru did not move out—reached the Indians. At the Vancouver Gurdwara a meeting of 4,000 Indians was held. The atmosphere was electric. It was resolved to reply to force by force and set the whole city aflame if fire was opened on the Komagata Maru. This had a restraining influence on the Canadian Government.

But the plight of the passengers worsened. Without food, without sufficient water, it was impossible for them to continue the fight much longer. On the 23rd of July the Komagata Maru



was compelled to leave the harbour—the Canadian Government only agreed to pay all expenses incurred by the passengers.

The returning *Komagata Maru* was, by now, a ship of revolution. Its passengers had already staked their all in the attempt to get abroad. They were now inspired with the single determination to end British Imperialism and work for their country's honour and freedom. Among these passengers was young Gurmukh Singh.

The Ghadar Party had done all it could to aid the passengers of the *Komagata Maru* but this inhuman and insulting treatment of their fellow countrymen put an end to their endurance. The hatred smouldering in their hearts for years now burst forth. A Government which made the *Komagata Maru* incident possible had no moral right to exist.

### Back To Their Homes

The Ghadar Party had not merely organised the Indians abroad; it had done much more. In a surprisingly short time the idea of freedom had completely transformed the life of these emigrants. Narrow, selfish competition had given place to unity in one brotherhood fighting for the same ideal. Days of black-legging and strike-breaking were over; they were now joining the trade unions. The drinking brawls, in which they had figured so prominently in the past, had ended. These were now considered a national disgrace. They had at last begun to think of something bigger than a few dollars, and the Americans respected them for this. Three of them (Americans) including a woman even came to India to fight with them. The British Government, however, arrested them and sent them back. Even the factory owners screwed up their eyes and asked, "What has happened to these Indians?"

Early in 1913 a delegation of three Ghadar Party members had come to India to carry on anti-imperialist propaganda among the people. The Ghadar Party members knew that the fight against British rule had to be waged in India itself and they looked upon their activities in America as merely a prelude to that fight. The *Komagata Maru* affair deepened their hatred

against British rule. The shadows of the coming war sharpened their sense of emergency. Meetings were held all over America in which thousands came forward as volunteers for the coming battles.

Baba Sohan Singh Bhakna had left America with the *Komagata Maru* passengers. Another batch in which were Kartar Singh Sarabha, Prithvi Singh, Karam Singh Cheema, Kesar Singh, Jwala Singh, Rur Singh, Jagat Ram and many others, left immediately after the outbreak of the war. Now was the time to strike! The Party ordered all its members to return to India.

The exodus homeward began, thousands left behind them their lucrative jobs and business worth lacs of dollars, built through years of hard and strenuous labour. Many of them carried arms, now their most precious possession.

They knew little about the situation in India. One single idea had taken possession of their minds: an opportunity like the present one would never come again. They might all die but they would die after they had struck a blow for freedom.

In Japan Barkatullah, in Shanghai Mathra Singh, and in Hongkong Bhagwan Singh had built up the Ghadar Party. Everywhere on their way back among the settlers of China and Japan and soldiers of Hongkong and Singapore, the returning emigrants preached the gospel of armed national revolt and won new recruits. Among these were Gujjar Singh and Sucha Singh.

They passed the mist-surrounded Andamans, that standing monument of imperialist terror. They vaguely imagined heroes lying hand-cuffed and fettered in its dark tomb-like cells. With tears in their eyes but grim determination in their hearts, they pledged anew, "We return, Motherland, to smash your chains for ever!" In their unbounded enthusiasm very few realised that in another year's time many of them would be sharing these very dungeons.

### Welcome With Bullets

The Government of India was fully informed of this revolutionary home coming. Their spies like Ram Chander had reached high places inside the Ghadar Party. The Party, moreover, had



made no secret of its agitation and aims. Nor in their burning enthusiasm, coupled with lack of experience, had they tried to keep secret the decision to return to India. Spies shadowed them specially from Hongkong onwards. At Calcutta the Government was ready to receive them "free of charge" into special trains under armed military and police guards.

The *Komagata Maru* was the first to reach Hooghly on the 27th September and was moored at Budge Budge at 11 a.m. on the 29th. Its passengers had not been allowed to land at Hongkong and Singapore. Needless to say, they refused to board the special trains now. A clash occurred and the police opened fire. 18 were shot dead and 31 arrested and put into prison. Only 60 could be got off into the train, about 30 including Gurdit Singh, escaped. The martyrs of Budge Budge are to this day remembered in the patriotic songs of the Punjab.

The other emigrants were in Shanghai, Hongkong, Penang and Rangoon when they got the news of this reception with bullets. It added fuel to the fire. They grew still more indignant; but they also realised the need for caution. Chinese revolutionaries whom they met also advised caution. Most of the arms that they were carrying with them—arms they loved more than any other of their possessions—were thrown overboard. Some tried to enter India through Burma, others broke up into smaller groups and tried to trickle in.

But these precautions came too late and not all adopted them. Sohan Singh Bhakna, among the first to arrive in a batch of one hundred, was arrested immediately on landing. The *Tosa Maru* passengers numbering 173, among whom were most of the leaders of the Party, were all arrested on reaching India; later 73 were released and the rest one hundred were kept in Montgomery and Multan Central Jails.\*

\* Once in Multan jail these prisoners were lined up before Sir Michael O'Dwyer—then Governor of the Punjab—who sneeringly asked them, "So you claim the Punjab to be yours?" Prompt came the reply, "Yes, and not only the Punjab but the whole of India and we shall rule over the land one day." No wonder O'Dwyer in his *India As I Knew It*, writes, "What the state of the province would have been if all this gang had remained at large, one shudders to imagine."

Of the 3,125 emigrants that passed through the hands of the police during this period about a thousand were sent to prison or interned. Later more arrived. Altogether, during the first two years of the war, about 8,000 persons returned—the Ghadar Party membership at the time was over 12,000—of whom 400 were jailed and 2,500 interned.

For dealing with these men the Government of India had already armed itself with special powers and these powers were ruthlessly used. Most of the plans which the returning revolutionaries had made while on board their ships—plans distributing areas of activity, filling up leaders etc.—were nipped in the bud.

## Planning Armed Revolt

Having taken these precautions the Government felt they had finished with the Ghadar Party. But they were mistaken.

More than 6,000 had already returned and the police had failed to keep track of at least half of them. No doubt many of these settled down peacefully in their homes but the rest carried the message of freedom and revolt to their people. Kartar Singh Sarabha, Pingley, Kanshi Ram, Jagat Singh and many others, the police were unable to lay their hands upon. Pandit Jagat Ram escaped right before their eyes at Calcutta and Prithvi Singh quietly walked out of the prison-train at Rawalpindi. Others like Gurmukh Singh defied the internment orders and joined in. Men like Karam Singh Cheema worked while in internment. The original plan had been disorganised, their ranks temporarily broken, but these men, never daunted, soon established contacts and got down to work.

It appeared to them that the only way to overthrow British rule was to infect the Indian Army with the idea of revolt. And why should they not succeed? After all, the army consisted largely of simple peasants like themselves. Their fathers, brothers and relatives were there in it. All that was necessary was to open their eyes to the disgrace of slavery. Already the army was seething with discontent. Soldiers hated the idea of going abroad, to Mesopotamia, to France, to strange lands to die at the bidding of the British Government. Let the banner of revolt be



raised by a band of determined revolutionaries, they argued, and thousands would flock under it.

Contacts were soon established with older revolutionary groups in Bengal and the U.P. through Sachindra Nath Sanyal, V. G. Pingley and Rash Behari Bose. These groups had much greater experience in conspiratorial work, but they had gone little beyond college students and middle-class youth. The Ghadar revolutionaries were the first to take revolutionary ideas to the Army and the peasantry.

They soon found their feet. Guerilla bands of 4 to 5 members were organised. Their literature was becoming increasingly popular. Out of the way small Gurdwaras became the centres of revolutionary activities. In many villages kisans openly defied the police to give shelter to their revolutionary sons.

Most important of all was the work in the Army. 19-year-old Kartar Singh Sarabha, a former student of the Ravenshaw College, Orissa, stood out as the model revolutionary organiser. Always on his bike, he would travel hundreds of miles at a stretch leaving in his wake the burning trail of revolt. There was not a single cantonment from Bannu down to Benares that he had not visited and created revolutionary centres in. Brilliant and resourceful, with unfailing presence of mind he would go dressed as an officer and take the salute from unsuspecting guards. "If you must die, why not die under the revolutionary flag, in your own country's cause?"—he would tell the discontented Indian soldiers, daily dreading to be sent abroad. The Indian garrisons at Ferozepur, Rawalpindi and Lahore promised to revolt. The spark was lighted among the soldiers at Meerut, Lucknow, Fyzabad, Cawnpore, Allahabad and the flames reached out as far as Jubbulpore and Dacca. Even in the distant Burma and Malaya Ghadar revolt was maturing with No. 16 Dufferin Street, Rangoon as its headquarters.

The moment seemed opportune. Besides smouldering discontent in the Army, there was growing agrarian unrest among the Muslim peasants of south-west Punjab.

21st February, 1915 was fixed as the date of the uprising.

Already in December things were getting hot for the Government; military and police posts were attacked, Government

treasuries, mail bags and railway stations looted in several parts of the province to get cash for the revolutionary cause. Arrests were made but the Government were growing panicky. On the 19th December they went begging to the Central Government for a special ordinance to meet the situation. "It is most undesirable at the present time to allow trials of any of these revolutionaries . . . to be protracted by the ingenuity of counsel and drawn-out to inordinate length by the committal and appeal procedure which the criminal law provides," they wrote in their letter. The claim "that bulk of the people are well-disposed" sounded pitifully hollow beside this.

February 21 was approaching fast and the preparations grew more intense. With Lahore as the centre the net was thrown far and wide. A press was established at Amritsar and bomb factories at Lohathaddi and Jhabawal. Arms were being collected, Jagat Ram was sent to Kabul and Parmanand of Jhansi to Bengal. A new four-coloured national flag was decided upon, the revolutionary uniforms and emblems were got ready and the declaration of war against the British Government drawn up.

The situation seemed to be developing favourably. The major part of the British Army was on the battlefields of France, the number of disgruntled Indians in the country was overwhelming. War was having its effect, prices were rocketing up causing widespread discontent. All kinds of rumours were afloat. A hermit, Sri Maha Prabhu Jagbandhu, from distant Himalayas who had promised freedom to India at the end of his 13 years *Tapasya* was said to be coming out of his cave any day. In the streets of Calcutta people whispered about some impending catastrophe in the Punjab.

The revolutionaries had planned with precision and accuracy; their facts, figures and information were unimpeachable. One fateful night the attack would be launched, towns and cantonments suddenly stormed and arsenals and magazines captured with the aid of the soldiers. After releasing the prisoners and taking over treasuries, all the revolutionary bands and soldiers were to assemble in the Punjab, they would now be strong enough to give battle to the enemy for another year. And who could



say the whole country would not rise to a man once the flag of revolution triumphed in one province?

The uprising was to begin in the cantonments of the Punjab and spread eastward. It was the most powerful revolt planned since the Mutiny of 1857.

### The Blow Falls

But now when the entire plan was ready and expectant eyes were focussed on the Punjab—the fatal blow fell.

During the night of 18th February and early next morning people in the major cities of the province saw truck-loads of white soldiers pouring in. Together with the police they posted themselves at the key points and started patrolling the streets. In the cantonments too the British soldiers had taken over the arsenals, the watch was increased and military discipline enforced more rigorously. The onlookers watched these grim preparations and wondered if these were some emergency war measures.

The Government had struck. A spy, Kirpal Singh who had sneaked into the Ghadar Party had informed the police of the projected uprising. The revolutionaries made a last-minute effort to bring it off on the 19th February. But the opportunity was irretrievably lost—the secret was out again.

When early on the 19th morning young Sarabha with his band of 50 revolutionaries reached Ferozepur, not all his eloquence could rouse the soldiers out of the torpor of disappointment and despair into which they had sunk. They merely pointed at the white soldiers stiffly parading in the distance—others only wept.

All seemed lost. The dreams cherished for years had come to nothing, the hard work of months had turned to dust. For a moment tears stood in the eyes of even Kartar, the fearless warrior who had never known defeat and frustration.

Now the real manhunt began. For the next two weeks terror held the Punjab in its grip. Everyone was suspect and very few escaped. Over 200 arrests were made. Kartar Singh Sarabha refused when asked to go abroad. "With all my comrades inside the jail how can I even think of doing such a

thing," he calmly answered. He was arrested among the soldiers at Wazirabad.

Pingley was arrested in the lines of the 12th Cavalry at Meerut "with a collection of bombs, sufficient in expert opinion to blow up a regiment," as Michael O'Dwyer said.

Jagat Ram was arrested at Peshawar.

Order had been restored, thought the Government, but clashes and conflicts with those who had escaped arrest continued till September 1915.

### "Waging War Against The King Emperor"

The arrested men were to be tried, but not before the Government had made things secure for itself.

A Defence of India Act was hurriedly rushed through the Imperial Legislative Council, its most important provisions were the appointment of Special Tribunals for trying revolutionary cases. It allowed neither commitment proceedings to these Tribunals nor judicial appeals from their decision. One such Tribunal of three was set up in the Punjab. Its only Indian member was one Shiv Narain Sharma.

On 27th March 1915 the first Lahore Conspiracy Trial opened in Lahore.

Barrack No. 16 in Lahore Central Jail had been specially improvised to serve as the hall for the trial. On a slightly raised platform sat the Special Tribunal, the symbol of imperialist justice. The Public Prosecutor Pitman with his colleagues and a host of C.I.D. officials took his seat on the right. On the left stood hand-cuffed, 65 men charged "with conspiracy to wage war against the King Emperor."

Among the accused were those who had been arrested before they set foot on Indian soil. Those, like Sohan Singh Bhakna, who were arrested at Calcutta itself were threatened and bribed but they refused to betray their comrades. Others had been arrested while carrying on the struggle and some of them had not been to their homes since their return from America. Old men of 60, Bhan Singh, Nidhan Singh and Kehar Singh stood in the dock together with young lads, Sarabha, Prithvi Singh and



Gurmukh Singh, barely in their twenties. They hailed from all over the province.

The accused felt from the very beginning that the whole trial was a staged farce. Nor did they ever want to defend themselves: "Why ask for justice from those you seek to overthrow?" They contemptuously rejected the very idea.

The Government, however, wanting to give the appearance of justice, had engaged nine lawyers for the Defence. The very first encounters in the case showed that except for one they were perhaps all appearing before a court for the first time. Most of the accused did not know English and could not follow the proceedings. The few who knew the language did not care to.

All the same the trial continued and the Prosecution were the masters throughout. To the witnesses they pointed the accused. They wanted them to be recognised and Jwala Singh was given 30 lashes for objecting to this. He was considered guilty by the Jail Superintendent of insulting an official and interfering with the due carrying out of law. Witnesses would say, "I have to do as 'Sarkar' bids me to do"—as Numbardar Ala Singh of Bhakna did pointing his finger at a Sub-Inspector of Police sitting with the Prosecution. Yet everything was deemed in order. One Defence lawyer, Raghunath Sahai, started when Kesar Singh casually pointed out that having been arrested on the ship he could not be charged with any prejudicial acts. "What are you dreaming of?" he faltered, his eyes wide open with amazement, "Better get ready to face the gallows."

Everyone knew where the trial was leading.

So the months passed by. The accused laughed and joked and exchanged reminiscences as 404 Prosecution witnesses and 228 Defence witnesses were gone through. The President would ring the bell, wait a few minutes and shout, "Proceed." And he had to repeat the performance quite often—the accused were such an inattentive lot!

The trial was nearing its end. The 65 held counsel. It was decided that seven who had led the struggle after their comrades were arrested at Calcutta should accept full responsibility for all that had happened and enter their statements. There was a keen tussle to get on this list. . . . They knew it

would not save anyone—but who wanted to be saved? Infinitely more important was to give through the Tribunal a straight answer to the imperialist rulers.

"The charge is wrong," young Kartar Singh Sarabha told the court in even and balanced words; the judges pricked their ears, "yes, ours was not a conspiracy, it was an open challenge to the powers that rule this land and we are proud of having made that challenge." He recounted what slavery had meant to them—poverty and degradation at home, contempt and humiliation abroad. He told them the story of the *Komagata Maru*, of the birth and growth of the Ghadar Party, of the emergence of the idea of national revolt. Without fear and without regret he spoke of the unsuccessful struggle they had waged, of the flame they had kindled that would never die out.

Kartar and his comrades were speaking to judges higher than those sitting on that raised platform—to their own people. The trial was strictly *in camera*. No visitors, not even the relatives of the accused were allowed in the court. Nothing but the censored reports went out. Still they knew that the truth would be known one day to their people.

The judges listened spellbound. They looked at young Sarabha's handsome pride-flushed face. "Do you know what it means?", said one of them when Sarabha had finished. "Yes, death," was the defiant reply. He refused to retract the statement but the judges would not record it and adjourned the court for the day to give him time to think it over. When the court re-assembled the next day, Sarabha had his answer ready, it was the same as he had given before. He would not retract a word.

Persuasion was tried in vain. "I have committed no crime, it is the right of the slave to revolt," were Sarabha's only words.

The statement was recorded as also those of Sarabha's comrades.

The judges retired to the hills to prepare their judgement and the accused returned to their cells. Locked in day and night handcuffed and fettered during the worst hot days of the year they spent another two months.

On 13th September, they were marched out for the last time to barrack No. 16. The Special Tribunal delivered its judgement.



Twenty-four were sentenced to death with confiscation of property. These included Kartar Singh Sarabha (Ludhiana), Jagat Singh (Lahore), Harnam Singh (Sialkot), Pingley (Maharashtra) Bakhshish Singh (Amritsar), Surain Singh (Amritsar) and another named Surain Singh (all hanged later on), Sohan Singh Bhakna (Amritsar), Kesar Singh (Amritsar), Nidhan Singh Chuga (Ferozepur), Parmanand (Jhansi), Jagat Ram (Hoshiarpur), Harnam Singh Tundilat (Hoshiarpur), Prithvi Singh (Ambala), Nand Singh (Ludhiana), and others.

Another 26 were sentenced to transportation for life with confiscation of property. These included Jwala Singh (Amritsar), Wasakha Singh (Amritsar), Rur Singh (Ferozepur), Udham Singh Kasel (Amritsar)—later killed in Kabul—Gurmukh Singh (Ludhiana), Sher Singh (Amritsar) and Madan Singh Gaga (Lahore).

Six others were given varying sentences. The rest were released only to be re-arrested at the jail gate and tried in the next case. Among these was Baba Gujjar Singh later sentenced to transportation for life.

Of those sentenced to be hanged 15 had been arrested aboard before they set foot on Indian soil. Of the rest only three were involved in the death of a policeman during an armed clash.

There could be no judicial appeal and very few agreed to appeal for mercy. On the day fixed for the execution, buckets of water were placed before the condemned cells. They took their bath and said their prayers. Each was eager to mount the gallows first. To those who came to sympathise with them they simply said, "How better can a man lay down his life than in the cause of his country's freedom?" So they waited for death.

But they waited in vain. Next morning the Superintendent told them that the execution had been stayed.

Those were the days of O'Dwyer—of terror on the one hand and rampant toadyism on the other. Toady Sikhs like Sir Sundar Singh Majithia and Sardar Bahadur Gajjan Singh declared that the Ghadar heroes had blackened the fair record of Sikhs by their disloyalty and got it declared from the *Akal Takht*—the highest religious sect of Sikhs—that they were no Sikhs. But the conscience of the common man was shocked by the ferocity of the

sentences and the demand for their revision gathered strength despite severe bans and censorship. The death sentences of 17 were commuted to transportation for life.

But mourning continued to hang over the Lahore Central Jail. Even the ordinary prisoners moved about with tears in their eyes. Kartar Singh Sarabha was still to die.

Early on the morning of 19th November, 1915, Kartar and his 6 comrades were taken out. They mounted the gallows singing and smiling and showed their executioners how Indian revolutionaries die.

On the eve of his execution Kartar Singh was again asked to appeal for mercy. "If I had to live more lives than one," he said, "I would sacrifice each of them for my country's sake."

Pt. Jagat Ram sang :

"Behold on the second of Maghar, 1972 the heroes of the  
army of Ghadar seek fulfilment on the gallows ;  
Hail, O immortal Kartar, warriors shall vow in your  
name when going into future battles !"

Altogether 9 cases were tried by the Special Tribunals constituted under the Defence of India Act. In the Punjab, the U.P., Bengal and Burma, 28 revolutionaries were hanged and many more transported for life. Dr. Harnam Singh and Sohan Lal Pathak were hanged in the Mandalay Conspiracy Case together with 4 of their comrades. Hardit Singh, Vir Singh, Kapur Singh and many others were sentenced to transportation for life. As Sohan Lal stepped on to the gallows he was made yet another and last offer to repent and seek mercy. He smiled and calmly answered back, "With tyranny and injustice all on your side, it is you who should beg forgiveness."

In between these trials, summary trials and executions were ordered of the Ghadar Guerilla bands. About 30 were hanged in Lahore Central Jail and their dead bodies were refused to their relatives. Among those hanged was Kanshi Ram.

Balwant Singh Granthi, leader of the Ghadar Party in Canada



was hanged in Singapore Jail, Dr. Mathra Singh was hanged in the British Embassy at Meshed, Iran.

Sir Michael O'Dwyer says in his book *India as I know It*,

"175 accused were brought before Special Tribunals which dealt with general conspiracies *as apart from the separate outrages* . . . 38 were sentenced to death (18 commuted to life transportation later), 58 transported for life, 58 transported or imprisoned for shorter periods."

The 130th Baluch Regiment had unsuccessfully mutinied in Rangoon at the end of January. Later, in February, 1915 the 5th Infantry held the fort of Singapore for full one week. It was only with Japanese and Russian assistance that the British broke their resistance. Hundreds were shot.

There were ordinary trials as also court martials. Soldier participants in the conspiracy were shot at Meerut and a few of the 7th Rajput Regiment were hanged in Delhi. Another 12 of the Risala No. 23 led by Havildar Lachman Singh met their fate in the Ambala Jail. Among these latter was one Abdullah, the only Muslim accused. The C.I.D. did its best to make Abdullah betray his "kafir" comrades. "It is with these men alone that the gates of Heaven shall open to me," was the only answer they got out of him.\*

\* Others hanged in Burma in 1916 were Niranjan Singh, Narain Singh, Pahlia Ram and Pal Singh.

Twelve men of Risala No. 23 were hanged in Ambala Jail:

Lachman Singh, Buta Singh, Inder Singh, Budh Singh, Mota Singh, Bhagat Singh, Gujjar Singh, Jeta Singh, Tara Singh, Wadhawa Singh, Abdullah—mostly from Lahore and Amritsar.

Twenty-eight men of the Guerilla Groups were hanged in Lahore Jail:

Balwant Singh, Arjan Singh, Uttam Singh, Ishar Singh, Ranga Singh, Vir Singh, Rur Singh, Dhyan Singh, Chanda Singh, Jiwan Singh, Dhyan Singh, Jagat Singh, Jiwan Singh, Lal Singh, Arur Singh, Atma Singh, Banta Singh, Harnam Singh, Kala Singh, Chandan Singh, Prem Singh, Gandha Singh, Inder Singh, Buta Singh, Jawand Singh, Ram Rakha, Maulvi Abdullah, Rahmat Ali—coming from all districts.

Others sentenced to be hanged in the first case were:

Hirday Ram Mandi, Ramsaran (Kapurthala), Rullia Singh (Ludhiana), Khushal Singh, Wasewa Singh, Kala Singh—all from Amritsar, Sawan Singh, Balwant Singh, Bhai Parmanand—sentenced to transportation. Among others sentenced to transportation were

The Ghadar revolt had failed. The Punjab had a veritable bloodbath. Countless men died on the gallows and before the firing squads. They died like heroes—but remained unwept and unsung.

At a time when the leaders of the Indian national movement were talking of "self-government on British Dominion model" the heroes of the Ghadar Party had dared to raise the banner of complete independence, of armed revolt against imperialism.

The revolt was drowned in blood, but the flame had been kindled. The Ghadar revolutionaries could proudly look around from the gallows and still say, in the words of the English poet, Byron:

"Still freedom's banner torn yet flying,  
Streams like a thunderstorm against the wind."

## The Andamans

On the afternoon of 10th December, 1915, 18 men handcuffed and fettered in twos alighted from S. S. *Maharaja* at Port Blair in the Andamans. Among them were men whose ages varied from 22 to 60. The laws provided that no one above the age of forty could be transported. Such rules seemed to have been contemptuously waived in this case. This was the first batch of the "dangerous prisoners" of the First Lahore Conspiracy Case.

At the prison gates they were met by the Jailor. He looked up and down at the new men given into his power for the next 20 years and jeered, "*Raj lenewala log. Raj mangta raj? Raj nehin koloo (oil mill) dega.*" The tired and exhausted prisoners looked at the round plump Jailor and burst into peals of laughter. Such defiance of the lord of the island on the very first day! Red in the face, Jailor Barry was trembling with rage. Yes, the Government of India was right, these men had to be broken.

Inder Singh, Bishen Singh, Hazara Singh, Mangal Singh, Bishan Singh, Chuhan Singh, Bhan Singh, Roda Singh, Inder Singh, Kala Singh, Gurdit Singh, Pyara Singh, Diwan Singh, Kirpal Singh, Kharak Singh, Inder Singh, Lal Singh, Kehar Singh, Jawand Singh.



The prisoners were divided over the 740 cells in the 7 blocks of the three-storied Andamans prison.

The prisoners knew that Andamans meant hell and they had already vowed to fight back.

The very first day they refused to be harnessed to the *koloo*—the most brutal type of hard labour. The Jailor knowingly smiled and asked them to do “easier labour” and separate nine chattaks of coconut fibres. He knew that they could not do it and so it happened. Young Parmanand of Jhansi was called up for explanation. The smile on his face annoyed Barry who abused and tried to hit him. Parmanand hit back in self-defence. He was beaten unconscious by the warders and thrown into a cell.

Next day even as the entire prison was acclaiming him, Parmanand bleeding and in rags was carried out of his cell and flogged under the orders of the Superintendent, Major Murray.

His comrades struck work. The Chief Commissioner who came went about threatening to flog everybody. On each prisoner's ticket was entered, “6 months solitary confinement, danda berry, penal diet, and standing handcuffs for a week.” The battle began.

Other batches of the prisoners of the Ghadar Conspiracy now reached the Andamans and joined in their struggle. But Barry and Murray claimed to have beaten tougher men into submission; and the struggle continued. Prisoners began to be deliberately starved, the sick remained uncared for and the thirsty were refused water. Even the peaceful and saintly Wasakha Singh sang out against the “three tyrants of the Andamans.” News of the struggle reached the Indian Government.

*Burra Sahibs* at Delhi who got their report from the Murrays and Barrys eased their conscience by calling these heroic revolutionaries “a pack of wolves” and declared the subject closed. They would not intervene.

In the Andamans the terror increased. Refusal to work on Sundays was “disobedience.” To complain of injustice was to make “baseless allegations against responsible jail officials with malicious intent.” The washing of hair with an indigenous stuff in the absence of soap and tap water was a “breach of prison discipline.” Punishment followed in each case; handcuffs and

fetters, gunny clothes, solitary confinements and bread and water became a part of their daily routine. The prisoners knew that sturdy physiques of men like Ashutosh Lahiri had first been carefully broken inside the prison before they were flogged for non-fulfilment of their quota of hard labour. And they fought on all the more determined and all the more desperately.

Now 60-year-old Baba Bhan Singh died. He was severely beaten and had succumbed two days later. More martyrs began to die at their posts. Budha Singh, Ram Rakha, Rullia Singh, Nand Singh, Kehar Singh, Natha Singh, Roda Singh—all fell one after another; but abandoned and forgotten by their people, these heroes fought on—their backs to the wall.

Four years thus passed. Thrice did Sohan Singh Bhakna resort to hunger strike. Prithvi Singh hunger-struck for 155 days and spent 20 months in solitary confinement. Jwala Singh lived imprisoned in cages for years, Rur Singh stood chained to the walls for weeks on end, young Gurmukh Singh defied all these gruelling tortures, but refused to submit. Separately confined in their cells they all fought—they all suffered. It was an epic of superhuman endurance, of matchless heroism.

The whole prison saw these handful of men playing with their lives to defy the trio of tyrants who ruled the Andamans and cried out, “*Sabas bombwala.*”

Then victory came. Through some Punjabi soldiers the news at last got to India. A storm of protest swept over the land. The Andamans had to be closed down.

In July 1921, the homeward journey began. Once again they looked through the holes in the sides of the ships. With tears in their eyes they greeted their native land rushing forward to meet them. The cold ashes of eight of their comrades remained in the Andamans.

### “A Revolutionary Never Gets Old”

The prisoners were now repatriated to India but they had become too dangerous to be kept together. They were received into different jails, Hazaribagh, Yerawada, Nagpur, Vellore, Coimbatore.



It was during these transfers that Prithvi Singh and Gurmukh Singh escaped from running trains. In the meanwhile 15 of their comrades including Baba Wasakha Singh had been released in the amnesty granted at the end of the war.

The struggle, however, did not end even in Indian jails. In Coimbatore they saw the ruthless violence with which the Moplah revolt was being suppressed. Young men were hanged daily. Even little children who had been arrested were left to starve inside the prison. The heart of these heroic Punjabis wept in sympathy for them. Out of their own ration they tried to feed them. Baba Jwala Singh was given 30 lashes for this simple act of humanity.

In Yerawada Jail they had to go on hunger strike once again to win *pugris* for Sikh prisoners. The battle-scarred hero Baba Sohan Singh Bhakna was again in the midst of the struggle when Bhagat Singh and his comrades went on their famous hunger strike in 1929 in the Lahore Central Jail. When he was asked by Bhagat Singh himself not to go on hunger strike because of his old age, his reply was: "What if the body has grown old, a revolutionary never gets old." And true to his word he remained on hunger strike for a month and a half.

Years passed. The usual 14 years of a life term were over long ago, but the Government refused to release them, as 14 years had not been long enough to break these men. But Baba Sohan Singh Bhakna refused to submit. "Why continue to cling to life?" he asked and began a fast unto death. Three months passed before the Government agreed to release him unconditionally in 1930.

Soon afterwards he was arrested in the Congress movement. Coming out again he threw himself into organising a campaign for the release of political prisoners, specially his old comrades. In the meantime Nand Singh and Chuhan Singh had started a fast unto death. The latter died, only a few days after his release. The whole province was now stirred. At last these veteran warriors after serving as many as 20 years began to pour out of various prisons of the Punjab. Many of them came out having become permanent invalids for the rest of their lives.

But it was a new world into which they now stepped. It

was a world moulded by the first mass Civil Disobedience, the great Akali movement and the young Communist Party—the world of Cawnpore and Meerut Conspiracy Cases, of the Kirti Kisan Party. It was the period of the second Civil Disobedience movement, of the great worker, kisan and student mass upsurge that followed in its wake.

The victorious Russian Revolution had made Moscow the centre of pilgrimage for revolutionaries all over the world. The Ghadar Party in America had also sent its representatives to the first workers' and peasants' state. In its great socialist constructions they saw the birth of a new civilization, something grander and far beyond the narrow horizon of American capitalist democracy. They came over to Communism.

That superb organiser and tireless revolutionary fighter—Santokh Singh—came to India, founded the *Kirti*, first revolutionary working-class paper in the Punjab and kept it going till he fell a victim to T.B. in 1928. Henceforth a regular stream of Indians educated at the Eastern University in Moscow began to flow into India. These young Ghadarites wanted to play their role in the building up of this new world.

## Into The Struggle Again

It was into this new world that these released men now came. They had gone in young and middle ages but now on their old bodies they carried the scars of innumerable battles, of endless sufferings. They had stood under the gallows, done 20 long years in prisons, undergone gruelling tortures and faced death in the dark dungeons of the Andamans. Their bodies were shattered, but they were not to pass their old age in peace.

Baba Sohan Singh Bhakna forgot the way to his home. All that remained of it was an old crumbling structure where his wife would occasionally come to shed tears. But the path of revolution was clearer than ever before. He knew as also his comrades why their revolt in India had failed and why a greater one succeeded in Russia. And had he not himself said, "a revolutionary dies, he never grows old"? They now gathered under the Red Flag.



They not only found their old comrades but with true revolutionary devotion they all lined up with comrades half their age and very often younger. A new chapter in their lives began.

Baba Sohan Singh Bhakna by building up the Congress in his area was elected to its Provincial Committee. Walking miles to organise Kisan Sabhas, receiving unflinchingly brutal lathi blows at Amritsar (1938) on his age-stiffened bones, he rose to be the President of the All-India Kisan Sabha.

Baba Jwala Singh who roused the peasants, organised Kisan Sabhas all over the province, carried the Red Flag even into the dark feudal belt of the Nili Bar and died in harness—is today immortal in the Punjab kisan movement.

Baba Rur Singh, always on his feet, rousing the peasants of Ferozepur and the down-trodden tenants of the Kalisa State, leading their victorious campaigns, one after another, was elected without opposition by the people of Moga Tehsil to the Punjab Legislature.

Baba Kesar Singh, fighting heroically together with Baba Sher Singh against wild imperialist repression to keep the *Kirti* going, at the head of every kisan struggle, among the first to be clapped into jail in the famous Lahore *Morcha* in 1939, has today spent more than 33 years of his life in jail.

Baba Wasakha Singh, sublime and saintly founder of the *Desh Bhagat Pariwar Sahaik Committee* (a committee formed to help the families of patriots in prison), fighting since 1921 to defend the political prisoners and aid their families, who rose to be the *Jathedar* of the *Akal Takht*, is today the most loved and revered person among the Sikh kisans.

Baba Gurmukh Singh, the hero of *Komagata Maru* and the Andamans struggle, organiser of the Congress in Afghanistan, the man who together with Prithvi Singh defied the dark dungeons and tortures of the Kabul Jail to get back to India from the Soviet Union—is today a legendary figure in the Sikh homeland.

Prithvi Singh, the hero of the Andamans battles, living and fighting under half-a-dozen assumed names, has carried the torch of freedom into more than one province of our vast land.

Baba Sher Singh, Baba Harnam Singh Tundilat, Baba Lal Singh, heroes of countless battles, put younger men to shame by

their undaunted courage and tireless work in building up every patriotic movement in the province.

Baba Gujjar Singh, builder of Kisan Sabha, Baba Harnam Singh Komagatamaru, Baba Hardit Singh Lamme and many others are even at their advanced ages active fighters for freedom and political leaders of their areas.

With them work their comrades, the co-founders of the Ghadar Party who have kept the flag flying even when most of them had been clapped in the 1914-15 cases. Among them is that veteran fighter Karam Singh Cheema, hero of the Second Akali Conspiracy (1925), founder of the first Sikh revolutionary paper *Desh Sewak*, convicted in various Congress struggles and the builder of Kirti Kisan movement.

There too is his fellow fighter Bhag Singh Canadian, a leader of the great Akali upsurge, builder of the Sikh League in the early twenties and of the kisan movement in the Doaba during the thirties. There is Baba Bhagwan Singh, the hero of the famous *Shahidi Jaiha* (martyr's squad) which in 1925 toured the whole country torn with communal riots with their message of Hindu-Muslim unity and freedom, and won applause from the entire patriotic India led by Pandit Nehru. Among them again is Santa Singh Gandiwind, one of the first to bring to his people the new light of Socialism.

And there are, apart from Santokh Singh and Jwala Singh, other heroes like Isher Singh Marhana, Nidhan Singh Chuga, Karam Singh Dhut, Madan Singh Gaga, Kapur Singh Mohi and Inder Singh Sursingh who, old and ill, still fought on and unflinchingly laid down their lives, but did not let the flame, for which their comrades had hung at the gallows, flicker out.

Together they are still building up a tradition of patriotism and self-sacrifice which any freedom movement of the world would feel proud of.

## Over To Communism

The Second World War started in September 1939. For the imperialists, the *Babas* had all along been marked men. Most of them had spent only 3 or 4 years outside the prison since they



first came out. They were all again arrested in the first war round-up of June 1940. In October, they were sent together with other kisan leaders to the Deoli concentration camp. Here they met the leaders of the Communist Party of India.

The *Babas* had already come over to the Red Flag and Socialism but it was in Deoli that they undertook the most serious study of Socialist theory and a critical evaluation of their crowded past. They grappled with new ideas and once again came out victorious. Having dedicated their lives for the freedom of their motherland they felt more keenly than many younger men the need for all revolutionary fighters to work together as one disciplined army of revolution.

The burning shame of being slaves had led them to revolutionary struggle. The influence of the Soviet Union coupled with their tenacity of purpose and love for their people led them during the thirties to organise the great kisan movement in the Punjab. With their undying devotion to the cause of revolution it was but natural that they should join the Communist Party—that great brotherhood of all revolutionaries—to fight for the freedom of their country and happiness of its people. "It is the logic of our whole life-struggle," said Baba Sohan Singh Bhakna when joining the Party.

At the time of the famous hunger strike at Deoli Camp not all the entreaties of the comrades could keep them back. It needed a Party mandate to stop some of them from giving up water too. The notorious concentration camp was closed down, but the vindictive bureaucracy refused to release them. The *Babas* were among the last to be released, Rur Singh coming out as late as October, 1945.

Prithvi Singh, after years of underground struggle, surrendered to the Police on Gandhiji's advice in 1939. He spent some time at Gandhiji's Ashram after his release. Arrested again in 1942, he was released in 1943. He is again like his other comrades back at his post inside the Party.

But one of the greatest among them, Baba Gurmukh Singh, continues to rot behind the prison walls; learning Marxism in the Soviets, reorganising the Ghadar Party in America and fighting underground in India—he kept the fire of revolution burning

among his people till he was arrested in 1936. Lodged in the worst cell in the Lahore Fort, notorious for its inhuman tortures, Gurmukh Singh, now old and grey fought back with all the ferocity of his youth. Not one C.I.D. officer dared to interrogate him. Anxious to launch a new case for escaping from custody, for "new conspiracies," the police kept him for some months in the Fort.

But in the end they decided merely to send him back to the Andamans to complete his life sentence. They feared that a new trial would be used by Gurmukh Singh as a powerful indictment of the British rule in India and would secure international publicity.

In the Andamans, Gurmukh Singh led the historic hunger strike which once again smashed the Andamans. Gurmukh Singh and his comrades were repatriated. Since then the veteran hero has been languishing in the Punjab jails. Faced by stupid and vindictive pin-pricks, Gurmukh Singh fights on—a terror to all jail authorities.

He has already served 17 years—but he is a man the Punjab Unionists dread more than anyone else and they refuse to release him.

Another comrade of theirs, Baba Sucha Singh is doing the thirteenth year of his life-term in the Hazaribagh Jail.

Such are the facts about the Ghadar Party and its heroes, the comrades of the immortal Sarabha—who have themselves become legends in the Sikh kisan homes. 20 to 33 years of their lives they have spent inside the worst prisons our rulers have built. They have given their all and suffered everything in the fight for our country's freedom. They are the embodiment of our people's unbreakable will to freedom. They are men of whom any country would be proud.